

F/O Eric Richard Victor Ashcroft 126517 RAFVR



The memorial to the crew of ED626 in Holland

Twenty-year-old Eric Ashcroft was the bomb aimer of a Lancaster which was lost in an experimental raid which went tragically wrong.

He was part of the crew of Sqn. Ldr. Charles O'Donoghue RAF, A Flight CO of 103 Squadron at RAF Elsham Wolds who, in the spring of 1943, came up with the idea of single aircraft carrying out early morning nuisance raids on relatively small German targets. The first, again the small coastal town of Leer on 19 March, proved successful but when it was tried a second time on 1 April their Lancaster was caught by German fighters and shot down over Holland, killing all on board.

They left Elsham on board Lancaster ED626 PM-G at 0430 hours heading for the town of Emmerich on the Rhine. Again, it was a low-level raid but this time the Germans were prepared. They managed to bomb Emmerich at first light but by this time two units of Fw190s had been scrambled and there followed an unequal chase across Holland before ED626 was finally shot down by Oberfeldwebel Timm, crashing near Harderwijk in central Holland at 0722 hours. There were no survivors.

Today the crash site is marked by a simple wooden cross which is tended by local schoolchildren in remembrance of those who died.

Killed with Charles O'Donoghue and his bomb aimer were flight engineer Sgt. Jim Callaghan RAFVR, navigator Sgt. Tony Fry RAF, wireless operator Sgt. John Winn RAFVR, mid-upper gunner F/O Ian Burns DFM RAFVR, and rear gunner Sgt. Sefton Stafford RAF. Six of the crew rest in Harderwijk General Cemetery while the rear gunner is buried in Amersfoot (Oud Leuden) Cemetery.

Eric came from Worthing in Sussex and was the son of Harold and Milicent Ashcroft.

Eric's name can be found on panel 003

Photographic source: Groundspeak