Sgt. Leslie George Baker 581492 RAF

Leslie was born in 1921 in Tavistock, Devon, the son of Sydney George Baker and Eliza Jane Baker (née Metters).

Educated at Tavistock Grammar School, Leslie joined the RAF straight from school and trained as an Observer.

Leslie was stationed with 98 Squadron at Chateau Bougon, near Nantes, France where the squadron operated as a supporting unit to the Advanced Air Striking Force (AASF) fighting squadrons, supplying replacement crew and aircraft as needed.

When France capitulated, the AASF began the withdrawal to England. Just two weeks after Dunkirk, Operation Aerial was launched - the evacuation of the servicemen and civilians who had been left behind - and involved over 130 British and allied vessels. There were an estimated 40,000-60,000 men, women, and children waiting to be rescued at St. Nazaire, Brittany.

On 15 June 1940, the CO of 98 Squadron left Chateau Bougon Aerodrome, Nantes in the last aircraft belonging to the squadron. The Adjutant was left in charge of the remaining personnel, numbering 13 officers and 230 other ranks. The rear party was given orders to proceed to St Nazaire on 16 June to embark for England.

RMS Lancastria arrived in the mouth of the Loire estuary late on 16 June. Her normal complement in troopship configuration was 2,180 including 330 crew; however, the Captain was told to take as many as he possibly could.

Troops were ferried out to Lancastria and the other larger ships by destroyers, tugs, fishing boats and other small craft, a round trip of three or four hours, and by mid-afternoon of 17 June she had embarked an unknown number (estimates range from 4,000 up to 9,000).

At 1550 hours the Lancastria was within minutes of hauling up anchor when a lone JU88 bomber, from Kampfgeschwader 30, began its bombing run. Lancastria was hit by three bombs and sank within 20 minutes. Estimates of the death toll vary from 3,000 - 6,500, the largest loss of life in British maritime history.

Leslie was one of at least ninety-six 98 Squadron personnel lost in the sinking of the Lancastria.

Leslie's body was washed up on the French coast in July 1940 and he is buried in La Bernerie-En-Retz Communal Cemetery, Loire-Atlantique, France

Leslie is commemorated on Wall Panel 5