

Sgt Robert Kenneth Rye 1809922 RAFVR

Robert, known as Bob, was born in 1924 in Malling, Kent, the son of Andrew Rye and Rita Rye nee Chambers.

Before joining the RAF and training as a Flight Engineer, Robert was employed by Tilling-Stevens Engineering Works, Maidstone.

On 2 December 1943 Robert joined 101 Sqn at RAF Ludford Magna, Lincolnshire from 1656 HCU.

On 16 December 1943 Bomber Command crews were tasked with a raid on Berlin. Of the 498 aircraft despatched that night, 101 Sqn contributed 21 crews. Around 16:30 Robert, operating as the Flight Engineer, and the crew departed RAF Ludford Magna in Lancaster I LM389 (SR-Y). This would be this newly mustered crew's first, and last op.

The crew successfully bombed the target area; however, as the Bomber Command aircraft returned from Berlin, the weather had deteriorated significantly, with fog blanketing most of the airfields in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire. Robert and the crew were ordered to divert to Yorkshire, probably aiming for RAF Holme on Spalding Moor.

At 00:27 on 17 December 1943, whilst trying to identify somewhere to land, the aircraft was descended into the ground in a small wooded area to the north of the village of Eastrington, between Selby and Goole, East Yorkshire. Only the 2 gunners at the rear of the aircraft survived.

Black Thursday, as the day was soon called, saw the loss of twenty-five Lancasters during the Berlin operation, but a further thirty-one lost due to the fog over England - crashed or abandoned when their crews baled out, or in the case of two unfortunate crews collided over Lincolnshire.

Of the 328 aircrew who lost their lives that night, more were the victims of the weather than enemy action.

Also Killed: PO Norman Maylin Cooper (Pilot); WO Herbert Percy Davis (AG); Sgt Robert Corrie Custance (Nav); Sgt John Gregory Hayden (WOp); Sgt Reginald William Melville Spelman (AB)

Robert is buried in Stonefall Cemetery, Harrogate, Yorkshire

Robert is commemorated on Wall Panel 93

Photo Source: Kent Messenger

