

Sqn Ldr Christopher Francis Gibson DFC Croix De Guerre Avec Palme 39981 RAF

Christopher was born in 1912 in Bath, Somerset, the son of James Arthur Gibson and Lucy Catherine Gibson nee Nichols. Educated at Chard and Bloxham Schools, Banbury, Christopher joined the RAF and was commissioned as a Pilot in 1937.

On the outbreak of war, Christopher was deployed with 105 Sqn to Villeneuve, France as part of the AASF, initially on reconnaissance missions along the French-German border. When the Germans invaded France in May 1940, the squadron was tasked with bombing the bridges over the River Meuse in an attempt to slow their advance. On 14 May 1940 Christopher crashed behind enemy lines during an attack on Sedan. Although arrested by the Germans he was able to escape and made his way south, but was injured and had to be admitted to hospital where he remained until the area was overrun by the Germans. Not prepared to become a prisoner once again, he escaped to Spain and was eventually repatriated back to the UK via Gibraltar. For his determination and bravery, on 18 June 1940 he was awarded the Croix de Guerre avec Palme by the French Government. In November 1941, on repatriation, Christopher was posted to 138 Sqn at RAF Newmarket, Cambridgeshire, moving shortly afterwards to RAF Tempsford, Bedfordshire.

On the night of 16/17 February 1943, Christopher participated in "Operation Gunnerside", the dropping of 6 Norwegian Commandos and containers to the north of the Heavy Water facility at Rjukan, 120 miles NE of Stavanger. On the night of 26 February 1943, the Norwegian Commandos successfully destroyed the Norsk Hydro Plant. With their supply of heavy water cut off, the German scientists who had been working on the atomic project had to give up, and Hitler was not going to get the atomic bomb.

On 14 March 1943, Christopher and his crew were tasked with "Operation Bronse", the insertion of a 3 man Czechoslovakian SOE Bronse team to Bohemia. The team was tasked to organize the resistance, carry out intelligence surveillance activities, and transmit information back to London. The group radio was codenamed "Blanka" .

Christopher and his crew, together with the 3 man Czech team departed RAF Tempsford, Bedfordshire, in Halifax II BB281 (NF-O) destined for a drop zone near Brno, SE of Prague. Deteriorating weather conditions in the drop area prevented the planned operation continuing and the decision was made to return to base. Whilst flying to the south of Munich, the aircraft was hit by German anti-aircraft fire and crashed in the Perlacher Forest. Only one crew member and one Agent survived the crash, but they died later of their injuries.

In March 1943 Christopher was awarded the DFC. His citation read:

"Sqn Ldr Christopher Francis GIBSON (39981), 138 Sqn (since missing). This officer has at all times displayed high courage and outstanding devotion to duty. Early in the Battle of France he was grievously wounded but recovered to render excellent service, completing many operational missions. In addition he has accomplished good work in the training of air crews".

Also Killed: WO2 Maurice Tallier Peter Myers RCAF (WOp/AG); WO1 Douglas Clark Lisson RCAF (Pilot); FS John Stanley Rigden (Nav); FS Arthur Stokes DFM (WOp/AG); Sgt Malcolm John Hudson (FE) died 11 April; Sgt Harold John Sharood (AG); Sgt Leo Peter Ward (AG); Lt Bohumir Martinek (Agent); František Vrbka (Agent) died 23 March; Antonin Kubec (Agent)

Originally buried in Munich West Cemetery, in November 1947 Christopher was moved to Durnbach War Cemetery, Bayern Germany

Christopher is commemorated on Wall Panel 169