

FO Leslie Howard Thomas MiD 132176 RAFVR

Leslie was born on 29 October 1920 in Kensal Rise, London, the son of Lewis Percy Thomas and Gladys Ethel Maude Thomas nee Saxton.

Educated at Harrow County School, in 1937 he joined the staff of Westminster Bank, working at the Northwood and West Ealing Branches.

In July 1940 Leslie joined the RAF and trained as a Navigator. In August 1943 he was posted to 161 Sqn at RAF Tempsford, Bedfordshire from 24 OTU, RAF Honeybourne, Worcestershire, following a tour of instructor duties.

In January 1944 he was posthumous Mentioned in Despatches.

On 16 December 1943, 161 Sqn were tasked with Operation "Wheelwright", a supply and Agent drop to the Wheelwright Circuit of the French Resistance in Angoulême, SW France.

At 20:37 Leslie, operating as the Navigator/Air Bomber, and the crew departed RAF Tempsford, Bedfordshire, in Halifax V DK206 (MA-V). The crew returned early from the sortie due to high patchy rain, and thick ground fog over the target area. In the poor weather, the crew received no responses from Eureka beacons on the onboard Rebecca set, the fog hid signal lights and no S-Phone contacts were made.

The weather at base had also deteriorated and the crew were ordered to land at RAF Woodbridge, Suffolk. Attempting to take the plane beneath the cloud base, which had dropped to only 200 feet, at 05:05 the aircraft flew into trees and crashed at Tangham Forest near Capel St. Andrew, Suffolk.

Of the 8 people on board, 3 died in the resulting crash. The two 2 French Agents on board escaped unscathed and were able to return to London the same day. Three other planes came down in the area that night due to the weather, all being unable to see the Verrey lights or make contact with air control to approach the airfield safely.

Also Killed: Flt Lt Stanley Nicholson Gray (Pilot); FS Peter Austin Fry (FE)

Leslie is buried in Harrow Cemetery, Middlesex

Leslie is commemorated on Wall Panel 252

Photo Source: natwestgroupremembers.com

