Sgt Josef Tomanek 787501 RAFVR



Josef was born on 12 March 1918 in Prerov, Olomouc, Moravia, the son of Josef Tomanek and Frantiska Tomankova nee Pavlickova.

Educated at the Prerov Grammar School and the Secondary School in Lipník nad Becvou, Josef began glider flying whilst at school and devoted a significant part of his free time to flying. Continuing to powered flying, Josef joined the Hana Aeroclub.

In the Autumn of 1938, after the occupation of the borderlands of Czechoslovakia, together with other members of the Hana Aeroclub, Josef left to fight against Nazi Germany.

Travelling through Slovakia and North Africa, Josef arrived in Istres, France, and on 2 October 1939 he reached Paris, and was enlisted as a private in the Czechoslovak Air Force. Following the French capitulation, Josef was evacuated to the UK where he joined the RAFVR and, following advanced training, was posted to 311(Czechoslovak) Sqn at RAF East Wretham, Norfolk.

On 28/29 December 1941, Bomber Command was tasked with an attack on the German naval shipyard and harbour installations at Wilhelmshaven, Lower Saxony, Germany. A combined force of 86 Wellingtons, including thirteen 311 Sqn crews were allocated to the raid.

At 17:16 on 28 December Josef, operating as the 2nd Pilot, and the crew departed RAF East Wretham in Wellington Ic T2553 (KX-B).

Hit by flak above the target, twenty minutes into the return flight, the left engine caught fire; however, the crew managed to extinguish the flames and shut down the engine. Continuing the flight home, a propeller blade detached from the windmilling engine and embedded into the fuselage by the Wireless Operator's position, damaging the hydraulic system and making the aircraft uncontrollable. The aircraft was successfully ditched in the North Sea, 60 miles West of Petten, Noord-Holland. Although five of the crew were able to get into the dinghy, the Rear Gunner went down with the aircraft.

Shortly after midnight on 2 January 1942, after five days in the dinghy, Josef succumbed to the conditions, and the crew buried him at sea. Two hours later, the navigator died. At 15:00 on 3 January 1942 the dinghy was washed ashore on the beach near Petten, Noord-Holland.

Also Killed: FO Josef Mohr CWCx3 MzC (Nav); Sgt Rudolf Skalicky (AG)

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

Josef is commemorated on Wall Panel 254

Photo Source: valka.cz