



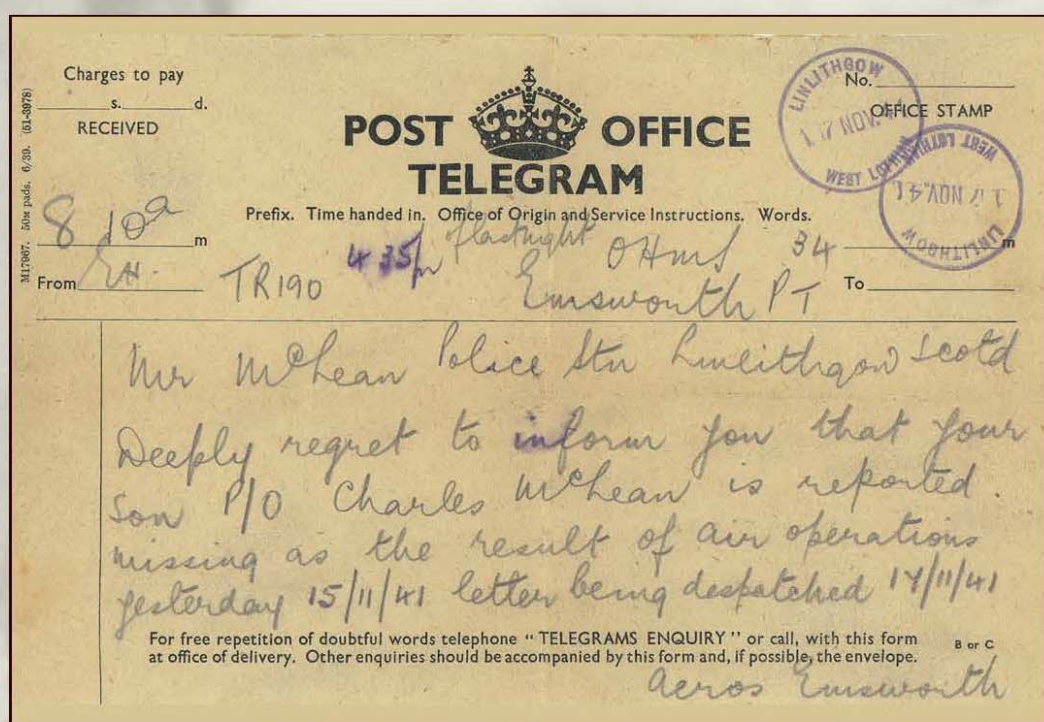
Charles's head for numbers meant that he was earmarked to be a navigator. At his final exam, Charles finished with top marks and he was one of only six in his group to be selected for a commission. He had spent sixteen months in training.

In 1941, Charles was posted to 217 Squadron, Coastal Command, flying Beauforts out of RAF St Eval on the north Cornwall coast: 'I like the work a lot. We do all sorts of different jobs as we're Coastal and not Bomber Command – Patrols, Searches, Convoys, Bombing, Sea mines, Landmines, Torpedoes and so on.' Censorship meant that he had to be guarded about his operational work in letters home: 'I think I told you we'd visited Nantes. Well, this is from the Mail of the 25th. "According to Vichy radio last night a tremendous fire at Nantes destroyed valuable stocks of mineral oil in a warehouse." That was us.'

As a Pilot Officer, his social life also improved 'I've had dinner several times at the home of a girl whose father, a Scot, is a major in the Medical Corps. They were enjoyable evenings.' He also took an interest in the new sport of surfing: 'I'm just getting the idea of surf-riding. The breakers down here are even bigger than at Tiree at times.'

In October 1941, Charles and his crew were moved to RAF Manston in Kent to trial new radar equipment. It was to be his final posting. On 15 November, they took off to attack enemy shipping off the coast of France. The plane never returned.

The bodies of two crew members were washed up on the Dutch coast, but those of Charles and the pilot were not recovered. It was an agonising wait for the family home in Linlithgow. It was ten months before the Air Ministry declared that it was 'presumed for official purposes [that Pilot Officer Charles McLean had] lost his life'.



Charles was just twenty-four when he was killed and had served in the RAF for a little over two years, of which his operational duties had lasted just six months. Of Charles's original 'D' Flight cohort in the Hastings Initial Training Wing, a staggering 80% perished in the War.



TOP Charles with an unidentified companion in Cornwall in 1941. MIDDLE Telegram sent to Charles's father with the first news that he had been reported missing. LOWER 'D' Flight, RAF no. 3 Initial Training Wing, Hastings 1940. Only one fifth of these men survived the war

Charles's name is engraved onto the Tiree War Memorial and the Linlithgow War Memorial. It is also carried on the Runnymede Memorial overlooking the River Thames, a tribute to airmen and women who were lost in Europe during the Second World War and who have no known grave.

'They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old: Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn. At the going down of the sun and in the morning: We will remember them.'

LAURENCE BINYON

'Virtue Mine Honour' is the motto of Clan MacLean.