

## **An account of the events that occurred in the Yonne Department of Bourgogne at le Paumier and les Maisons on July 20th 1944 and at Ecluse de la Place on July 21st 1944**

Early in the evening of July 19th 1944, Captain Lawrence Roy Bradford left his camp and set out on an Operation Houndsworth mission.<sup>1</sup>



One month earlier, on the night of June 21<sup>st</sup>, the Special Air Services (1 SAS) Troop Commander parachuted into the Morvan with his troop and established a camp in the forest near Chalaux (58140).



Captain L R Bradford

Travelling in a jeep armed with front and rear mounted twin Vickers K machine guns, his mission was to deliver rations and explosives to an advance party that had been sent to establish a new SAS base camp at Foret-des-Dames (58410).

This WWII jeep is like the one that was used by this patrol. Many of these jeeps were dropped into the Morvan in June/July 1944 using four huge 60-foot parachutes.

Accompanying Captain Bradford was Sergeant Cornelius (Maggie) McGinn (the driver), Sergeant Frederick Henry (Chalky) White (front gunner), Craftsman William Henry Devine<sup>2</sup> (rear gunner) and Jacques Morvillier, a young member of maquis Jean (their guide and interpreter).



Sergeant F H (Chalky) White

Sergeant C (Maggie) McGinn



Captain Bradford was seated between Sergeant McGinn and Sergeant White, Jacques Morvillier was behind them with Craftsman Devine.

The patrol travelled all night on minor roads to avoid detection by the German occupiers and the Royal Air Force (RAF).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Operation Houndsworth was an A Squadron, Special Air Service Regiment (1 SAS) operation conducted in the Morvan from June 6th to September 6th 1944. Their orders were to attack the German occupiers and to assist the maquis to prevent German reinforcements from opposing the Allied invasion.

<sup>2</sup> The Primary Regiment of Craftsman W H Devine was the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME). He was subsequently recruited to 1 SAS. The rank of Craftsman is the REME equivalent to Private.

<sup>3</sup> The patrol could easily have been mistaken for the enemy so they had to take precautions to avoid being attacked by the RAF. At this time, every effort was being made to hamper the relocation of German forces.

Enroute Captain Bradford decided to contact Captain Francois de Montaudouin (Chevalier) at the maquis Chevalier camp at les Maisons (89660) on the eastern side of Foret domaniale de Fretoy.

Captain Bradford was not aware that two days earlier, Chevalier had acted upon a pre-warning of an impending attack and moved the camp 10 km west to the other side of Foret domaniale de Fretoy, into the Bois de Druyes just to the north of the village of Druyes-les-Belles-Fontaines (89560). With extremely unfortunate timing, Captain Bradford and his patrol arrived on the scene after preparation for the attack had commenced.

At about 8 am on July 20<sup>th</sup>, the patrol crossed the River Yonne at Lucy-sur-Yonne (89480). After turning right onto the D39 at le Paumier (89480) they were surprised to be waved down by a German officer and a German soldier. Their only option was to try to shoot their way through.

They had inadvertently stumbled across some of the German forces<sup>4</sup> that had commenced the extensive, pre-dawn invasion and occupation of neighbouring villages to “box in” the communes of les Maisons and les Champs-Gras.

Very soon they came across a row of troop trucks parked on the side of the road and German troops on both sides of the road. It was a chaotic scene as the troops tried to dive out of the way and raced for their weapons.

Early in the engagement Captain Bradford was wounded in the left arm and Craftsman Devine was shot dead. As the patrol passed the convoy they became the target of a truck mounted Spandau. Without the protection of the rear guns, they were defenceless. Captain Bradford was shot dead, Jacques Morvillier suffered a shattered elbow and Sergeant White sustained serious wounds to a leg, an arm and had three fingers shot off his left hand. Sergeant White later commented that “Maud will give me hell for losing her ring”.



Sergeant McGinn was the only member of the patrol to be left unscathed. Despite lethal damage to the jeep, he managed to keep it moving. Unable to do more than about 50 kilometres per hour, it wasn't long before the jeep stopped just out of sight of the pursuing German troops.

As they disembarked, they could hear the soldiers running down the road towards them. Fortunately for the three survivors, they were very close to the southern corner of the Foret domaniale de Fretoy.

View of the southern corner of the Foret domaniale de Fretoy and the spot where the Jeep came to rest.

47.538023, 3.589683

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<sup>4</sup> The identity of these German troops is not known. They could have belonged to Feldgendarmarie 624 (barracked in Avallon) or they might have been White Russian troops from Ostbataillon 615. The number of German casualties is also unknown. An unconfirmed British report claimed there were 62 German deaths but the Gendarmes report states that according to the inhabitants of le Paumier, only two German soldiers died.

