

Sgt. Peter Lees 1578183 RAFVR

Peter Lees was a 37-year-old rear gunner from Derby who was killed in a black night for No. 12 Squadron over the Baltic Sea.

He was part of the crew of Lancaster W4954 PH-V, which was one of four bombers and crews from the squadron lost during a mining operation off the Polish coast on the night of 28/29 April 1943. His squadron was based at RAF Wickenby in Lincolnshire.

Peter's aircraft was part of a major mine-laying operation staged by Bomber Command involving 207 bombers mining areas off the Danish and German Baltic coasts. This involved flying relatively low to lay mines leaving them vulnerable to both fighters and flak batteries. All four 12 Squadron losses were believed to be down to light flak.

W4954 was hit and crashed off Ostswine auf Usedom, near Swinemunde, in the sea. All seven men on board were killed and their bodies recovered and initially buried in Swinemunde before being reinterred in the Poznan Old Garrison Cemetery in Poland.

Peter was among the oldest members of aircrew at 12 Squadron. He was the son of Mr and Mrs Alfred Lees and with his wife, Joyce, lived in the Alvaston area of Derby. Peter was an apprentice in Rolls-Royce's factory in Derby before joining Melbourne Engineering in Derby and, when war broke out, became a member of the Alvaston Home Guard, later enlisting in the RAF. He was a keen motor-cyclist and had often raced at Donington Park track near Derby where he won a cup before the circuit closed because of the war.

The others who died with him were the Irish pilot Flt. Lt. Ronald Ashton, flight engineer Sgt. Arthur Goodhand, navigator Sgt. Edwin Buscombe, bomb-aimer Sgt. John Mackintosh, wireless operator Sgt. Maurice Savage and mid-upper gunner Flt. Sgt. John Huggard RAAF.

Peter's name can be found on panel 062.

Sources: IBCC/Aviation Safety Network/Bomber Command War Diaries by Martin Middlebrook and Chris Everitt/Bomber Command Losses 1943 by Bill Chorley.

