

Sgt John Milner Hadfield 1132867 RAFVR

John was born on 28 July 1920 in Oldham, Lancashire, the son of John Hadfield and Mary Hannah Hadfield nee Batty. Before joining the RAF and training as an Air Gunner John was employed as a Beamer at the local Carpet Mill.

In the Spring of 1943 John arrived on 101 Sqn at RAF Holme-on-Spalding Moor, Yorkshire.

On 4 May 1943 Bomber Command was tasked with "Operation Sprat", the largest non-thousand plane raid of the war to date, and the first major attack on Dortmund as part of the Ruhr Offensive. Of the 596 aircraft despatched on the raid, 101 Sqn contributed 18 crews. Two squadron aircraft failed to return, and 4 crash landed killing a further 7 crew members.

At 21:40 John, operating as the Rear Gunner, and the crew departed RAF Holme-on-Spalding Moor, Yorkshire in Lancaster I W4888 (SR-P).

Whilst over the IJsselmeer on the Frisian Coast, John's aircraft was intercepted by Oblt Lothar Linke, flying a Bf110 from 12./NJG1 operating from Leeuwarden airfield. Oblt Linke claimed 4 aircraft on this raid. Damaged and on fire, the pilot realised that they would not be able to return to the UK and a decision was made to make an emergency landing along the Frisian Coast.

Shortly after the Lancaster flew over the Workum railway station, the aircraft skimmed over a large farmhouse where the tail section broke away, throwing John out of the aircraft into a meadow west of that farmhouse. At 01:40 the burning plane crashed around 150 metres from the two farmhouses on the south side of the Dyke, 1km S of Workum. The Navigator had managed to parachute out before the aircraft crashed killing the 5 remaining crew.

The Navigator, with serious burns, was taken as a POW. The five crew from the main fuselage were recovered and buried in the local cemetery.

On 7 May, John's body was discovered in a meadow to the west of the farmhouse, and he was buried alongside his crew.

Also Killed: FO William Thomas Lewis DFM RCAF (WOp); FO Nicholas James Stanford (Pilot); FS George William Francis Reynolds RCAF (AG); Sgt Arthur Harold Clark (FE); Sgt Anthony Jules Lawson Lyon (AB)

John is buried in Spoordyk General Cemetery, Workum, Friesland, Netherlands

John is commemorated on Wall Panel 43

Photo Source: www.tracesofwar.com

