Sqn Ldr Kenneth Graham Hart 42222 DFC RAFVR



Kenneth was born on 27 April 1921 in Mitcham, Surrey, the son of Frederick John Hart and Elizabeth Hart nee Lincoln. Educated at Heath Clark Central School, Thornton Heath, Kenneth was accepted on a short service commission in the RAF, graduating in March 1939.

Following advanced training and qualifying on the Spitfire, Kenneth was posted to the 11 Group Pool in December 1939 before his posting to 65 Sqn at RAF Hornchurch, Essex in January 1940 where he flew ops in support of the withdrawal from Dunkirk and throughout the Battle of Britain. In May 1940 he was compelled to undertake a forced landing on the beaches of Dunkirk and, after setting fire to his Spitfire with a flare pistol, he returned to the UK on a ship engaged in "Op Dynamo" and was soon back on flying duty. On 24 August, Kenneth completed six sorties in under 12 hours, the last big engagement before the squadron was "rested" at RAF Turnhouse, Edinburgh. In November the squadron returned to ops from RAF Tangmere, Sussex.

In March 1941 Kenneth was posted as a Flying Instructor to 59 OTU RAF Turnhouse, moving soon afterwards to 55 OTU RAF Aston Down, Gloucestershire, and then in July to 60 OTU RAF Leconfield, Yorkshire. In November 1941 Kenneth was posted to the Middle East, joining 250 Sqn flying Tomahawks in Egypt in support of the advance to Tobruk. For his actions in Egypt, along with his previous combats during the Battle of France and Britain, in January 1942 Kenneth was awarded the DFC. His citation read:

"This officer has displayed great courage and skill in operational duties. In December 1941 during a patrol his squadron intercepted a force of 24 enemy bombers escorted by 27 fighters. In the ensuing engagement F/O Hart shot down two aircraft and several times prevented attacks on his fellow pilots. He has destroyed at least eight enemy aircraft".

In January 1942, Kenneth was posted to Rear HQ Desert Air Force, then to 71 OTU in the Sudan as an instructor, with a six week detachment to 94 Sqn. In February 1944 Kenneth was posted to 18 Sqn at the Foggia Airfield Complex. Throughout 1944 18 Sqn were engaged in close support for ground forces, particularly the British, and tasked with destroying airfields and transport throughout Italy, and into Southern France.

On 28 December 1944 three 18 Sqn crews were allocated to an armed reconnaissance flight of the area North of Po, and an attack on Villafranco Airfield. At 16:35 Kenneth and his crew departed Falconara Airbase in Boston IV BZ557 (-Z).

Whilst attacking a bridge over the Santerno River, Kenneth's aircraft was hit by flak from the German Anti-Aircraft guns positioned on multiple levels near the river. The aircraft crashed 1km North of the bridge near the hamlet of Villa Pianta, and exploded on impact, killing all on board.

Also killed: FO John Woods (WOp/AG); WO Robert James Frizzell RNZAF (AG); FS Hyam Maurice Bluston (Nav)

Originally buried at the site of the crash, post war Kenneth was moved to Coriano Ridge War Cemetery, Riccione, Italy

Kenneth is commemorated on Wall Panel - NYE

Photo Source: www.bbm.org.uk