

LANCHESTER

LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Issue No.5 1994.



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SCRIPTA BREVIA LONGOVICIENSIA

The Journal of the
Lanchester Local History Society

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 Chairman: Canon F.S.M. Chase
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The Logo Shows

The Horned God of the Brigantae

found at Upper Houses Farm, Lanchester

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The fifth issue of the Society's Journal appears at a time when the two foremost events of the twentieth century are remembered. Nineteen ninety four saw the eightieth anniversary of the start of the First World War while Nineteen ninety five will see the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War. It is therefore appropriate that this issue should contain two accounts of how those two conflicts affected the lives of individuals - in this case airmen and their families.

On a lighter note, as an early nineteenth century gentleman, you may have been interested in the sale of The Woodlands Estate, Lanchester. If so you would have found the information in Jottings from Beamish of use.

The old adage says that history is about chaps and geography is about maps. Perhaps the detailed study of Tanfield will show that boundaries between the two subjects are sometimes blurred and that history has a contribution to make to a geographical study just as geography has to a historical one.

John Clifford
Editor

Particulars and Conditions for the Sale
OF A VALUABLE
FREEHOLD ESTATE,

Tithe Free and Land Tax redeemed,

Combining Properties which invite the Attention of Men of Family and Fortune, Sportsmen,
Capitalists, Timber Merchants, and Farmers, situate in the Parish of

Lanchester, in the County of Durham,

About 11 Miles from the City of Durham, and 17 from

NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE;

WHICH WILL TAKE PLACE BY AUCTION, BY

WILLIAM ABBOTT,

At the AUCTION MART, London, at One precisely, on Wednesday, March 14th, 1838.

That Beautiful and Picturesque Property, known as

"THE WOODLANDS,"

*The Domain of the late THOMAS WHITE, Esq. (so well known in Scotland and the North
of England, for his excellent taste in laying out Parks and Pleasure Grounds;)*

COMPREHENDING A

GENTLEMAN'S HOUSE,

Of pleasing Elevation, substantially built, and in perfect order, with numerous Apartments, skilfully arranged and admirably adapted to family comfort.—Appropriate Offices, Coach House and Stables, for a good Establishment; walled in Kitchen Garden, Orchard, Pleasure Grounds and Shrubberies, laid out with good taste, and planted with judgment, in a finely timbered

LAWN OF EIGHTEEN ACRES,

in which are large and ornamental PIECES of WATER, having the appearance of a River, when viewed from the Mansion, the whole forming a delightful Country Residence, commanding a fine View of GREENCROFT PARK, the Seat of SIR THOMAS CLAVERING, Bart., and of the Hills above the Roman Station of Longovicum.

EXTENSIVE WOODS OF THRIVING TIMBER,

which have for many years produced, are now yielding, and will for many years to come, supply the Owner with a very considerable Income.—A SAW MILL, driven by Water, by which the Timber is converted into the most saleable Planks and Scantlings at a little expence, and for which there is a ready Sale to the Collieries and Railways in the Neighbourhood.

A FARM

of convertible LAND, with detached Steward's House, Farm Buildings, and FIVE Labourer's COTTAGES, containing together,

527 ACRES OF LAND,

in a Ring Fence, estimated very low at £300. per ANNUM, exclusive of the Income to be derived from the Timber. Subject to out-goings, amounting in the whole, to £34. 12s. 11d.—The Poor Rates are so low as scarcely to be worth naming.

The Stanhope and Tyne Railway passes within Two Miles and a Half of the Estate, and when the Great Northern Railway, now in progress, is completed, a Chain of Railway Communication will be formed between this Property and London, as well as the Midland Counties and Manufacturing Districts.

Very good GROUSE SHOOTING may be had within eight Miles, and it is in the far famed LAMBTON HUNT.

N. B. The situation of "Woodlands" will be seen by referring to Greenwood's Map of Durham, where it is correctly delineated.

Printed Particulars, with Plans and Conditions of Sale annexed, may be had of Mr. JOHN GRANGER, on the Premises, (who will show the same;) of Messrs. COX and RULE, Lincoln's Inn Fields, and at the Auction Mart, London; of Mr. J. S. WHITE, Solicitor, Dipton near Gateshead; Mr. CRIGHTON, Newcastle-upon-Tyne; Mr. T. HUTCHINSON, Solicitor, Durham; BAGSHAW & STEVENSON, Solicitors, Manchester; Mr. Edmund REED, Solicitor, Birmingham; Messrs. PEPPERCORN and WILKINSON, St. Neots, Huntingdonshire; and at WILLIAM ABBOTT'S Offices, Eynesbury, St. Neots.

