

FO Herbert Brian Lightoller 37884 RAFVR

Herbert was born on 19 January 1918 in Dover, Kent, the youngest son of Commander Charles Herbert Lightoller DSC RNR and Iowa Sylvania Zillah Lightoller nee Hawley-Wilson.

Herbert's father was the most senior Officer to survive the sinking of the RMS Titanic, served throughout WW1 and also participated in the "Little Ship" contribution to the Dunkirk Evacuation, rescuing 130 men in his yacht "Sundowner". In an interview he praised his son for his help - "My youngest son, FO Herbert Lightoller, had at different times given me a whole lot of useful information about attack, defence and evasive tactics (at which he was apparently particularly good) and I attribute, in a great measure, our success in getting across without a single casualty to his unwitting help."

Educated at Emanuel School, Battersea, he entered the RAF on a Short Service Commission in June 1936.



When war was declared on the 3 September 1939, Brian was operating as a Pilot on 107 Sqn based at RAF Wattisham, Suffolk. The Sqn was tasked with flying the first bombing operation of the war the following day.

A reconnaissance flight on the day war was declared had observed the German "pocket" battleship Admiral Scheer, cruiser Emden, and other warships anchored at the German naval base at the entrance to Wilhelmshaven on Germany's north coast. Orders were issued by 2 Group Bomber Command that fifteen Blenheims were to attack the warships, five from each of 107, 110, and 139 Sqn.

The morning of 4 September 1939 was cloudy over southern England with heavily overcast skies and a strong NW wind. Together with four crews from 107 Sqn, Herbert took off from RAF Wattisham at 1600 hours in Blenheim IV N6189. Poor weather conditions over the Channel forced the aircraft to fly at very low level and the five aircraft from 139 Sqn jettisoned their bombs and turned back after failing to locate the warships; however, 110 squadron aircraft found the targets.

The Blenheims hit the Admiral Scheer with at least four bombs, although none exploded, probably because of the extremely low altitude of the attack and the battleship's thick armour plating. When the 110 Sqn Blenheims headed home, the 107 Sqn aircraft prepared to attack. Having lost the element of surprise, the flak was now heavy and well directed. Herbert's aircraft disintegrated under intense anti-aircraft fire from the Admiral Hipper during the attack and crashed into port side of the cruiser Emden. Three of the four Squadron aircraft were shot down during their low level bombing runs.

Also killed were : Sgt Owen Lobb Dunkirk Howells (Observer), AC1 Ernest William Lyon (WOp/AG)

Herbert is buried in the Sage War Cemetery, Niedersachsen, Germany. His remains were transferred in July 1947 from his original burial place in Wilhelmshaven German Military Cemetery, Bremen.

Herbert is commemorated on Wall Panel 199

Photo source: <https://emanuelschoolatwar>