

Pilot Officer Ernest Brown 415612 RAAF



Ernest Brown (front, centre) with his crew

Ernest Brown was the Australian pilot of a No. 166 Squadron Lancaster lost on what turned out to be Bomber Command's final attack of the Battle of Berlin.

He was flying Lancaster I ME635 AS-C, which was hit by flak at 25,000 feet shortly after dropping its bombs on the German capital on the night of 24/25 March 1944. Both port engines were set on fire before the aircraft was attacked by a night fighter, at which point the crew was ordered to bale out. The burning aircraft then spiralled down before crashing on the edge of a forest near the village of Reuden, east of Berlin.

The only survivor was the mid-upper gunner, Sgt. William Burnell, who was later to recount that he was wounded in the night fighter attack and lost consciousness but believed all six other crew members got out of the aircraft. He miraculously came to in the wreckage of the Lancaster and later surrendered to the Germans. What happened to the rest of the crew is unclear, but German authorities reported that six bodies were discovered and buried locally before being reburied after the war in Berlin War Cemetery (coll. grave 5. B. 17-22).

ME635 had left RAF Kirmington at 1835 hours and was one of three Lancasters lost by 166 Squadron on the raid. Bomber Command lost a total of 72 aircraft from the 811 sent, the bomber stream being badly scattered by unexpectedly strong winds.

Ernest Brown was 22 and came from the Perth suburb of Victoria Park in Western Australia where he lived with his mother, Mrs Winifred Brown.

The others killed with him were the flight engineer Sgt. John Scruton, navigator Flt. Sgt. Bill Mitchinson, bomb-aimer Sgt. Russell Boyde, wireless operator Sgt. Joe Flavell and rear gunner Sgt. Bill Mason.

Ernest's name can be found on IBCC panel 013.

Photographic source: 166 Squadron Association and Aircrew Remembered