

Sgt. Francis Henry Bathmaker 1892488 RAFVR



The Swiss graves of the crew members of LL750

Francis Bathmaker was the rear gunner in an ABC-equipped Lancaster of 101 Squadron at RAF Ludford Magna. He had joined the squadron early in 1944 as part of the crew of WO Bert Noble and by late April had completed seven operations. The crew's eighth was to Friedrichshafen, close to the German-Swiss border, a centre for tank production for the German army. The raid by 322 Lancasters was deemed to be an 'outstanding success' although 18 of the 322 Lancasters taking part were shot down, the majority after they had bombed. Two of those were from 101.

WO Noble, who had already been mentioned in dispatches twice, headed a crew of eight – ABC Lancasters carried a 'special operator' to jam Luftwaffe fighter frequencies. On 27 April 1944 they took off from Ludford at 2140 hours, in Lancaster LL750 SR-P, for the long trip south. At 0219 hours on 28 April 1944, after successfully bombing, the aircraft was intercepted at around 20,000 feet by a fighter flown by Hptm Gerhard Friedrich and it exploded.

Two of the crew members were blown clear but the other six died when the Lancaster crashed in thick snow at Alp Grappelen, across the Swiss border. All six are buried in St Martin's Churchyard in Vevey, close to Lake Geneva. The two survivors, flight engineer Sgt. R K Bridges and bomb-aimer F/O H S Prowse RCAF, were briefly interned by the Swiss.

Francis was the son of George and Winifred Bathmaker of Kensal Rise, London. He was 21 years old when he died.

Killed with him were the pilot WO B B Noble, navigator F/O J R Burton, wireless operator Sgt. W G Anderson, mid-upper gunner P/O O J Albrecht RCAF and special operator Sgt. M Smith.

His name can be found on IBCC panel 007

Photographic source: Aircrew Remembered.