

Ft. Sgt. Gordon Frederick Callon 1452884 RAFVR

It is not hard to find tributes in the Sussex town of Worthing to commemorate seven men from a Lincolnshire airfield who many believe saved the seaside town from catastrophe.

Along with memorials, seven roads in the town carry the names of the men who climbed aboard Lancaster PB355 EA-B of 49 Squadron at RAF Fulbeck on the afternoon of 17 December 1944 to take part in a 5 Group attack on the city of Munich.

Twenty-year-old rear gunner Gordon Callon was on his 12th operation when they lifted off to join a force of 280 Lancasters and 8 Mosquitoes heading for the Bavarian capital. But, after crossing the south coast, PB355 had to turn back because of a serious problem with the aircraft. At 1755 hours people in Worthing heard the roar of engines and saw the Lancaster losing height and it became clear that the crew were doing all they could to avoid crashing in the town, managing to lift clear of the sea-front Plaza cinema, at the time packed with people, before exploding along with its bomb load on

the beach close to the water line. The explosion was followed by a fierce fire which was tackled by the local fire service. There was extensive damage to the windows along the sea front but no serious injuries. Only one body of the seven-man crew was found.



It was a further four years later that the wreckage of PB355 was finally dealt with and in 1949 the town clerk of Worthing, Ernest Townsend OBE, said he was certain the pilot had sacrificed his own life and that of his crew to avoid crashing into buildings in the town. Now the names of every member of the crew are remembered on streets in Worthing along with a memorial for them on Worthing Pier and on a panel on the sea front.

Gordon came from Birkenhead in Cheshire and was the son of Celsus and Winifred Callon. His was the only body recovered and he is buried in Littlehampton Cemetery, near Worthing.

The others who died were the pilot F/O Edward Essenhigh, flight engineer Sgt. Harry Varey, navigator Sgt. Leonard Bourne, bomb-aimer F/O James Thomson, wireless operator Ft. Sgt. Frederick Rees and mid-upper gunner Sgt. Jim Moore.

His name can be found on panel 016.

Sources: 49 Squadron Association/Worthing Herald/Brighton Argus.

