

P/O Joseph Emmanuel Alves 170028 RAFVR

Joseph Alves was a Lancaster navigator who was born in the West Indies and became part of one of his squadron's most decorated crews, all of whom were lost when their Lancaster disappeared without trace during a raid on Berlin in January 1944.

Three of the crew had received bravery awards in 1943, while they were with 100 Squadron, for their role in nursing a badly damaged Lancaster with a wounded gunner on board back from Kassel. The aircraft had been hit by cannon fire and an incendiary bomb and led to most of the navigation instruments and maps being destroyed. Joseph used his ingenuity in fashioning new dividers from matchsticks and a length of string and with this, and a small-scale map which had survived, managed to navigate the aircraft back to make a safe landing at Grimsby. There was later some puzzlement why Joseph was not also decorated for his role that night.



The crew, with a new rear gunner, was later detached from 100's C Flight to help form the new 625 Squadron, which was based at the new airfield at Kelstern, a few miles away. The Berlin attack involved 775 Lancasters and Halifaxes, and the route to and from Berlin was over both the North Sea and the Baltic, where it is believed his aircraft was lost. Forty-five other bombers also failed to return.

Joseph and his crew were on their 18th operation and were about to go on leave before transferring to a Pathfinder squadron. They had left Kelstern shortly before midnight on 28 January on board Lancaster DV364 CF-D, which had been delivered new to the squadron when it was formed at the beginning of November 1943. All the crew are now remembered on the Runnymede Memorial.

Joseph came from Bassaterre, the capital of St Kitts, and was one of three children of Mr and Mrs Jeremiah Alves. His father was a successful merchant on the island and was part of a family that had originally migrated from the Portuguese island of Madeira. Joseph had left St Kitts in November 1941 to join the RAF. He was fascinated by flying and believed aviation would play a major role in the development of the West Indies. He was a former pupil of Bassaterre's Convent High School and the holder of a Senior Cambridge Certificate. Joseph met his future wife, Elsie, in England and the couple were married at St James Church in Grimsby with two of his crew acting as witnesses. Edith's home was in Chadwell Heath, Essex.

The other crew members were pilot Flt. Lt. George Spark DFC, flight engineer Sgt. William Lyssington DFM, bomb-aimer P/O Robert Latham MiD, wireless operator Sgt. George Bone, mid-upper gunner WO2 Lewis Carson RCAF and rear gunner P/O Herbert Watkins DFC, who had joined the crew as a replacement for the wounded gunner.

His name can be found on panel 002.

Sources: Aircrew Remembered/The Berlin Raids by Martin Middlebrook/The Leeward Times/Grimsby Evening Telegraph.