

**Flt. Lt. Thomas
Neison DFC 138890
RAFVR**



Thomas Neison was a decorated Scottish air gunner, who was also 630 Squadron's Gunnery Leader, who was killed along with his crew when their aircraft was one of five lost by 630 Squadron during a disastrous raid on a Ruhr synthetic oil plant in June 1944.

He and his crew were on their 20th operation when they joined a force of 128 Lancasters from 5 Group, plus five Lancasters from 1 Group, attacking the plant at Wesseling, near Cologne. There was fierce resistance from the Luftwaffe night-fighter force and 37 Lancasters, almost 30 per cent of the force, were lost including four others from 630 Squadron with the loss of 28 aircrew. 630's historian records it as 'a massacre'.

Thomas was part of the crew of Lancaster ME843 LE-U, which had taken off from East Kirkby in Lincolnshire at 2327 hours on the night of 21/22 June heading for the Rhineland oil plant. They had successfully bombed and ME843 was homebound when it was caught in the radar of Hpt. Heinz-Wolfgang Schnauffer's Bf110 and shot down in flames. The bomber crashed near the Belgian village of Bocholt, close to the Dutch border, killing all seven men on board. ME843 was one of four victims claimed by Schnauffer that night and one of 121 throughout his service in the Luftwaffe.

Thomas was born in Rutherglen and was the 31-year-old son of Thomas and Annie Neison (née Stannage) and lived with his wife, Christina, in Edinburgh. Thomas and his crew had been with 630 since early in the spring and in April they were involved in a raid on Clermont Ferrand when his Lancaster was attacked by a night-fighter in an engagement that was to earn him a Distinguished Flying Cross. The citation said that he defended his aircraft 'with much skill and finally hitting the enemy aircraft with a well-placed burst, causing the fighter to explode'. Thomas was an experienced air gunner and had been appointed Gunnery Leader in March 1944.

The others who died were the pilot P/O Robert Hooper DFC, flight engineer Sgt. Thomas Fraser, navigator WOII Frederick Dewis RCAF, bomb-aimer P/O John McKenna RCAF, wireless operator Sgt. Peter Kano and rear gunner Sgt. Daniel Synott. All are buried in Heverlee War Cemetery in Leuven, Belgium.

Thomas' name can be found on IBCC panel 078.

Sources: 630 Squadron Association.