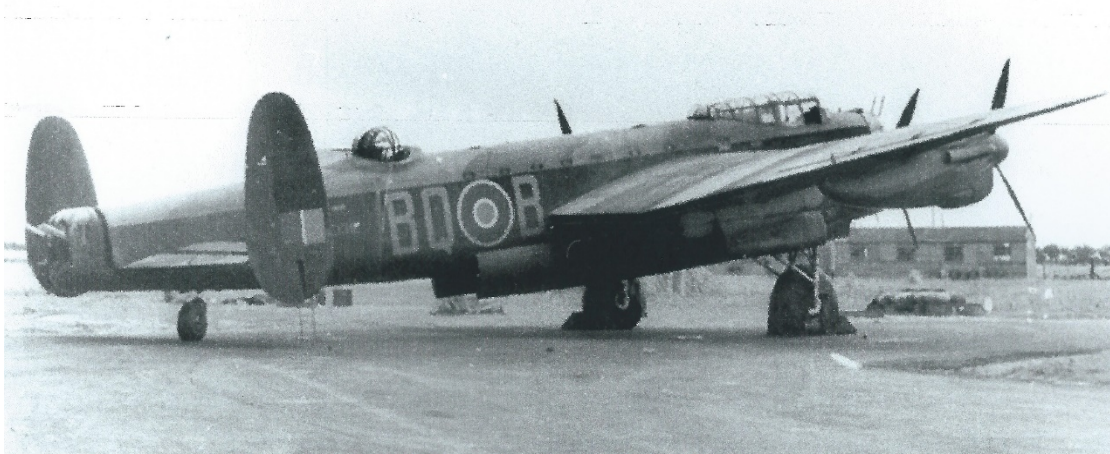


## Flt. Sgt. John Carman Atherton 426486 RAAF



### **This 550 Squadron Lancaster took part in the Christmas Eve Berlin raid**

Seven minutes into the start of Christmas Eve 1943 Lancaster ED730 BQ-G2, of 550 Squadron, lifted off the busy main runway at RAF Grimsby destined for Berlin. A little over 30 minutes later it was involved in a mid-air collision with another aircraft from 100 Squadron, claiming the lives of 14 young men.

The collision occurred at 12,000 feet as the Lancasters were climbing before heading for their assembly point on the Lincolnshire coast. ED730 was roughly over the village of Fulstow, five miles south of the airfield, when it collided with ND327, both aircraft exploding and showering wreckage over the surrounding area. There were no casualties on the ground – mainly due to the time of the collision – but several buildings were damaged including the Methodist chapel in the village of North Thoresby.

ED730's mid-upper gunner was 30-year-old Australian John Atherton. He was born in the northern Queensland mining town of Chillagoe, his family later settling in the waterside Brisbane suburb of Teneriffe. He was the son of John and Gertrude Atherton and is remembered on the Brisbane war memorial. John is buried in the military section of Cambridge City Cemetery.



He had joined a crew that was also relatively new to 550, having already completed one Berlin operation, but this was their first in ED730, an ex-460 Squadron Lancaster that had twice returned early since joining 550.

The others who died in his all-NCO crew were the pilot Sgt. Hubert Woods, flight engineer Sgt. David Davies, navigator Sgt. Montague Giles, bomb-aimer Flt. Sgt. Joseph Legere RCAF, wireless operator Sgt. Leonard Wright and rear gunner Sgt. John McConnell.

His name can be found on panel 004.

Sources: 550 Squadron Association/Avro Lancaster: The Definitive Record by Harry Holmes/Five-Fifty: The Wartime Story of a Lancaster Squadron by Patrick Otter.