J. HATFIELD, PRINTER, STATIONER, BOOKBINDER, PAPERHANGER, &c. HUNTINGDON.

The Farm Buildings:

Are substantially built, in very good repair, and are all well arranged around the farm yards; they consist of Corn and Hay Barns, with a Thrashing Machine, Stabling for 8 cart horses, Granary, Hen-house, Piggeries, Cattle Sheds, and a Drying Kiln.

The Kitchen Garden, which is contiguous to the Mansion House, is walled round, choicely planted, and highly productive.

The Mansion House is approached from the high road, by a serpentine drive, through the lawn and pleasure grounds of 18 Acres, in the arrangement of which, Thomas White, Esq., the father of the late owner, spared no expence, and he has here displayed to the utmost, his taste and scientific knowledge as a landscape gardener: thus rendering the pleasure grounds of "Woodlands", a much admired specimen of the art. Trout, Tench, and Perch abound in its Ornamental Waters, through which there is a pure and constant stream; and the Arbor Vitae, Laurel, and other Evergreens grow luxuriantly in great abundance, giving, even in the depth of winter, a cheerful aspect to the grounds, and an effectual screen to the walks.

The Woods:

Are thriving and very productive in Timber, of an excellent quality, for which there is a ready sale to any extent.

The Saw Mill is worked by an over-shot water wheel, of much greater power than is necessary for the purposes of the Estate.

The Farm:

Is chiefly divided into small enclosures, of Arable and Pasture Land, young Plantations, Nursery Grounds, and Sheep Walks. The whole lies in a ring fence, and there are Five Labourers' Cottages on the Estate, which the workmen inhabit at low rents. The Land is in a good state of cultivation, and may be rendered productive to an almost indefinite extent, by the use of lime, which is supplied by the Stanhope and Tyne Railway, of the finest quality for agricultural purposes, at a cheap rate. The Annual Out-goings are £34.12s.11d., and the Poor Rates very low.

N.B. Near the Village of Shotley Bridge, which is situated on the Banks of the River Derwent, about five miles from "Woodlands", Mineral Springs have lately been discovered, which have been proved by analyzation, to possess all the medicinal properties of the Harrowgate Waters, and to quite as great a degree. Shotley Bridge will, therefore, in all probability, ere long, become a formidable rival to that celebrated watering place.

John Gall

The North of England Open Air Museum, Beamish

THE MURDER OF A BOMBER CREW

PROLOGUE

On the night of 7th/8th March 1945, a Lancaster bomber took off from its base near Reading to bomb Dessau in Saxony, Germany. It never returned! The crew of that bomber was reported as 'missing' by the Air Ministry. This is a remarkable story of a father's determination to find out what happened to his 'missing' son, and other fellow crew members of that bomber. It took three years and many hundreds of letters to find the evidence and reveal the whereabouts of the 'missing' crew.

The account of that father's mission is reproduced to the lasting memory of:

RALPH SIDNEY HOWE

who was a crew member of the Lancaster Bomber
and is
dedicated to his family and grandchildren

THE CREW

WARRANT OFFICER	R.S. HOWE	CASTLESIDE
SERGEANT FLIGHT/ENGINEER	A.K. ROBINSON	SALE
FLIGHT/LIEUTENANT	PETER SCOTT	LONDON
FLYING OFFICER	THOMAS DRAPER	ONTARIO, CANADA
FLYING OFFICER	R. APPELYARD	WEST HARTLEPOOL
SERGEANT	WOODBURN	AMBLESIDE
SERGEANT	SHEPHERD	FIGHELDEAN

Arthur Lambert

On the evening of the 7th March 1945, at 5.06 pm, a Lancaster Bomber with seven R.A.F. crewmen aboard left its collecting base at Reading to bomb Dessau in Saxony. The aircraft never returned, and it was not known then whether the objective had been achieved or not. The crew were posted as 'Missing from air operations'.

