AC1 Walter Lochrie Small 612896 RAF



Walter was born in 1918 in Invergowrie, Dundee, Scotland, the fourth son of Mr and Mrs James Small. Walter worked on the family farm until he joined the RAF in May 1938.

In April 1940 Walter, part of 98 Squadron Ground Crew, moved from England to Chateau Bougon, near Nantes, France as a supporting unit to the AASF fighting squadrons, supplying replacement crew and aircraft as needed.

When France capitulated, the AASF began the withdrawal to England. Just two weeks after Dunkirk, Operation Aerial was launched - the evacuation of the servicemen and civilians who had been left behind and involved over 130 British and allied vessels. There were an estimated 40,000-60,000 men, women, and children waiting to be rescued at St. Nazaire, Brittany.

On 15 June 1940, the CO of 98 Sqn left Chateau Bougon Aerodrome, Nantes in the last aircraft belonging to the squadron. The Adjutant was left in charge of the remaining personnel, numbering 13 officers and 230 other ranks. The party was given orders to proceed to St Nazaire on 16 June to embark for England.

RMS Lancastria arrived in the mouth of the Loire estuary late on 16 June. Her normal complement in troopship configuration was 2,180 including 330 crew; however, the Captain was told to take as many as he possibly could.

Troops were ferried out to Lancastria and the other larger ships by destroyers, tugs, fishing boats and other small craft, a round trip of three or four hours, and by mid-afternoon of 17 June she had embarked an unknown number (estimates range from 4,000 up to 9,000).

At 15:50 the Lancastria was within minutes of hauling up anchor when a lone JU88 bomber from Kampfgeschwader 30 began its bombing run. Lancastria was hit by three bombs and sank within 20 minutes. Estimates of the death toll vary from 3,000 - 6,500, the largest loss of life in British maritime history.

Walter was one of at least ninety-six 98Sqn personnel lost in the sinking of the Lancastria.

Walter has no known grave an is commemorated on the Runnymede Memorial, Surrey

Walter is commemorated on Wall Panel 242

Photo Source: Dundee Courier