

Sqn Ldr Ernest Frank Sly 46091 DFC AFM RAF

Ernest was born on 16 November 1916 in Bruton, Somerset, the youngest son of Frank William Sly and Florence Mary Sly nee Butler. In 1933 Ernest joined the RAF with 28th entry, No.1 School of Technical Training, RAF Halton, Buckinghamshire. Later qualifying for his 'Wings', on the outbreak of war Ernest was serving as a flying instructor. In August 1940, whilst serving at No.3 Service Flying Training School, RAF South Cerney, Gloucestershire, Ernest was awarded the Air Force Medal for saving the life of his pupil passenger when their aircraft suffered catastrophic damage in a mid-air collision.



His Citation read: *"On 3 August 1940, Sgt Sly was carrying out a formation flying practice in an Oxford aircraft with a pupil in another such aircraft. At an altitude of 900 ft he was warned by his passenger that the other aircraft was approaching from astern and was about to hit on the starboard side. Sgt Sly immediately banked but was unable to avoid a collision and his starboard wing was practically severed just outboard of the engine. By exceptional coolness and skill he succeeded in making a forced landing with under-carriage retracted, without injury to himself or his passenger."*



Commissioned in June 1941, Ernest completed his first operational tour with 218 Sqn, flying Stirlings at RAF Downham Market, Norfolk. In December 1942 Ernest was appointed 'B' Flight Commander.

In May 43 Ernest was awarded the DFC. His citation read: *"In November 1942 whilst on operations against Stuttgart, one engine of the officer's aircraft became unserviceable whilst over the target. Despite this he pressed home his attack in a daring manner and returned safely to base. On another occasion whilst minelaying in the Baltic, Sqn Ldr Sly was forced to bring his aircraft down to 300 ft owing to damage sustained in combat with an enemy fighter. By superb airmanship and determination, a safe return was made. Sqn Ldr Sly has at all times displayed high courage and devotion to duty"*.

In June 1943, Ernest completed his tour and was rested until he commenced Lancaster conversion training at 1651 HCU, RAF Waterbeach, Cambridgeshire, and in November 1943 he was posted to 514 Sqn, also at RAF Waterbeach. On 14/15 January 1944, Bomber Command was tasked with an operation to Brunswick, the first major raid on this town of the war. A combined force of 498 aircraft was allocated to the op, including 23 514 Sqn crews. At 17:06 on 14 January Ernest and his crew departed RAF Waterbeach in Lancaster II LL685 (J1-G2). The German controller tracked the bomber stream from just off the English coastline and many German fighters entered the stream over Bremen, continuing to claim aircraft until the stream left the Dutch coast on the return leg. On approach to the target, at 19:05 Ernest's aircraft was intercepted by Hptm Walter Barte of the Stab III./NJG3, flying a Bf110 from Stade Airfield. Ernest's aircraft crashed 3 miles South of Celle, and ½ mile West of Bennebstel, Lower Saxony, Germany, killing all on board.

Also Killed: FO Philip Pullyn Boulter (FE); FO William Leonard Harvey DFM RNZAF (WOp/AG); FO Frank George Rosher DFM (AG); FO Edwin Horton Thomas DFM RCAF (AB); FO John Livingstone Martin RCAF (Nav); FO James Allan Sneddon DFM (AG)

Originally buried in Westercelle Cemetery, Lower Saxony, Germany, in October 1946 Ernest was moved to Hanover War Cemetery, Niedersachsen, Germany.

Ernest is commemorated on Wall Panel 242

Photo Source: Daily Herald, London