

ANOTHER STAR FOR OUR HISTORIAN

In recent newsletters, you have read about the 357th Fighter Group participating in the "shuttle mission" to Russia, Italy and back to England. From Aug. 4, 1944 until Aug. 12, 1944, 64 pilots and their aircraft were away from the Leiston Air Base. Also 35 ground crew members were on this shuttle mission for the same duration.

HOWEVER there still was combat activity going on at the Leiston Base while the men were away. Five missions flown by the Group with about 15 aircraft airborne each mission. On 10 August while on one of the five missions escorting B-24 Bombers, Lt. Edward K. Simpson and Lt. Donald Ferron collided in air. Ferron did not survive but Simpson did and received the protection of the French Marquis for a time. Soon the Army reported that Simpson was Killed In Action.

Our active Fighter Ace William "O'Bee" O'Brien plays a part in this story! On 4 August 1944 the shuttle mission departed. On 5 August, "O'Bee" was transferred out of the 363rd F.S. of the 357th F.G. to another unit and base not too far from the Leiston Airbase. It was only natural for "O'Bee" to drop back to Leiston often to visit his 363rd F.S. friends. On one of those visits, "O'Bee" picked up some "scuttle-butt" that an R.A.F. Pilot had come to the Leiston Airbase with the metal bracelet of deceased Simpson. This bothered "O'Bee" over the years and he always desired to know the true story of how his friend Edward Simpson had died. He pursued Merle Olmsted for help.

The next chapter of our story is a letter dated 23 June 1996 written by our 357th F.G. Historian Merle Olmsted. Letter as follows:

More than a year ago when I obtained some army personnel files on Edward Simpson and passed the same on to "O'Bee", he remarked that there must be further information on the death of Simpson because the army report left some questions. It did however, mention that the STARS AND STRIPES for 25 Nov. 1959 had an article on Simpson's death. After talking to "O'Bee" about it, I decided to try to obtain a copy. First I contacted a friend at the AF Museum and he told me there were only 3 complete files in the world, one in Tokyo, one in Germany and one at the Pentagon Library. I tried the Pentagon first and now a year later, they continue to ignore me. Next, I tried the Univ. of Penna. where they have extensive 8th A.F. files. They answered immediately saying they did not have them but they sent a computer readout on libraries that had some S & S files. I tried the N.Y. City Library and as with the Pentagon, they continue to ignore my letter. Next I tried the Wisc. Historical Society in Madison and GREAT DAY, they not only answered immediately but sent me a copy of the article, NO CHARGE (although they did suggest a donation which I sent gladly). So after re-arranging it and recopying, I enclose a copy for you. This does seem to rather well complete the story of what happened, as of 1959.

Cheers,
Merle Olmsted

What perseverance it takes to be a good war Historian. Thank you Merle for putting our minds at ease as to the fate of one of our good men. (Simpson story follows)

The 'Dead' Yank Hero of Orleans Forest

A World War II fighter pilot, listed as killed in action on Aug. 10, 1944, actually died four days later with the maquis.

THE STARS AND STRIPES

25 Nov '59

By PAUL KACKLEY, Staff Writer

A ROW OF NINE simple wooden crosses, deep in the heart of the Forest of Orleans in France, marks the spot where an American fighter pilot enjoyed his last moment of peace on earth.

Just as the crosses were being driven into the ground at the head of the nine freshly filled graves, a series of shots shattered the dawn quiet of the forest.

Minutes later, Capt Edward K. Simpson was dead. But he died a hero — sacrificing his life that a group of freedom fighters he had known only a few days might live.

This was Aug. 14, 1944, the day remembered by the people of this part of France as the "day that the maquis were attacked."

Members of the maquis who were in the forest that day remember that Simpson joined them late in the evening of Aug. 10, after his fighter plane was shot down south of the Loire River and several miles from the maquis' forest hiding place.

Just after landing, Simpson was contacted by two of the freedom fighters who were returning from carrying messages to Col Marc O'Neill, commander of the maquis in four districts of France, who was then near Orleans.

