WO2 Donald Menzies Thorpe J/117355 RCAF



Donald was born on 23 January 1919 in Liskeard, Ontario, Canada, the son of Ralston Robert Thorpe and Mildred Thorpe nee Menzies.

Educated in New Liskeard, Ontario, Donald was employed as a Newspaper Carrier Boy for the Toronto Star before enlisting in the RCAF in August 1941. Called up the following year, Donald completed his Air Gunner training at Fingal in late 1942 and was sent overseas immediately.

After further training in the UK, in June 1943 Donald was posted to 49 Sqn at RAF Fiskerton, Lincolnshire as a mid upper gunner where he completed 7 operations. In September 1943 he was posted to 617 Sqn.

On 8 December 1943, three Lancasters from 617 Sqn were sent from RAF Coningsby to RAF Tempsford on special detachment for SOE operations.

At 21:12 on 10 December 1943 Donald, operating as the Rear Gunner, and the crew departed RAF Tempsford in Lancaster III ED886 (AJ-O) tasked with a supply drop to the Resistance in France. The mission was considered to be an "easy operation" as the area was largely undefended by fighters or anti-aircraft guns.

As they neared Doullens, 15 miles N of Amiens, flying at very low level and a short way behind another 617 Sqn Lancaster (ED825) on the same mission, the crew saw the burning wreckage of the Lancaster on the hillside near Doullens. Before they could react, they too were hit by the same mobile Flak gun that shot down ED825. The Pilot managed to gain a little more height and five of the crew managed to bale out at very low level. The aircraft crashed in flames near the village of Terramesnil, a few miles south-east of Doullens and was completely destroyed. Of the 5 that managed to bale out, 4 became POWs and the 5th managed to make it back to England. Donald and the Air Bomber were killed.

It is believed that a French 'Double Agent' informed the Germans of the supply drop, and when the Lancaster arrived over the town they were waiting.

Also killed : Sgt John McLean Stewart (Air Bomber)

Donald is buried in Terramesnil Communal Cemetery, Somme, France.

Donald is commemorated on Wall Panel 107

Photo Source: www.veterans.gc.ca

NOTE: Lancaster III ED886 (AJ-O) was one of the 24 aircraft prepared for Op Chastise and was used in the third wave raid against the Ennepe Dam. This was the last aircraft to return.