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Avro Anson Mk. I K.6183
No. 206 Squadron

THE LAST FLIGHT OF:

ANSON L.7072

A narrative of the last flight of Anson L.7072, from No. 5 (Coastal) Operational Training Unit, R.A.F. Chivenor, which crashed into the sea off Hartland Point, North Devon, on 27 August 1941. The pilot, S/Lt K. SAPIEHA, was a member of the Free French Air Force of Polish and Lithuanian descent. He and the three trainee wireless operators all lost their lives in this crash.
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The Last Flight of Anson L.7072

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Introduction

The Royal Air Force was a multi-national organisation, and this is shown by the loss of Anson L.7072 from No. 5 (Coastal) Operational Training Unit. The pilot was serving with a British unit at R.A.F. Chivenor in North Devon, yet he was born in France of a Polish/Lithuanian family of nobility. He was a Prince in this family, and probably the only Prince to serve at Chivenor. He had come to the U.K. and joined the Free French Air Force in London.

His death off Hartland Point on 27 August 1941 was a sad loss, and he died with three trainee wireless operators/air gunners who were flying with him. This is their story.

The Avro Anson

The Avro Anson became known within the Royal Air Force as 'Faithful Annie', in view of its long and distinguished service with the R.A.F. throughout the Second World War and beyond. The military version of the aircraft was developed from a civil version designed for Imperial Airways. It was designed by Roy CHADWICK (who later designed the Lancaster bomber) as the Type 652. It was a low wing monoplane, fitted with two Armstrong Whitworth Cheetah Mk. V engines, giving it a cruising speed of 150 mph, and a range of 600 miles. The first two aircraft flew on 7 January 1935, fitted with an improved mark of Cheetah engine, and with an all-up weight of 7,500 lbs. The two aircraft were delivered to Imperial Airways, who used them on the Croydon to Brindisi route.

Meanwhile, the U.K. government had commenced a rearmament programme to meet the threat being posed by Germany's increasing military presence in Europe. In May 1934, the Air Ministry issued a requirement for a twin-engine landplane to be used on maritime reconnaissance, and to address the perceived threat from German submarines in the event of war.

Avro were one of fifteen firms to submit bids to the Air Ministry, and with their modern design, they were awarded the contract for the Avro 652A. The first flight of the military version took place on 24 March 1935, in competition with the De Havilland Rapide biplane. The Avro design, fitted with a turret, outclassed the De Havilland design, so on 27 August 1935, the Air Ministry placed a contract with Avro for one-hundred and seventy-four aircraft, now called the Anson.

The first production aircraft, K.6152, was flown at Woodford in Lancashire (the home of Avro) on 31 December 1935, and the first Ansons entered R.A.F. service at R.A.F. Manston in Kent with No. 48 (General Reconnaissance) Squadron on 6 March 1936. It had two firsts, as the first monoplane in R.A.F. service, and the first aircraft fitted with a retractable undercarriage.

By the outbreak of the Second World War, the Anson equipped six R.A.F. squadrons:

- No. 48 Squadron now at Thorney Island, Sussex,
- No. 206 Squadron at R.A.F. Bircham Newton, Norfolk,
- No. 217 Squadron at R.A.F. Warmwell, Dorset,
- No. 220 Squadron at R.A.F. Thornaby, North Yorkshire,
- No. 223 Squadron at R.A.F. Leuchars, Fife,
- No. 269 Squadron at R.A.F. Montrose, Angus.

In addition to the six Regular squadrons of the Royal Air Force, the Anson equipped four squadrons of the Auxiliary Air Force, in effect the part-time reserve, or Territorial element, of the R.A.F. The four squadrons were:

- No. 500 (County of Kent) Squadron, at R.A.F. Detling, Kent,
- No. 502 (Ulster) Squadron, at R.A.F. Aldergrove, County Antrim,
- No. 608 (North Riding) Squadron, at R.A.F. Thornaby, North Yorkshire,
- No. 612 (County of Aberdeen) Squadron, at R.A.F. Dyce, Aberdeenshire.

Although, at this time, the Anson was primarily an operational aircraft, it also equipped the School of General Reconnaissance at R.A.F. Thorney Island, and the No. 1 Coast Artillery Cooperation Unit at R.A.F. Gosport, the former being in Sussex and the latter in Hampshire.

By the outbreak of the Second World War, despite being the most modern aircraft in the R.A.F. at the time of its inception, just three and half years later, the Anson was approaching obsolescence. Coastal Command were beginning to receive deliveries of the Lockheed Hudson from the U.S.A., another passenger aircraft modified for military use. These were purchased by the R.A.F. following a trade mission to the U.S.A. just prior to the war. No. 224 Squadron at R.A.F. Leuchars commenced receiving Hudson aircraft in August 1939, but deliveries were slow.

The Hudson was superior to the Anson as more powerful engines were fitted, giving greater speed and a longer range. In addition, it could carry a bigger bomb load, as early actions confirmed that the small bomb load of the Anson was ineffective against U-boats and surface vessels. In spite of its increasing obsolescence, the Anson remained in front line service until December 1941.

Meanwhile, the use of the Anson for training purposes was being recognised. Its large, glazed cabin was ideal for navigator, wireless operator, and air gunner training. More Ansons were built as the war progressed, including 1,528 that were shipped to Canada. When production of the Anson ceased in May 1952, 8,138 aircraft had been built in the U.K., with a further 2,882 built in Canada. The Anson did not retire officially from R.A.F. service until 28 June 1968.

R.A.F. Chivenor and No. 5 (Coastal) Operational Training Unit

The North Devon Airfield was officially opened in April 1934 and comprised a large grass field of about three-hundred yards by two-hundred yards, a clubhouse, and workshop buildings. The field was situated roughly where the officers' married quarters now stand, and the airport buildings were erected immediately to the south of the Barnstaple – Braunton railway line some three-hundred yards east of the Duckpool level crossing. Flights commenced to the island of Lundy in the summer of 1934 with a De Havilland Dragon aircraft, which in the following year, were extended to provide 'on demand' services to Cardiff.