This is a grim story relating the frustrating but determined search by a father, (Mr Tom Robinson of Chestnut Drive, Sale), for the whereabouts of his R.A.F. son, Sergeant Flight Engineer Alan Kenneth Robinson, a member of that Lancaster Bomber.

I had been reported 'killed' in the last war and knowing that Alan was well equipped with his French and German, I was very optimistic that he would return. I had to wait until the war ended. I gave him three weeks to

return. He didn't, there was no information from the Air Ministry, and nobody knew anything. I made up my mind to find him.

Many rumours came to me, Alan had been seen, Alan was in hospital and so on. They were all untrue. I wrote to the Air Ministry for details of the course taken by the flight.

The Air Ministry sent me details of the course taken by the aircraft. I sent details of the crew to the Town Mayors of forty three towns along that course.

The Americans at Spa, Marche and Nancy searched all camps, hospitals and cemeteries without avail. The British authorities returned all my letters except for three. An amazing part of this tale was those three letters were addressed to within a few miles of Buttstadt. Had they arrived and been actioned on, then this search may have been solved earlier. Nevertheless, I had managed to get letters into Germany. Colonel Erroll worked hard in Germany and Austria to obtain information. In the meantime I had read in newspapers of our men wandering about Czechoslovakia, Poland, and even in Russia.

I wrote to the Soviet Ambassador to ask for his good offices. He referred me to my own Government. I wrote Mr Ernest Bevin (Foreign Secretary) to ask him to instruct his ambassadors in Poland and Czechoslovakia to effect a search. He replied that no useful purpose would be served. I wrote to Major General Kotikov, then Governor of Halle, but the British intercepted my letter and returned it as 'Irregular use of Military Information'. The Y.M.C.A. and the Red Cross were invited to assist me but they could obtain no news.

I wrote to Mr Ernest Bevin again, this time demanding a more effective search throughout these two countries. On the 8th November 1945, he replied, asking me to give him more information. On the 9th November 1945, I received a telegram from the Air Ministry informing me that Alan had lost his life during Air Operations. I found this difficult to believe and asked for investigations to be continued. At Christmas time I was given some details stating that Alan's death was believed to be a result of a War Crime.

On the 3rd January 1946, I went to London to visit the Air Ministry hoping to obtain all the information. The Ministry had some details but they would not part with the names of the suspected murderers. I took off my overcoat and said I would not budge out of the room until I got those names. An hour and a half later I obtained the names of Fritz Wenzel and Bernhardi Kalkofe and a statement was made that Alan and his officer (W.O. Ralph Sidney Howe) were shot attempting to escape. I was seething with rage and vowed I would not give up the search until those men were in custody.

I wrote to many Government officials, including the Prime Minister, the foreign Secretary, the War Minister, the Air Minister etc., in an attempt to find the right department quickly and requested to be present at the trial. I was granted permission with all facilities, but the named men had not been found. They were believed to be in the hands of the Americans. The Russians handed over Kalkofe in April 1946. Later news came through that Wenzel was being tried for the murder of two American airmen. It later proved to be that the two airmen were my son and his officer.

In March 1946, the War Office picked up via the German News Service, a statement made by a man (call him Johann) who had been Alan's guard on the fateful night. I was given a copy of the statement and from that moment began my search in Germany. Johann was willing to co-operate, and from that information received I built up contacts within a twenty mile radius of Buttstadt. The names of Landrat Hoffman, sub-prefect of the district, and Hermann Jakob, the Bergomaster of Buttstadt were quoted as the men who gave the orders. It is impossible to go into every detail. The names of French prisoners of war who witnessed or knew of the incident became known. I obtained their names and addresses in France, one wrote to me, others made statements.

We still did not know where the boys were buried. I wrote to the gravedigger of Buttstadt cemetery, and the boys were found. By an enlargement of a photograph I recognised the Christian names of the wireless operator. This was verified and a full photograph obtained.

Further letters went to Germany and the details about the death of the bomb aimer were acquired, also a picture of his grave. He too had been murdered. Landrat Hoffmann had ordered him to be taken to the roadway, where Hoffmann ran him over and killed him.

The wireless operator had lived on a farm for seven days. Hoffmann found him and sent for an S.S. doctor, who gave him an injection and sent him to Buttstadt hospital. The wireless operator died on the way. Information with a photograph came through of another Sergeant, not of my son's crew. His parents and the Air Ministry were notified. Later still, came the news of two air gunners, whose badly burned bodies were found near their parachutes. They had been buried where they fell. Now the Air Ministry found the navigator. All the crew were found.

