Flt Lt David Drexel Laird J/21258 RCAF



David, known as "Butch", was born on 20 September 1919 in Iowa City, Johnson County, Iowa, USA, the only child of Dr Donald Anderson Laird and Hilda Laird nee Drexel. In December 1940 he married Gwendoline Nesbitt in Baltimore, Maryland, USA.

Educated at Hamilton Central School, New York, USA, in June 1938 he was admitted to the U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland but resigned in June 1940.

David was employed as an inspector by Hamilton Standard Propellers, East Hartford, Connecticut when, in September 1941, he enlisted in the RCAF. Completing his pilot training in Canada, in July 1942 David was awarded his Wings, granted a commission and, after completing further training at 36 OTU RCAF Greenwood, Nova Scotia, in January 1943 he embarked for the UK.

Following advanced training at No.1 (Coastal) OTU, RAF Thornaby, Yorkshire, in July 1943 David was sent to North Africa where he served on 500 Sqn and 52 Sqn before, in November 1943, he was posted to 13 Sqn at RAF Sidi Amor Airfield, Tunisia and then to Kabrit Airfield, Egypt where the squadron was engaged on coastal patrols and convoy escort duties. In February 1944 the squadron converted to the Baltimore and were deployed to Biferno Airfield, Campobasso, Italy. By July, the squadron was based at Cecina, Tuscany.

On July 1944 seven 13 Sqn crews were tasked with an armed reconnaissance over the Gothic Line, the last line of defence for the Axis forces in Italy. Situated in the northern parts of the Apennine Mountains, it was used during the fighting withdrawal of the Axis forces as they retreated from the advancing Allied offensive.

At 22:15 on 26 July 1944 David and his crew departed RAF Cecina in Baltimore V FW317 (AN-Z).

At 23:18, for unknown reasons, the aircraft crashed at farmland near Firenzuola, 12km NNE of Florence killing all on board. This was David's 47th op.

Also Killed: FO James Phillips McCarter (Nav/AB); WO Jack Finlow RNZAF (WOp/AG); WO Frank Wallace West RAAF (WOp/AG)

Originally buried in an isolated grave near Firenzuola, David is now buried in the Beach Head War Cemetery, Anzio, Italy

David is commemorated on Wall Panel - NYE

Photo Source: veterans.gc.ca