

FO (the Hon) Richard Laurence Grenville Bowyer 123153 RAF

Richard was born on 17 February 1920 in Chelsea, London, the eldest son of George Edward Wentworth Bowyer MC, 1st Baron Denham, and Daphne H M Bowyer, nee Freeman-Mitford, Lady Denham.

Educated at Eton College, Richard was awarded a major classical scholarship at King's College, Cambridge, and was expected to go up in October 1939. With the declaration of war, Richard elected to join the RAF and by the summer of 1940 was in training in Rhodesia and South Africa. Richard qualified as a Navigator, and was awarded a commission in August 1941. In August 1942 Richard was posted to 226 Sqn at RAF Swanton Morley, Norfolk.

By January 1943, a major priority for the Allied naval and air forces was the defeat of the U-boats which were causing huge losses to allied shipping. The U-boat pens at Brest, Lorient, St Nazaire, and La Pallice were attacked by the heavy bombers, whilst the lighter bombers were tasked with cutting off supply routes to the bases.

On 29 January 1943, 226 Sqn was tasked with the bombing of the Morlaix Railway Viaduct, which allowed the crossing of the Morlaix river on the Paris - Brest railway line and was a major supply route from the German naval stores at Rennes to Brest. Twelve crews from 226 Sqn, escorted by fighters, departed RAF Swanton Morley in 2 boxes of six. Airborne at 12:07 Richard, operating as the Navigator in Boston III AL278 (MQ-Y), was in the second formation.

At 13:30, the Bostons rendezvoused with the fighters over Exeter, and remained at low level over the sea in order to avoid enemy radar detection. Just north of Ile de Batz the Bostons commenced a climb to clear the island, before descending to the attack height of 8000 feet and turned towards the target where heavy and accurate flak was encountered. Bombing run complete, the aircraft turned for home, descending back to low level over the sea.

Six miles out to sea, North of Lanmeur, Richard's formation was intercepted by enemy aircraft. With the starboard engine on fire, at 14:34 the Boston crashed into the sea, killing all on board. The loss was claimed jointly by Oblt Heinz Wurm flying a Fw190 from 5/BF Gr196 from Brest Sud, and the flak unit in Morlaix area.

The viaduct was put out of full use for three months, but at a huge cost. Eighty civilians were killed, including 39 children in the Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes Nursery School.

Also killed : FO Clifford Stanley Thomas (Pilot); Sgt George Currah (AG); Sgt Robert Morton (WOp/AG)

Richard has no known grave and is commemorated on the Runnymede Memorial, Surrey

Richard is commemorated on Wall Panel 134

Photo Source: IBCC