The first building work for the new Royal Air Force station began in May 1940, and on 21 June 1940, the first sod was removed to inaugurate work on the runways. The initial plans provided for three runways, each one-thousand yards long and fifty yards wide, on the alignment of the present runway layout. The building plans, when completed, left the Station virtually as it is today, the only major later additions being the two airmen's brick barrack blocks and the married quarters. The eastern boundary of the airfield was extended in 1941 to take in the North Devon Airport, and between then and 1944 the east-west runway was progressively lengthened to its present two-thousand yards. In 1942, the dispersal pans and taxiways on the present married quarters site were constructed. Post-war, concrete aircraft servicing platforms were built, and the married quarters were constructed on the site of the pre-war aerodrome. R.A.F. Chivenor was extensively rebuilt in the 1970's, with all but one of the original wooden huts replaced.

The first Royal Air Force unit to occupy the Station was No. 3 (Coastal) Operational Training Unit, administered by No. 17 Group, Coastal Command. Flight Lieutenant (F/L) E. D. BRADFIELD arrived on Friday, 25 October 1940, from R.A.F. Mount Batten in Plymouth, to take up the position of Senior Equipment Officer. He was accompanied by Pilot Officer (P/O) A. C. SHARPE, who was posted from R.A.F. Gosport as an Equipment Officer on the same day. These two officers were the first personnel to be posted to the new R.A.F. Chivenor, to establish the Operational Training Unit there. It opened formally on 27 November 1940 and assumed responsibility for operational training of Beaufort crews from R.A.F. Silloth in Cumberland. There were five Flights within No. 3 (C) O.T.U., allowing two courses to run concurrently for each aircraft type, and they were:

'A' Flt.	Bristol Beaufort
'B' Flt.	Bristol Beaufort
'C' Flt.	Avro Anson and Bristol Blenheim
'D' Flt.	Avro Anson and Bristol Blenheim
'F' Flt	Fairey Battle (later Westland Lysander) – for target towing

On 1 August 1941, the unit based at Chivenor became No. 5 (Coastal) O.T.U.. This change of style does not seem to have altered the work of Chivenor in any respect, as the conversion courses continued in an unbroken sequence, and the personnel on the unit remained the same.

This came about because of the expansion of Coastal Command, with the added requirement to train crews on Whitley and Wellington aircraft. It had been intended to move the Beauforts to R.A.F. Turnberry, in Scotland, but this airfield was not ready in August 1941 to accept this unit. Hence, the training of Whitley and Wellington crews consolidated at R.A.F. Cranwell, with the training of Beaufort crews remaining at R.A.F. Chivenor. The O.T.U. at Cranwell was formed as a new unit, although some personnel transferred from R.A.F. Chivenor to R.A.F. Cranwell. Other personnel and aircraft came from R.A.F. Silloth in Cumberland.

Most pilots were regarded as a 'cut above' the other members of the crew. At this stage of the war, the officers were either pre-war members of the R.A.F., or were university educated. The formation of the crews was a lottery. Although the crews would fly, fight, and sometimes die together, they lived separately at R.A.F. Chivenor and other bases. The officers lived in the Officers' Mess, and the sergeants, flight sergeants and warrant officers lived in the Sergeants' Mess. No matter how close an officer was to his crew, all officers were to be addressed as 'Sir' or 'Pilot' if appropriate, although the more colloquial term of 'Skipper' was often used. Not all officers adhered strictly to this, but it appears that for most crews, some degree of formality remained in place.¹

Most of the Wireless Operators/Air Gunners (WOp/AGs) had been together through training at Blackpool and Yatesbury, and so tended to know each other well. They were generally working class men, often qualified in a trade, from across the U.K.. WOp/AGs tended to have lower educational attainment than the pilots or observers, or they were older and above the age limit for becoming a pilot (25 years). They would often stick together at the O.T.U., and sometimes chose their captains rather than the other way around. They wanted a steady driver, one most likely to ensure their survival. They chose the men that they could care to live with, and possibly die with.²

When not on duty, some men would go swimming at Croyde, the cinema in Braunton, and also would go into Barnstaple drinking or to dances in Barnstaple or Ilfracombe. They would take a bus into Barnstaple at about 5.00 pm, but there was no bus back. Some men used to sleep in railway carriages at Barnstaple, and one morning a Sergeant was absent at breakfast. Then he phoned up, from Bristol, having slept on a carriage that formed an early morning train to Taunton and then onwards to Bristol.³

By the time that they reached R.A.F. Chivenor, the four men who formed an air crew had endured several stages of selection and assessment. This began with the initial interview and medical examination, then onwards through other training units with more exercises, tests, and examinations, plus of course, drill and physical fitness training.

¹ MAYNE, Maurice with RYAN Mark *Down but not out – The incredible Story of Second World War Airman Maurice 'Moggy' MAYNE* (Stroud, The History Press, 2014)

² Ibid

³ Ibid

Generally, the pilots streamed for Bomber and Coastal Command were seen as:

- Being cool, steady, and tenacious,
- To have stamina,
- To have initiative,
- Having powers of leadership.⁴

In terms of flying skills, they had to be reliable on the use of instruments and have a flying accuracy required to ensure efficient coordination between the pilot and navigator (observer). At no point was it explained to the other air crew how dangerous their operational role was going to be. This was war, so everything was dangerous, and all the air crew were volunteers. All they wanted to do was to get on with it. There was no question in the minds of the young men training at Chivenor of transferring away from this role, and they had no chance to take a different direction; from the moment you joined up, you did as you were told. There was little choice. R.A.F. Chivenor took an official photograph of the students early in the course, as soon as they had crewed-up. An example of the dangers these men faced can be seen from the photograph of Course 7A. Of the twenty-eight men in the picture, twenty died, one became a prisoner-of-war, four were injured, and two were branded 'Lack of Moral Fibre' and taken off flying duties. Only Sergeant (Sgt) Bill CARROLL was destined to survive the war unscathed.⁵

