Flt Lt Stanley Nicholson Gray 125739 RAFVR



Stanley was born in 1919 in Belfast, Northern Ireland, the eldest son of Hugh H and Martha Gray. Educated at Belfast Royal Academy, on leaving Stanley was employed by the Eagle Star Insurance Company.

At the outbreak of war, Stanley volunteered for aircrew training and was called up in August 1940, completing his pilot training in Canada. In May 1942 Stanley was posted to 161 Sqn at RAF Tempsford, Bedfordshire from 214 Sqn, receiving his commission in August 1942. Stanley also instructed on 24 OTU at RAF Honeybourne, Worcestershire.

On 16 December 1943, 161 Sqn were tasked with Operation "Wheelwright", a supply and Agent drop to the Wheelwright Circuit of the French Resistance in Angoulême, SW France.

At 20:37 Stanley and his crew departed RAF Tempsford, Bedfordshire, in Halifax V DK206 (MA-V). The crew returned early from the sortie due to high patchy rain, and thick ground fog over the target area. In the poor weather, the crew received no responses from Eureka beacons on the onboard Rebecca set, the fog hid signal lights and no S-Phone contacts were made.

The weather at base had also deteriorated and the crew were ordered to land at RAF Woodbridge, Suffolk. Attempting to take the plane beneath the cloud base, which had dropped to only 200 feet, at 05:05 the aircraft flew into trees and crashed at Tangham Forest near Capel St. Andrew, Suffolk.

Of the 8 people on board, 3 died in the resulting crash. The two 2 French Agents on board escaped unscathed and were able to return to London the same day. Three other planes came down in the area that night due to the weather, all being unable to see the Verey lights or make contact with air control to approach the airfield safely.

Also Killed: FO Leslie Howard Thomas (Navigator); FS Peter Austin Fry (FE)

Stanley is buried in Carnmoney Cemetery, Co Antrim, Northern Ireland

Stanley is commemorated on Wall Panel 172

Photo Source: Northern Whig Newspaper