**Ministry of Defence | Air Historical Branch 3 (RAF) | Ruislip**

7 November 2014

We have received your application for information from the RAF Casualty Files concerning the accident in which 198190 Pilot Officer Joseph Duthac Finlayson was seriously injured on 3 July 1945. I have recalled and reviewed the appropriate file and have found the following information:

On 3 July 1945, Pilot Officer Finlayson was flying as the navigator on De Havilland Mosquito MkXV Serial No KB416 of 627 Squadron then based at RAF Woodhall Spa. Flight Lieutenant D N Johnson was the pilot. The aircraft was returning from a Day Cross Country training and bombing exercise when the pilot contacted the airfield to say he was flying on one engine. After making a right hand circuit, he approached the runway in the normal manner but overshot and crashed in a field at the end of the runway at 17.41hrs. The pilot was killed and as you are aware, P/O Finlayson suffered serious injuries.

There is a statement by P/O Finlayson contained on the file which reads as follows: Mosquito KB416. Cross Country Exercise with dive bombing on last leg. Port engine developed shudder about 16.40hrs near 3rd turning point, so bombing abandoned and course set for base. Few miles from base engine cut and control informed. Approach made to long runway after right hand circuit. Undercarriage selected too late to be available for that run so pilot tried to climb for another circuit. Speed fell to under 80 Knots and plane sallied, left wing first hitting field. I scrambled through hole but was held by left leg. I was released by magnificent self-sacrifice of one of the crash crew and an unknown civilian.

A Court of Inquiry was subsequently held on the 4. of July and whilst the proceedings of the inquiry do not survive, a précis of them does and I have transcribed these for you. Unfortunately, due to the poor quality wartime paper I am unable to provide a direct copy.

***Short Account of the Accident:***

Flt Lt Johnson pilot and Pilot Officer Finlayson navigator of 627 Squadron took off in Mosquito K8416 from Woodhall Spa at 14.50 hrs on the 3rd of July to carry out a duly authorised Cross Country and Bombing Flight.

The aircraft behaved normally until approximately 16.15 his when the port engine began to vibrate and to cut out on one magneto switch. The pilot Flt Lt Johnson decided to return to base. At 17.35hrs flying control at Woodhall Spa was informed over the VHF by Flt Lt Johnson that his port engine had failed and was feathered. This pilot was instructed to land using the long runway 2150 Yds in length and the aircraft commenced a right hand circuit.

The aircraft approached to land low and fast and the pilot purposely left the selecting of undercarriage down until late. Whilst holding off to land the pilot was informed by his navigator that the red warning tabs were still showing and he said “the wheels are not down” and opened up his starboard engine to take overshoot action. The aircraft continued down the runway until at about 50 ft over the airfield boundary the port wing dropped and the aircraft crashed. The time of the crash was 17.41 hrs.

The pilot was killed in the crash and the navigator Plt Off Finlayson received multiple injuries and bums. One of the crash crew, received burns whilst removing the navigator from the crash.

Flt Lt Johnson had flown a total of 825 hrs of which 162 hrs were on Mosquito aircraft.

***Findings of the Investigating Officer:*** *(5 July 1945)*

The original engine failure is under technical investigation and it can be classified as the primary cause of this accident.

The secondary cause of this accident was the attempt by the pilot to go round again on one engine after he had committed himself to landing, and was in fact only a few feet above the runway in the hold off attitude. The fact that his undercarriage was not locked down must have made him do this.

The right hand circuit and the low approach are likely to have influenced the landing and are considered contributory factors.

***Remarks of the Officer Commanding:*** *(7 July 1945)*

Concurs with the findings of the Investigating Officer.

***Remarks of the Air officer Commanding:*** *(23 July 1945)*

Agrees with the findings of the Investigating Officer and the remarks of the Base Commander. The errors made by the pilot on this occasion are being brought to the notice of all Mosquito pilots in the Group.

***Remarks of Base Commander:*** *(16 July 1945)*

Agrees with the findings The pilot erred in his judgement, having lowered the undercarriage too late to lock down before the touch down he should have accepted the alternative of a belly landing. The very brave actions of an RAF Corporal and a civilian in rescuing the Navigator have been represented to high authority.

***Remarks of the Air Officer Commanding In Chief:*** *(1 August 1945)*

Concurs with the findings and the remarks of the Base and Group Commanders.

Kindly provided by Mr Andrew Finlayson