"Our couriers led him back through the German lines to our hiding place," recalls Madame O'Neill, widow of the former maquis commander. "They thought he was British, since the only other English-speaking persons they had met during the war were a few British agents who worked with us."

At the time Simpson joined the maquis, the Allied forces had pushed to within a few miles of Orleans, and the German troops in the area were showing signs of a retreat to the north. The Free French fighters who had been operating from the

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Orleans forest for several months were awaiting orders to break out of the woods and join other maquis units in the push to Paris.

Rather than run the risk of trying to slip Simpson back to American forces, the maquis leaders suggested to him that he remain with them until time for the whole unit to break through the German Panzer division surrounding the forest.

The funeral service Simpson was attending when the attack began was for nine members of the maquis who had been killed in a life-fight on the outskirts of the forest. (The bodies of the nine were moved after the war, but the crosses marking the graves are still there.)

Although several of the freedom fighters fell when the patrol opened fire, the well-armed group quickly overpowered the Germans and drove them off. But knowing that their hiding place had been discovered, the Free French—numbering between 200 and 300—decided the time had come to escape from the woods and join the Allied forces near Orleans.

Hurriedly breaking the camp they had occupied for several months — signs of which can still be seen—the hunted men rushed through the woods to their well-hidden motor pool nearly a mile away. Most of their vehicles were captured from the Germans.

Simpson found a place on the last truck of the convoy as it broke from cover and raced down one of the forest's narrow trails leading to the Orleans highway.

As the maquis vehicles turned on to the highway they were spotted by a German column of trucks and armored cars. The Germans pursued the maquis convoy and were rapidly closing in, when Simpson made his decision—and died.

Knowing that the German column had to be stopped, one of the Frenchmen riding in the truck with Simpson called for the driver to slow down, and reached for it heavy machine gun.

As the truck slowed, Simpson and five of the Frenchmen dropped from it and set up the machine gun in the center of the road as the truck roared away. All six of the men surely realized that they could not escape death, since the point where they established their roadblock was flat and completely without protective cover.

The final action those men fought was brief, but successful. Their first burst of machine-gun fire stopped the lead German vehicle and blocked the road. They kept firing until all six were dead.

But the time they gained was enough, for by the time the road was cleared, the maquis convoy was well on the way to Orleans and out of reach of the Germans.

"I was with my husband when the convoy reached us," Madame O'Neill recalls. "When he asked for a report of the action, all we heard for nearly 15 minutes was an account of the bravery of the six men—especially the English-speaking one."

She continued, "Our soldiers were so impressed with the fact that Simpson gave his life for them even though he didn't have to, and didn't even know those he died with."

Simpson's action impressed the people of Ouzouer-sur-Loire—a village just a few yards from where he died—so much that they collected enough money to build a small monument at the scene of the roadblock. Many of the villagers were members of the maquis during the war.

The monument lists the names of the six men killed there:

Simpson's name also appears on a large monument dedicated to all of the maquis. This second memorial, located where eight of the forest trails converge on a circle in the center of the forest, is inscribed with the names of those who lost their lives during the bitter fighting in the woods in August 1944.

Near the monument to the maquis is O'Neill's tomb. He was killed in Algeria in 1956. The French government granted his wish to be buried in Orleans forest in gratitude for his leadership of the maquis.

Ironically, while the French people haven't forgotten the actions of the brave young American pilot, it is possible that no one—including his own family—from his own country even knew how he died.

"I told the first Americans I met about Simpson," Madame O'Neill recalls. "But they were combat troops, busy fighting, and I've wondered ever since if the manner of his death was ever entered in his official records."

Marc Grippon, who operates a cafe in Ouzouer-sur-Loire, and who buried Simpson's body in the local cemetery, also tried to tell the Americans how Simpson died.

"When the graves registration soldiers came here to move his body, I tried to tell them about Simpson," Grippon said. "But I don't speak English and they didn't have anyone who could speak French, so I'm sure they didn't understand me."

