

Honour for Bajan pilot killed in WW2



A plaque honouring George Inniss whose plane was shot down on February 4, 1941. (Internet Images.)

By **Sandra Sealey**

A Barbadian pilot was among those honoured on May 8 at the official opening of a permanent exhibition space that documents the four aircraft and crew that crashed in Pont-Saint-Martin, a coastal town in northwest Italy, during World War II.

PO George Harold Frederick Inniss, 24, and the aircrew of the Handley Page Hampden Mk. I, AD750 lost their lives when the plane crashed nose first at a farm, two kilometres southeast of Nantes Atlantique Airport after being hit by German flak.

Inniss, born on May 31, 1916, was the younger son of Charles Humpleby Inniss and Caroline Maria (née: Jamieson) who lived at Barbarees Hill, St Michael. His siblings were sisters Alma and Marjorie and brother Charles.

Pilot training

A Barbados scholar, Inniss, having completed a classics degree, had just finished a teaching diploma at London University. Three days after the declaration of war he volunteered for the Royal Air Force (RAF). At that time the RAF was short of pilots. Pilot training which generally took two years with pilots accumulating 320 flying hours was shortened to 14 months and 170 flying hours.

Having completed his training, Inniss was with 106 Squadron for just 51 days. It is believed that this was his first operational flight. He was then assigned to a more experienced pilot and was flying as the navigator which was common practice for new pilots to give them some operational experience.

The new permanent exhibition contains items retrieved from the crash sites in Pont-Saint-Martin and shares the location with the static Air France Lockheed Super Constellation F-BGNJ at Aéroport Nantes Atlantique.

The inauguration ceremony for the exhibition started with an address by the president of AREA-PL – Jérôme Batard, followed by an address by



Pilot George H.F. Inniss

the secretary – Nicolas Roturier. Delivering the feature address to open the exhibition was the Honorary Mayor of Pont-Saint-Martin – Yves François who paid tribute to the fallen airmen.

“Today, this exhibition allows us to look at a past that touches us in a sensitive way because of the geographical proximity of the plane crashes and because of the friendly, physical acquaintance of the English, Canadian and Barbadian families of the young airmen who died on our soil.

This morning, I salute Peter Burton, nephew of George Inniss, co-pilot of the Hampden I AD750 which left Yorkshire with five other aircraft, hit by German flak over Saint Nazaire and fell at Pont-Saint-Martin at 10.30 p.m. on February 4, 1941 while trying to land on the

runway of this airport.

“This exhibition is not an inert collection, a furtive temporal act, or a backward-looking act. Too many people today want to turn the page on commemorations, sometimes with only a lasting grudge.

“... On this 8th of May, I thank all those who have made it possible to find and keep these concrete traces of the commitment of all these young airmen who came with so many others to liberate France from external dominating wills.

Let's not forget to say “thank you.”

Burton, a Barbadian historian and writer/researcher of the BajanThings.com website, who resides in the United Kingdom, described the occasion as a very humbling experience. He delivered a message of thanks on behalf of the Inniss family in Barbados which read in part:

“I am honoured to be here today representing my cousins, the nephew and niece of P/O George Inniss who was shot down and killed when his aircraft was hit by German flak while attempting to bomb the French aircraft factory La Société Nationale des Constructions Aéronautiques de l'Ouest situated behind us on February 4, 1941.

“George was from Barbados. His older brother, Charlie, was married to my aunt. On my aunt's side-board was always a photo of George that he had sent to his mother when he gained his RAF wings in July 1940. It is inscribed “with love from George”. It was and is a very cherished photo. It is the only

photograph the family has of George in uniform.

“Growing up all the cousins knew the photo on the side-board of the RAF pilot was Uncle Charlie's brother, George, who was shot down and killed in France at the start of World War II.

“That was all the family knew. . . .

“On this special day in France, we remember George and all the others who gave their lives fighting for the freedom of France. He gave his tomorrow that we might live today in a democracy under the rule of law.

“On behalf of the Inniss family, thank you for inviting us to this opening ceremony today.”

Record of service

Burton added, “With the help of Jérôme Batard and Nicolas Roturier of the Association pour la Recherche d'Épaves Aéronautiques en Pays de Loire (Association for the Research of Aeronautical Wrecks in Pays de Loire, AREA-PL), by requesting George's RAF Record of Service from the UK Ministry of Defence and by searching RAF 106 Squadron Daily Operations Record Books and associated Personal Experience Reports we were able to piece together George's story which was published on BajanThings.com.”

In his account of the proceedings, Burton wrote: “We in the UK, US, Canada, and the Caribbean do not appreciate how important May 8 – la fête de la Victoire 1945 – is to the French. We were never occupied. France was occupied in June 1940.

“Liberation on May 8, 1945 had a significant meaning. What became obvious from attending this ceremony is how much it means to the French that these young men came to their country to fight for their freedom and died doing so.”

In France the May 8 is la fête de la Victoire 1945, le jour de la libération (Victory Day 1945, or Liberation Day). It is a national holiday when those that gave their lives fighting for the freedom of France are remembered. The date celebrates the announcement of the end of World War II by General Charles de Gaulle in 1945.

This year, 2024, is a significant anniversary. It is the 80th anniversary of “D-Day”, “Operation Neptune”, and “Jour-J” with the commencement of the Allied invasion of France that began on Tuesday, June 6, 1944. This operation began the liberation of France and the rest of Western Europe.

The Pont-Saint-Martin mayor was responsible for setting up a memorial to the crews of the RAF Hampden AD750 and RAF Wellington R1374 in 2011 that is outside the Hôtel de Ville (Mayor's office) in the centre of Pont-Saint-Martin.