

## **Sgt. Leonard Bertie Bourne 1582055 RAFVR**

It is not hard to find tributes in the Sussex town of Worthing to commemorate seven men from a Lincolnshire airfield who many believe saved the seaside town from catastrophe.

Along with memorials, seven roads in the town carry the names of the men who climbed aboard Lancaster PB355 EA-B of No. 49 Squadron at RAF Fulbeck on the afternoon of 17 December 1944, to take part in a No. 5 Group attack on the city of Munich.

Navigator Len Bourne was on his 12<sup>th</sup> operation when he lifted off to join a force of 280 Lancasters and eight Mosquitoes heading for the Bavarian capital. But, after crossing the south coast, PB355 had to turn back because of a serious problem with the aircraft. At 1755 hours people in Worthing heard the roar of engines and saw the Lancaster losing height. It became clear that the crew were doing all they could avoid crashing in the town, managing to lift clear of the sea-front Plaza cinema, at the time packed with people. Instead, it crashed and exploded (along with its bomb load) on the beach close to the water line.



The explosion was followed by a fierce fire which was tackled by the local fire service. There



was extensive damage to the windows along the sea front but no serious injuries amongst the residents. Only one body of the seven-man crew was found.

It was a further four years later that the wreckage of PB355 was finally dealt with. In 1949 the town clerk of Worthing, Ernest Townsend OBE, said he was certain the pilot had sacrificed his own life and that of his crew to avoid crashing into buildings in the town. Now the names of every member of the crew are remembered on streets in Worthing, along with a memorial for them on Worthing Pier and on a panel on the sea front.

Len came from Corby in Northamptonshire where he lived with his wife, Beryl, and was the 28-year-old son of Walter and Lizzie Bourne. He is remembered on the Runnymede Memorial (panel 225).

The others who died were the pilot F/O Edward Essenhigh, flight engineer Sgt. Harry Varey, bomb-aimer F/O James Thomson, wireless operator Flt. Sgt. Frederick Rees, mid-upper gunner Sgt. James Moore and rear gunner Flt Sgt. Gordon Callon.

Len's name can be found on IBCC panel 011.

Sources: 49 Squadron Association/Worthing Herald/Brighton Argus.