The total distance from where the patrol turned on to the D30 to where the jeep came to rest was only about 750 metres and the whole episode would have taken only about one minute. A lot can happen in one minute!

While Sergeant White and Jacques Morvillier headed for the forest, Sergeant McGinn quickly checked Captain Bradford and Craftsman Devine. All three had just enough time to reach the safety of the forest before the German soldiers arrived on the scene.

The trio kept moving into the forest but had to stop to allow Sergeant McGinn to treat Sergeant White's wounds.

By the time they reached a secondary road in the forest it was being patrolled and the risk of attempting a crossing was too great.

They spent the next 14 hours holed up in the forest listening to the sentries stationed along the road, well aware that they had to maintain absolute silence to avoid disclosing their location. After 10 pm the sentries left the forest and it was dark enough for the three fugitives to safely cross the road.

While they remained hidden in the forest, the German forces continued with their assault on the recently vacated maquis camp.<sup>5</sup>



When they found the camp deserted, the Germans realised that the maquis had been pre-warned about the assault.

Reacting angrily, they took Brigadier Fernand PIERRE from his home in les Maisons to the abandon maquis campsite and beat him to death.

Brigadier Fernand Pierre

The Brigadier Pierre monument at the abandon maquis campsite where he was beaten to death.

47.566718, 3.590626



After crossing the road, the three fugitives walked with frequent rest stops for about two hours. Sergeant McGinn scouted ahead for signs of the enemy and did everything he could to support and encourage his wounded comrades.

By about midnight it was raining and the wounded were too exhausted to continue. Sergeant McGinn used corn sheaves to build them a shelter.

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<sup>5</sup> The only account of this assault is the Gendarme report written following their visit to the site two days after the event. The gendarmes were puppets of the German occupiers and parts of the report reflect the German perspective. It is the author's view that this account is quite confused and not totally reliable.

At first light they continued for about an hour towards la Place (89660), a small commune on the southern side of the Yonne River.

The path they followed down through the forest to the river is marked on the current local map and is still accessible.

The entrance to the path leading down to the river.

47.546359, 3.605456

When they reached the river it would have been a huge relief for them to find a rowing boat chained to a tree on the opposite bank.

Sergeant McGinn stripped off, swam across the river and with great difficulty managed to break a branch to free the boat.



This was probably where the three fugitives found the boat tied to a tree on the other side of the river.

The Ecluse de la Place is in the distance, hidden by the bushes to the right of the group of trees.

After using the boat to cross the river they cast it off and let it drift downstream. They then found their path still blocked by the Nivernais Canal.



Exhausted and desperately hungry, their only option was to approach the lockmaster at Ecluse de la Place.

The Ecluse de la Place and the lockmasters maison.

47.538796, 3.606499

It was 4 am when Jules VISTEL saw the trio approaching the canal bridge. It was obvious to the lockmaster that they were fugitives.

Hiding them in his maison would have been too great a risk so he hid them in a dense patch of thorny bushes about 100 metres from the lock. Using some hay and a tarpaulin, he created a comfortable refuge and he then fed them the family's bread ration. <sup>6</sup>



Photo showing the location of the patch of thorny bushes

All that day the German patrols searched for the three fugitives. From the door of their house, Jules and his wife Madeleine had an excellent view of the Yonne Valley and the bare banks of the river. They observed the patrols thoroughly searching the northern side of the river and they were greatly relieved that the patrols made no attempt to cross the river.

Jules waited patiently before seeking the support of Felix MORET, a friend who he thought might have links to the maquis. Felix immediately enlisted Bernard (Prodal) BUET and together they went to the lock with Bernard's bike and fishing rods. The three fugitives were greatly heartened by this show of support.

Prodal left immediately and rode his bike to the camp of the maquis du Loup at Creux (58500), a distance of 19 km that would have taken him over an hour.



Felix walked 3.2 km to the Chateau de Faulin, a strategic stronghold with a commanding view of the area, from where he could monitor any troop movements and co-ordinate the rescue.

Georges (the Wolf) MOREAU, the leader of maquis du Loup, responded immediately. He used minor roads through the Forêt de Champornot to drive his Citroen Traction 11CV to rendezvous at Chateau de Faulin.

From there the Wolf insisted they use the canal tow path to take the 10 minute drive to Ecluse de la Place. This was the quickest, most direct route. Felix protested that it was too risky, but he was over-ruled.

The rescue mission proceeded down the tow path without any problems.

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<sup>6</sup> The patch of thorny bushes was on the northern side of the canal and on the eastern side of the road to the river. It would have been next to the spot where Jules VISTEL met the three fugitives, and it would have provided an excellent refuge. This location was also conveniently accessible for the retrieval.

