

Sgt. Alec Frederick Backler 1029538 RAFVR



His crew pictured boarding ED689 at Bardney

Alec Backler was a young wireless operator and was killed during an attack on Cologne which saw the introduction of a new tactic by the Luftwaffe.

On the large-scale raid on the night of 3/4 July 1943 the Luftwaffe unveiled a new tactic of operating over targets by single-engined fighters, picking up victims' illumination by the light of searchlight beams and burning areas. This so-called 'wild boar' tactic is believed to have accounted for a third of the 30 bombers lost, including his aircraft, ED689 WS-K.

Alec was part of a young but experienced 9 Squadron crew which had taken off from Bardney at 2217 hours as part of a force of 653 bombers. His Lancaster crashed in a Cologne suburb, close to the east bank of the Rhine. His was one of only two bodies ever recovered and he is now buried in Rheinberg War Cemetery.

He was part of a popular crew at Bardney, their popularity being increased on June 24 when they returned from a raid with bunches of bananas they had picked up after landing at Blida in North Africa. They had been involved in an attack on Friedrichshafen in southern Germany before 52 aircraft flew on to Blida and returned three days later, en route bombing La Spezia, a naval base in Italy. These so-called 'shuttle' raids were to become more common although the bananas were an added bonus.

Alec came from the Manchester suburb of Burnage and was the 22-year-old son of Frederick and Constance Backler.

The others who died were the pilot Flt. Lt. John Wakeford DFC, second pilot Sgt. Thomas Porter, flight engineer Sgt. John Owen, American navigator F/O Jonah Reeves, bomb-aimer Sgt. Harold Hawkridge, mid-upper gunner Sgt. Harry Wilson and rear gunner WO2 George Dohaney RCAF.

His name can be found on panel 004.

Sources: *Bombers First and Last* by Gordon Thorburn/*Bomber Command War Diaries* by Martin Middlebrook/Air Pages.ru.