

WO Roland Brainerd Herbert Townsend-Coles MiD 625503 RAF

Roland was born in 1913 in West End, Hampshire, the son of Francis William Townsend-Coles and Rosalind Ethel Townsend-Coles nee Townsend, step son of Ethel Townsend-Coles. In 1939 he married Vera Hazel Harrison in Wandsworth, London.

At the outbreak of war, 18 Sqn was sent to France as part of 70 Wing of the BEF in the reconnaissance and bombing role. Initially based at Beauvraignes, they moved to Meharicourt in October 1939. Roland joined the squadron as a LAC WOp/AG in early 1940.

At 09:15 on 10 May 1940, the opening day of the "Battle of France", Roland, operating as the WOp/AG, and the crew departed Meharicourt in Blenheim I L1405 (WV-K) on a reconnaissance mission over the River Maase and Venlo.

Whilst flying to the West of Dusseldorf, the aircraft was engaged by a Me109 flown by Oblt Johannes Steinhoff of 11(N)/JG2 flying from Cologne Butzweilerhof Airfield.

At 10:20, the Blenheim crashed at Breyell, Germany killing the Pilot and Observer. Roland survived the crash and was taken as a POW (No. 19211) and interned in Stalag Luft I at Barth, Western Pomerania, Germany.

Sometime after June 1943 Roland was transferred to Stalag Luft VI, the northernmost POW camp within the German Reich. It was located near the town of Hydekrug, Memelland (now Šilute in Lithuania).

A persistent escaper, Roland was a continual problem to the German internal security forces. Roland escaped from the camp on 7 April 1944 and followed a proven escape route to the Port of Danzig where a previous escapee had boarded a Swedish Vessel. At large until 18 April, Roland was captured in the dock area and returned to Stalag Luft VI on 28 April.

Placed under arrest in solitary confinement, Roland was removed from the Camp on 10 May 1944. The last trace of him was when he was reported to have been seen at Tilset Civil Prison in May 1944 and later, via the Protecting Power, it was reported that he had been charged with espionage and collaboration with the Polish Underground Movement. This was the typical excuse for the ending of a POW's life and it was reported to the Protecting Power that Roland had been shot on 15 July 1944 when offering resistance.

By the time of his murder, Roland had been promoted, time-served, to Warrant Officer and was posthumously MiD for his conduct whilst a POW.

Also killed: PO Geoffrey Fawconer Harding (Pilot)t Kenneth Norman Shrosbree (Observer)

Roland has no known grave and is commemorated at the Runnymede Memorial, Surrey

Roland is commemorated on Wall Panel 255