The wounded were promptly conveyed to the maquis Camille Chateau de Vermont hospital at Dunles-Places (58230) and Sergeant McGinn was taken to the main SAS camp at Mazignien (58140) to report to his Commanding Officer, Major William Frazer.

Ian Wellsted was present when Sergeant McGinn arrived back at the camp. In his book, Ian recalled that Sergeant McGinn was a sorry sight when he was helped out of the jeep.

*“His shirt was torn, his face was white and drawn, and as he spoke he quivered with nervous tension and the strain of his experience.”*

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## Epilogue

On July 20th the bodies of Captain Bradford and Craftsman Devine were handed over to the Mayor of Crain (89480) and the next day they were buried in the Crain cemetery.

The inscription on the plaque between their graves reads in French:

**“AFFECTIONATE AND GRATEFUL TRIBUTE TO THE VALIANT WHO FAR FROM THEIR HOMELAND DIE BRAVELY TO RECONQUER OUR FREEDOM 20-7-1944”.**



The graves of Captain Bradford and Craftsman Devine in the Crain cemetery

On August 31st 1944, Jules VISTEL joined maquis du Loup with the codename Laridou and he remained a member until he was discharged on September 27th 1944.



This photo was taken soon after the maquis le Loup liberated Clamecy on August 19 1944. Georges (the Wolf) MOREAU is on the left leaning against his Citroen Traction 11CV that he used to rescue the three fugitives.

Standing next to him is Felix MORET and on the far right is Jules (Laridou) VISTEL.

Sergeant McGinn survived the war and on March 22nd 1945 it was announced in the London Gazette that he was awarded the Military Medal for his involvement in this mission.

After the war Jacques Morvillier returned to Paris with a permanently disabled elbow. On December 19th 1946, he signed a testimonial regarding his involvement in this incident. He later returned with his family to thank his rescuers. During that visit he expressed the view, that their lives had been spared by their decision to let the boat drift away.

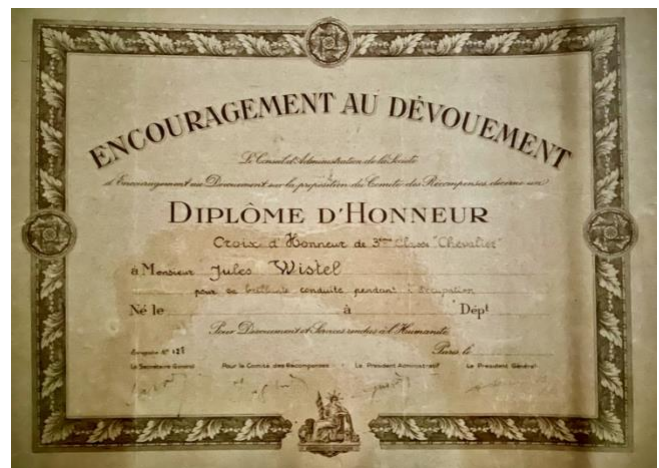
The bravery of Jules VISTEL was acknowledged by the Republican Society for the Encouragement of Dedication when they awarded him “Cross of Honour 3rd Class Knight” on November 20th 1947.

This award was for dedication and service to humanity and brilliant conduct during occupation.



Jules Vistel

Cross of Honour  
3rd Class Knight



Jules VISTEL died on March 5<sup>th</sup> 1972 and was buried in the Chatel Censoir cemetery.

He was honoured by "l'Association Nationale des Anciens Combattants on November 1<sup>st</sup> 1974 by the placement of an ANACR plaque on his grave.

Georges MOREAU and Jacques Morvillier were both present at this ceremony.

The grave of Jules Marcel VISTEL showing the ANACR plaque.



On the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 1994 a memorial stone was erected beside the D39 at the point where the jeep came to rest and the road was named Rue du 20 Juillet.

The photo of the southern corner of the forest also showed the location of the memorial stone.

