PO Louis Max Lavallee J/18759 RCAF



Louis "Lew" was born on 18 January 1920 in Morinville, Alberta, Canada, the son of Francois Octave Lavallee and Parisian born Leonie Alphonsine Lavallee nee Duvernois. They had met during WW1.
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Educated at Morinville Convent, Sacred Heart and St Joseph High, Alberta, on leaving education Louis was employed as a house painter.

In June 1940 Louis enlisted in the RCAF at Edmonton and completed his training in Canada, receiving his Air Gunner Badge in February 1941. Louis arrived in England in April 1941 and, following further training, in August 1941 was posted to 103 Sqn at RAF Elsham Wolds, Lincolnshire. At the end of his tour, Louis instructed on 10 and 24 OTU until he volunteered for a 2nd tour at RAF Tempsford, Bedfordshire, arriving there in June 1943.

At 23:42 on 22 July 1943 Louis, operating as the Air Gunner, and the crew departed RAF Tempsford in Halifax V DK119 (MA-U) on three operations, Princesse, Tomcodio and Mistral 3. The first two ops, probably leaflet drops, were carried out successfully, the third ended in disaster.
Mistral 3 was a drop of two tons of arms and munitions to the French Resistance. The BBC had broadcast the code, *"The King loves the shepherdess"* and the reception team prepared the landing site "Wrangel", located 2 km from the town of Saint Sauvier.

The drop was scheduled for 01:10, but the arrival of a summer storm obscured the signal from the ground. The navigator twice directed the Halifax to the Loire at Blois to use the river as a landmark to re-calculate the route to Saint Sauvier. At 03:10 one more attempt was made, and this time the light was spotted. The Halifax descended to the release height of 350 - 400 feet and the supply containers were pushed out; however, when the plane tried to pull up the far left engine failed. It veered to the left, tore through some electrical lines hitting the top of an oak tree, before crash landing at 03:20 at le Boucheroux on the NE outskirts of Saint-Sauvier.

As a result of the crash, Louis was thrown from his turrett and killed. This was his 42nd op. Of the other crew, two were seriously wounded and were imprisoned by the Germans, the Resistance helped the other 5 crew to evade.

Louis is buried in Choloy War Cemetery, Meurthe-et-Moselle, France

Louis is commemorated on Wall Panel 197

Photo Source: Findagrave