

**FOWLER, Leslie Gordon. Flight Lieutenant/Navigator (126036) DFC
214 Squadron, Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve
Died 15 March 1945, aged 23**

Images and further details at http://www.214squadron.org.uk/personnel_f_m.htm
and <https://www.tracesofwar.com/persons/63678/Fowler-Leslie-Gordon.htm?c=aw>

The marriage of George Robson Fowler to Mabel Lilian Lawler was registered at Blean, Kent, for the June Quarter of 1921. Their son, Leslie Gordon Fowler, was born on 13 June 1922, reg, Blean, 9/1922.

The family came to live at 4 Kinross Avenue, Worcester Park, Surrey, during 1934 for G R Fowler to conduct a newsagents and stationers business at 117 Central Road, Worcester Park – the family name remains on the fascia although the business is now carried on by Burkitt Stationery.

Leslie was educated at King's College School, Wimbledon, before enlisting in the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve, in September 1940 at Euston, with a Service Number 1387456. He learned to fly in Canada and, as a LAC, he was commissioned Pilot Officer on 11 July 1942 being promoted to Flying Officer a year later.

Between 31 December 1942 and the middle of June 1943 Fowler flew 23 operations as a Navigator with 199 Squadron in Vickers Wellington bombers from Blyton and Ingham .

Announced by the Air Ministry, 10th September, 1943: -

The KING has been graciously pleased to approve the award of a Distinguished Flying Cross to Acting Flight Lieutenant Leslie Gordon FOWLER (126036) Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve, No. 199 Squadron - for gallantry and devotion to duty in the execution of air operations.

Citation:-

'This officer has completed many operational missions over enemy territory, including attacks on main targets such as Cologne and Essen and mine laying operations in enemy waters.

At all times Flight Lieut Fowler has displayed navigational abilities of a high order which has contributed much to the success of these sorties. This officer possesses a fine fighting spirit, which has inspired confidence in his crew.'

Further promotion to Flight Lieutenant came into effect on 11 July 1944.

After retraining on B17's he had been posted to No. 214 Squadron which was equipped with various navigation and countermeasure instruments (Fortress Electronic Equipment). On 24 February 1945 a Flying Fortress Mk. III, HB805, took off from RAF Oulton with Leslie Fowler and eight other crew members on board. The bomber was shot down at 20.08 hrs - 20-30 km West of Dusseldorf airfield by Oblt. Kurt Matzak of Stab IV/NJG1 - a Luftwaffe night fighter ace with 19 kills to his score. Fowler was injured during the attack but survived

to be taken PoW and hospitalized, only to die on 15 March from his wounds. In total seven crew members had been killed with Air Gunner Flight Sergeant Jennings, D.F.M, also taken PoW to survive the war.

Leslie Fowler was buried in Zuidlaren, Drenthe, Netherlands, although his plane had been reported to crash near Ittenbach 300 km to the south. It had actually been brought down with the starboard inner engine on fire at 20.10 hrs, into the River Niers, near Neersen, Germany. The final flight path described by an eye-witness suggested that the fire was spreading so fast that the aircraft rapidly lost altitude and was unable to reach a flat area only 100 metres away which had earlier been a dummy airfield. The fuel tanks exploded when close to the Konradkapelle, [St Konrad Chapel] the starboard wing broke off and fell on the house occupied by the Gaspers family, whilst cockpit and fuselage fell into the Niers, the port wing section smashing into the opposite bank of the Niers.

An explanation for confusion over the crash site is that remains of the aircraft's pilot, F/O J.M Shortle, DFM, had been discovered months later, in the wreckage of an American type aircraft, and taken for burial at the US Military cemetery at Ittenbach – only later when his identity was confirmed, were they exhumed and re-interred at Rheinberg.

W/O G J E Jennings who parachuted to safety and was taken prisoner had been interviewed post-war at the RNZAF HQ on 20th July 1945 and 20th September 1945, concerning the whereabouts of F H Dix the sole New Zealander of the crew. His testimony was recorded: -

“Jennings was informed by the Germans that the whole crew, with the exception of the Navigator Fowler, had been killed in the crash. The Germans knew the names of all the crew and that one man had jumped, they thought however it was Sgt Jones. Jennings had difficulties convincing them that he was the man and not Jones. The exact crash location could not be established, but was estimated as about ten miles south or south-west of Krefeld” Concerning Fowler, Jennings provided the following information “I saw F/Lt Fowler in a civil hospital about ten miles to the south or south-west of Krefeld on the 27th or 28th February 1945 (which matched the crash location and would be just prior to the US troops occupying the area). We were then taken to a military unit about 2 miles from Krefeld as far as I can tell. F/Lt Fowler was in a very bad way – he was burned all over and was clearly in great pain. A sister said that the index finger of his right hand had to be amputated. Fowler however seemed to think that his recovery was proceeding satisfactorily. He was taken away in an ambulance and I never saw him again”

F/Lt Fowler had died in a military hospital in the Netherlands on 15th March 1945 to be buried in the Zuidlaren General Cemetery, Drenthe, which lies between Groningen and Assen. A psychiatric institution at Dennenoord Zuidlaren had been cleared of inmates by the Germans on 20 February 1945 to serve as Kriegslazarett 3/541 (war hospital) but how Fowler came to be transferred there has not been established. Zuidlaren was liberated by Canadians on 13 April 1945.

Buried in Zuidlaren General Cemetery, Drenthe, Netherlands, Plot 1 Row E Grave 12. Son of George Robson Fowler and Mabel Lilian Fowler, of Worcester Park, Surrey.

IMAGE <https://www.tracesofwar.com/upload/8653170911001436.jpg>