

Sgt. John Stanley Saunders 963858 RAFVR

John Saunders was the son of Charles Stanley and Edith Saunders. He was married in 1936 to Freda Alice Filmer George of Iver, Buckinghamshire. John was born on 11 July 1913 and died age 28 on 30 November 1941. In the 1939 census his occupation was Schoolmaster.

John joined No. 142 Squadron on 7 July 1941. The squadron moved to RAF Grimsby in November 1941 and John joined a crew consisting of non-commissioned officers: Sgt. Alexander Gilmour (Captain), Sgt. John Lucking (2nd Pilot), Sgt. William Lewis (Observer), Sgt. John Saunders (Wireless Operator/Air Gunner), Sgt. Jesse Butterworth (Front Gunner) and Flt. Sgt. Frank Sumner (Tail Gunner). They flew together on their first operation on 30 November 1941.



Wellington Z1292 (QT-) took off from Grimsby aerodrome at 1757 hours and was one of two of the squadron's aircraft that failed to return from this mission. Z1292 crashed at 2223 hours on 30 November 1941. The Squadron Order of Battle simply states, "This aircraft failed to return. No W/T communication at all".

Mrs Irmgard Petersen (who at the age of 4 had witnessed the crash of Z1292 in November 1941) said that she saw a burning plane at extremely low altitude fly directly at her family farmhouse. She saw three crew members in the burning cockpit. In an effort to avoid a fatal collision with the farmhouse Sgt. Gilmour (pilot), while flying at approx. 10m, tried to evade the farmhouse and make an emergency landing on pasture behind the house but a few seconds later the plane exploded with its bomb load and crew. Five of the six-man crew were still on board; one had jumped out shortly before the crash.

News came, via the German authorities, that the crew of a Wellington that had been shot down by German Naval Artillery (coastal flak) near Kiel had been recovered and buried at the local Garrison Cemetery. After the war in Europe had finished John's body was exhumed, identified and laid to rest in the Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemetery at Kiel.

On 6 October 2007 the inauguration of a memorial stone in honour of the fallen crew of the Wellington Z1292 took place in the municipality of Wildenhorst.

John Saunders is commemorated on Panel 94.

Sources:

<http://spurensuchesh.de/rastorfer-passau/>

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank_Sumner

Picture: 142 squadron facebook page