In the meantime, I was still busy trying to find Hoffmann and Jakob. I wrote to the Burgomaster of Buttstadt and was informed that Jakob may be at Kornwesthiem or Dachau. I wrote to Kornwesthiem but he had never been transferred to Dachau. Air Ministry and War Crimes were informed and Jacob

was detained. Hoffmann was believed to be dead, having been shot by a German Sergeant. I wrote to the Burgomaster and Landrat of Weimar asking for the whereabouts of Hoffmann and was told Hoffmann was dead and that his grave was in Weimar cemetery.

No news was available of Wenzel, but it was believed he was in American hands. I wrote to various departments of the American Forces in Germany and to our office in Weisbaden. The case against Wenzel had been dropped and he was free for extradition to the British. He never arrived, said the British. I wrote to Dachau for a copy of the certificate of delivery of Wenzel to the British.

I was given a certified copy of the transaction, containing the name of the British official who signed for the men. Nine prisoners were handed over and I have the names of those men. Fritz Wenzel was the ninth on the list. The British said he never arrived. Later on they said they had him but it was the wrong man. There could only be one Fritz Wenzel who lodged in Rostenberger Strasse, Buttstadt, lived in Tannroda, was arrested by the Americans for the murder of two American airmen, who later turned out to be my son and his officer (American statement) and who was tried by the Americans and handed over to the British. Wenzel has not been found to date but is believed to be working in the German blackmarket.

On the 19th September 1947, I was informed by Johann that my son's body had been exhumed, along with his officer's, by the State Pathologist for the investigation of wounds and reconstruct the crime. I was never told of this by our authorities, but upon enquiry I found it to be true. My boy was re-interred in the Herrstrasse Cemetery, Berlin, and I was given the details of the site. During Easter 1948, my friend's son, a Staff Sergeant in Germany went to Berlin to find Alan's grave. His intention was to take a photograph and send it to me. This is his statement, "That he didn't like to take a photograph owing to the untidiness". There was neither a cross or name, nothing except the entry in an official book. The cemetery is unfinished, but it is hoped to be complete by September.

His grave in Buttstadt was beautifully kept, regularly covered in flowers and German wreaths, and sited in a lovely portion of the cemetery. Six months after re-internment in a British cemetery he still hasn't a name or wooden cross on his grave.

That is the story in brief. It is impossible to give every detail of hundreds of letters that have passed. Johann made it possible. I am no longer vindictive. Kalkofe and Jakob have been in goal for nearly three years now pending trial. As far as I am concerned, provided they tell the

whole truth, and there is little else for them to say, then they can go home to their families. Fritz Wenzel remains to be found.

Finally, this is no wonderful feat. I have received from many sources during the last week or so, letters from parents who have done as I have done, from many who know absolutely nothing except that their husbands or boys never came back from those raids. They still search, hoping for news. The war is over and unsuccessful people get scant sympathy and little help from the powers that be.

I have been given permission to be present at the trial, but the conditions have now been altered, I must make my own arrangements and pay my own expenses.

Tom Robinson

WARNEFORD, V.C.

Reginald Alexander John Warneford, known throughout his life as Rex Warneford, was for a short time the most famous man in the world during the First World War, because single-handedly, in his Morane fighter plane, he destroyed a German Zeppelin Airship and because of his bravery received the first Victoria Cross awarded to a Naval Airman.

Delving back into the origins of his forebears, we discover that he came from a long line of parsons, musicians and poets, but he was an enigma to his fellow men to whom he appeared to be foolhardy and carefree, and they frequently misjudged him. He went his own way, a law unto himself, shy, reserved, but not concerned about his own personal safety.

Rex Warneford was born at Cooch Behar, India, on October 15th 1891, and was the first child of Reginald and Alexandra Warneford. His father, after a career as an Engineering Officer in the British Army in India, became chief construction engineer to the Cooch Behar Railway. He met his wife Alexandra whilst in the Army, and although in the beginning theirs was a happy marriage, dissention began to cloud the peace of the young couple's home, the main reason being that Reginald spent most of his time working on the Railway which was a very demanding mistress.