On Monday, 13 January 1941, No. 1 Course of Instruction, for Beauforts and Ansons, commenced, but the number of students on this course is not recorded. This course concluded on Sunday, 2 March 1941. These were the first students to undertake the two-month operational training course, including the formation of an aircrew of four to include a pilot, observer, and two wireless operators/air gunners. The course comprised three stages. These were:

- Weeks 1 and 2
 - Ground Instruction/Crewing Up/Familiarisation/Circuits and Landings,
- Weeks 3 to 6
 - Ground Instruction/Basic Air Training Day & Night/Bombing/Air Firing/Cine Gun,
- Week 7 & onwards
 - Ground Instruction/Applied Air Training/Cross Country/Advanced Navigation/Fighter Affiliation.

Elements of the training syllabus included:

- Synthetic training:
 - Link Trainer,
 - Bombing Teacher,
 - Clay Pigeon Shooting,
 - Turret Training,

⁴ THORNING, Arthur G *The Dambuster who cracked the Dam – The story of Melvin 'Dinghy' YOUNG* (Barnsley, Pen & Sword Aviation, 2008)

⁵ ALDRIDGE, Arthur with RYAN, Mark *The Last Torpedo Flyers – The True Story of Arthur ALDRIDGE, Hero of the Skies* (London, Simon & Schuster Ltd., 2013)

- Gunnery:
 - Combat Manoeuvres,
 - Air-to-Sea Firing,
 - Air-to-Air Firing,
 - Fighter Affiliation,
- Bombing:
 - Bombing Target Practice,
 - Mine Laying,
- Navigation:
 - Dead Reckoning Navigation,
 - Cross-Country Navigation Exercises,
 - Cross-Sea Navigation Exercises,
- Drills:
 - Ditching and Dinghy,
 - Parachute,
 - Fire,
 - Crash,
- Operational Procedures:
 - Formation Flying,
 - Attack Profiles.

Throughout the course there were daily classroom lectures, navigational exercises, morse practice in the air and on the ground. The first element of the training programme at No. 3 (C) O.T.U. was for the pilots to be assessed by an instructor (also known as a Screened Pilot) and passed for solo flying. The instructors taught the pupil pilots to: *'Always trust your instruments'*, and not to rely on their instincts. Any conflict between a pilot's instincts and his instruments could result in spatial disorientation, particularly in cloud, and no doubt led to many aircraft stalling and crashing. Many pilots avoided flying in cloud, unless taking evasive action, for this reason.⁶

Once a pilot was passed as competent for flying solo, they would team up with an Observer (Navigator), and two Wireless Operators/Air Gunners (WOp/AG). It was the practice of Coastal Command to train aircrew as both wireless operators and air gunners to allow flexibility in their duties, so they could interchange roles on long sorties to avoid becoming stale.⁷ The process for forming up crews was informal, with the pilots, observers and WOp/AGs all meeting up in a room and choosing their crews by discussions, and then reaching an instinctive decision.

The next stage for the crews was for the pilots to qualify for night flying. Many did their first sorties at dusk, before being passed for solo flying. It should be remembered that the aircraft of this period lacked many of the sophisticated flying aids fitted to modern aircraft. Most pilots relied on their experience, judgement, and luck.

⁶ Ibid

⁷ See Footnote on Page 3.

Each pilot went solo at night to do an initial circuit and landing. In the dark, a pilot would take off and then turn to port to keep the flare path in sight while flying downwind. It was often pitch black for the pilots, with the blackout in force on the ground.

The O.T.U. course included navigation, bombing and air-combat exercises, with one of the last elements being formation flying. This was because the anti-shipping aircraft would usually fly and attack in 'vics' of three aircraft, so this skill had to be learnt. It was a perilous climax to the course. One pilot's misjudgement, or a lapse in concentration, could result in a collision with one or both aircraft crashing.

Once the training programme was completed, the course would be concluded, and the crews posted. Most crews were posted as formed crews, although some would be split up according to operational requirements. Some crews were posted direct to either No. 22, 42, 86, or 217 Squadrons, the four Beaufort equipped squadrons in Coastal Command at this time. Other crews were posted to the T.T.U. at R.A.F. Abbotsinch, near Glasgow, and some were posted to prepare for deployment overseas to the Mediterranean.

24068 Wing Commander (W/C) P. D. CRACROFT, A.F.C. was appointed to the rank of Group Captain (G/C) to become the Commanding Officer, R.A.F. Station, Chivenor, with effect 1 August 1941. The station was organised along the following lines:

<u>Royal Air Force Chivenor</u>	<u>No. 5 (C) O.T.U.</u>
Station Headquarters @	Maintenance Wing
No. 47 Works Flight	Training Wing
A.A. Defence Squadron	

Just three days into its new designation, the O.T.U. suffered its first loss. On 3 August, P/O D. M. BATLEY met with a fatal accident when his Beaufort N.4478 crashed one mile north of Croyde, North Devon, due to the supposed failure of one engine (but confirmation lacking). P/O H. J. ABRAMS also met with his death in the accident. 937544 Sgt N. C. J. COLES received slight injuries.

On 9 August, a Court of Enquiry was assembled at R.A.F. Chivenor at 10.00 hours to enquire into the accident involving Beaufort L.4478 on 3 August 1941. The day was also marked by the tragic loss of P/O S. H. LAST and his air crew in Beaufort L.9953 which was seen and heard by many personnel to dive vertically into the River Taw at 10.15 hours from a height of five-hundred feet. P/O LAST, his Observer P/O V. J. HALL, and WOp/AGs Sgt WESLEY and Sgt FELL all died instantly in the violent crash only about half a mile from Chivenor. A Committee of Adjustment was formed on 11 August with S/L The Reverend R. H. BATE as the President, and Warrant Officer (W/O) LOVELL, the Station Warrant Officer, as the sole Member.

