

F/O James Burleigh Hill J/35779 RCAF

Mining operations were universally disliked by Bomber Command aircrew. They involved operating at relatively low altitudes, often in poor weather and lacked the comparative 'safety' of bomber streams. Add to that the difficulties of navigating over open seas or coastal waters, limited chances of survival should something go wrong and the ever-present danger of fighters and flak ships and it was easy to see why crews disliked them so much.

Canadian bomb-aimer Burleigh Hill – he was always known by his second name - and his crew were posted to 166 Squadron at RAF Kirmington, which flew more than its fair share of mining ops, at the beginning of August 1944.



By late October they had accumulated 18 operations, by which time they were an experienced Lancaster crew. Their 19th operation was their first carrying sea mines and it was one from which they were never to return.

Flying in Lancaster III ND626 AS-O, in which they had already completed 13 of their operations, the crew left Kirmington at 1720 hours on the evening of 26 October, one of six Lancasters from 166 that joined another four from neighbouring 103 Squadron tasked with mining an area off Heligoland.

During the operation one of the other Kirmington crews reported seeing anti-aircraft fire, from either a shore battery or a flak ship, followed by an explosion. Nine of the Lancasters returned to north Lincolnshire but no trace was ever found of ND626 or its crew and the aircraft was presumed to have crashed in the sea. It was the only Bomber Command aircraft lost that night.

Burleigh was a member of a farming family who lived in the small rural community of Boharm, Saskatchewan. The 21-year-old son of John and Nina Hill, he attended the local elementary school before going to Moose Jaw High School, later working in the family business. He is remembered on the Moose Jaw High School war memorial, thanks in no small part to his brother Doug's determined efforts. The school had omitted him because he did not live locally so Doug had an engraved plate made with his brother's name on it and attached it to the memorial himself. Burleigh's name was later permanently added to the memorial.

The crew who died with Burleigh were the pilot F/O Jim Burton RCAF, flight engineer Sgt. Aubrey Eades, navigator F/O Don Walker RCAF, wireless operator WO Peter Byers RAAF, mid-upper gunner Flt. Sgt. Victor Tarbard and rear gunner Flt. Sgt. George Elders. All are remembered on the Runnymede Memorial.

His name can be found on IBCC panel 049.

Photographic source: Moose Jaw Times