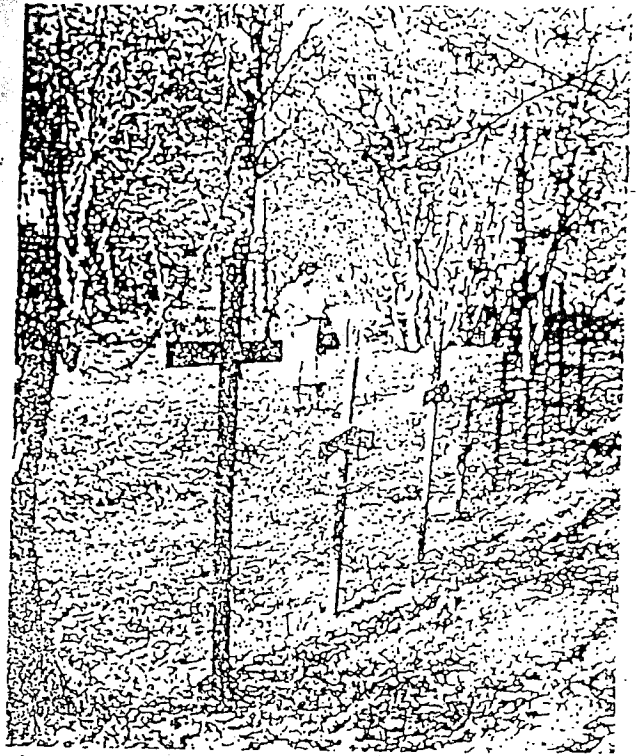
Evidently his words were not understood, for Simpson's official record of service, on file at the U.S. Army Records Center in St. Louis, states he was killed in action in France on Aug. 10, 1944—four days before he actually died.

Thanks to Olmsted

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Madame O'Neill stands near the monument to Simpson and the maquis fighters.



Crosses mark scene of maquis funeral interrupted by Nazis.

COMBAT

12 AOUT 1944

PASCAL MEUNIER GEORGES
LOUIS SGT DANAUX JACQUES
AT ALBERT MOUGET MARCEL

BOIS 13 AOUT 1944

UL

14 AOUT 1944

BEAUDEAU ANDRE
SIMPSON EDWARD

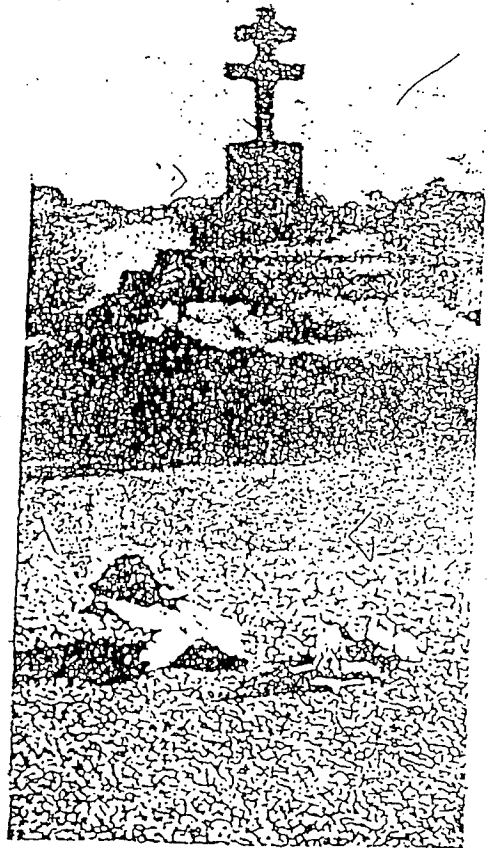
AOUT 1944

HURTAULT PIERRE

23 AOUT 1944

PLOUIN ALBERT

Combat records Simpson's death on Aug. 14, four days later than in U.S. records.



Autumn leaves mark the spot in road where Simpson died helping to man machine gun.

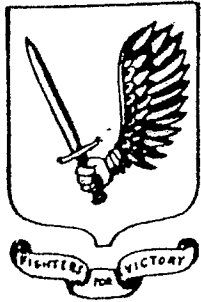
Wednesday, November 25, 1959



Marc Grippon picked up Simpson's body.

