

Sqn. Ldr. Martin Bryan-Smith DFC & Bar MiD 77103 RAFVR

Martin Bryan-Smith was the decorated Gunnery Leader in the Pathfinders of No. 97 Squadron who was killed in the early morning of D-Day, a little over four years after his twin brother died on Bomber Command operations.

He died along with the other seven members of his highly-decorated, all-officer Lancaster crew just 86 minutes before the 1944 D-Day landings began. His aircraft was shot down by a Fw190 near Carentan, 18 miles from his Lancaster's target, a German gun battery at St Pierre du Mont. This was close to Omaha beach where American soldiers were to land at 0630 hours.



Martin's Lancaster, ND739 OF-Z, and his crew were officially listed as 'lost without trace' for many years. However in 2012 the wreckage and personal items from the crew were found and recovered by a team of British aviation archaeologists. The bodies of the crew were never discovered; all are remembered on the Runnymede Memorial (Panel 200).

97 Squadron played a key part in the plan to nullify German defences as the landing craft arrived on the Normandy beaches. Martin's squadron CO and pilot, W/C 'Jimmy' Carter, chose to lead 97's element, applauding at the briefing at Coningsby and telling aircrew: 'Thank God I'm still on ops and not at an OTU!'

His aircraft took off from RAF Coningsby in Lincolnshire at 0256 hours on 6 June, flying over the assembling invasion fleet. At 0504 hours the controller picked up a signal from his aircraft which suddenly stopped, and it is believed that ND739 was attacked by one of a number of Fw190 fighters which had been scrambled.

Martin, who was 33, and his twin brother Anthony were born at Penn, Wolverhampton and were the sons of Frank and Ellen Bryan-Smith. Martin was educated at Dean Close School in Cheltenham and later married his wife, Anne, who came from the Tomkinson carpet family. They settled at the village of Wolverley in the Wyre Forest area of Worcestershire. His brother was a wireless operator/air gunner in 49 Squadron at RAF Scampton, who died in April 1940 when his Hampden crash-landed on the beach at Ryehope, near Sunderland.

The others who died were W/C Edward Carter DFC, flight engineer P/O Guy Dunning DFM, navigator Flt. Lt. Ronald Conley DFC RAAF, bomb-aimer Flt. Lt. Herbert Rieger RCAF, second bomb-aimer F/O Henry Jeffery DFM, wireless operator and squadron Signals Leader Flt. Lt. Albert Chambers DFC & Bar and mid-upper gunner P/O Frank Watson DFM.

Martin's name can be found on IBCC panel 14.

Sources: RAF Pathfinders Archive/97 Squadron Association/Bomber Command Losses 1944 by Bill Chorley/Kidderminster Shuttle.