Their role was to gather and list the personal effects of the dead air crew from the crash of Beaufort L.9953, dispatch them to the Central Registry for transit to the next-of-kin, and to ascertain the assets and liabilities of each of them, to pay outstanding Mess bills and other debts, and then to send details of the remaining assets to the Casualty Section of the Air Ministry for the benefit of the next-of-kin. On 14 August. P/O A. R. MILNE-HENDERSON, A. & S.D. proceeded to Nottingham and returned to the unit on 16 August. This was possibly in connection with the repatriation of the bodies of Sgt WESLEY and Sgt FELL to their home city of Nottingham and to represent the base at their funerals.

Captaine R. MOIZAN, Forces Aériennes Françaises Libres (F.A.F.L.), the Free French Air Force was posted to R.A.F. Chivenor on 16 August: the first foreign airman to serve on the unit, he was the forerunner of many more members of the Commonwealth and Allied Air Forces. On the same day, Sous Lieutenant (S/Lt) R. CASPARIUS, F.A.F.L. was posted to R.A.F. Chivenor from No. 3 Personnel Reception Centre. On 17 August, No. 7 Anson and Beaufort course was completed. No. 9 Anson and Beaufort course commenced on 18 August.

Circumstances of the Crash

On Wednesday 27 August 1941, took off from R.A.F. Chivenor at 12.10 hours on a local wireless training exercise. The pilot was Sous Lieutenant (S/Lt) K. SAPIEHA, Forces Aériennes Françaises Libres (F.A.F.L.), the Free French Air Force, with three Wireless Operators under training on board. There was no instructor on-board the aircraft. The four men were:

30433	S/Lt K. SAPIEHA, F.A.F.L.	Pilot & Captain
987549	Sgt W. T. DOUGLAS, R.A.F.V.R.	WOp/AG (u/t)
1172596	Sgt P. J. BULL, R.A.F.V.R.	WOp/AG (u/t)
1311666	Sgt E. B. JONES, R.A.F.V.R.	WOp/AG (u/t)

The weather was good with 5/10 cloud cover at 1,800 feet, and visibility of six miles. The aircraft was seen by a witness, who was stood on the cliffs near Hartland, flying in an easterly direction towards Clovelly and Chivenor. The aircraft was in wireless contact at 13.26 hours, but shortly after this, it was seen to crash into the sea. The witness related how some parts of the aircraft were seen above the surface for about fifteen minutes, after which the wreckage sank. The witness, a local farmer, was not able to report what he had seen until he contacted the Police at Hoops Inn at 20.40 hours that evening. Meanwhile, when the Anson failed to return by 15.10 hours, the overdue procedure was commenced. This included phoning other nearby airfields to see if the aircraft had put down at an alternative location, and also checking radar and wireless telegraphy stations. No aircraft was sent up until 06.00 hours the next morning, as the staff at R.A.F. Chivenor had no idea of where to commence the search until the report was received from the Police. The Senior Naval Officer at Appledore also informed R.A.F. Chivenor when they became aware of the crash.

The body of Sgt BULL was found washed ashore at Benouth, Tintagel, on the North Cornwall coast at 13.00 hours on 13 September 1941. Papers on the body disclosed his identity as 1172596 Sgt BULL. The body was taken to the mortuary at R.A.F. St. Eval to await burial in his hometown of Wimbledon on 30 September.

The body of Sgt JONES was found next, having travelled across the Bristol Channel to the South Wales coast. It came ashore at Ricketts Head at St. Brides Bay in Pembrokeshire and was taken to Preston in Lancashire for burial on 8 October. The last body to be located was that of Sgt DOUGLAS, which was recovered from the sea off Milford Haven, Pembrokeshire on 13 October. The body was taken to Pembroke Dock where DOUGLAS was identified by means of his Identity Disc. His body was taken to Langholm for burial.

The body of the young French pilot was never located, and he remains 'Missing, presumed dead'. The recovery of three bodies, but not that of the pilot, suggests that the pilot was possibly unable to get out of the aircraft following the crash into the sea, but that the three trainee WOp/AGs managed to escape from the aircraft, but they were unable to access the dinghy and died of exposure and/or drowning. On 11 September, Sous Lieutenant C. SAPIEHA, who was missing following the loss of Anson L.7072, was formally posted to No.1 Depot, R.A.F..

L.7072 was one of a batch of twenty-eight aircraft ordered as contract 633200/37, built at Newton Heath in Manchester, and delivered to the Royal Air Force between October and December 1937.⁸ It commenced its service with No. 10 Flying Training School, later moving to No. 6 Flying Training School, which in turn was redesignated as No. 6 Service Flying Training School. It was transferred to No. 3 (C) O.T.U. when that unit was formed in October 1940. In turn, No. 3 (C) O.T.U. was redesignated as No. 5 (C) O.T.U. on 1 August 1941.⁹ The engines were Armstrong Siddeley Cheetahs, that on the port side being 115551 and the starboard one being 133735, suggesting that the starboard engine was a later replacement.

Court of Inquiry

On 6 September, a Court of Enquiry was assembled at R.A.F. Chivenor at 10.00 hours to enquire into the flying accident involving Anson L.7072, which was the aircraft flown by S/Lt Karol SAPIEHA, F.A.F.L. that was seen to crash into the sea off Hartland Point on 27 August, resulting in the deaths of the four crew. The President was S/L L. CHISWELL, and the Members were F/L D. SHAWE, D.F.C. and F/O R. FOSTER. Unfortunately, a copy of their report has not been located. In the Casualty File, there are details of the witness statement taken by the Devon Constabulary at Hoops Inn at about 19.40 hours on 27 August.

