

P/O John Leo McKenna J/92153 RCAF

John McKenna was a Canadian bomb-aimer who was killed along with his crew when their Lancaster 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'.



John was part of the crew 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 Schnaufer'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 Schnaufer that night and one of 121 throughout his service in the Luftwaffe.

John was the 22-year-old son of John McKenna and Mary McKenna (née McCrory) and came from the city of Montreal. He had celebrated his 22nd birthday two weeks before his death.

The others who died were the pilot P/O Robert Hooper DFC, flight engineer Sgt. Thomas Fraser, navigator WOII Frederick Dewis 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.

John's name can be found on IBCC panel 071.

Sources: 630 Squadron Association/Canadian veterans