

Wg Cdr Vernon Stanley Butler DFC 37465 RAF

Vernon was born in 1916 in Wallasey, Cheshire, the only son of Chief Constable Samuel Flowers Butler OBE and Lilian Hetty Butler nee Parslow. In 1937 he married Hilda Margaret Harrison in Thanet, Kent. They had one son.

Educated at Dudley House School and St Lawrence College, Ramsgate, Kent, Vernon joined the RAF in 1935 on a Short Service Commission and was posted on to 226 Sqn. He would serve with the squadron for the whole of his career and, at the time of his death, was the squadron's Commanding Officer.

Equipped with Fairey Battles, in September 1939, 226 Sqn was deployed to France as part of the Advanced Air Striking Force and was based in Reims. The Sqn suffered heavy losses during the Battle of France before retreating westwards and evacuating from Brest in Mid June 1940. Following conversion to the Blenheim and time in Northern Ireland, 226 Sqn arrived at RAF Wattisham in May 1941 before converting to the Boston III in November and moving to RAF Swanton Morley in December.



In August 1941 Vernon was awarded the DFC, one of 51 officers and men decorated for daylight attacks in July.

"In July 1941, large scale attacks were made on german warships at Brest and La Pallice (including the Gneisenau, Scharnhorst and Prince Eugen). A smaller attack was made on Cherbourg. The operations were carried out in daylight and extremely heavy and accurate anti-aircraft fire and fighter opposition were encountered by all aircraft when approaching the targets, which at Brest was protected by a balloon barrage. The aircrews engaged succeeded, nevertheless, in securing direct hits on their objectives and in inflicting very severe damage in the target area. During the combats with enemy fighters 21 hostile aircraft were destroyed and others were severely damaged. The precise timing of attack by the various formations of aircraft and their correct approach to and accurate bombing of the objectives in the face of such powerful opposition, demanded great skill and high courage. The great success of these operations was largely due to the bravery, determination and resource displayed by the following officers and airmen, who participated in various capacities as leaders and members of the aircraft crews".

On 8 March 1942, Vernon led a force of 12 aircraft from 88 Sqn and 226 Sqn, together with a fighter escort, tasked with an attack on the Matford automotive works at Poissy near Paris. Vernon departed RAF Swanton Morley at 15:22 in Boston III Z2209 (MQ-G). The target was beyond the fighter's range, and the final stages of the attack were unescorted. Vernon's aircraft flew into flak near the target and was hit, but carried on. The bombs were released at low level, but Vernon's aircraft was now in trouble, necessitating an emergency landing. As the aircraft touched down it hit a tree at high speed and exploded. Vernon and the Observer were killed instantly, the WOp/AG died of wounds in hospital a few weeks later. This was the only aircraft lost on what was declared a successful operation, and was the first Boston to be lost on operations.

Also killed : FO Basil Mervyn Sayers (Observer); FO Weston James Robertson (WOp/AG)

Vernon is buried in Marissel French National Cemetery, Beauvais, France

Vernon is commemorated on Wall Panel 139

Photo Source: Thanet Advertiser