



A STUDY OF THE AIRMEN CASUALTIES IN A CWGC CEMETERY

BY JOE MORAN

HAVING READ MIKE O'CONNOR'S BOOKS *Airfields & Airmen of the Somme* and *In the Footsteps of the Red Baron*, the latter co-authored with Norman Franks, my wife and I decided to visit the Somme battlefields and some of the areas mentioned in those publications. I then started looking at the possibility of trying to research all the airmen that were buried in one of the cemeteries. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) cemetery in Achiet-le-Grand became an obvious choice after the curators of the Ulster Tower Memorial on the Somme, Teddy and Phoebe Colligan, introduced me to Phillippe Drouin who was the vice-president of the Somme Remembrance Association and was himself working on a history of Achiet-le-Grand during WWI.

Achiet-le-Grand is a small French village located close to the main Arras to Bapaume road (now the N17). The Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemetery is well sign posted and easy to find. As with all such cemeteries that we visited it is very well looked after; a beautiful, if sad, place to visit.

Achiet-le-Grand Communal Cemetery contains four WWI burials and the Achiet-le-Grand Communal Cemetery Extension contains 1424 Commonwealth burials and 42 German war graves. Of the Commonwealth burials, 200 of them are 'known unto God'. Achiet-le-Grand train station was an allied railhead and the 45th and 49th Casualty Clearing Stations were based there. The village changed hands a number of times during the war, being finally liberated during August 1918. After the Armistice the cemetery expanded as bodies were recovered from the battlefields nearby and from other smaller cemeteries. The Communal Cemetery contains two

airmen while the Communal Cemetery Extension contains 34.

A number of the airmen buried in Achiet-le-Grand were victims of both early and late German aces; Martin Zander later to command Jasta 1 and Pour le Mérite winners, Gustav Leffers; Ernst Fr von Althaus; Max Immelmann; Kurt Wintgens; Albert Dossenbach; Manfred Fr von Richthofen; Erwin Böhme; Werner Voss and Fritz Otto Bernert. I decided to start at the earliest burial in 1915 and continue chronologically to the end of the war. As I researched and wrote the article I realised that 'old' is a very relative term!

From an aeronautical point the story of the CWGC in Achiet-le-Grand began on Wednesday **21 July 1915**. Early that morning, at approximately 04.20, Corporal Victor Clarence Judge and his observer **2Lt John Parker** (Kings Own Royal Lancaster Regiment) from 4 Sqn RFC¹ left their base at Vert Galant airfield. The squadron had only moved to Vert Galant the previous day. They were on an early morning reconnaissance patrol when they were engaged by enemy aircraft and shot down in combat. They were flying a Voisin LA, 1858.

Some records indicate that the pilot, Cpl V.C. Judge, was WIA and later DOW, but this is incorrect, I can find no information on his death but it is known that he survived as a POW and was transferred to the Netherlands in May 1918. Corporal (494) Judge was born in Portsmouth on 29 June 1891 and he joined the RFC in 1912. He took his 'Ticket',² number 855, at the Central Flying School, Upavon, on 21 July 1914, while flying a Maurice Farman Biplane. At this time his rank was recorded as a 1st Class Air Mechanic. He was one of 47 NCOs and other ranks graded as RFC pilots (Second Class) on 4 August 1914.

The survivors of the combat that resulted in Achiet cemetery receiving its first British airman for burial; Voisin 1858 surrounded by its German captors and Corporal C.C. Judge, who was made POW. Judge's observer, 2Lt John Parker was the luckless victim.

:CCI Archive and RAEC

