



OUR FILE 43-12-1 Chap (P)1  
REF. YOUR .....  
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ROYAL CANADIAN AIR FORCE  
"Western Air Command"

Vancouver, B. C.,  
5th July, 1945

Mr. L. L. Hammond,  
32 Winkworth Rd.,  
Banstead, Surrey,  
England

Dear Mr. Hammond:

For some weeks now I know you have been anxiously awaiting further news about your son, Sgt. James Leonard Gordon Hammond. As R. C. A. F. Chaplain (P) who accompanied the burial party to the scene of the tragedy, may I tell you in some detail about the trip to Mount Welch where the aircraft crashed and also of the actual burial service conducted.

It would be impossible for me to over-emphasize the inaccessibility of the location of the aircraft where it struck the peak of Mt. Welch, one of the mountains of the Cheam Range. It was a full two day trip, both going to and coming from the scene, travelling by motor transport, jeep, Bren gun carrier, pack horse and then by foot both ways. The aircraft rested on a ledge of the mountain at an elevation of 7100 feet above sea level. The steep mountain grades, the tangled underbrush, the avalanche snow and the fording of numerous creeks made it most impractical, if not impossible, for us to bring out the bodies of the eleven Royal Air Force lads. Even the burial party of six persons, all of whom were experienced mountaineers, except myself, required nine full days to complete the work entailed in the mountain burial.

As I trust you can see from the enclosed photographs, the grave site is indeed a most beautiful spot. It is situated in what is described as the saddle between the peaks of Welch Mountain and Still Mountain at an elevation of 6800 feet as read on our altimeter; it is just near the scene of the crash. It seems literally on top of the world,

for one can stand at the graveside and look down either side of the mountain on the most beautiful scenery in the world, as we hope you can tell from some of the photographs.

The utmost care and preparation were given to all details of the burial ceremony. Due to the extreme rocky terrain, it was impossible to prepare individual graves for each of the eleven lads. One great grave was prepared and the bodies were carefully wrapped and lowered into the grave in salvaged parachutes from the wrecked plane. All the lads were buried together side by side -- comrades in death as they had been in life as members of the crew of the fateful Liberator. On the top of the grave a great stone cairn was built, at the head of which was set the standard Air Force Cross, white with black lettering of the names of each boy. A beautiful wreath of wild flowers, ferns, moss and cedars was placed on the grave along with the Air Force Ensign.

The actual burial service, which was held at 3:00 P. M. Sunday, July 1, 1945, was as solemn and reverent an occasion as I have ever witnessed, at the conclusion of which, the stillness and peacefulness of the mountains resounded with a military salute -- not by the traditional firing party -- but by three well-timed blasts of dynamite placed at a safe distance from the grave site. The volleys echoed and re-echoed from every mountain side. It was a most fitting conclusion to a very impressive burial ceremony.

It is to be hoped that from what has been written above, you will glean some of the information for which I am sure you have been anxiously awaiting. If there is anything further that I might do for you, I hope you will not hesitate getting in touch with me.

May I extend to you on behalf of the Royal Canadian Air Force our deepest sympathy in the loss of your son. May the God of comfort give you strength throughout these troubled days.

Yours sincerely,

*E. W. S. Gilbert F/L*  
(E. W. S. Gilbert) F/L  
Chaplain (P)1  
Western Air Command  
Vancouver, B. C.