

Charles W. Roberson – 16 weeks in France

April 24 to August 15, 1944

Charles and his crew bailed out on April 24, around noon, while returning from a mission to Oberpfaffenhofen, Germany. All crew members survived, but four members were immediately arrested. HARVEY, RULE, BROWN, RADER, McMANUS and ROBERSON managed to avoid immediate capture.



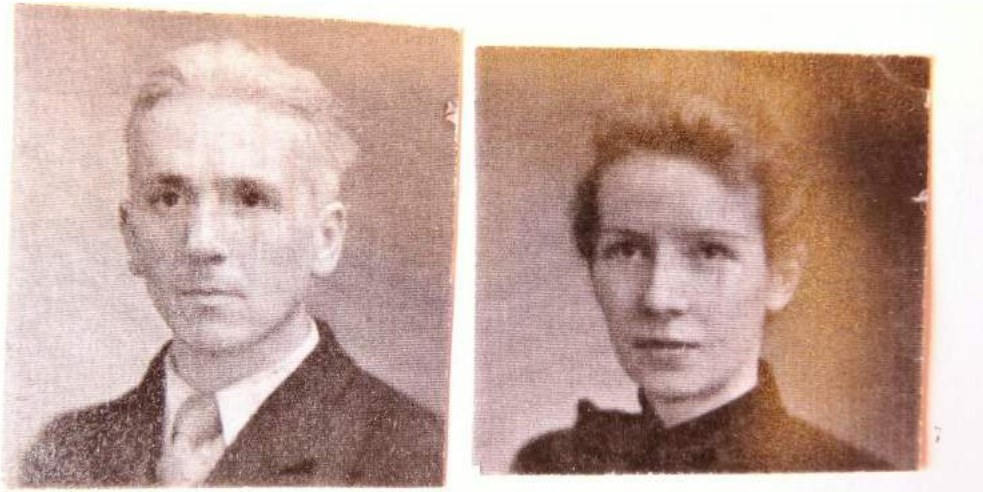
General map of the crash location (90 miles East of Paris) and the maquis camp

Charles landed near the small city of Arcis sur Aube (a few miles east of the crash), and met the local chief of resistance, Mr BERNARD, the next day.

On April 26, Charles was moved to the village of “Saint Mards en Othe”, where he met Mr & Mrs DERIVERY.

Marcel DERIVERY could speak English fluently, and that’s probably why many other airmen (both RAF and USAAF) were sent to Saint Mards en Othe. Marcel would first make sure the airmen were genuine allies, as it was known that the German were sending spies to infiltrate evasion networks. Marcel was helped by Mr COUILLARD and Mr LEBRUN, who were very active in the resistance and helped many downed airmen.

Within six weeks, 14 airmen who had been shot down in the region of Troyes were sent to the DERIVERY’S. Charles was the first one. Obviously, Marcel could not lodge them all, and it was decided that the men would join the Maquis nearby, a few miles south of the village.



Marcel & Genevieve DERIVERY

At the beginning of June, five members of his crew arrived in Saint Mards : Bill HARVEY, Jack RULE, Cornelius McMANUS and Robert BROWN. With Charles, they participated in the activities of the maquis, including air drops. Meanwhile, the number of French Resistants in the Maquis grew quickly.

On June 20th, the Germans massively attacked the maquis, and killed 27 men among the resistants. All the airmen but one managed to flee (Georges MORLEY was killed in the battle). Charles and Robert BROWN decided to walk together, westward.

Charles and Robert were seen in another maquis camp during the first week of July, 40 miles west of St Mards. There, they briefly met Henry WOODRUM and Walter KOZICKI (both USAAF officers). They spent a few days in a village nearby, named Fontaine Le Port, with Mr Paul DESARTHE.



In Fontaine le Port, with the family of Paul DESARTHE

On the 16th or 17th of July, both men were brought to the small town of Bannost, where they met Roy ALLEN, another airman whose plane was shot down a month earlier. Bannost was the starting point of a new journey to Paris (by bus, then by train). Police inspector Robert LEDUC was their guide, and he was travelling with Mr and Mrs BERTHAUD.

