

P/O Robert Cecil Hooper DFC 172176
RAFVR



Robert Hooper was a decorated Lancaster pilot from Somerset who was killed along with his crew when their aircraft was one of five lost by 630 Squadron during a disastrous raid on a Ruhr synthetic oil plant in June 1944.

He and his crew were on their 20th operation when they joined a force of 128 Lancasters from 5 Group, plus five Lancasters from 1 Group, attacking the plant at Wesseling, near Cologne. There was fierce resistance from the Luftwaffe night-fighter force and 37 Lancasters, almost 30 per cent of the force, were lost including four others from 630 Squadron with the loss of 28 aircrew. 630's historian records it as 'a massacre'.

Robert was the pilot of Lancaster ME843 LE-U, which had taken off from East Kirkby in Lincolnshire at 2327 hours on the night of 21/22 June heading for the Rhineland oil plant. They had successfully bombed and ME843 was homebound when it was caught in the radar of Hpt. Heinz-Wolfgang Schnauffer's Bf110 and shot down in flames. The bomber crashed near the Belgian village of Bocholt, close to the Dutch border, killing all seven men on board. ME843 was one of four victims claimed by Schnauffer that night and one of 121 throughout his service in the Luftwaffe.

Robert came from Bridgwater and was the 22-year-old son of Cecil and Lilian Hooper. He and his crew had joined the squadron back in March and he was awarded his Distinguished Flying Cross a month before his death (*he is photographed above wearing his DFC ribbon*) following a raid on Munich in April 1944 when his Lancaster was attacked by a night fighter, knocking out both turrets, but he successfully evaded the fighter and went on to bomb the target. The citation added: 'This officer set a fine example of skill, courage and resolution.'

The others who died were the flight engineer Sgt. Thomas Fraser, navigator WOII Frederick Dewis RCAF, bomb-aimer P/O John McKenna RCAF, wireless operator Sgt. Peter Kano, mid-upper gunner and 630 Squadron Gunnery Leader Flt. Lt. Thomas Neison DFC and rear gunner Sgt. Daniel Synott. All are buried in Heverlee War Cemetery in Leuven, Belgium.

Robert's name can be found on IBCC panel 051.

Sources: 630 Squadron Association/Bridgwater Mercury.