

Sgt. Alexander Oliver Johnston 1851675 RAFVR

Alexander was born on 1 December 1915 in Bristol, Gloucestershire, the son of Oliver and Ellen Louisa Johnston (née Williams). In 1936 he married Irene Ruth F Mills in Bristol and they had two children.

Educated locally, Alexander was employed as a Template Maker for a Construction Engineer and also worked as a Special Police Constable before joining the RAFVR. Alexander trained as a Flight Engineer, completed his conversion training and on 10 March 1944 was posted to 101 Squadron at RAF Ludford Magna, Lincolnshire.

On the night of 30/31 March 1944, 795 aircraft were dispatched for an attack on Nuremberg. This was the last act of Bomber Harris's "Battle of Berlin", an attempt to destroy German morale by battering its cities night after night before the bomber force turned its attentions to preparing the way for D-Day in June. A direct route, full moon and a new German weapon, the upward firing gun fitted to many fighters, would make this an incredibly challenging and dangerous mission. More than 200 night-fighters based around the Ruhr and the Rhine took to the skies that night. Twenty-six 101 Squadron Lancasters participated in the raid.

At 2150 hours on 30 March 1944 Alexander, operating as the Flight Engineer, and the crew departed RAF Ludford Magna in Lancaster III LM463 (SR-K2), tasked with ABC duties for the raid. At 0036 hours, whilst outbound, the aircraft was engaged East of Siegen at 18,000ft by a night fighter flown by Uffz. Bruno Rupp of 4./NJG3. The aircraft crashed near Dillenburg, Hessen, killing 6 of the 8 crew; the pilot (P/O Albert Lander RNZAF) and wireless operator (Sgt. W G Clapp) survived and were captured. This was the crew's 2nd op. Seven 101 Squadron aircraft were lost, with 47 men killed.

The raid was a major disaster for Bomber Command with the loss of 105 aircraft, Bomber Command's heaviest loss of the war. There were 721 casualties: 542 men died, 6 injured, 161 POWs, with just 12 airmen evading capture. The damage to Nuremberg itself was slight - 256 buildings destroyed and 75 enemy dead.

Also killed were the navigator F/O Mervyn Hutchinson RNZAF, air bomber F/Sgt. Raymond Cato RNZAF, air gunner F/Sgt. Cyril Parkinson RNZAF, air gunner Sgt. Erod Johnson and special duties operator Sgt. Alfred Clayton.

Originally buried in Dillenburg Cemetery, Hessen, Alexander and the crew were moved to Hanover War Cemetery, Niedersachsen, in April 1947.

Alexander is commemorated on Wall Panel 56.