

“Loire Rendezvous”

by Philip E. West

SIGNATURES – PRIMARY EDITION

Philip West is recognised as one of the world’s finest aviation artists. Collectors of his original oil paintings span the globe, many waiting patiently for his next breathtaking canvas to appear. Self taught, Philip has won many accolades for his paintings, not the least of which was the prestigious Duane Whitney Award for Excellence at the 1997 American Society of Aviation Artists Exhibition.

Flight Lieutenant Murray Anderson, DFC*, US Air Medal, flew Spitfires with No 1 PRU then moved to No 4 PRU in Algiers before returning to England and joining 542 PR Squadron at Benson. While here he brought back pictures of the “Prince Eugene” in Kiel Harbour.

Having trained on Lysanders in late 1940 he was happy to move to 161 SD Squadron at Tempsford in 1943 to be re-united with his favourite aircraft. Among other difficult operations, he flew six double Lysander missions, all except one with his friend, Leslie Whittaker, who had moved from PR work with him and who was killed during an operation in May 1944. Andy’s navigational skill was obvious and on one triple operation he was able to recognise where an accompanying pilot was from his description of the ground below and return him to the correct course to the pick up. He is also remembered for his records of sentimental French songs and his performances on the bag-pipes. In June 1944 he transferred to 2nd TAF to fly Mustangs after D-Day.

Flight Lieutenant Peter Arkell, OBE, USAF Medal Of Distinction, joined the RAFVR in 1940 and was sent by convoy to Canada and then to Arizona for pilot training. In 1942 he was posted to 26 Squadron at Gatwick where he flew Mustangs and Spitfires on low level intruder raids and coastline photography.

In 1944 he joined 161 SD (Special Duties) Squadron at Tempsford and in a double Lysander operation saw the second aircraft shot down killing the pilot and the two returning agents. Peter was then transferred with six Lysanders to India and then flew on to Burma to 357 Squadron. Here he continued to fly dangerous Lysander operations behind the Japanese lines supplying Force 136. On his thirty-fifth mission in August 1945 he attempted to land in the mountains during a monsoon and was seriously injured. The local Burmese mountain people took good care of him and another Lysander rescued him and his passenger.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Lewis Hodges, KCB, CBE, DSO, DFC joined the RAF in 1937 as a Cranwell Cadet and at the outbreak of war served with 76 and 49 Squadrons flying Hampdens. One of his fellow pilots at Scampton was Guy Gibson, later of “Dambusters” fame. It was then that he had to crash land in Occupied France in September 1940, but succeeded in evading capture and, with the help of Nancy Wake’s escape route, returned via Spain.

From 1942-4 he flew Halifaxes, Hudsons and Lysanders on many hazardous SOE operations into France and other occupied countries and for a period commanded the Squadron. He later flew similar missions with Liberators and Dakotas into Japanese Occupied Territories as commander of 357 Squadron.

At one period he served in Bomber Command working as Operations Officer with ACM Arthur Harris at his HQ in High Wycombe during the height of the bomber campaign.

Flight Lieutenant R G (Bob) Large, DFC, Legion d'honneur, learned to fly in Scotland in 1940 and in 1941 joined 616 Squadron as part of the Tangmere Wing, commanded by the famous legless pilot Wing Commander Douglas Bader. The Squadron flew Fighter and Bomber sweeps over Northern France. The remains of Bob's Spitfire lie at the bottom of the sea ten miles off Hythe (where he now lives) after being bounced by eighty plus ME 109Gs over the English Channel.

Having learned of the activities of 161 SD Squadron he was interviewed by the CO, Wing Commander Lewis Hodges, and joined the Lysander Flight. He then flew many important missions into occupied France in single, double and a memorable treble pickup when his excuse for being late at the rendezvous was that he had had a haircut "in the firm's time" because "it grew in the firm's time". After D-Day he returned to Fighter Command and later flew Meteors. (Bob's dog, Patrick, became the first dog in the Allied Forces to fly in a jet which took place in a Meteor 3 on 11th May 1946 and is now recorded in the Guinness Book of Records!)

SIGNATURES – Artist Proof and Remarque editions.

