

Lucy's Letter: A touching story ... unfinished ...

At the heart of this beautiful story is an Englishman (Albert TARRANT) and a French girl (Luce CREPY).

The story unfolds in Normandy, France, more precisely, Bernay, 1944-1945. Albert (Dennis TARRANT born 10/05/1925 at Southampton) was conscripted into the army and sent with his comrades of the 59th Staffordshire Regiment to Normandy sometime during the summer of 1944.



A plaque commemorating the part played by Albert's Regiment at Thury Harcourt, south of Caen, Normandy

Albert, with his mother and father, 1944

Most unfortunately, and not long after his arrival in France, Albert and several of his comrades were surrounded and captured by German troops in Thury Harcourt then eventually led away to a German POW camp. Shortly after his capture, Albert's parents received an official telegram saying that Albert had gone missing in battle and was presumed to be dead. His parents were understandably devastated.



During this time (we do not know exactly when) it is evident that Albert must have met the second person in this story – Lucy Crepy, who lived in Bernay at 11 Rue Taillefer, a large house just south of the station. At that time, Lucy's father was President of the Red Cross in Bernay. Somehow, the paths of Albert and Lucy crossed and he gave her a photograph of himself with his home address written on the back. It is very possible that the photograph was the one on the left or something very similar.

At some point, Lucy decided to use the address on the back of the photo and write to Albert's parents. Here is the letter she eventually wrote on the 12th March 1945, just two months before VE Day (8th May 1945).

A little while later, and with the thought of a lost son still fresh in their minds, a letter arrived completely out of the blue from Bernay with the following good news ...

Comma

BERNAY on 12th / 3 / 45
M^{lle} Lucie Prepy
11 Rue Tailleur
(Cure) BERNAY

Sir

I have the great pleasure to give you some brief news about your son. Unhappily I should have liked to do it earlier but it's only from a few days ago I know I could write at last in your country.

I have seen him on last August month, when we were near the battle; Germans had captured him with some other friends near Caen and nobody was wounded.

As my father was president of Red Cross in the little town where we lived from the war, I could have seen him. They seemed in good health and chiefly their moral was splendid. We could have given them food and cigarettes and they were all happy to know I could prevent their families. So soon very sorry to be so in late by bad circumstances. I miss you the little photo he gave me for his family I think it will be a great joy for you.

If you have received from this time some news about your son, I should be very happy to know it.

Receive from a greeting French young girl her best wishes for the coming back of your son and the assurance of her deep friendship for the unknown family of your son

Lucie Prepy

This short letter is remarkable from so many points of view. First of all, Lucy wrote with an excellent command of the English language, an interesting fact in itself. Either, someone had taught her really well at her local lycée (Lycée Augustin Fresnel?) or someone must have helped her put

it together. Whichever is true, it is a document that is at one and the same time both historic and very personal, in which we learn that Lucy last saw Albert in August 1944 shortly after D-Day, 6th June 1944, when 'we' (Lucy and who?) 'were near the battle'. And how did Lucy know that 'nobody was wounded'? Was the Red Cross in the vicinity? Did the wounded come to them for help? Was it here that Lucy met Albert?

At the start of this letter Lucy said that she had wanted to write earlier to assure Albert's parents that he was alive, in good health and 'splendid moral'. Getting a letter across the Channel at such a time would have been difficult, to say the least; hence the delay. She refers to her father's position as the President of the Red Cross in 'the little town where we

lived'; doubtless referring to Bernay. Lucy goes on to say that 'we were able to give them food and cigarettes', and that 'THEY were happy to know that I could warn (reassure) their families' of their situation. All this probably took place just before they were shipped off to the prisoner of war camp in Germany, where they remained until the end of the war when they were liberated by the Russian forces advancing towards Berlin from the east. At the end of the letter Lucy says how happy she would be to receive news of Albert, if they have any. She clearly wants to keep in touch!

Put yourself in the home of Albert's parents when that letter arrived ... imagine the emotion, the tears of joy and the celebration as the news sank in. Their son, presumed dead, was alive. At the end of the war Albert eventually returned home at the age of 20.

Albert's mother kept this letter for the rest of her life until her death in 1985. Even then, the letter remained in some half-hidden box in the attic, perhaps. It was as recent as April 2020 that the letter came to light with all the time in the world given us by the lock-down due to the Covid-19 virus. Albert's daughter, Janice Vincent (née TARRANT) is now the guardian of this historic treasure.

This story, so full of emotion, remains a puzzle with several pieces missing; notably ...

- **Is Lucy CREPY still alive?**
- How long did she live at 11 Rue Taillefer, Bernay?
- What did she do after the war?
- What stories does she keep in her heart, in her memory?



Albert, in 1950, at the age of 25

Michael Bawtree

Chairman of the Haslemere Twinning Association, Twinned with Bernay, Normandy