

F/O Francis Desmond Clarke 129352 RAFVR



The graves of the crew of BK459 in Couvron-et-Aumencourt Cemetery

Francis Clarke was a Wellington navigator who lost his life on his eighth operation in what proved to be a futile attack by Bomber Command on the city of Frankfurt in April 1943.

Five hundred and two bombers were sent to raid the city but thick cloud cover and the absence of accurate marking led to virtually every bomb missing the city, with just one building damaged with no listed casualties. Eighteen people were reported to have died as the bombs were scattered over neighbouring countryside.

The cost to Bomber Command and its crew was, as ever, high. Twenty-one aircraft were lost along with the lives of 100 young airmen, including Francis Clarke.

He was a member of the crew of one of the three Wellingtons lost by 166 Squadron out of the 12 sent from their base at RAF Kirmington to join the raid. He was flying in Wellington III BK459 AS-T, which had left North Lincolnshire at 2310 hours on the night of 10 April 1943. The Wellington later crashed at Beautor, near Laon in the Aisne region of France. There were no survivors from this or either of the other two Wellingtons lost by 166 that night.

Twenty-one-year old Francis came from Nottingham and was the son of Francis and Margaret Clarke. The others who died with him were the pilot F/O Jerrold Everill, bomb-aimer P/O Roy Brown, wireless operator/air gunner Sgt. John Gurdon and rear gunner Flt. Sgt. Thornton Richardson RCAF. All five are buried in Couvron-et-Aumencourt Communal Cemetery.

His name can be found on IBCC panel 020.

Photographic source: Pierre Vandervelden.