Ladislav FORNŮSEK (1920 – 1942)



Ladislav FORNŮSEK

Četař Aspirant

787826

Wireless Operator/Air Gunner

Sergeant

Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve

138 Squadron

17.4.18 – 10.3.1942

Age 21



With gratitude to Tom Dolezal, Free Czechoslovak Air Force Associates Ltd for providing the photo and biographical information about Sgt Fornůsek and a historical background to the Free Czechoslovak Air Force in WW2.

Ladislav Fornůsek was born on 17 April 1920 in Hodonín, in the South Moravia region of Czechoslovakia. According to his Czechoslovak Air Force military records he was a member of the Roman Catholic faith.

Pre-WW2 he was a High School student studying to be a vet. Shortly after the Germans occupied Czechoslovakia in March 1939, he crossed illegally into the Slovak Republic, then through Romania to Yugoslavia making his way to France, where he arrived on 4th March 1940. There he joined the Czechoslovak military at their Agde Depot, near Marseille. When France capitulated, he was evacuated to Britain where he joined the Royal Air Force Voluntary Reserve and was trained as a Wireless Operator/Air Gunner. On completion of that training, in April 1941, he was posted to 311 (Czechoslovak) Squadron, RAF based at RAF Honington. This squadron was equipped with twin-engined Wellington bombers. From the squadron's formation, their operational activities were bombing missions over occupied Europe including targets at Dunkirk, Rotterdam, Kiel, Berlin, Hamburg, Dusseldorf, Aachen and Wilhelmshaven. In November 1941, he was awarded the Czechoslovak, Za chrabrost před nepřítelem, Gallantry Medal.

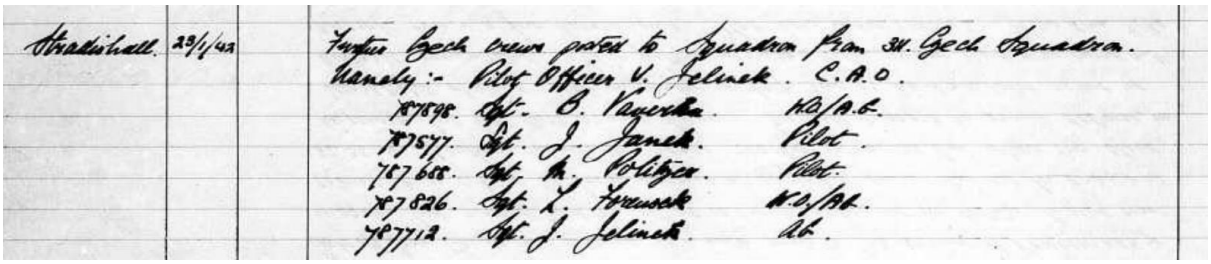
DECORATIONS.

Distinguished Flying Cross:- F/Lt. J. GELLNER.

Czech Gallantry Medal:- Officers:- KRCHA, DOUBEK, JELINEK. N.C.O. s KAMARAD, HRDINA, MIKLOSEK, LENC, DANIELKA, PARA, JELINEK,J., VAVERKA JANEK, FORNUSEK, KANOVSKY, OSOLSOBĚ, BUNZL, KVĚT, KOSTELECKY



On 23rd January 1942 a crew of six airmen, including Sgt Fornůsek, were posted from 311 Sqn to 138 (Special Duties) Squadron, RAF, based at RAF Stradishall. The others were Pilot Officer V. Jelínek, Sgt B. Vaverka, Sgt M. Politzer, Pilot Sgt Janek and Sgt J Jelínek.


Stradishall 23/1/42 Further Czech crews posted to Squadron from 311 Czech Squadron.
Namely:- Pilot Officer V. Jelinek. C.A.O.
787898. Sgt. B. Vaverka. W/O/A.G.
787577. Sgt. J. Janek. Pilot.
787655. Sgt. M. Politzer. Pilot.
787826. Sgt. L. Fornusek W/O/A.G.
787712. Sgt. J. Jelinek. do.

Reformed in 1941, No 138 was the first squadron of the Royal Air Force Special Duty Service initially based at RAF Stradishall before moving to RAF Tempsford in Bedfordshire. The Royal Air Force Special Duties Service provided air transport to support the resistance movement in enemy controlled territories. Planes from the 138 Squadron were involved in top-secret missions to the heart of the war-torn Continent.

