

PO Lester Lascelles Bonisch 422098 RNZAF

Lester was born on 28 June 1922 in Gisborne, Auckland, New Zealand, the son of Ernest Joseph Bonisch and Clara Adelaide Winifred Bonisch nee Lascelles.

Educated at the Marist Brothers School and St Mary's Convent, Christchurch, Lester was employed as a brush maker by Bon Brushes, Christchurch when, in January 1941, he volunteered for service in the RNZAF.

Called up in March 1942, Lester completed his training in New Zealand in February 1943 with the award of his Wings, and he embarked for the UK in April.

Following advanced training at 20(P) Advanced Flying Unit, RAF Weston on the Green, Oxfordshire, 11 OTU RAF Westcott, Buckinghamshire, where he converted to multi crew/multi engine ops on the Wellington, and 1657 HCU RAF Stradishall, Suffolk for conversion to the Stirling, in March 1944 Lester was granted a commission and posted to 75(NZ) Sqn at RAF Mepal, Cambridgeshire, converting to the Lancaster in April.



As part of the "Transportation Plan", the targeting of bridges and rail infrastructure order to limit the German military response to the invasion of France, on 10/11 June 1944, 432 Bomber Command aircraft, including twenty-four 75(NZ) Sqn crews, were tasked with operations against railway targets at Acheres, Dreux, Orleans and Versailles. Lester's target was Dreux, Eure-et-Loir, France. Two squadron crews failed to return.

At 23:09 Lester and his crew departed RAF Mepal in Lancaster I ME702 (AA-Q)

Shortly after leaving the target in the early hours of 11 June, Lester's aircraft was hit twice by flak and broke up in the air, killing six of the crew. The Mid Upper Gunner survived to be taken POW. This was Lester's 16th op.

Also killed: FO Henry Herbert Marsh (Wop/AG); FS John Murdoch Thomas McKenzie RNZAF (Nav); FS James Stuart Miller RNZAF (AB); Sgt Frank William Cousins (AG); Sgt William Thomas Reaveley (FE)

Originally buried in St Andre US Military Cemetery, Normandy, France, in June 1945 Lester was moved to Bayeux War Cemetery, Calvados, France

Lester is commemorated on Wall Panel 133

Photo Source: aucklandmuseum.com