FO Thomas John Lennie 425684 RAAF



Thomas was born on 6 February 1913 in Maryborough, Queensland, Australia, the son of Thomas Lennie and Chrissie Lennie nee Garton. Thomas was employed as a State school teacher when, in April 1942, he volunteered for service with the RAAF.

Thomas commenced pilot training in Australia; however, when his training was terminated in February 1943 he re-mustered as Navigator and was sent to Canada to train under the Empire Air Training Scheme.

In October 1943 Thomas completed his flying training in Canada with the award of his Navigator badge, and was granted a commission before posting to 34 OTU RAF Pennfield Ridge, New Brunswick where he qualified on the Ventura. In January 1944 Thomas embarked for the UK. Following advanced training at 13 OTU RAF Bicester, Oxfordshire, and conversion to the Mitchell, in July 1944, Thomas was posted to 98 Sqn at RAF Dunsfold, Surrey.

On 25 September 1944 twelve 98 Sqn aircraft, escorted by six Spitfires were detailed to bomb a bridge in Schaarsbergen, north of Arnhem, known as "The Bridge Too Far" which had been occupied by German forces with Flak equipment. This op was in support of the withdrawal of the British paratroop brigade from "Operation Market Garden". Two 98 Sqn crews failed to return.

At 15:15 on 25 September Thomas, operating as the Navigator, and the crew departed RAF Dunsfold, Surrey in Mitchell II FW194 (VO-N).

Close to their destination, the Mitchell formation was attacked by a flight of twenty FW190s of the IV./JG 54. An air battle ensued with the Spitfires; however, the overwhelming odds led to a loss of the majority of the fighter protection. At 17:00 Thomas's aircraft was intercepted from below by Major Wolfgang Späte, killing Thomas in the attack.

The rear hatch was jammed by the attack, and the Rear Gunner was unable to escape. Upon trying to escape, the Wireless Operator found his hatch jammed partway open and he could not get through with his chute on. He pushed his parachute out through the opening and, while gripping the harness, put his head and shoulders through the opening and pulled the cord. He sustained some injuries being pulled through the hatch, but escaped. He then drifted to the ground where German troops took him prisoner.

The plane continued on towards Arnhem where the pilot baled out, only to be killed by German machine gunners as he drifted over the bridge onto Graslaan Street.

The Mitchell crashed into a dyke near the bridge in Arnhem with Thomas and the Rear Gunner still inside. This was the last day of the battle of Arnhem.

Also Killed: Flt Lt Charles Bindon Carter DFC DFM (AG); FS Bruce Llewellyn Williams RAAF (Pilot)

Originally buried in a temporary grave close to the crash site, in July 1946 Thomas was moved to Arnhem Oosterbeek War Cemetery, Gelderland, Netherlands

Thomas is commemorated on Wall Panel Not Yet Erected

Photo Source: vwma.org.au