⁸ STURTIVANT R. C. *The Anson File* (Tonbridge, Air-Britain (Historians) Ltd., 1988) p.11

⁹ *Ibid* p.46

The witness was Mr Frank COLWILL of Exmansworthy Cottage, Hartland, and the report stated:

That while off Fattacott Cliffs, Hartland, at 1.30 pm to-day he saw an aeroplane coming from the direction of Hartland Point westerly direction proceeding easterly towards Clovelly.

It was losing height over the sea and when it came to Chapman Rock 1 ½ miles E.N.E. of Hartland Point the wings of the plane were up.

He went to the edge of the cliff and saw three pieces of the plane showing about four feet above the water. It remained in this position for 15 minutes and then disappeared.

There was a lot of oil on the surface of the water, he is certain that it was a British aircraft, believe an Avro Anson, approx. 600 yards from land. Tide out at the time of the crash. Cannot say the number of occupants.

Accidents Investigation Branch

It is not believed that this accident was referred to the Accidents Investigation Branch of the Air Ministry for investigation because it crashed at sea, and little evidence was forthcoming.

The Air Crew

30433 Sous Lieutenant Karol SAPIEHA, Forces Aériennes Françaises Libres (F.A.F.L.),

Karol Wladyslaw (or Charles Ladislaus) SAPIEHA was born in Quartier St. Sylvestre in Nice, France, on 16 June 1920. His father was His Highness, Prince Alexandre Josaphat Ladislaus Adam SAPIEHA (also known as SAPIEHA-KODENSKI) (25 November 1888 – u/k) who was a member of this distinguished family of Polish and Lithuanian heritage. The family can trace their origin back the 15th Century around the area of Gdansk, which they left because of the threat of Teutonic invasion. The title of the Sapieha family was recognised in Poland in 1572, Russia in 1800 and Austro-Hungary in 1845. The family married into some of the Royal households of Europe. The family were members of the Roman Catholic faith.

Alexander married Elizabeth HAMILTON-PAINE in London on 15 March 1915. She was born in Boston, U.S.A., of French heritage. Their first son, Leon Roman SAPIEHA was born in Biarritz on 3 December 1915. Karol was born four and a half years later, on 16 June 1920, in the Quartier St. Sylvestre, Nice, France. Karol attended Downside School in Somerset from 1929 until 1935, where he was known by the Anglicized name of Charles. He obtained the Oxford and Cambridge Elementary Studies Certificate and the Baccalaureate, with mathematics and philosophy.

It is presumed that the family moved from France to the U.K. early in the Second World War, and lived at 6, Kensington House, Kensington, London. They moved to 128, Swan Court, Flood Street, Chelsea, in late 1941. Karol obtained naturalisation as a French citizen on 17 January 1940.

He went to a recruiting office in Chambéry to enlist in the French Army. At 12.30 hours on 17 June 1940, Marshal PETAIN (having succeeded Paul REYNAUD two days before) made an address on radio requesting an armistice. On 22 June 1940, the German authorities made the French government sign the armistice agreement in the same railway carriage in Compiègne that the Germans had signed their armistice in 1918.

On 25 June 1940, having heard on the radio the announcement of the armistice between France and Germany, SAPIEHA decided to leave and travel to the U.K. to continue the fight. He took his passport and having obtained a Visa to travel to Portugal, he made his way to that country. Upon arriving in Lisbon, he made his way to the British Embassy, where he met the Air Attaché, Group Captain CHAMBERLEYNE. SAPIEHA explains his desire to volunteer to fly with the Royal Air Force, so CHAMBERLEYNE makes the arrangements necessary for SAPIEHA to reach the U.K.

Upon his arrival in the U.K., SAPIEHA heard the call of General De GAULLE in September 1940 for men and women to join les Forces Françaises Libres (F.F.L.), the Free French Forces, and he decided to join the Free French Air Force. SAPIEHA enlisted and signed the act of engagement No. 00422D with the F.F.L. in London on 19 September 1940. SAPIEHA stated that his religion was Roman Catholic and that he could speak English and Polish, as well as French of course. On 28 September 1940, he was registered with the F.A.F.L., the Free French Air Force, as a student pilot with the rank of Private, 2nd Class and the service number FAFL 30443.

On 4 November 1940, SAPIEHA was posted to R.A.F. Odiham in Hampshire which had been established as the basic training depot for the several French and Belgian air crew who had made their way to the U.K.. On his arrival at Odiham, he was promoted to the rank of Corporal. The Franco-Belgian School at R.A.F. Odiham had opened officially on Tuesday, 29 October 1940, under the command of a British officer Wing Commander WYNN. The school was able to accommodate about one-hundred men at various stages of training and operated as the Franco-Belgian Initial Training Wing. Initially, it was equipped with four French Morane 230 and 315 aircraft, and three Simoun aircraft. Several Miles Magister training aircraft were provided by the Royal Air Force to allow elementary flying training and grading of potential pilots.

The thirty or so Belgian air crew were under the responsibility of Captain CAJOT, with the French under Captain RANCOURT, also comprising about thirty students. A British officer, Flight Lieutenant DAVIES was appointed to be responsible for flight training. The actual flying training was provided by Belgian and French instructors, with British officers teaching all the air crew English where necessary. The first flights in the Magister aircraft took place on 7 November 1940. The Maggy was a small, monoplane, open cockpit training aircraft, fitted with a 130 hp Gipsy-Moth engine. Eventually, about twelve aircraft were allocated to R.A.F. Odiham.

The Franco-Belgian School was declared officially operational on 18 November 1940, and with Belgian instructors Leon PREVOT, Henry GONAY, Giovanni DIEU, C. GOETHALS, G. van-CROMPHOUT and Jacques D'URSEL.