In the autumn of 1899 Alexandra left Reginald for ever. When he returned home, he found Rex, barely eight years old, sitting alone waiting for him. He descended into such grief and despair, he found oblivion in drink, which culminated in his death in Bombay in 1900. He was 36 years old.

Rex, on hearing of his father's death, was inconsolable and to make it worse had to conceal his grief, as there was no one to share it with him, not even his mother who did not mourn for her husband.

In 1901 Alexandra married Captain M.P. Corkery, but Rex could not get on with him and became rebellious. No one could replace his father, and in spite of pleading from his mother he would not change his attitude. The situation became so strained he was to go to his grandparents until it was decided what could be done with him, so Rex was sent to England to stay with his grandfather, the Reverend Tom Warneford, who was Vicar of Satley in County Durham.

Tom Warneford had spent twenty five years in India as an Army Chaplain to the Bengal Army from 1866-1891, having left Piddletrenthide in Dorset when he was 33 years old. When his wife died he asked to be relieved of his post and to be sent to minister elsewhere. His request was granted and he sailed for the Andaman Islands in the Bay of Bengal, a Penal Colony for Sepoy mutineers captured after the Indian Mutiny. He returned to England, remarried in 1900, and became Vicar of Satley.

At Satley Rectory, Rex, now 11 years old, soon settled down and quickly realised what a wonderful and considerate person his grandfather was. Soon after his arrival he was asked to sing in the choir, and quickly made friends with the other boys in the choir who introduced him to many sports and games. This was a happy time for Rex, but the holiday passed too quickly and in 1903 he was sent away to school. Although he would have preferred to have gone to Satley School, his grandfather insisted Rex had to be properly equipped to make his way in the world, and he was sent to King Edward VI Public School in Stratford upon Avon.

Rex spent all his holidays at Satley until 1904 when his grandfather, taken seriously ill, relinquished his living in Satley, and went to live in Ealing, where he died in 1905.

Rex left Stratford in 1904 and was told by his Uncle Nightingale he was to be sent back to India, and apprenticed to the British Steam Navigation Company. On 11th January 1905, Rex began as an apprentice on S.S. Somail bound for Calcutta, and remained with this company for eight years, being promoted in 1911 to Fourth Officer. He remained in the Merchant Navy until the outbreak of the First World War when he joined the Royal Navy.

Rex tried to enlist in the Submarine Service but was rejected because he did not have the correct Royal Navy background or training at the Dartmouth Royal Naval College for Officers. Disappointed he turned to the Army and volunteered for the Sportsmen Battalion which was attached to the Royal Fusiliers. The Sportsmen Battalion was a 'crack' unit of handpicked men, membership of which being considered an honour. Rex had his own opinions, and decided he must get out of this suicide unit and requested a transfer to the Royal Naval Air Service.

The Royal Naval Air Service was formed on June 26th 1914, and was formerly connected with the Royal Flying Corps. Its main concern, in co-operation with the Royal navy, was the defence of Britain, and the area around the coast from sea and air attack. The Royal Naval Air Service accepted Rex as a probationary pilot and he was sent for instruction in basic flying to Hendon. After obtaining the Royal Aero Club Aviators Certificate he was transferred to the Central Flying School at Upavon for further training where he managed to make the grade in five weeks and was granted his Aero Club Certificate No. 1098 on February 25th 1915.

Flight Sub Lieutenant Warneford was posted to No. 2 Squadron RNAS at Eastchurch on the Isle of Sheppey. Because of his nature he found it difficult to mix with his fellow pilots, and earned the reputation of being over-confident and a positively cocky individual. The Squadron Commander, E.L. Gerrard, found Rex's behaviour a problem, but his lack of unorthodox discipline was counterbalanced by his ...

On the morning of May 17th 1915, Rex was posted to No. 1 Squadron RNAS based at Dunkirk. The duties of the Squadron were to prevent German Zeppelin Airships and aircraft bombing England, to attack enemy submarines, obtain information on enemy shipping, and to develop aerial photography and wireless communication.

On May 8th, Flt. Sub Lt. Warneford flew on his first mission, a coastal reconnaissance flight to Zeebrugge accompanied by an experienced observer. They headed up the coast at about 4,000 feet and shrapnel began to burst around them. The observer advised Rex to stay clear of the flak but he took no notice and kept flying through the barrage. When a German aircraft appeared Rex immediately gave chase, and as it turned towards its airfield at Ostend he pursued it low over the town, firing at it with a rifle. So ended Rex's first encounter with the enemy, and he arrived back to his airfield with his plane looking like a pepperpot. Shortly after reports came in from the French front line that some mad pilot was flying up and down the German lines firing at the guns at a very low altitude.