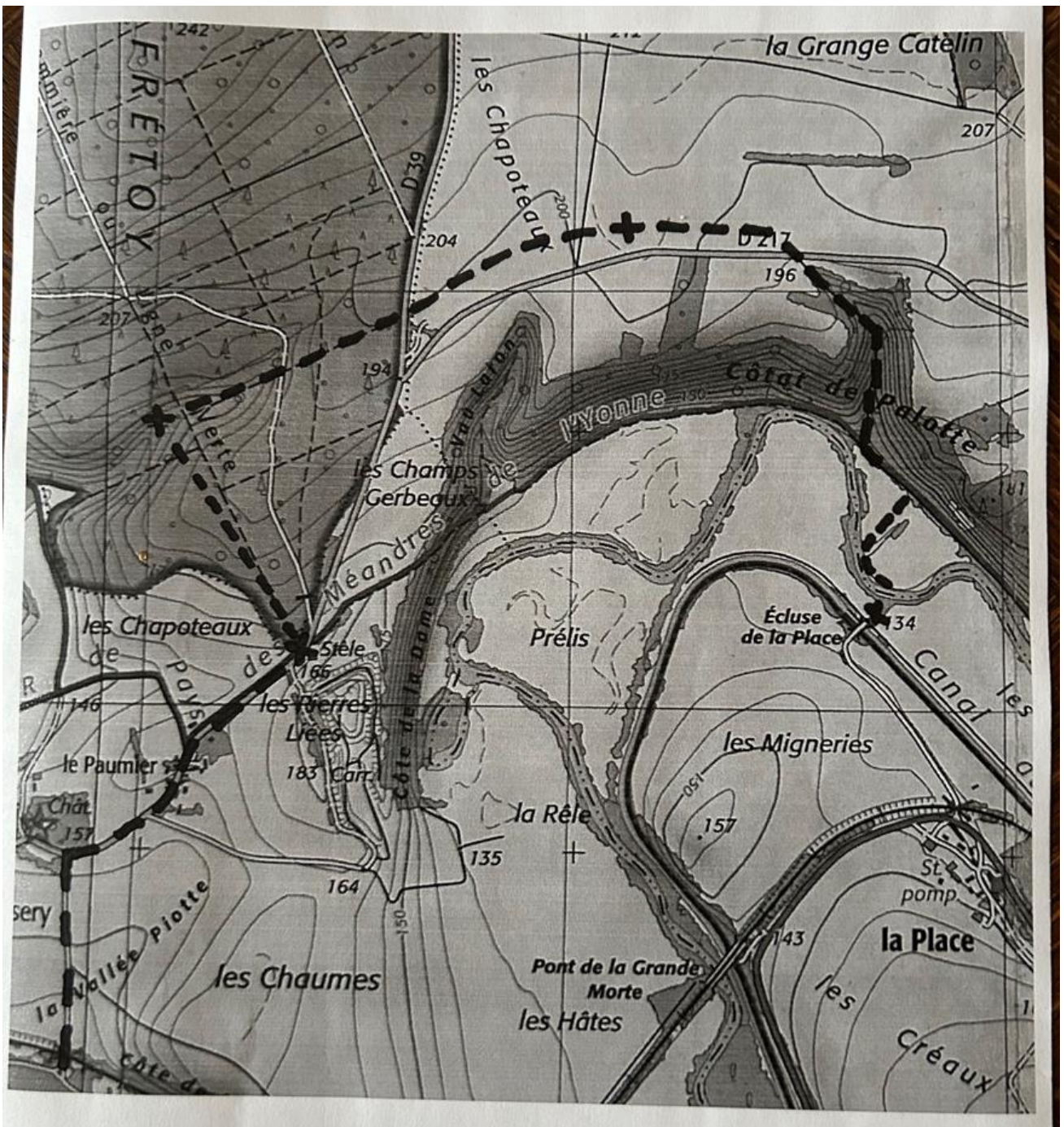
The memorial stone erected on the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary at the spot where the jeep came to rest.

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Sergeant White survived the war and was highly decorated for his distinguished military career.

He died in 1995 and his ashes were scattered in the maquis Bernard cemetery near Ouroux-en-Morvan (58230).





Approximate route taken by the jeep and then by the three fugitives on foot

## References

Relevant sections of the 40 page Operation Houndsworth composite report from WW2Talk:

- Report on Operation carried out on Bicycles 18/25th July 1944 by No. 2888910 Sergeant J DuVIVIER, M.M. (Pages 29 & 30)
- An account of Events leading to the death of Captain BRADFORD, 19/21<sup>st</sup> July 1944 by No. 2888389 Sergeant McGINN, C (Pages 31 & 32)

Citation in respect of Sgt McGinn by Major Frazer W. M.C dated 5/11/1944, published in WW2Talk and the Special Forces Roll of Honour

National Gendarmerie Report #203 dated July 22nd, 1944  
Departmental Archives of l'Yonne, Reference 1W 120 (pages 768 to 770)

Jules Marcel VISTEL Voluntary Resistance Fighter Application File  
Departmental Archives of l'Yonne, Reference 1453 w 154

An account of the rescue carried out by Jules VISTEL by Henri Desgranges  
amateur historian and resident of Chatel Censoir, 1973

Testimonial by Jacques Morvillier, Paris December 19<sup>th</sup> 1946

Special Forces Roll of Honour - Media

Capt Laurence Roy Bradford, Find a Grave & British Resistance Archive

SAS with the Maquis – Author Ian Wellstead  
Written in 1944, first published in 1994

The SAS in World War II An Illustrated History – Author Gavin Mortimer

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