

P/O George Leonard Burgess 423053 RAAF

George Burgess was a 24-year-old Australian Lancaster pilot 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 George'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. The bomb-aimer, Flt. Sgt. 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.

George was one of two Australians on board along with five British crew members. George came from the coastal town of Forster in New South Wales and was one of three children of Mr and Mrs George Burgess. He was born in the town of Singleton in New South Wales and had enlisted in June 1942. George left a young wife, Doreen, whose home was in the Doncaster suburb of Hyde Park, the couple marrying in South Yorkshire.

The others who died were the flight engineer Flt. Sgt. Peter Sweetman, navigator Flt. Sgt. Derek Little, bomb-aimer Flt. Sgt. John Bryant RAAF, wireless operator Sgt. Kenneth Grundy and mid-upper gunner Sgt. Philip Brown. All are buried in the Reichswald Forest War Cemetery.

George's name can be found on panel 015.

Sources: RAAFA Aviation Heritage Museum/Australian Virtual War Museum (photo)/Aircrew Remembered/Bomber Command War Diaries by Martin Middlebrook and Chris Everitt.