The squadron dropped supplies and agents for the SIS (Secret Intelligence Service) and the SOE (Special Operations Executive). The service helped develop and support the resistance by bringing in agents, wireless operators and supplies. They had to fly low and without lights in order to identify drop zones and deliver the supplies and secret agents that would help the resistance forces liberate Europe. Parachute drop was the primary method by which the Special Duties units delivered supplies and agents to the occupied countries. They also developed an air taxi service to pick up agents, political leaders and special communications from occupied Europe and bring them to England. They flew to target fields in Vichy and Occupied France, Belgium, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Greece.

Ladislav Fornůsek was a member of Sqn Ldr Boris Romanoff's crew, along with fellow Czechoslovaks, Maximillián Politzer, Jan Janek, Václav Jelínek and Bohumil Vaverka.



In March 1942, they were involved in Operation Frensham with the purpose of dropping supplies to the French resistance.

This Operation was unsuccessful on the 8/9 March so on 10 March, 138 Sqn B Flight Commander Sqn Ldr Boris Romanoff took off from RAF Stradishall.

This was his first flight as Captain of Whitley Z9125 NF-A with his all Czech crew. The aircraft failed to gain height and crashed at the end of the runway.

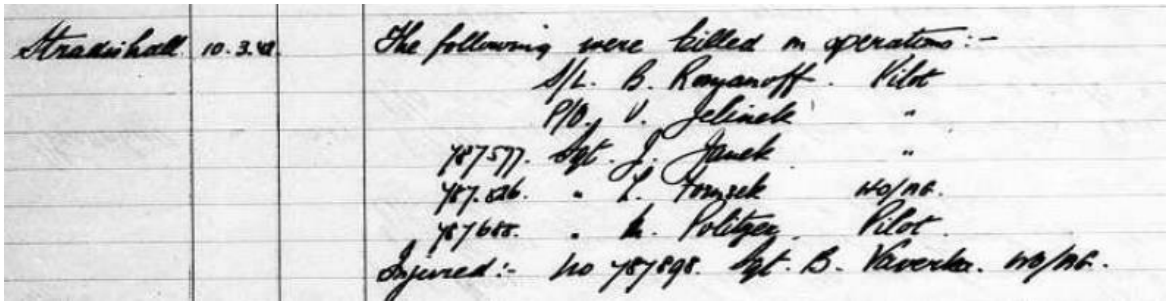
It then exploded when the rescuers arrived and only the rear gunner, Vaverka, was saved.



RAF Stradishall

from East- South-East

Wireless Operator/Air Gunner, Sgt Ladislav Fornůsek (Czechoslovak) was buried at Haverhill cemetery, Suffolk, England, grave 192, section U.


Haverhill 10.3.48 The following were killed on operations:-
S/L. B. Rayanoff. Pilot
P/O V. Jelinek "
[illegible] Sgt J. Janek "
[illegible] Sgt L. Fornusek W/Op/AG.
[illegible] Sgt L. Polišenský Pilot.
Injured:- No [illegible] Sgt B. Vaverka W/Op/AG.

All the Czech airmen are remembered on the Winged Lion Monument in Prague, where the names of 2507 Czechoslovak men and women who served in the RAF during WW2 are listed.


