

Sgt. Thomas Ivan Betts 1231205 RAFVR

Tom Betts was the wireless operator/air gunner of one of the last two Wellingtons lost by 166 Squadron.

He and his crew were flying in Wellington X HE988 (AS-U) during a raid on Monchengladbach in the early hours of 31 August 1943 when their aircraft was shot down over Belgium.

The Wellington crashed at Loozen in the north of the country. The crew were later buried at St Truiden before being reinterred in the Heverlee War Cemetery.

The attack, which caused considerable damage to the target area, was carried out by 660 Bomber Command aircraft, 25 of which were lost. A second Wellington from 166 vanished without trace bringing the total lost by the squadron to 46 since it formed at RAF Kirmington in late January, the highest Wellington losses of any Bomber Command squadron in 1943. Shortly afterwards the squadron converted to Lancasters.

Tom and his crew were on their 10th operation in less than five weeks at Kirmington. They had all previously survived a belly landing in a Wellington at RAF Finningley while with 18 Operational Training Unit in June 1943.

He came from the Leicestershire village of Rothley where he lived with his wife Betty. They were married early in 1942 and his son, John, was born four months after Tom was killed. Tom was the 22-year-old son of Harry and Annie Betts.

Those who died with him were the pilot P/O Henry Heron, navigator P/O Clifford Musto, bomb-aimer Sgt. Jim Smith and rear gunner Sgt. Leslie Wakerell.

His name can be found on IBCC panel 009.

Photographic source: Rothley Parish Council.