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Flying Officer J A (Tommy) Thomas began his flying career at RAF Llandow as Winch Operator on target towing duties with Fairy Battles and Lysanders. He remustered to Aircrew duties as Air Gunner and qualified at Dalcross in March 1943. He then joined a Halifax crew. Following his posting to RAF Tempsford he flew a number of operations as Rear Gunner over Occupied France in Halifaxes and Hudsons. Because of his early experience with towing winches he was detached to 161 "A" Flight Lysanders for mail pick up (MPU) duties as Winch Operator on G-George. His training saved him and his pilot, Bob Large, when he reacted instantly to free a tow wire, which had fouled the elevators on their Lysander during a low practice run. He flew with thirty-one different pilots.

Corporal Donald Dunstan joined the RAFVR in January 1940 and was trained as a Flight Mechanic working on Fairy Battles. He then transferred to 103 Squadron, Bomber Command, on Wellingtons at Newton before joining 419 Canadian Squadron at Mildenhall until their ground force arrived. Following a Fitter 2E course at Filton and Feltwell he joined 161 Squadron at Tempsford on Lysanders. During the "Moon Period" he would often move to the forward base at Tangmere to keep the "Lizzies" airborne. He serviced the aircraft of Wing Commanders Pickard and Hodges and Flight Lieutenant Fowler and Flying Officer McCairns. He was saddened to see Flying Officer McBride depart on an operation only to be tragically lost in a burning aircraft when attempting to land in thick fog on his return.

Nancy Wake, George Medal, Legion d'Honneur, Croix de Guerre, French Resistance Medal, US Medal of Freedom, was the most decorated servicewoman of WW 2. Shortly after the war began Nancy married a Marseilles businessman, Henri Fiocca and in 1940 served as an ambulance driver at the front before the surrender of France. Nancy then returned south and organised escape routes into Spain for evading Allied airmen. Her flat in Marseilles became a refuge for many escapers. She was arrested by the French police and interrogated. Shortly after, Nancy had to use her own escape route to reach England. Unbeknown to Nancy, her husband was later arrested and executed by the Germans.

She was then trained as an SOE agent, where her natural exuberance and vitality became obvious to her instructors. At the end of February, 1944 Nancy and a companion were dropped into the Auvergne to organise and train a large group of Maquis. She had to organise and distribute weapon and supply drops to her own and adjacent Resistance Groups. At one stage she cycled 400 km in 72 hours across the mountains to re-establish lost radio contact with London. She was involved in a number of dangerous subversive missions during which she earned the everlasting respect of 3500 members of her Maquis.

Captain George Millar, D.S.O., M.C. was parachuted secretly into France as an SOE agent on 1 June 1944. He was dropped north of Dijon to organise and train local Resistance groups to harass the enemy in support of the forthcoming D-Day landings in Normandy. In his incredible book, "Maquis", George tells of their many daring exploits, which included the destruction of the giant railway turntables on the important rail junction at Besancon. He also vividly describes his day-to-day survival and the disruptive SOE operations carried out on the German supply lines. George depicts with understanding, the characters of the ordinary men and women of the French Resistance who selflessly served with him to play their heroic part in the final liberation of France. "Emile" and his Maquis are still remembered in the quiet villages of the Ognon Valley.

Major E H Van Maurik (OBE Mil) was called up the day before the war began, and after training was commissioned into the Wiltshire Regiment. Later he was sent to North West Scotland where he trained SOE agents (including Peter Churchill) in the use of explosives, sabotage, weaponry and survival. Van then worked with the Air Liaison section at SOE's Baker Street HQ providing the operational instructions for clandestine missions into France. He often accompanied the agents to and from Tangmere for their flights by Lysander to help the Resistance Groups.

As a result of applying for a more active role in SOE's activities, Van was parachuted into France to the Maquis de l'Ain on 6 January, 1944. He then had to visit the groups in the area to assess and report on their strength and ability to support the forthcoming invasion on D-Day. Disguised as a shot down Bomber crew member (Pilot Officer Patterson) he smuggled himself into Switzerland to send his report, following which, the Maquis received a series of arms drops.

At the final victory Van was in charge of the SOE mission, which was sent to trace those agents who had been arrested by the Germans or otherwise had disappeared.