His observer, John H. D'Albiac, (who later became Air Marshal Sir John D'Albiac) was not very happy on landing and requested never again to fly with this 'madman'.

Another observer, Leading Mechanic G.E. Meddis, volunteered to fly with Rex and found him to be a magnificent pilot, and although the rest of the Squadron foretold of an early death for both pilot and observer, because of the risks taken by Rex, the observer, Meddis survived the war.

Because of his flying abilities Rex was allotted a Morane Saulnier single seater monoplane and was given a roving commission to harry German observation aircraft.

With his new machine Rex spent many happy hours over the front lines attacking enemy observation aircraft and balloons hoping to see them explode. Rex Warneford took risks and the other pilots took risks, as it was a case of live today and do not think of tomorrow. A pilot's life expectancy was no more than three weeks, but they flew day after day to attack the enemy. With increasing experience to re-inforce and direct his natural ability, Rex was now equipped to join a heroic company of men whose fame would endure.

In July 1900, Count Ferdinand Von Zeppelin's first giant airship had taken to the air from its floating hangar on Lake Constance at Friedrichshaven. Within a decade the airships were carrying thousands of passengers on scheduled services throughout Germany. The German Army and Navy were not slow to adopt this example of German genius, and realised that with the Zeppelin they had the means of carrying the war to England.

At the outbreak of war Germany had available seven military and three commercial Zeppelins. The German Army Zeppelins were squandered in reconnaissance flights over the battle front where their large bulk offered easy targets for ground fire, and three were lost within a month of the war starting. On January 9th 1915 the Kaiser Wilhelm, gave his permission for the Zeppelins to attack military targets in England. London was not to be bombed.

The first raid was carried out on 19th January 1915 when three Naval Zeppelins, L3, L4, L6, left for England. L6 was forced to return with engine problems. L3 dropped nine bombs on Yarmouth killing two civilians, injuring three, and wrecking several houses.

The second Zeppelin, L4, bombed Kings Lynn, killing one man, one woman and injuring a further thirteen. Both Zeppelins returned safely but a month later were lost in a snowstorm off Jutland. Building up strength in Belgian bases the military Zeppelins commenced raids over England. There were several attempts to shoot them down by aircraft without success but because of one pilot's persistence the Zeppelin's days were numbered.

During the afternoon of Sunday 6th June 1915, LZ37 rose from its base at Berchem St Agathe in Belgium with 28 people on board and under the command of Oberleutenant Von Der Haegan. His orders were to attack London. Before LZ37 and LZ39 reached the English coast they were forced back by heavy fog. They were making their way back to Belgium unaware their signals were being picked up and relayed to the Admiralty in London. The signals were reported to Wing Commander Arthur Longmore, in charge of No 1 Squadron RNAS at St Pol. Longmore sent Warneford and Sub Lt Rose in their Morane fighters to intercept the Zeppelins in the vicinity of Ghent. They took off but soon got separated. Ross was forced to land and overturned his Morane in the process, but climbed out unhurt.

Rex was now on his own heading east over Dixmude when he momentarily caught sight of a pencil slim grey shape north beyond Ostend. As it vanished from sight, he banked his aircraft towards the area of the sighting when suddenly it appeared again. LZ37 was returning to its base. It was about twenty miles away and heading south west as Rex set out in pursuit. For the next 45 minutes their courses converged and he climbed to a height where he could attack, but flashes of gunfire from the airship caused him to take his aircraft out of range.

The Zeppelin released ballast to increase height, but Warneford decided to play the waiting game and remained well astern in case his aircraft was damaged by gunfire from the airship. He suddenly became aware of the Zeppelin turning south and dipping its nose. He eased the stick forward into his final dive with his engine switched off so no sound came from his engine.

came sweeping around towards the stern of the Zeppelin at full speed calculating the right moment to release his bombs. One hundred and fifty feet above the airship he released the first of his bombs, and it having no effect, he loosed off another, and a third which struck the Zeppelin.