LAC František FIŠER
F/Lt Vladimír FIŠER
AC2 Vlastimil FIŠER
F/Sgt Josef FIŠERA †
AC1 Jiří FIŠL
Miloš FLEISCHER
F/Sgt Arnošt FLEISCHMANN
F/Lt Josef FLEKAL
W/O Zdeněk FLUSS
F/Lt Václav FOGLAR
S/Ldr Emil FOIT
AC2 Karel FOJTÁŠEK
Sgt Juraj FÖLDES
ACW1 Margita Edita FOLDEŠOVÁ
F/Sgt Štefan FONTA
F/Lt Jaromír FORETNÍK
P/O Vojtěch FORMÁNEK
F/O Adolf FORNUSEK
Sgt Ladislav FORNUSEK †
LAC Alois FORT
Cpl František FRÄHLICH
F/Lt Jaromír Alois FRANCU
W/O Alois FRANĚK
Cpl Otakar FRANK
LAC Viktor FRÄNKEL
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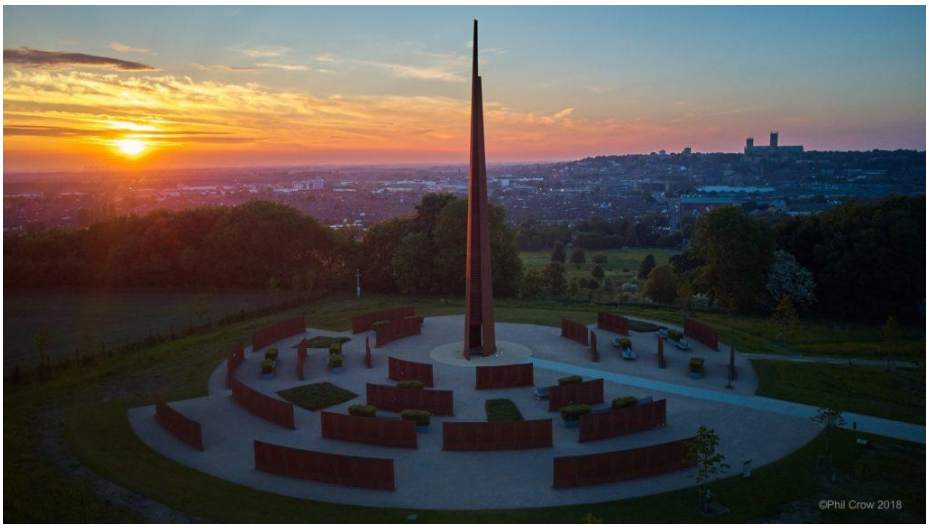
Sgt Ladislav Fornůsek is also remembered on the National Memorial for Czechoslovakian Airmen in Prague (photo bottom of previous page) and on a Memorial at Strážnice, Hodonin, (photo right).





Additionally his name appears on a memorial, in front of the school, at Kunovice, Czech Republic. (photo left)

Sgt Ladislav Fornůsek's name also appears on one of the walls surrounding the Spire that is the centre of the Memorial at the Imperial Bomber Command Centre, Lincoln (photo below credit to original photographer).



The other members of the crew were:

Pilot: Sqn Ldr Boris Romanoff MiD RAF is commemorated on Hendon Crematorium Panel 5. He was a cousin of the last Russian Tsar Nicholas. His parents lived in West Ealing.

2nd Pilot: Sgt Maximillián *Politzer (Czechoslovak) – was cremated at Cambridge Crematorium. His ashes were returned to Czechoslovakia in 1945, along with the ashes of his brother, Františe, a navigator with 311 (Czechoslovak) Sqn RAF who died in an air crash in 1944.*

Pilot: Sgt Jan Janek (Czechoslovak) was buried in Haverhill Cemetery Suffolk - Sec. U. Grave 193.

Navigator: Fg Off Vaclav Jelinek (Czechoslovak) was buried in Haverhill Cemetery Suffolk - Sec. U. Grave 243.



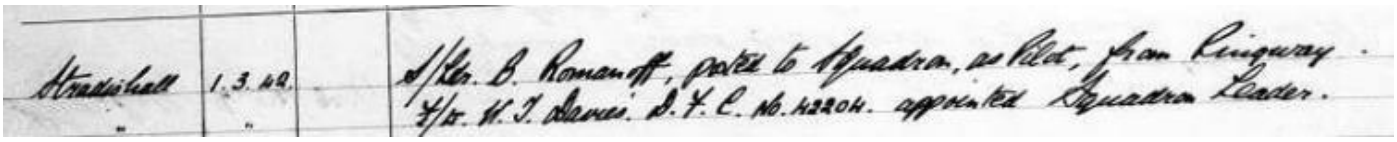
Wireless Operator/Air Gunner: Sgt Bohumil Vaverka (Czechoslovak) was seriously injured. Sgt Bohumil Vaverka lost his life on 5th October 1945. He was at this time a Flight Lt with 311 (Czechoslovak) Squadron, part of the crew of a Liberator of 311 (Czechoslavak) Squadron flying from UK to Czechoslovakia repatriating Czechoslovak nationals including children when they crashed. He was buried in Brookwood Cemetery.

In Brookwood Military Cemetery there is a CWGC memorial dedicated to Czechoslovakians who lost their lives during conflict. It is a large stone memorial with a bronze shield depicting the Czechoslovak heraldic lion.



The pilot of the fated aircraft, Squadron Leader Boris Romanoff, was born in 1914, the son of Russian-born Theodore and Evelyn Mary Romanoff, of West Ealing. In his childhood, he appears to have lived in Ealing and later Worthing, and possibly St Petersburg where his parents were brought up. He was a member of the Russian royal family, a cousin to the late Tsar. He was commissioned in the Royal Air Force on 7 September 1936 as an acting pilot officer. In that year he won a gold medal in the RAF's Wakefield Boxing Championship.