The first fatal accident occurred on 17 December 1940 with the death of Instructor Sebastien ALBERT, and the student Victor DUBOURGEL being seriously injured. Christmas Day 1940 came, with all the men exiled from their homes being invited to local British families for the day, including Christmas dinner. At Odiham, the men selected to train as pilots were posted to one of the Elementary Flying Training Schools (E.F.T.S.) in the U.K.. Charles SAPIEHA was posted to No. 6 E.F.T.S. at R.A.F. Sywell in Northamptonshire.

Charles SAPIEHA arrived at R.A.F. Sywell on 15 February 1941, in company with Max GUEDJ. The course was eight-weeks in duration, with about fifty hours flying, half of which was solo. The students had to be able to take off and land safely, undertake flight manoeuvres and simple aerobatics. Ground training included principles of flight, knowledge of engines, basic navigation, communications, and weapons. It was while SAPIEHA was based at Sywell that Germany invaded the Soviet Union and the threat of invasion of the U.K. all but disappeared.

For the next stage of his flying training, SAPIEHA was posted to No. 11 Flying Training School (F.T.S.), based at R.A.F. Shawbury in Shropshire. Other French officers who trained with SAPIEHA on course No. 33 at No. 11 S.F.T.S. included: René CASPARIUS (Missing, presumed dead); Henri de MONTAL (Died); Joseph D'HAUTECOURT (Died); Charles FEUVRIER; Jean FORSANS; Jean LECOINTRE (Missing presumed dead); Alain KERBRAT; Simon STOLOFF; Philippe of BRETTE (Died); Paul HUBIDOS (Died); Marcel ROUSSELOT; Eugène THEATER (Missing, presumed dead); Rein LEGUIE; Gérard HOUDIN (Missing, presumed dead); and Gérard WEIL.

The French officers trained on the Airspeed Oxford twin-engine aircraft, and they had the added hurdle in that all the course instruction, and the examinations, were in English. At the conclusion of their course, Karol SAPIEHA and his fellow French student officers all received their Flying Badge, commonly known as their 'Wings'.¹⁰ In addition to receiving his Wings, on 22 July 1941, SAPIEHA was appointed to the rank of Sous Lieutenant (Second Lieutenant) in the F.F.L.. While he awaited a place on a course at an Operational Training Unit, S/Lt SAPIEHA was posted to No. 3 Personnel Reception Centre at R.A.F. Bournemouth with effect from 25 July 1941. On 16 August 1941, S/Lt SAPIEHA was posted to No. 5 (Coastal) Operational Training Unit at R.A.F. Chivenor in North Devon.¹¹

Other French officers posted to R.A.F. Chivenor from No. 3 Personnel Reception Centre on this date included, Capt. R. MOIZAN, F.A.F.L., Sous Lieutenants Gérard HOUDIN, Eugène THÉATRE, René CASPARIUS, Jean LECOINTRE, Max GUEDJ. Including S/Lt SAPIEHA, none of the other five Sous Lieutenants were destined to survive the Second World War.

¹⁰ The Association pour la Memoire des Forces Aeriennes Francais Libres gives the date that SAPIEHA received his Wings as 16 August 1941, but this would appear to be incorrect, as it is after he left No. 11 F.T.S.. Currently, I cannot ascertain the dates of Course No. 33 at No. 11 F.T.S..

¹¹ This date is taken from the Form 540 (O.R.B.) for R.A.F. Chivenor, and as it is the date quoted for the award of his Wings, this may be the reason for the confusion.

The body of Karol SAPIEHA was never recovered, and sadly, he is not commemorated on any memorial in the U.K. He was aged twenty-one years when he died and was single. He is commemorated on the War Memorial at Le Bourget Du Lac in France, with his brother Leon. This memorial was originally placed at the entrance to Saint Laurent church, but it is now placed in the Priory at 137 Route d'Aix-les-Bains. Leon was killed on 13 June 1940 in Fromentieres, France, during the German invasion of his home country. Karol's name also appears on a commemorative plaque in Friborg, Switzerland, for the honour of the 'Professors and Alumni who fell on the Field of Honour'. This is currently located in the French military square of the St. Leonard Cemetery.

Posthumously, Sous Lieutenant SAPIEHA was awarded two decorations; namely the Médaille de la Résistance Française (dated 11 March 1947) and Médaille Commémorative des Services Volontaires dans la France-Libre, with the following citation: *'Young fighter pilot full of spirit and confidence, esteemed by his leaders. Was missing in air service ordered on 27 August 1941'*. In 1944, SAPIEHA's parents were living with a Colonel COOTIN-NIAN at 'The Old Feathers', in Burnham, Buckinghamshire. A year later, his father, Alexander, was living at 127 Sloane Square, London. His mother died on 17 December 1971 in Nice, France, and his father died on 16 December 1980, aged ninety-two years. A cousin of Charles SPIEHA, Mathilde Marie Christine Ghislaine of Udekem D'Acoz, who was born on 20 January 1973 in Uccle, Belgium, married King Philippe of Belgium on 12 April 1999, thereby becoming Queen of the Belgians.

987549 Sergeant Walter Thomas DOUGLAS, R.A.F.V.R.

Walter James DOUGLAS was born in Newcastleton in the Scottish Borders on 3 February 1921. He enlisted at R.A.F. Padgate in Lancashire prior to April 1940 and was training as a wireless operator and air gunner when he died. At the time of his death, his family were living at Hagg on Esk, Cononie, Dumfriesshire.

1172596 Sergeant Peter James BULL, R.A.F.V.R.

Peter James BULL was born on 29 May 1921 in Hampstead, London. He enlisted at R.A.F. Cardington after April 1940 and was training to qualify as a wireless operator and air gunner when he died. At the time of his death, his family were living at 2, Pentney Road, Wimbledon.

