

Sgt. William Roberts 2206786 RAFVR



Sgt. Roberts was a last-minute substitute in the No. 550 Squadron crew of Flt. Lt. Joe Morris for a raid on the Merseberg refinery, near Leipzig on 6 December 1944.

The crew's regular wireless operator, 19-year-old Sgt. John Byrne, had been told to report to RAF Elsham Wold for an interview with the Base commander regarding his application for a commission and Sgt. Roberts took his place for the operation. His aircraft, Lancaster NG251 BQ-J, left RAF North Killingholme at 1634 hours. Squadron records state baldly: 'Nothing further heard after take-off'. It would appear that once in the target area the aircraft was crippled by flak and eventually crashed at Dolzig, near Leipzig, killing all seven on board.

Little is known about Sgt Roberts. Unusually, he is referred to only by his initial, W, both in the squadron records and by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, although he is referred to as 'William' Roberts in the Roll of Honour in Lincoln Cathedral. Nor is there any note of him flying with another crew prior to the fateful trip to Merseberg. 550's immaculate records do not record his arrival at the squadron, so Sgt. Roberts must remain a mystery.

What is known is that he was eventually buried in Venray War Cemetery in Holland, along with four other members of the crew. A fifth was buried in another Dutch cemetery and another in Berlin after it is believed they were reinterred following investigations by a US graves registration unit.

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 and gunners Sgt. George Dennis and Sgt. Tom Hooper.



His name can be found on panel 091.

Sgt. Byrne, the wireless operator whose place was taken by Sgt. Roberts, got his commission but was killed flying with 550 two months later.

Photographic sources: 550 Squadron Association and CWGC.

Venray War Cemetery