

F/O Wilfred James Cowen 144617
RAFVR

Wilfred Cowen was a long-serving flight engineer who died when his Lancaster vanished on a training operation in November 1944.

He was one of 16 men from 97 Squadron who were killed on the night radar exercise over France in two Lancasters that had been among six sent out on training sorties from Coningsby on the night of 10/11 November 1944.



Their task was to use the new American-designed LORAN (long range reconnaissance) radar on board their Pathfinder Lancasters. One crashed in France, but no trace was ever found of the second, PB450 OF-D, or the eight experienced men on board. Each crew was carrying an additional radar operator and both were described by the squadron records as 'very capable'.

Wilfred was one of three brothers in the armed forces, sons of the late William Cowen and his wife Edith from Romford in Essex. One brother was taken prisoner at Anzio and his second served with the RAF in Egypt while his sister, Patricia, had joined the Land Army. Wilfred was 32 and he and his wife, Frances, also lived in Romford.

The others who died on board PB450 were the pilot Flt. Lt. John Runnacles, bomb aimer F/O Hugh Annett MiD, navigator WO John Crawford, wireless operator WO Harold Moore MiD, radar specialist (substantive trade of navigator) Flt. Sgt. John Farrell, mid-upper gunner WO John Madge and rear gunner Sgt. Leonard Oldfield. All are remembered on the Runnymede Memorial.

His name can be found on panel 024.

Sources: Bomber Command Losses 1944 by Bill Chorley/97 Squadron ORBs/Patricia Durrant (nee Cowen).