

Flt. Sgt. John Derrick Bryant 418625 RAAF

John Bryant was a 30-year-old Australian bomb-aimer who was killed along with five of his crew in the final devastating bombing raid on the battered city of Dortmund.

On the afternoon of 12 March 1945 1,108 Bomber Command aircraft dropped 4,851 tons of bombs on the Ruhr city, in which large areas had already been reduced to rubble following numerous attacks over the previous few years. It was the largest attack on any German city during the war with the heaviest tonnage of bombs dropped; just two aircraft failed to return. One of these was John's Lancaster, PB187 AR-E of No. 460 (RAAF) Squadron. The aircraft, which was one of twenty Lancasters from the squadron on the raid, took off from RAF Binbrook at 1255 hours and was hit by flak over Dortmund. The only survivor was rear gunner Sgt. Edmund Grant, who parachuted to safety before the aircraft crashed.



After the war it was established that the aircraft crashed at Duisberg-Meiderich, killing six crew members. The sole survivor, Sgt. Grant, later recalled that during the bombing run at 20,000 feet the aircraft was hit twice near the nose. John Bryant was killed instantly, and the engineer was wounded and had collapsed over the forward escape hatch. With the bombs jammed and the nearest Allied emergency landing ground about 20 minutes away, the skipper ordered the crew to try to help the engineer and prepare to bale out. Grant saw the navigator destroying maps and equipment before being told by the wireless operator to jump from the rear exit. He baled out at about 5,000 feet, lost sight of the aircraft in cloud and briefly saw another crew member descending with a badly torn parachute. He landed about two miles east of the Rhine, near Duisberg, and was captured by German guards. He was held by the Germans for several days until Dortmund was captured by Allied forces shortly afterwards.

John was born in the Melbourne suburb of Glenferrie, the son of Daniel and Elizabeth Bryant. A commercial salesman, he lived in Ivanhoe, Melbourne, with his wife, Marguerite, and enlisted in May 1942.

The others who died with John were the pilot P/O George Burgess RAAF, flight engineer Flt. Sgt. Peter Sweetman, navigator Flt. Sgt. Derek Little, wireless operator Sgt. Kenneth Grundy and mid-upper gunner Sgt. Philip Brown. All are buried in the Reichswald Forest War Cemetery.

John's name can be found on panel 014.

Sources: Australian Virtual War Memorial/RAAFA Aviation Heritage Museum/Aviation Safety Network/IBCC (photo)/Bomber Command War Diaries by Martin Middlebrook and Chris Everitt.