1311666 Sergeant Edward Benonie JONES, R.A.F.V.R.

Edward Benonie JONES was born in Chubut, Argentina, on 3 July 1910. His mother had returned to the U.K. either prior to the war or shortly after war was declared, and she lived at 158, Tulbeth Road, Preston, Lancashire. Edward enlisted in the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve at Blackpool after July 1940 and was training as a wireless operator and air gunner when he died. In the C.W.G.C. records, he is shown as holding the rank of Aircraftman 2nd Class, and he is referred to by this rank in some correspondence, but other correspondence in the Casualty file refers to his rank as Sergeant.

Conclusions

It is much more difficult to analyse and investigate an accident that occurred at sea due to the nature of the crash scene and the inability to examine the wreckage. These were the days before Cockpit Voice Recorders and Flight Data Recorders to provide information for investigators. Sadly, this is the case with the loss of Anson L.7072. We will never know what led the Anson to force land in the sea off Hartland Point.

It was unfortunate that even though the actual crash was witnessed, the authorities were not notified for several hours. It is pure conjecture that if a search had been initiated earlier, whether one or more of the men on-board would have been recovered alive.

At least the three British men who died have graves, but Karol SAPIEHA has no grave or memorial to his memory in the United Kingdom. That is a shame, as he is no less deserving of one than any of the others who died in wartime. He was, of course, serving with a Royal Air Force unit in the U.K., so perhaps he and the other French airmen who served with the R.A.F. should be commemorated here in the U.K.?

In Memoriam

15 May 1941 – Avro Anson Mk. I – N.7072

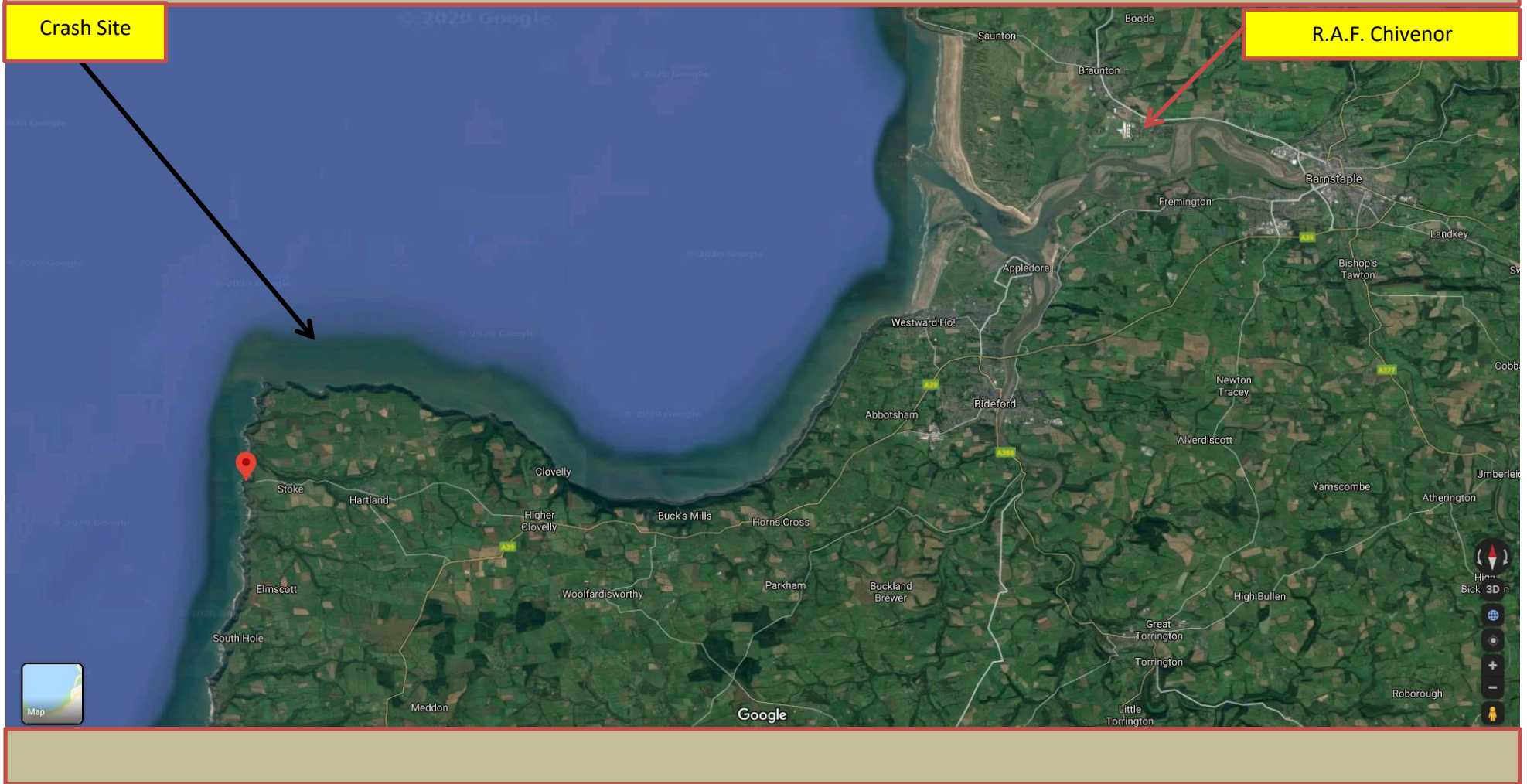
No.	Surname	Forenames(s)	Age	Date of Death	Rank	Role	Service	Service Number	Place of Burial	Grave
1.	SAPIEHA ¹²	Karol (Charles)	21	27/08/41	Sous Lieutenant	Pilot	F.F.A.F.			
2.	BULL ¹³	Peter James	20	27/08/41	Sergeant	WOp/AG	R.A.F.V.R.	1172596	Wimbledon Cemetery	Plot M.A. Grave 1239.
3.	DOUGLAS ¹⁴	Walter Thomas	20	27/08/41	Sergeant	WOp/AG	R.A.F.V.R.	987549	Langholm Cemetery	Sec. 1. Grave 3.
4.	JONES	Edward Benonie	31	27/08/41	Aircraftman 2 nd Class	WOp	R.A.F.V.R.	1311666	Preston (New Hall Lane) Cemetery	Sec. G. Nonconform Grave 762.

