

**Lt Robert Bennett Byerly A/22256 Essex Scottish
Infantry Corps
AKA - Robert Antoine Breuil
Code Name - Gontrand**

Robert was born on 20 March 1916 in Passaic, New Jersey, USA, the son of Francis Parkman Byerly and Laura B Byerly nee Dawes.

A graduate of the University of Chicago, Robert was living in Paris, France, when in 1940 the French capitulated and he was forced as a USA citizen to leave. On returning to the USA, Robert was employed as a school teacher in New York when, in August 1941 he travelled to Ottawa, Canada, and enlisted in the Canadian Army. In April 1942 Robert embarked for the UK.

Fluent in French, Portugese, Spanish and Italian, Robert was recruited by F (France) Section, Special Operations Executive (SOE), his linguistic skills and knowledge of France making him an ideal recruit for field work in France. Trained as a wireless operator, Robert was destined to undertake that role for the "Surveyor" circuit.



In February 1944, Jacques and his fellow Agents were tasked with establishing a new circuit in the Brittany region, and were given a list of targets to sabotage which included locomotive sheds, railways and roads. The Agents were to be dropped to a reception committee from the "Phono" circuit.

At 20:58 on 8 February 1944, despite increasing certainty that the "Phono" circuit had been exposed, Robert and the team of three other Agents departed RAF Tempsford, Bedfordshire in 138 Sqn Halifax II L9613 (NF-V).

Successfully dropped at a site near Sully sur Loire, the Gestapo were waiting. The operation and reception on the drop zone had been arranged by the Germans as part of their "*Funkspiel*", using the captured radio set and codes of Noor Inayat-Khan.

All four Agents were arrested immediately and taken to Gestapo HQ at 84 Avenue Foch, Paris for interrogation. After interrogation, Robert was imprisoned at 3 bis place des Etats-Unis until he was transferred to Rawitsch Prison, Poland, in June 1944.

In the period 24 June to 4 September 1944, after orders were received from Berlin for the execution of the SOE agents at Rawitsch, they were taken by SS-Obersturmbannführer Dr. Wilhelm Scharpwinkel, head of the Breslau Gestapo, from the prison to the KZ Gross-Rosen concentration camp, 100 km SW in German Silesia. Robert was executed and his body cremated.

Also killed : Captain Francois Adolphe Deniset, Royal Canadian Artillery; Capt Jacques Paul Henri Ledoux Highland Light Infantry; Lt Roland Eugene Jean Alexandre (Agent)

Robert has no known grave and is commemorated at the Brookwood Military Cemetery, Surrey

Robert is commemorated on Wall Panel (NYE)

Photo Source: www.veterans.gc.ca