

Sgt. John George Sacre
1515172 RAFVR

John Sacre was a Lancaster flight engineer who drowned after his damaged aircraft crash-landed in the sea off the Northumberland coast following a raid on Berlin.



He and his crew were on their 12th operation with 49 Squadron at RAF Fiskerton when they joined a force of 316 Lancasters and 4 Mosquitos to attack the German city on the night of 3/4 September 1943.

During the bomb-run his aircraft, JB126, is believed to have been hit by a flare before it was damaged by the city's formidable flak defences, damaging both wings and causing the aircraft's fuel tanks to leak.

The route back from the raid was across north Germany, over the Baltic and along the Swedish coast, before turning west across the northern tip of Denmark. By the time the aircraft was over the North Sea it became clear that JB126 didn't have enough fuel to make it back and a distress call was sent. With misty conditions across the sea, the pilot had to abort the first ditching attempt before the Lancaster made a heavy impact on the sea about 15 miles off Blyth on the Northumberland coast.

The pilot may have been incapacitated in the landing as he was unable to get clear before the Lancaster broke up and sank. The other six crew members did get into the water and five made it into a survival dinghy, but John, who was 30 and came from London, was unable to reach the aircraft's dinghy and drowned. His body was later recovered and buried in Woolwich Cemetery.

John was the son of George and Elizabeth Sacre. He and his wife Jessie had two sons, Brian and Gordon.

The others who died were the pilot F/O Harold Coates, navigator Sgt. Henry Jack (whose brother would later be Killed in a 1667 Heavy Conversion Unit Halifax that crashed in April 1944), wireless operator Sgt. Clarence Kendrew and rear gunner Sgt. George Pawson. The survivors were the bomb-aimer Sgt. Leslie Underwood and mid-upper gunner Sgt. Raymond Nelson RAAF.

John's name can be found on IBCC panel 093.

Sources: 49 Squadron Association/The Berlin Raids by Martin Middlebrook.