

Flt. Lt. William Cross Fitch
DFC GM 143764 RAFVR



Bill Fitch was a veteran bomb-aimer who was killed when his Lancaster was shot down over Holland four years before he first flew operationally.

He was flying in a hand-picked Pathfinder operation which was to breach the Mittelland section of the Dortmund-Ems canal on the night of 21/22 February, 1945. Bill was in a crew assembled by the commanding officer of RAF Coningsby, Group Captain Anthony Evans-Evans DFC, made up of personnel from at least three 5 Group squadrons.

After taking off from Coningsby at 1707 hours his Lancaster, NE165 OL-Y of 83 Squadron, was shot down by a night fighter in an attack close to the Dutch border, crashing in Gertruda Farm in the village of De Rips, near Helmond. Only the rear gunner in the eight-man crew survived and all seven men who died are buried in Mierlo War Cemetery.

Bill had begun his operational career with Bomber Command back in 1941 with 49 Squadron, flying Hampdens from Scampton, In July that year he was badly wounded when his Hampden was attacked by an intruder before ditching in the North Sea off Cromer, an incident which was to lead to him being awarded a George Medal. After recovering from his injuries, he joined 83 Squadron and completed his tour and received his DFC in November, 1944.

The others who died on NE165 were G/C Evans-Evans, flight engineer F/O Sidney Marsh, navigator S/L William Wishart DFC & Bar, GM, second navigator F/O Desmond Ball DFM, wireless operator Flt. Sgt. Richard Takle and mid-upper gunner F/O Clifford Coombes. The survivor was rear gunner P/O E Hansen RAAF.

His name can be found on panel 035.

Sources: 49 Squadron Association/RAF Commands/Bomber Command Losses 1945 by Bill Chorley/Facebook.