Sgt. Thomas Joseph Hooper 2217010 RAFVR

Pictured at North Killingholme on 8 November 1944 are (from the left) Flt. Lt. Morris, F/O Leonard, Sgt. Bailey, Sgt. Furber, Sgt. Byrne (who missed the fatal operation) Sgt. Dennis and Sgt. Hooper. Below, the crew pictured with Flt. Lt. Shaw, ground crew and veteran 'Press on Regardless' before their first operation.

Tom Hooper was a 22-year-old rear gunner killed within six weeks of joining 550 Squadron at RAF North Killingholme.

He and his crew had arrived at the 1 Group airfield on 20 October 1944 after completing a course at 1 Lancaster Finishing School at Hemswell. They were to fly their first operation under the guidance of the experienced Flt. Lt. 'Jock' Shaw on what was the 100th operation of 550's centenarian Lancaster, 'Press on Regardless', on 2 November. Six of them were to be killed, along with a replacement wireless operator, on 6 December when their aircraft failed to return from an attack on the Leuna oil refinery, near Leipzig.

On that raid they were flying Lancaster NG251 BQ-J, which left North Killingholme at 1634 hours. Over the target area their aircraft was badly damaged by flak and crashed at Dolzig, not far from Leipzig. There were no survivors. It is believed they were buried locally before their bodies were recovered by an American graves registration unit and reburied in cemeteries in Germany and Holland.

Tom's home was in Sketty, Swansea, and he was the son of Albert and Mary Hooper. He is buried in Berlin War Cemetery.

Killed with him were the pilot Flt. Lt. Joe Morris, flight engineer Sgt. Alan Furber, navigator F/O Arthur Leonard, bomb-aimer Sgt. Harry Bailey, wireless operator Sgt. William Roberts and mid-upper gunner Sgt. George Dennis.

His name can be found on panel 051.

Photographic source: 550 Squadron Association.