PO William Anthony Saunders 40756 RAF

William, known as Tony, was born in 1920 in Treherbert, Glamorganshire, the only son of Lionel Ralph Stanley Saunders and Dorothy Margaret Saunders nee Giles. After leaving Reading Grammar School, Tony joined the RAF and was granted a commission in May 1938.

Tony joined 21 Sqn early in 1940, and he and his crew were in continuous action from the end of March 1940. They flew throughout the Battle of France in an attempt to stem the rapid German advance to the Channel, flying numerous bombing sorties against German armour and shipping.

On 14 June 1940 six Blenheims from 21 Sqn, together with 2 sections from 82 Sqn and 4 sections from RAF Wattisham, Suffolk, with fighter escort from RAF Hawkinge, were tasked with an attack against the enemy held aerodrome at Merville, NE France. The attack was to be delivered from 9000 feet.

Operating from RAF Watton's satellite airfield of RAF Bodney, Norfolk, Tony and his crew departed at 17:00 in Blenheim IV R3742 (YH). Whilst over the target their aircraft was hit by flak, and as they fell behind the formation they were then attacked by Me109s. Tony made a forced landing at Ardres and the whole crew went on the run, making their way the 20 miles to Wissant on the French Coast. On reaching Wissant, the crew were offered a small rowing boat by the locals and they decided to attempt to make it back to England.

After 3 days at sea, with no food, water or dry clothes, they reached a point about 10 miles from the English coast when the oar broke. Caught by the currents they drifted back to France. During the day Tony had been suffering hallucinations, possibly because he had been drinking sea water, but finally went to sleep, as did the other two. During the night he disappeared from the boat.

The two remaining crew were washed up on the shores of France, and as they made their way up the coast were arrested by the Germans and sent to Prisoner of War camps.

The Air Ministry made great efforts to try to identify Tony's last resting place, but the nearest they came to a possible identification was the recovery of an unknown Pilot Officer’s body washed up on the French coast on 26 June 1940, 12 days after he disappeared.

Tony has no known grave and is commemorated on the Runnymede Memorial, Surrey

Tony is commemorated on Wall Panel 238