July 26, 2004

357th Fighter Group Association, Inc.
"The Yoxford Boys"



DEAR MARC POUCKET,

I WAS A P-51 PILOT IN THE 357TH FIGHTER GROUP 1943 AND 1944. A GOOD BUDDY, EDDIE SIMPSON, SURVIVED A MID-AIR COLLISION IN AUGUST, 1944. HE WAS PICKED UP BY FRENCH FREEDOM FIGHTERS. THEY ADVISED HIM TO STAY WITH THEM UNTIL THE GERMANS WERE PUSHED BACK SOME MORE. HE DID AND FOUGHT WITH THEM UNTIL HE GAVE HIS LIFE FOR THEM AND FREEDOM.

I AM ENCLOSEING A COPY OF A PROCLAMATION TELLING THE STORY. DO YOU HAVE ANY SUGGESTIONS OF HOW HIS STORY COULD BE HONORED IN YOUR MUSEUM? I WOULD BE MOST GRATEFUL FOR YOUR IDEAS,

MANY THANKS FOR YOUR HELP.

SINCERELY,

Bill Overstreet

address:

W. B. OVERSTREET
3387 PASTLEY AVE.
ROANOKE, VA 24015-4423

E-MAIL - WOVERSTREET @ IOPENER.NET

STATE OF NEW JERSEY
EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT

Proclamation

WHEREAS, all the citizens of the Garden State and indeed, all the people of the United States, owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to all those who have worn the uniform of the Armed Forces of the United States; and

WHEREAS, for more than 220 years, these patriotic and dedicated young men and women have well and faithfully defended the sacred principals of freedom and liberty so eloquently outlined in the Constitution of these United States; and

WHEREAS, all too often, this valiant defense of democracy and the preservation of our freedom has exacted all too high a cost, and this cost, the price of freedom, has been paid with the blood of our nation's sons and daughters; and

WHEREAS, one such heroic individual, Captain Edward (Eddie) K. Simpson, of the US Army Air Corps, 357th Fighter Group, 363rd Fighter Squadron, was from East Orange, New Jersey; and

WHEREAS, during World War II, Captain Simpson, a P-51 Mustang Fighter Pilot, was involved in a midair collision with a squadron mate near Sens, France on August 10, 1944. He survived the collision and was found by a group of French freedom fighters (Maquis) who gave him aid. He was with them for four days and, on August 14, 1944, was attending a funeral service for nine members of the Maquis who had been killed by the Germans, when they were attacked; and

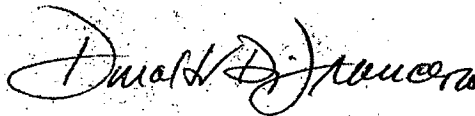
WHEREAS, the Maquis, numbering between 200 and 300 individuals, broke camp and tried to escape on vehicles they captured from the Germans. Captain Simpson was in the last truck of the convoy with the Germans in pursuit and rapidly closing in, when he and five of the Maquis jumped from the truck with a machine gun to try to slow down the Germans. Their machine gun fire stopped the lead German vehicle, which blocked the road, and allowed time for the rest of the Maquis to escape. They kept firing until they all were killed by the Germans; and

WHEREAS, Captain Simpson's bravery so impressed the people of Ouzouer-sur-Loire, a village near where he died, that they erected a monument at the scene of the road block listing his name along with the five Maquis that died with him; and

WHEREAS, it would be most fitting and appropriate that we pay special homage to Captain Eddie Simpson, who made the ultimate sacrifice so that we could live in peace, liberty, and prosperity;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, DONALD T. DIFRANCESCO, Senate President, Acting Governor of the State of New Jersey, do hereby recognize and commend the memory of Captain Edward K. Simpson for his heroism. The family and friends of this true American hero can take comfort and solace in the fact that the sacrifice of their loved one has not been made in vain and that like those who are gathered today, Americans will always gather on Memorial Day to salute those who died on the field of battle so that all of us could live in peace.

GIVEN, under my hand and the Great Seal of the State of New Jersey, this twenty-eighth day of May in the year of Our Lord two thousand one and of the Independence of the United States, the two hundred and twenty-fifth.



SENATE PRESIDENT,
ACTING GOVERNOR

BY THE GOVERNOR:



FOREST B. SOARIES, JR.,