UXB:
UNEXPLODED BOMB



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Nelson Literacy Directions

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UXB: Unexploded Bomb

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Meet the Characters

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"Chalkie" Sykes

A British Mosquito pilot.



"Mac" McPherson

A British Mosquito navigator.



Monique

A brave resident of St Augiére.



Sebastian

Monique's father.



Roland

Monique's brother.



Jean-Claude

A bomb disposal expert.

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Dear Reader

During World War II (1939–45), hundreds of thousands of bombs rained down on Europe. Many did not explode and lay buried beneath the soil. They are called UXBs, or unexploded bombs. I wanted to write a story about two UXBs – one, a real bomb that is discovered, and the other, a long-forgotten secret of betrayal!

John Parsons
Author

St Augiére in 1943

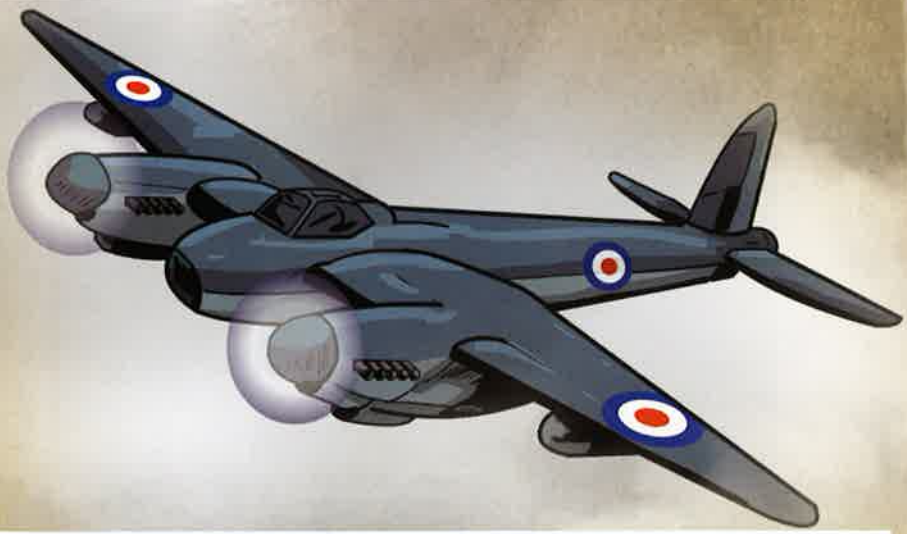


1. The workshop
2. The crash site
3. The farmhouse
4. St Augiére

1 Dangerous Times

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1943. Dangerous times. The full moon broke through the cloud cover, and a rippling slick of molten silver seemed to flash across the vast expanse of the Bay of Biscay. At 350 kilometres per hour, barely ten metres above the choppy waves, the Mosquito bomber tore through the night sky, its twin engines roaring.



The Mosquito's pilot, Squadron Leader Sykes, was nicknamed "Chalkie" because of his wild shock of blond hair. To the west, he saw nothing through the cockpit windshield except black sea. A low sea fog blurred the line between sea and sky to the east, and beyond that lay occupied France.



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Behind him, Chalkie's navigator, Ian "Mac" McPherson, checked his wristwatch. He distilled time, airspeed and revised direction into a thin pencil line on his navigational chart.

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Chalkie flicked a switch to jettison the tanks and, freed of the extra air resistance, the Mosquito's nose rose slightly. Chalkie levelled the aircraft out, knowing that if they flew above thirty metres and were detected, German fighter planes would be scrambled from their bases along western France.

"There!" shouted Mac.

At once, Chalkie saw the black outlines of the mountains looming through the fog.

Mac flicked his eyes between the dark mountains and the relief map on his knees, urgently trying to match the two.

"Keep tracking north," he said, the calmness in his voice disguising his rising anxiety. His suspicions had proven correct. Their long journey, keeping a safe distance from the French coast, had taken them fifty kilometres south of where they should have been. That meant retracing their path. If enemy troops along the coast had heard the roar of their engines, they'd alert the anti-aircraft guns to the north.

"Tracking north," confirmed Chalkie. He knew the danger they faced, but there was no turning back.

They'd come this far, and the mission had to be completed. If they survived, they'd have two long hours to worry about getting home, but right now, he needed to concentrate on reaching the target.

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1985. Bewildering times. Ten years ago, retirement had seemed like a good idea – long days to fill with hobbies or pottering in the garden shed. But now that it had finally arrived, retirement had quickly become boring. For years, there had always been a reason to get up in the mornings and now, suddenly, there was none.

The man stretched his aching leg as far as he could into the aisle of the train carriage. It had been a long journey back to London after his visit north to see an old friend. He rattled the pages of his newspaper and glanced at the headlines. Then he spotted it: a short paragraph buried in the overseas news on page eleven. It was curious how, in a page of text, the eyes could be drawn immediately to a word, a place name or a face that one immediately recognised. Suddenly, the ache in the man's leg vanished as he fixed his attention on the tiny article. He no longer heard the

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clatter of the carriage on the tracks, the chatter of the other passengers, the whoosh of brick walls and station platforms as they sped past. He stared at the photo accompanying the article. Those eyes. Cold, grey, expressionless.

