

American visits site of air crash that killed brother

By Lorraine Shearer

An American man visited the site in Orkney this week where his brother was killed in an air crash while on a secret mission to Norway in 1945.

Louie Allesio (67) from Massachusetts, said that his brother Charles, who was only 22 at the time, had died only months before the end of World War Two.

Lieutenant Charles Joseph Allesio was a navigator on board the B24 on her way with Norwegian Government agents to Norway in the early hours of March 31, 1945.

"It was a secret Office of Strategic Services mission. They had gone to Norway to make the drop but the weather was too bad so they turned back," Louie said.

"They could not make it to Aberdeen so they tried to make it to Hatston in Orkney. I guess they had fuel problems and the wings were icing up."

He said the next part is not clear, although Louie and his wife

Marty, who also made the trip to Orkney, think the plane was shot down by the British over Scaapa Flow as they flew in. "They were not marked and were in radio silence because it was a secret mission."

The B24 crashed in a field at Walliwall Farm, just outside Kirkwall, at 4am on March 31.

Incredibly one man, the co-pilot, survived out of the 14 on board, and Louie managed to trace him via the Internet.

"All were killed except one. One bailed out and survived," he said, "Lieutenant Peter Pulrang. He is still alive in Florida - he's a retired doctor."

According to Dr Pulrang it was Charles, as navigator, who suggested they try and make it to Orkney.

Louie was only 11 when news arrived telling of his older brother's death.

"I remember we got a telegram telling us he had been killed - it



Lieutenant Charles Joseph Allesio was killed when his aircraft crashed in an Orkney field while on a secret mission to Norway in 1945.

was the same day Roosevelt died, April 11, immediately after that the war ended. My mother never got over it."

He continued: "All these years I was under the impression, my mother told me my brother was shot down by the Germans. In the past three years through the Internet and information from the Government, I found out this was a secret mission."

Charles was buried in England and it was two years before his body was brought back to Massachusetts.

In 1998, Louie wrote to *The Orcadian* seeking more information to his unanswered questions.

"I received five answers, one from Tom Gray of Kirkwall who has been in touch with me constantly. He suggested a year ago we come and visit and so we're here."

They went to visit the crash site at the weekend. "And tomorrow I'm going to see somebody who saw the crash, so I'll probably get more information on that."

Louie explained that because the mission had been top secret, the crash site was cleared of all debris and cleaned up the next day.

And on looking through copies of *The Orcadian* from April 5 and 12, 1945 it seems the crash was not reported at all.

Louie would like anybody who remembers the crash or any subsequent facts about it to get in touch with him at 113 Shannon Lane, Westfield, Massachusetts 01085.

Now they know about their Uncle Charlie

Louie Alessio did not feel well on the morning of April 12, 1945. His mother said he could stay home from school.

Louie was 11, going on 12, the younger of two sons born to Italian immigrants.

Older brother Charlie was Louie's hero and closest friend. He taught him to ski and to fish. They shared a love of airplanes.

Charlie was a B-24 Liberator bomber navigator fighting in World War II. He had left Pittsfield two years earlier, but rarely went more than two weeks without writing to his little brother.

Charlie was a good guy like that.

Louie would respond to the letters with pages of his own. About the planes he spotted flying in the Berkshire sky, and the model aircraft he was putting together.

On the morning of April 12, 1945, when Louie Alessio looked out of his bedroom window, he saw no planes in the sky. But, parked in front of his home, was a black taxi.

A man in a dark suit was walking briskly toward the front door.

"I yelled to my mother," he re-

calls. "I don't think I had to even finish the sentence. She knew what that meant. That Charlie was gone."

Later that day, President Franklin D. Roosevelt died. That filled the headlines. But, within a week, one of them also read: "2nd Lt. Alessio Killed over Germany; Navigator on Liberator B-24 was 22."

A month later, the war in Europe was over.

Charlie was buried in an English cemetery for two years before his body was brought home, to St. Joseph's Cemetery in Pittsfield.

Every Memorial Day, Louie makes sure that he delivers fresh geraniums and ageratum to Charlie's grave.

"You can't put them down too early because the Berkshires are notorious for late frosts," Louie says. "They are hearty plants, though. They look great. Don't need much water."

Louie is now 67. A grandfather.



Tom Shea

After graduating from the Stockbridge School of Agriculture at the University of Massachusetts, Louie spent much of his adult life living in Westfield and working at the Adams Nursery there. Now, he is a turf salesman for Chicopee's Valley Green. His pow-

erful hands are scuffed and callused, no stranger to hard work.

Three years ago, his oldest grandchild, Shane Alessio, then at Amherst Middle School, wanted to do a report on his Great-uncle Charlie.

This made Louie feel good. He offered to help. He started on the Internet, entering his brother's serial number. The information Louie received pointed him in the direction of Alabama's Maxwell Air Force Base.

