

P/O Howard Earl Dabbs DFC J/15608 RCAF

Howard was born on 28 April 1922 in Forestburg, Alberta, Canada, the son of William L Dabbs and Florence Dorothy Dabbs (née Brown).

Educated at Forestburg Public and High Schools, Howard was employed on farm work when, in July 1940, he volunteered for aircrew duties in the RCAF. Called up in February 1941, Howard completed his pilot training in Canada with the award of his wings in September 1941, and he was posted overseas the following month.

Howard completed a tour with 109 Squadron and was granted a commission in June 1942. He was posted to 101 Squadron in August 1942, as the squadron converted to the Lancaster, and moved to RAF Holme-on-Spalding-Moor, Yorkshire.

Howard was awarded the DFC just four days before his final mission. The citation read:

"One night in December 1942, this officer was the pilot of an aircraft detailed to attack Frankfurt. When nearing the target area his aircraft, whilst held in a cone of searchlights, was hit by anti-aircraft fire and one of its engines was put out of action. Despite this, Pilot Officer Dabbs flew on to his target but as the bomb release mechanism was unserviceable he was unable to drop his bombs. Displaying skilful airmanship, he flew his aircraft back to this country without the assistance of wireless aids. With a full bomb load he made a masterly landing in poor visibility. This officer's skill and determination in the face of adverse circumstances set an example worthy of the highest praise. He has flown on several sorties with distinction."



On the night of 6/7 December 1942 Bomber Command was tasked with an attack on vital railway sidings near Mannheim, Germany. Of a combined force of 272 aircraft, 101 Squadron contributed five crews. At 1739 hours on 6 December Howard and his crew departed RAF Holme-on-Spalding-Moor in Lancaster I ED322 (SR-T). Returning from the mission in the early hours of 7 December 1942, Howard's aircraft was 300 miles off course from base over the Pembrokeshire Coast, Wales. Whilst attempting to land at RAF Carew Cheriton, 5 miles NW of Tenby, Pembrokeshire, the aircraft crashed into the sea in Camarthen Bay, off Tenby, killing all on board.

The raid was a dismal failure with the loss of 15 aircraft. The target area was completely covered in cloud and only 500 incendiary bombs and some leaflets were dropped. The only damage to the city was the destruction by fire of an old wooden building, whilst a local farmer lost 25 sheep, 4 lambs, some turnips and a hay barn. There were no casualties in Mannheim or the railway sidings but a total of 55 aircrew were killed, 3 were taken POW, and a further 10 injured.

Also Killed: F/Sgt. Leonard Roy Anderson RCAF (Nav); F/Sgt. Stefan Franchuk RCAF (AG); F/Sgt. Robert John Middleton RCAF (WOp); F/Sgt. Robert Gordon Smith RCAF (AB); Sgt. James Hughes (FE); Sgt. William Thomas Warren (AG).

On 9 December Howard was washed ashore at Amroth Beach, South Wales - his cause of death was determined as drowning. He is buried in St Mary Churchyard, Carew, Pembrokeshire, Wales. Dabbs Lake, Northern Alberta, was named in his honour.

Howard is commemorated on Wall Panel 26.

Photo Source: Aircrew Remembered