

Flt. Lt. John Seymour Runnacles 125432
RAFVR

John Runnacles was a long-serving bomber pilot who died when his Lancaster vanished on a training operation in November 1944, two months after his brother was killed fighting in Italy.

He was one of 16 men from 97 Squadron who were killed on the night radar exercise over France in two Lancasters that had been among six sent out on training sorties from Coningsby on the night of 11 November 1944.



Their task was to use the new American-designed LORAN (long range reconnaissance) radar on board their Pathfinder Lancasters. One crashed in France, but no trace was ever found of the second, PB450 OF-D, or the eight experienced men on board. Each crew was carrying an additional radar operator and both were described by the squadron records as 'very capable'.

Canadian-born John had first flown operationally as a second pilot in a 9 Squadron Wellington on 7 December 1940, and went on to complete a full tour of operations with the squadron at Honington. He joined the Pathfinders of 97 Squadron in the autumn of 1944 and was described in the squadron records as 'one of the most promising pilots' in the unit, having already flown operationally from Coningsby several times.

He was the 31-year-old son of William and Edith Runnacles, who had emigrated to Canada in 1912. John was born in York, Ontario, the following year, the family returning to England in 1919 and settling in Felixstowe in Suffolk. John and his wife, Dorothy, lived in the village of Sproughton, near Ipswich. His 27-year-old brother, Fred, was killed in Italy in September 1944 while serving with an anti-tank unit of the East Surrey Regiment.

The others who died on board PB450 were the flight engineer F/O Wilfred Cowen, bomb aimer F/O Hugh Annett MiD, navigator WO John Crawford, wireless operator WO Harold Moore MiD, radar specialist (substantive trade of navigator) Flt. Sgt. John Farrell, mid-upper gunner WO John Madge and rear gunner Sgt. Leonard Oldfield. All are remembered on the Runnymede Memorial.

His name can be found on panel 093.

Sources: Bomber Command Losses 1944 by Bill Chorley/97 Squadron ORBs.