"Then the fun began," Louie says between bites of an English muffin on a recent soggy morning at the Westfield Friendly's Restaurant. "I started writing letters.

Spending a lot of time on the computer. I think of my brother every day. But this was different. A friend of mine said, it's like my brother wants me to know all this."

From Maxwell, Louie received documents labeled "previously privileged."

In those pages he learned that his brother died, not in Germany, but on the Scottish island of Orkney.

Charlie Alessio was a navigator for the secret Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the predecessor of the Central Intelligence Agency.

He was in a B-24 en route to Norway with Norwegian government agents in the early hours of March 31, 1945.

"The war wasn't quite over, but the Allies were already making their plans to get their people in charge," Louie says. "They had gone to Norway to make the drop, but the weather was too bad and they turned back. They could not make it to Aberdeen, so they tried to make it to an airfield in Orkney."

"I assume they had fuel problems and the wings were icing up. After that, I'm only speculating."

Louie believes that his brother's

plane was shot down by British anti-aircraft fire.

"The plane wasn't marked, and they were in radio silence because it was a secret mission," he says. "It crashed into a farm field just outside the village of Kirkwall, and blew up. Fourteen of the 15 men on board died."

Louie found the survivor, Lt. Peter Pulrang, a retired doctor in Florida.

"He knew so many details that papers just wouldn't have," Louie says. "Thank God for the Internet. How else would I have found him?"

To come full circle, Louie and his wife, Martha, traveled to the Orkney village of Kirkwall last summer, visiting the crash site and talking to natives who remembered the night.

When Louie returned to Westfield, he copied all the information he had gathered about Charlie, placed each story and document in a see-through plastic sleeve, and made a thick-ringed book out of it. He gave one to each of his four children and six grandchildren.

"They didn't know my brother," Louie says. "I wanted them to, and now they do."

KIRKCUALL - ORKNEY ISLAND
SCOTLAND

PLACE CRASHED HERE



CRASH SITE - PLANE HIT WALL
+ ENDED UP IN FIELD

TOM GRAY



MARGARET GRAY

ELIZABETH + THORFINN
GRANDCHILDREN - GRAY

LUCKY ESCAPE AS PLANE CRASHES IN KIRKWALL GARDEN

A Kirkwall woman this week turned the clock back to the wartime and recalled the luckiest day of her life.

It happened when a giant American Liberator aircraft narrowly missed her home and crashed in flames in her garden.

Mrs Margaret Harrold and her family escaped thanks to a telegraph pole. The bomber hit the pole on its way down, causing it to change direction. Mrs Harrold's memory was jogged by her nephew's Mr Andrew Nicholson's reminiscences in last week's issue which referred to the Liberator crash.

She was able to bring the tragedy into sharper focus and provide an accurate picture. The Liberator was brought down in 1944 by Orkney gun batteries who had been unable to get any radio response and treated the aircraft as an enemy.

It was said to have been on fire as it passed over Kirkwall under heavy attack from the ground defences including ships berthed in the harbour. Mrs Harrold who lives in Clay Loan says she will never forget the events of that morning, March 31, 1944.

She told *The Orcadian*: "I was awakened about 5 a.m. by a terrible noise and thought it was a raid. You would have thought that the roof of the house was being torn off. Then there was an explosion. I couldn't move for the first five minutes, I was so petrified." Then, Mrs Harrold quickly made her way out of the house with the rest of the family, husband Jim, their five year old daughter Margaret and a nephew Ashley Nicolson.

Said Mrs Harrold: "The plane was in flames about forty feet from the end of the house. You heard the roar as we were leaving the house. The heat was scorching . . . I have never seen a fire like it and I never want to again. The road was closed, it was ablaze with

escaping aviation fuel which was running like a river. One of the plane's wings landed near the garden dyke which was demolished, the other one ended up in a field in Walliwall. The emergency services tried buckets of water but it was hopeless."

It was a little later before Mrs Harrold realised just how lucky she and her family had been. The noise of the doomed Liberator had brought her husband's boss Mr Peter Ormiston out of his house at the county garages and he witnessed the plane's last moments.

Said Mrs Harrold: "He was convinced that the Liberator was going to hit our house but seconds before, it hit a telegraph pole and slewed past the house. The three farms Little Corse, Walliwall and Quarrybanks were in a triangle, yet the Liberator came down in the middle."

The terrible truth that the defences had brought down one of their own aircraft soon became known. Two of the crew had jumped for their lives before the final impact — not one as previously thought and miraculously one of the airmen was alive.

Said Mrs Harrold: "He had a broken leg and was, I assume, taken to the Balfour Hospital. That was the last we saw of him. I don't know whether he survived or not." The Balfour had no record of the airman receiving treatment on that day and it was thought that he could have been treated at one of the military hospitals."