The result was a terrific explosion which almost tore the airship in two. It was instantly engulfed in flames and slowly started to disintegrate causing currents of hot air to swirl past the Morane fighter which was turned over and over. For a time the machine was upside down, with Rex hanging in the safety harness, and when at last the aircraft regained its equilibrium he saw the Zeppelin floating down to earth like a gigantic torch. Rex had no idea where the airship had fallen and later was shocked to learn it had landed on the Convent of St Elizabeth in Ghent killing and injuring nuns and children.

Rex sat in the cockpit of his fighter gliding down through the mist, his engine dead, looking for somewhere to land. Suddenly the ground rose up and the Morane lurched and creaked as it landed on the side of a hill where he climbed out, glad he was unhurt, and began to inspect his plane. If he was not able to take off he would have to destroy his aircraft as he was behind enemy lines.

As he began to inspect his plane he soon found out why his engine had stalled. Apart from a few bullet holes, the most serious mishap was a broken connection between the pressure and gravity tanks. He quickly repaired the join and reconnected the pipe. He had to work quickly to re-position his plane, and after some coaxing managed to start the engine, taking off just as a squad of German Cavalry entered the perimeter of the field where he had landed.

After a short while the engine spluttered and Rex had again to force land his plane. He had no idea where he was until he saw some French soldiers run towards him. At first they thought him a spy, but he persuaded them to contact his base who confirmed who he was. He was given some fuel and, fortified with some Cognac, took off for his base at St Pol where he made a short report to his commander and rolled into his bunk and slept for eight hours.

While he slept the telephone wires were humming between St Pol and Whitehall announcing Rex Warneford's incredible feat of bringing down a Zeppelin single handed. When he awoke at 7 pm the news had flashed around the world. He could not understand what all the fuss was about for as far as he was concerned he said that killing the Zeppelin was just an ordinary 'op'.

Whitehall decided the country needed a hero to boost the morale of a depressed population. A war that was supposed to end by Christmas 1914, was dragging into its second year and showed no sign of ending. The instructions from Whitehall were to take Warneford off operations as long as his value as propaganda was fully exploited.

On the 8th June 1915, Rex received a telegram from Buckingham Palace informing him the King had personally conferred on him the Victoria Cross. This was the first time the Monarch had awarded the Victoria Cross personally. "I most heartily congratulate you upon your splendid achievement of yesterday in which you single handed destroyed an enemy Zeppelin. I have much satisfaction in conferring upon you the Victoria Cross for this gallant act".
George R.

He was informed by his Commanding Officer he had to go to Paris to receive the Cross of the Legion of Honour before he received the Victoria Cross from King George V. Rex was now a national hero in France as well as England, and was to attend various functions and celebrations in Paris. After that he would return to duty, collecting a new aircraft for the squadron, and flying it back to St Pol. He was fated never to see St Pol again. Three days later he was dead.

On June 17th, he had arranged to meet the writer, Henry Needham, from Wyncote, Pennsylvania, who was at this time a free lance journalist. After lunch Rex was to test fly the Farnam aircraft, after which he would take Needham up for a flight. Rex and Needham went to Buc together with Lieutenant Fitzgibbon. He took Fitzgibbon for his promised flight, which was short and uneventful. The weather was beginning to change when Needham joined the aircraft where Rex was waiting, anxious to get the journalist's trip over.

At 2,000 feet Rex banked the plane to start his landing approach when suddenly it began to go into a spin. It dived steeply, pulled out, and appeared to fling out its tail. With a crack which was heard on the ground it snapped off and caught the propeller, shearing part of it away. The machine started to roll, and at 700 feet it turned upside down. To the horror of the watchers both occupants, neither apparently strapped in, fell one after the other to the ground followed by the aircraft.

Almost everyone on the ground rushed to the spot. Needham was dead. Rex lay fifty feet away. He was unconscious and terribly injured. The ambulance was quickly on the scene and took Rex to the British Military Hospital where he died. He was only 24.

On Friday, 18th June, his body was laid out in Versailles Military Hospital, before he was sent back to England for a public funeral and burial

in Brompton cemetery with full military honours. He was laid to rest close to the grave of one who would have been proud of him, his dear grandfather.

Kevin Leary

Acknowledgements:

In compiling this paper, I have used extracts from the book 'Warneford VC' by Mary Gibson.

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