He was posted to 138 Squadron as Pilot on 1st March 1942 just 9 days before his death.


Stradishall 1.3.42. S/Ldr. B. Romanoff, posted to Squadron, as Pilot, from Ringway. F/Lt. H.J. Davies. D.F.C. No. 42804. appointed Squadron Leader.

Boris Romanoff, who was mentioned in despatches, was cremated at Hendon Cemetery and Crematorium.

Why were the Czechoslovaks serving in the RAF?

The Munich Agreement of 29 September 1938 resulted in the Sudeten region of Czechoslovakia being ceded to Nazi Germany. On 15 March 1939, Germany completed their occupation of Czechoslovakia when German troops marched in. Czechoslovak President, Dr Emil Hácha had been pressurised by Hitler to cede the Bohemia and Moravia regions of his country to Germany and the Czechoslovaks armed forces were ordered

to offer no resistance. In the weeks that followed the occupation, many Czechoslovak soldiers and airmen managed to voluntarily escape by crossing the border into Poland. However, there they were to find that the Polish authorities were nervous about neighbouring Nazi Germany and had no wish to antagonise them. Thus, it was arranged that the some 1200 Czechoslovak escapees would sail to France.

However, until war was declared, French law did not permit foreign military units on its soil, and so instead the Czechoslovaks were enlisted, on 5-year contracts, to the French Foreign Legion in North Africa. They had the agreement that should hostilities commence, they would be transferred to the Armée de l'Air. In May 1940, they took part in the short-lived Battle of France. The rapid fall of France then led to some 4,000 Czechoslovak soldiers and airmen leaving France to sail to Britain.

The first 30 Czechoslovak airmen to reach Britain landed in an aircraft at Hendon on 17 June 1940. The following day, the Czechoslovak President-in-exile Dr Eduard Beneš wrote on behalf of the Czechoslovak National Committee to the British Secretary of State for Air, Sir Archibald Sinclair, pleading that a special effort be made to bring the remaining Czechoslovak airmen out of France to Britain so that they could continue the fight. On 2 July, he sent a memorandum to the British Government urging that the Czechoslovak airmen be allowed to participate immediately in the defence of Britain and sought a formal agreement covering the status of Czech military personnel in Britain. The British Government acted quickly and within a month 310 (Czechoslovak) fighter squadron and 311 (Czechoslovak) bomber squadron had been formed.

They Czechoslovaks were eager to fight and had invaluable combat flying experience gained in Poland and France. The RAF needed as many trained pilots as it could muster as the Battle of Britain was about to commence. With insufficient time to agree a formal agreement on the status of the Czechoslovak airmen prior to their deployment in the RAF, they were immediately commissioned or enlisted in the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve (RAF VR).

Originally all officers, irrespective of their Czechoslovak rank, were commissioned at the rank of Pilot Officer, the lowest commissioned rank in the RAF. The only exceptions made were in the case of Flight and Squadron Commanders who were granted the equivalent acting RAF ranks. All other airmen were enlisted with the lowest possible classification of aircraftsman 2nd class but promoted to higher ranks after trade training and English lessons.

In the beginning, the Czechoslovak airmen were concentrated at the Czechoslovak Air Force depot at RAF Cosford, near Wolverhampton, through which they all passed before they were posted to a squadron.

The incorporation of the Czechoslovaks in the RAF VR and the formation of the Czechoslovak squadrons was part of a formally recognised process agreed on 25 October 1940. The agreement confirmed the incorporation of the Czechoslovaks in the RAF VR and the formation of the Czechoslovak squadrons was part of a formally recognised process agreed on 25 October 1940. The agreement confirmed the deployment of the Czechoslovak airmen with the Royal Air Force, the personnel being members of both the RAF VR and the Czechoslovak Air Force, subject to the laws of both forces.

Emotionally what mattered most to the Czechoslovak airmen was that, together with the RAF ensign, the Czechoslovak flag – with its blue, white and red segments – was to fly at all stations where Czechoslovak units were based. The normal RAF uniform was embellished on both sleeves with a distinguishing badge bearing the word 'Czechoslovakia' and pilots, navigators and air-gunners wore their respective Czechoslovak Air Force badges on their uniforms.