

WING COMMANDER COLIN FRANK MORTLOCK CHAPMAN OBE (32-36)

Date of Birth	25 November 1918 in Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk
School Information	Foundation scholar. Head Prefect CSM, OTC cert. Squash team 1935, keeper 1936.
Career Information	Entered R.A.F. Cranwell in 1937, where he was captain of squash and cricket. Granted permanent commission as Pilot Officer from Cranwell with effect from 17th December, 1938. Married in Surrey in 1943.
Date Of Death	29 September 1944
Cause of Death	See below
Location	Merstham, Surrey
Cemetery	Caterham and Warlingham (Caterham) Burial Ground - Plot Sec. M. Grave 2.
Rank	Wing Commander
Branch of Service	Royal Air Force, Second Tactical Air Force, 140 Squadron



Our thanks to David Cooke, Secretary, Cobham Conservation and Heritage Trust, for the following additional information :

Husband of Barbara Sylvia Chapman, of Cobham. Parents born in Bury St. Edmunds, living there in 1911, father's occupation surveyor, mother's occupation dance teacher. Father died in 1924. Educated at Framlingham College , where he became head prefect.

Entered R.A.F. Cranwell in 1937, where he was captain of squash and cricket. Married in Surrey.

Granted permanent commission as Pilot Officer from Cranwell with effect from 17th December, 1938. Served with 2 Squadron, flying Lysanders, which went to France in October 1939, returning to England on 19th May, 1940. On 29th May, his aircraft hit by flak near Dunkirk during a tactical reconnaissance flight from R.A.F. Bekebourne, landed safely at Hawkinge after flying with full left bank, full left rudder and no control below 100m.p.h. Recommended for staff course, afterwards joining staff of Second Tactical Air Force. Took command on 20th September 1944 of 140 Squadron, flying Mosquito photo-reconnaissance aircraft, based at Amiens before moving to Melsbroek, Belgium.

Killed flying as a passenger on Avro Anson NK607 from Northolt to Melsbroek. The aircraft hit trees at Dean Lane , Merstham, Surrey in mist.

Awarded O.B.E. 28th November, 1944.

Resident at Kingfisher Court, East Molesey in 1944, his wife living at Tressmere, Oxshott Way, Cobham in 1946.

His grandson S/Lt. Guy Chapman was killed on a training flight in a Gazelle helicopter in 1995, serving with 705 Naval Air Squadron.

The following additional information was on Find a Grave website :

On 29th September 1944, five men perished in Avro Anson NK607, as it hit a tree in thick cloud and crashed in woods, somewhere within the grounds of an Army Ordnance Depot, near Dean Lane, Merstham, about three miles from RAF Kenley.

After taking off from RAF Northolt at 9.40am, the aircraft was "heard apparently circling over the neighbourhood of Merstham... It then broke cloud at a very low altitude over wooded country and was seen to be banked almost vertically to the left. It crashed almost immediately afterwards but, before it did, the tip of the port wing broke away."

The five men who died were:

W/Cdr. ROWLAND BRANSTON COX. RAFO. Aged 31. (Pilot)
W/Cdr. COLIN FRANK MORTLOCK CHAPMAN OBE. RAF. Age 25. (Pilot 2)
FI/Lt. PAUL HENRY WESTON PRIESTLY. RAFVR. Aged 23. (Wireless Op/ Gunner)
F/O. WALTER DAVID DICK COOPER. Aged 29. RCAF. (Navigator)
FI/Sgt. ALEC STEPHEN KAY. (Wireless Op/ Gunner)

Avro Anson NK607 was with 34 WSU (Wing Support Unit), based at Northolt. The unit had been formed on the 26th July, 1944, to provide transport for 34 Wing – four squadrons involved in photographic and strategic reconnaissance. In the aftermath of D-Day, 34WSU remained at Northolt when their Wing moved to the Continent at the beginning of September. Around the 26th-28th September, the Wing moved from B.48 Airfield (Amiens/Glisy) to B.58 Airfield (Melsbroek).

So, NK607's flight on the 29th September was most likely to ferry those on board to their new base or a conference , which accounts for the high ranking personnel on board. It must have been a big blow to the Wing to lose two Commanding Officers when they were working at full stretch. The big mystery is why the Anson was flying so low in such poor weather, which seems to have been a sensitive subject in the accident report.

The aircraft was being flown by W/C Cox, who had flown comparatively infrequently, prior to the crash,

probably due to more pressing responsibilities. He was probably trying to get some flying time in. The crash investigation, which had initially concentrated on structural failure, tried to ascertain how many hours he had flown but were unable to consult his logbook (he probably had it with him during the crash). During 1942, they could only find records amounting to 25 hours flying time. The movement records since he had taken command of 34WSU, on 9/8/44, indicated roughly 2 hours flying time. The investigators concluded that, although the cause of the crash couldn't be definitely established, the most likely scenario was that the pilot had lost control of the aircraft in cloud due to illness or lack of competence in instrument flying.

An improvised memorial now marks the location of the crash.

Rest in peace gentlemen and thank you for your service.