



# STUTTGART Citizen

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## Stuttgart remembers 9/11



# Great nephew and historian find lost bomber

By Marcus Fichtl  
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Fifty-three allied bombing raids descended upon Stuttgart between 1940-1945. By the end of World War II, officials estimated 68 percent of the city had been destroyed and more than 4500 lives lost. On January 28, 602 bombers made what would be the last major attack by the Royal Air Force in the war. 11 aircraft were lost during the raid, including a Canadian and British

manned Avro Lancaster that crashed in the forest outside the small town of Waldenbuch, 12 miles south of Stuttgart. Five members of the seven man crew perished, including one the bomber's gunners, 19-year-old Canadian Fernand L. Jolicoeur. The remains would be buried into a mass grave and the crash site cleaned up — all seemingly lost to history.

## Uncovering History

Jolicoeur's great nephew, Jean-Pierre Gendreau-Héту, regaled with tales of his uncle from his grandmother Rosaline, soon became interested in the Waldenbuch crash and the fate of his great-uncle.

"The memory of Fernand has remained alive in my family for a long time." the 55-year-old Gendreau-Héту told the Stuttgart Citizen. "His death still haunts us today."

Additionally, there was still some controversy over who survived the crash, Gendreau-Héту said reports mentioned four bodies were found with the downed Lancaster, but when the bodies were reburied at the Durnbach War Cemetery south of Munich, five names were on the gravestone, including Jolicoeur's.

"My grandmother kept telling me, 'Oh, I expect him to show up anytime,'" Gendreau-Héту told the Ottawa Citizen in 2014. "She waited for years thinking he might be somewhere."

He petitioned the Canadian government to exhume the grave for DNA testing, but his request was denied. Gendreau-Héту even took a trip to Waldenbuch, but came up empty handed. Then years later, this January, he found Waldenbuch's local historian Wolfgang Härtel.

Initially their search seemed to be going nowhere, post-war aerial photography archives provided little value. The small German village wasn't considered important enough to thoroughly photograph, and the tree cover made what few images they did have, incomplete.

Härtel then, this February, contacted three local newspapers, telling the story of the bomber crash and of Gendreau-Héту's search for his great-uncle. Almost immediately eye witness reports came pouring in. More than 30 townsfolk, now in their 80s and 90s, but then just kids, vividly remembered the crash.

"I was walking with my friends down a little path in the woods toward the crash site, and I remember a dead pilot lying there. He was covered with a parachute. I lifted the parachute a little and looked into the face of a very young man. I didn't go back to the wreckage of the plane," 92-year-old Ursula Niebel said in Härtel's report.

Another eyewitness in Härtel's report remembered a loud thud when he and his family were hiding in their neighbor's cellar during the bombing raid.

"It was a loud bang," said Hans Hartmann. "The crash site was quite close,



Fernand Leo Jolicoeur, mid-upper gunner, marked with an X in the bottom right, poses with his Lancaster bomber crew. Courtesy photo



Jean-Pierre Gendreau-Héту makes a statement thanking the people of Waldenbuch for finding his great uncle's crash site.

Photo by Marcus Fichtl

above our barn. My father and I walked there later. There were only fragments of the plane left, one engine and various parts."

Härtel said additional witnesses had mentioned in the immediate years that followed the crash that many people visited the site, and even one account said the bomber's plastic tanks were repurposed as manure barrels.

Then the historian and his team combined their research with the new witness reports, trudged out into the forest once more and soon found the crash site, serendipitously between a North American Red Oak and European Oak.

## One Last Walk in the Woods

On Aug. 16, one final trek would be made to the crash site. Gendreau-Héту, who now lives in Lucerne, Switzerland and his children who live in the U.S. and Canada, gathered with Härtel and some of the witnesses to the bomber crash 76 years ago.

They marched through the forest, first along a marked path, and then through a thicket to the crash site. There Härtel had created one final memorial for the bomber crew. Miniature Canadian flags were placed in an outline of how the Lancaster was presumed to have crashed. A framed picture of Jolicoeur stood on a chair, and debris and parts were placed in a small wooden box.

"This story began with an email in January that a Canadian was looking for his lost great-uncle who crashed near Waldenbuch in 1945," said Härtel during the memorial ceremony. "Now today, through detailed research we have found the site."

While no additional remains were found, and some mystery still surrounds who died in the Lancaster bomber crash on January 28, 1945, Gendreau-Héту said he found closure and a new family.

"Today is an important day for me and my family," he said addressing the crowd in German. "We have found a home here in Waldenbuch and I can proudly say that 'Ich bin ein Waldenbucher.'"

A memorial plaque will be placed on Waldenbuch forest trail, commemorating the Canadian Airmen and Germans who lost their lives during the Stuttgart bombing raids.



Jean-Pierre Gendreau-Héту walks with his family and locals from the village of Waldenbuch to the Lancaster bomber crash site.

Photo by Marcus Fichtl

The Avro Lancaster bomber, the mainstay of the British bomber fleet.



An aerial photograph circa 1945 shows the devastation 53 bombing raids did on Stuttgart. Officials estimate nearly 68 percent of the city was destroyed, killing more than 4,500 people. Photos by Wiki commons



Debris and parts from the RAF Lancaster bomber found near the crash site.  
Photo by Marcus Fichtl

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