

F/O James Roberts Burton J/25377
RCAF

Mining operations were universally disliked by Bomber Command aircrew. They involved operating at relatively low altitudes, often in poor weather and lacked the comparative 'safety' of bomber streams. Add to that the difficulties of navigating over open seas or coastal waters, limited chances of survival should something go wrong and the ever-present danger of fighters and flak ships and it was easy to see why crews disliked them so much.



Canadian pilot Jim Burton and his crew were posted to 166 Squadron at RAF Kirmington, which flew more than its fair share of mining ops, at the beginning of August 1944.

By late October they had accumulated 18 operations, by which time they were an experienced Lancaster crew. Their 19th operation was their first carrying sea mines and it was one from which they were never to return.

Flying in Lancaster III ND626 AS-O, in which they had already completed 13 of their operations, the crew left Kirmington at 1720 hours on the evening of 26 October, one of six Lancasters from 166 that joined another four from neighbouring 103 Squadron tasked with mining an area off Heligoland.

During the operation one of the other Kirmington crews reported seeing anti-aircraft fire, from either a shore battery or a flak ship, followed by an explosion. Nine of the Lancasters returned to north Lincolnshire but no trace was ever found of ND626 or its crew and the aircraft was presumed to have crashed in the sea. It was the only Bomber Command aircraft lost that night.

Jim was the 28-year-old son of Eugene and Nell Burton of Toronto. The crew who died with him were the flight engineer Sgt. Aubrey Eades, navigator F/O Don Walker RCAF, bomb-aimer F/O Burleigh Hill RCAF, wireless operator WO Peter Byers RAAF, mid-upper gunner Flt. Sgt. Victor Tarbard and rear gunner Flt. Sgt. George Elders. All are remembered on the Runnymede Memorial.

His name can be found on IBCC panel 016.

Photographic source: 166 Squadron Association.