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SQUADRON LEADER F. W. LISTER

Squadron Leader F. W. Lister, DSO, DFC and Bar, died at his home in Northorpe, Bourne, Lincolnshire, on May 30 aged 75. He was born on March 29, 1920.

FREDDIE LISTER arrived to take command of 127 Spitfire Fighter Bomber Squadron at Grimbergen, northwest of Brussels, in October 1944. The German anti-aircraft fire during the short but hazardous sorties that were flown in support of ground troops during the battle to liberate the Low Countries was both intense and accurate.

In his first sortie with the squadron, Lister was hit by flak; he was wounded in the arm, shrapnel cutting through his radio cable about an inch from his throat. Nevertheless he managed to crash-land and was taken to hospital. Two months later (the squadron had just lost another CO) the door of the dispersal hut (where the pilots were gathered) opened and Lister walked in uttering the same words later famously used by Cassandra in the *Daily Mirror*: "As I was saying before I was so rudely interrupted..." He remained as CO of the Squadron until 127 was disbanded on April 30, 1945.

Frederick Wooldridge Lister was born in St Leonards-on-Sea and educated at West Buckland School in Devon. His father owned the ice-rink in Southampton where both Freddie and his older brother, Derek, became part of the Ice Show. Freddie's speciality being speed-skating and barrel-jumping. He was 17 when he represented Great Britain in the speed-skating championships in Davos, Switzerland. He was said to have held the barrel-jumping world record, but air raids completely demolished the Southampton rink and all records were lost.

He joined the Royal Air Force in 1940 and after training went to 43 Squadron, flying Hurricanes from the South Coast in 11 Group. In August 1942 the squadron was assigned to strafe enemy coastal batteries during the ill-fated Dieppe Raid. Eight aircraft were hit including Lister's, which sustained such severe airframe damage that it was a miracle it could still fly. Nevertheless, with typical skill and determination, he made a hazardous but successful landing back at base, unharmed. Since it was the practice to remove re-usable



parts from crashed aircraft, the engine was quickly dismantled. A zealous reporter arrived from the local paper to report the incident and produced the immortal headline: "Pilot flies plane home without engine." In spite of the crash-landing Lister flew three more sorties that day and was awarded an immediate Distinguished Flying Cross, to which a Bar was added shortly afterwards.

He continued his first tour of operations, becoming CO of 152 Squadron. He took part in the Allied landings in North Africa, leading the squadron in ground attacks in support of the British First Army from hastily constructed runways in atrocious conditions.

He took command of 127 Squadron in October 1944 at a time when, as a result of heavy losses, morale was low. In spite of being shot down and wounded on his first sortie Lister returned two months later to replace Squadron Leader Smik, a Czech fighter pilot who had been shot down and killed. He was a man who always led from the front with great tactical skill and courage and never forgot that, in low-level attacks, there were 11 other pilots coming in behind him. For displaying courage

and leadership qualities of the highest order throughout his two tours of operations, Lister was in 1945 awarded the Distinguished Service Order.

The citation said: "Squadron Leader Lister at all times has displayed gallantry and devotion to duty of a very high order. Over a very long period he has shown a spirit of great keenness and aggressiveness and has led his squadron with great distinction and success."

After demobilisation he had a brief flirtation with civilian life but soon rejoined the RAF to become CO of No 1 Squadron, flying Hunter jets with the acting rank of Wing Commander. There followed postings in the United Kingdom, Germany, United States (where he trained in order to take over the missile site at Luffenham in Norfolk) and at Changi, Singapore. He was discharged in the mid-1960s through ill-health.

Bad health continued to dog him in his later years. He bore this with his customary humour and fortitude, helped by the care and support of his wife Marjorie (née Donnelly) whom he had married in 1957. There were no children but she survives him along with two nieces to whom he was devoted.