

Flt. Lt. William Dennis Crimmins DFC J/16533
RCAF



Bill Crimmins was a 'most gallant' Canadian air gunner who had joined 625 Squadron when it was formed at RAF Kelstern early in October 1943 and was appointed the squadron's gunnery leader.

On 16 December 1943 he took the place of the regular rear gunner in an experienced crew to take part in a raid on Berlin and was then killed when their aircraft was shot down by a night-fighter on the approach to the German capital.

His aircraft, Lancaster III LM424 CF-B of 625 Squadron, had taken off from RAF Kelstern at 1621 hours as part of an all-Lancaster force of 483 bombers, heading for the German capital. 625 contributed 17 aircraft, the highest for the squadron since it came into operation in October.

At 1907 hours LM424 was intercepted outbound by a Bf night-fighter flown by Luftwaffe ace Major Helmut Lent and shot down in flames, crashing on farm buildings in the German village of Wetschen. Six of the crew died along with two people on the ground. The only survivor of the crew was the bomb-aimer, Sgt William Pallett, who parachuted to safety and became a prisoner.

Bill's aircraft was one of 25 lost during the raid while a further 32, including one from 625 Squadron, crashed on their return when fog and mist shrouded many airfields in eastern England.

Bill came from the city of Guelph in Ontario and was the 29-year-old son of Daniel and Elizabeth Crimmins. He worked as a weaver before volunteering, trained as an air gunner and was posted to England where he joined 12 Squadron at RAF Wickenby in Lincolnshire. He completed his first tour of operations early in 1943 and in April was promoted and awarded his DFC, the citation describing his as 'a most gallant gunner whose cheerful confidence inspired a high standard of morale and courage'.

The others who died were the pilot P/O Donald Baker, flight engineer Sgt. Clifford Robinson, navigator P/O George Batchelor, wireless operator P/O Gilbert Adams DFC and mid-upper gunner Sgt. Ken Watmough.

His name can be found on panel 024.

Sources: 625 Squadron records/625 Squadron Association/Aircrew Remembered/Canadian veterans.