¹² Sous Lieutenant SAPIEHA was born on 14 June 1920, in Nice, France.

¹³ Son of Peter Francis and Marian Frances BULL, of Wimbledon, Surrey.

¹⁴ Son of Walter Thomas and Mary Graham DOUGLAS, of Canonbie, Dumfriesshire.

Map of Barnstaple Bay, including R.A.F. Chivenor and Hartland Point





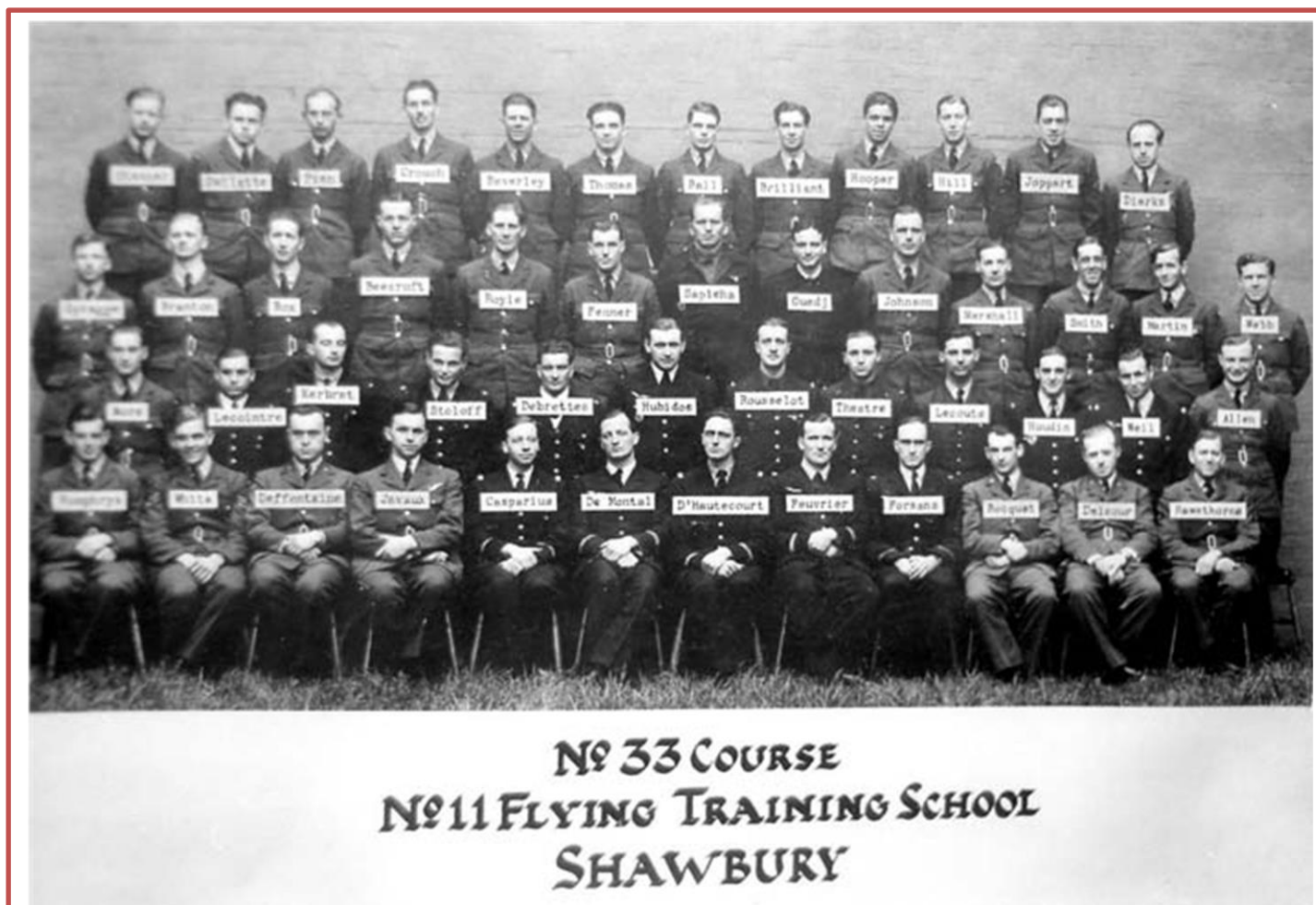
Left – Sous Lieutenant Karol SAPIEHA.

Courtesy of: Association pour la Memoire des Forces Aeriennes Francais Libres

Right – A photograph of a group of four French officers, including Karol (Charles) SAPIEHA, sat in the centre.



Au début des années 41, les Pilotes français sont reçus dans une famille Britannique.
De gauche à droite : Max Guedj, Charles Sapiéha (lituanien d'origine, dans les Forces Aériennes Françaises, disparu au Coastal Command le 27 Août 1941), debout Simon Stoloff (plus tard au Groupe Lorraine), Yves Lamy abattu par la Flak au cours du bombardement de Chevilly-Larue, percuta le pont de Tolbiac pour éviter de faire des victimes dans la population parisienne. Yves Lamy était lui aussi avocat.



Left – Course No. 33 at No. 11 Flying Training School, R.A.F. Shawbury. Charles SAPIEHA is stood on third row, seven from the right. Rene CASPARIUS is seated in the Front Row, fifth from the left.

Courtesy of: Association pour la Memoire des Forces Aeriennes Francais Libres



Left – The memorial in Le Bourget du Lac containing the name of Karol SAPIEHA and his brother.

Above – The names of the deceased on the same memorial.

Courtesy of: <https://monumentsmorts.univ-lille.fr/monument/4722/bourget-du-lac-presdeleglise/?elm=24013>

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