There was an immediate security clampdown on the whole affair but there seemed to be little doubt that at least some of the airmen were high ranking American officers. Said Mrs Harrold: "Gold braid was spotted on the uniforms of those who got clear. We gathered that they were on a mission but nothing ever emerged about it."

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Wartime plane crash survivor dies

by **CRAIG TAYLOR**

THE only survivor of a wartime plane crash on the outskirts of Kirkwall which killed 13 men has just died in America.

An American B-24 Liberator with serial number 42-50331 of the 492nd Bombardment Group, 856th Bomb Squadron (The Carpetbaggers) crashed on March 31 1945 at Walliwall.

Seven crew members and six others on board died in the crash.

The co pilot 1/Lt Peter C Pulrang was the only survivor. He jumped from a height of about 800 feet and was lucky to survive.

Peter Curran Pulrang, M.D., died peacefully at his home in Tallahassee, Florida last Tuesday, September 23 at the age of 83.

He served in the Army Air Corps in England during the Second World War, co-piloting a B-24 Liberator on missions over occupied Europe for the Office of Special Services.

He was wounded in action and awarded the Purple Heart, as well as the Air Medal with four Oak Leaf Clusters. He was discharged at the rank of First Lieutenant in 1945 and went on to have a long and distinguished career in medicine in the USA.



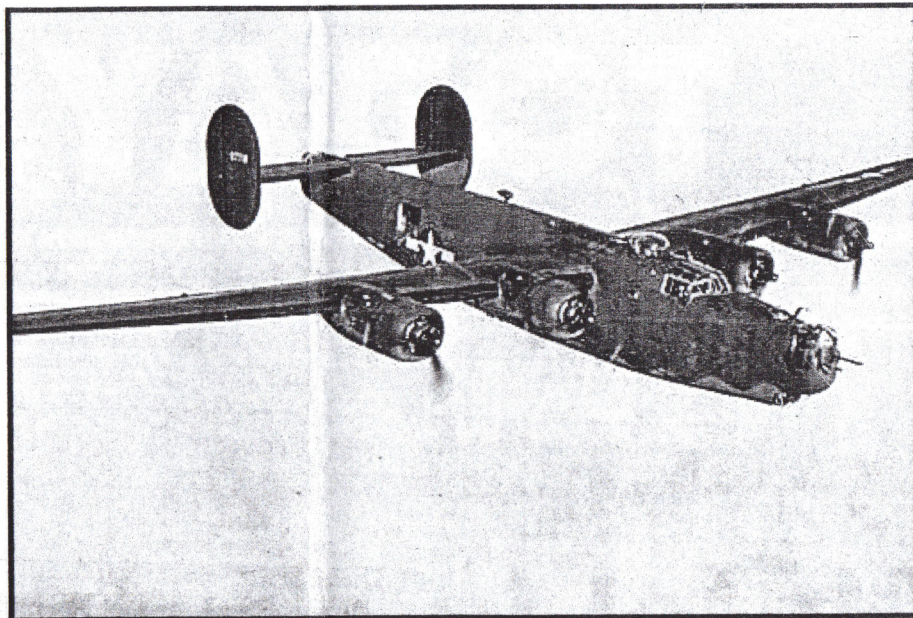
TRIBUTE: Flowers left at the scene of the crash on the 60th anniversary three years ago.

Back in 1945 the plane which crashed at Walliwall set off from Harrington, Northhamphshire on March 30. There were 19 B-24s involved in Mission 919 to support Operation Rype forces in Norway.

On board the plane were six Norwegian OSS (Office of Strategic Services) agents who were to parachute into Norway.

Bad weather forced several of the planes to turn back without being able to make their drop. The plane which crashed was one of those forced to turn back.

Peter Pulrang earlier told that there was a fuel



BOMBER: A B-24 Liberator similar to the aircraft which crashed at Walliwall.

problem on the return flight and two of the four engines stopped and could not be restarted. The pilot could no longer control the plane and gave the order to bail out, but he was the only one able to jump.

Kirkwall resident Norma Craigie lived in Glaitness Road at the time of the crash and said that she saw it when she was 10 or 11 years old.

She said: "I remember

seeing the plane which had crashed. As far as I can remember it was a great whopper of an aeroplane. It was massive to us who were kids at the time."

"There was someone who bailed out and his parachute was in a field near where the plane crashed. Some people who lived nearby took it and made underwear and blouses with it, possibly as clothing coupons

were required at this time."

Another person who remembers the tragic incident is another Kirkwall resident, Roberta Archbold.

"I stayed in Wellington Street at the time and remember being taken up to the plane which was badly damaged. It seemed huge to us as well. We were only kids at the time. I would have only been about eight."