

Sgt. Clarence Kendrew
1076759 RAFVR



Wireless operator Clarence Kendrew died after his Lancaster ditched and broke up following a raid on Berlin in September 1943.

He was one of five members of the crew who had made it into the aircraft's dinghy off the Northumberland coast, but was one of three who died of exposure before an Air Sea Rescue team arrived.

Clarence and his crew were on their 12th operation with 49 Squadron at RAF Fiskerton when they joined a force of 316 Lancasters and 4 Mosquitos to attack the German city on the night of 3/4 September 1943.

During the bomb-run his aircraft, JB126, is believed to have been hit by a flare before it was damaged by the city's formidable flak defences, damaging both wings and causing the aircraft's fuel tanks to leak.

The route back from the raid was across north Germany, over the Baltic and along the Swedish coast, before turning west across the northern tip of Denmark. By the time the aircraft was over the North Sea it became clear that JB126 didn't have enough fuel to make it back and a distress call was sent. With misty conditions across the sea, the pilot had to abort the first ditching attempt before the Lancaster made a heavy impact on the sea about 15 miles off Blyth on the Northumberland coast.

The pilot may have been incapacitated in the landing as he was unable to get clear before the Lancaster broke up and sank. The other six crew members did get into the water and five made it into a survival dinghy, while the flight engineer was unable to reach them and drowned. Later, a search aircraft spotted the dinghy with five occupants but by the time the ASR launch arrived three had died of exposure.

Clarence came from Wiltshire and was the son of Andrew and Phylis Kendrew. He lived in the village of Upper Wanborough, near Swindon, with his wife Ethel. He is buried in St Andrew's Churchyard at Wanborough.

The others who died were the pilot F/O Harold Coates, flight engineer Sgt. John Sacre, navigator Sgt. Henry Jack (whose brother would later be Killed in a 1667 Heavy Conversion Unit Halifax that crashed in April 1944) and rear gunner Sgt. George Pawson. The survivors were the bomb-aimer Sgt. Leslie Underwood and mid-upper gunner Sgt. Raymond Nelson RAAF.

Clarence's name can be found on IBCC panel 058.

Sources: 49 Squadron Association/The Berlin Raids by Martin Middlebrook.