While in Paris, they were brought by police car to the apartment of Mr Georges BANLIER, another policeman. The three airmen stayed there for about two weeks, at 73 avenue du general Bizot, in the south-east of Paris. Roy ALLEN suffered from kidney stones, and he had to go to the hospital, with the risk of being discovered and arrested.

The airmen had to move when Mr BANLIER suspected that his apartment was being watched. Another policeman – Mr Roger MALVAULT - took them over, and they stayed for another week at his home, in the city of Saint Maur, a few miles east of Paris.

Finally, on August 10, they were sent back to Paris. Mr PREVOST, the chief of the police, welcomed them in his apartment, 20 Boulevard Sebastopol (very close to Notre Dame Cathedral). Georges PREVOST was very active in the resistance, and has sheltered more than 50 airmen in his apartment. Unfortunately, his organization was infiltrated by a traitor, a Gestapo agent.



Picture of Georges PREVOST

On August 11, the day after they arrived in PREVOST's apartment, the traitor – Guy de Marcheret – received orders from the gestapo Headquarters: the evasion network was to be destroyed. Charles and Robert were arrested along with Georges PREVOST, his fiancée, his sister and her husband. Roy ALLEN was also arrested the same day.

Georges PREVOST was deported to Buchenwald, in the same train as the other 168 airmen, on August 15th. He died in deportation, as well as his brother in law, Jean ROCHER.



Memorial plaque – 20 Boulevard Sebastopol

Guy GLÈBE d'EU, comte de Marcheret was responsible for the arrest of many airmen, French resistants and jews. He was caught in Denmark in 1945, trialed in France, and sentenced to death in 1949.

De MARCHERET is famous for another event which happened a few days after Charles was arrested. He had organized a trap that resulted in the arrest and slaughter of 35 young resistants who were engaged in the battle for the liberation of Paris. That story is part of the famous movie “Is Paris Burning?”

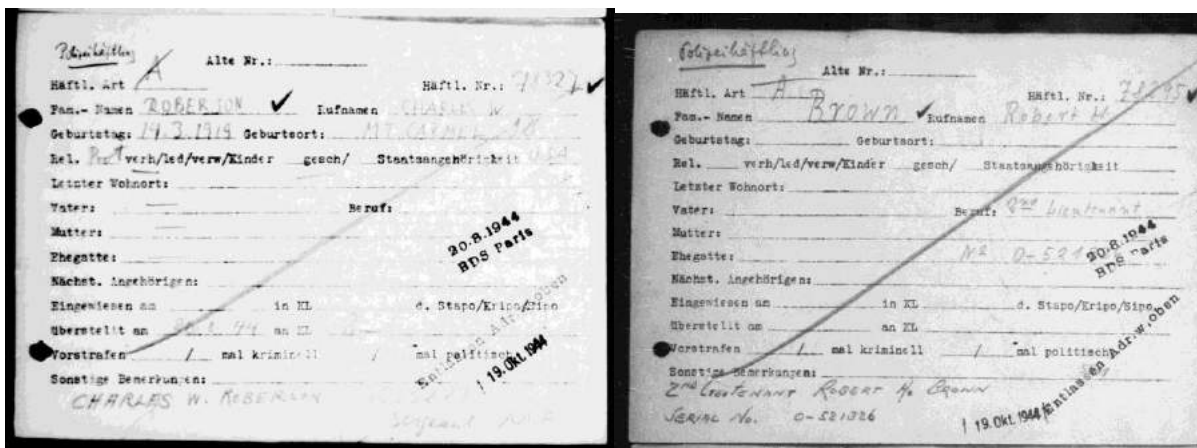
The airmen left the Gestapo HQ to the prison of Fresnes, where they stayed until August 15.



The Fresnes prison during the war

The living conditions in the prison were very hard, but it was nothing compared to what they would experience in Buchenwald.

The following documents were found by the US troops when they freed Buchenwald in 1945. Charles and Robert were not considered as American airmen (letter “A” was crossed out intentionally), but political prisoners.



Captured German records – Buchenwald records