

Sgt. Frank Skelly
1629697 RAFVR



Lancaster rear gunner Frank Skelly was killed along with the rest of his crew a few days after being posted to No. 626 Squadron at Wickenby.

Frank and his crew had completed their training at 1667 Heavy Conversion Unit at Sandtoft on 16 April 1944 and, after a couple of cross-country and practice bombing exercises, he and his crew took off at 2113 hours on the night of 24 April on board Lancaster ED424 UM-E2 heading for the major city of Karlsruhe in south-west Germany.

Their Lancaster was one of 637 bombers, 19 of which were lost during a raid that was later deemed to be only a partial success with cloud and winds affecting the marking. ED424, an ex-12 Squadron aircraft, was attacked by a night-fighter and shot down in a forested area near the French town of Haguenau, close to the German border. There were no survivors.

During the raid, one of the WAAFs manning the Wickenby Control Room was Vera Craddock from Sunderland. Her husband, 21-year-old Flt. Sgt. Ronald Craddock, was on board ED424 and their daughter, Joy, was born almost eight months later.

Frank was the 31-year-old husband of Lilian Skelly of Luton in Bedfordshire and the son of John and Mary. He is remembered on the Vauxhall Motors Luton War Memorial and also on the City of Dundee Roll of Honour.

The others who died were the pilot Flt. Sgt. Frederick Baker, flight engineer Sgt. Frederick Kimber, navigator Flt. Sgt. Eric Eyres, bomb-aimer Sgt. John McVey, wireless operator Flt. Sgt. Ronald Craddock and mid-upper gunner Sgt. Bernard Kimber. All are buried in the French National Cemetery at Haguenau.

His name can be found on panel 097.

Sources: 626 Squadron's Lost Lancasters.