

Sgt. Frank Smith 994288
RAFVR

Frank Smith was a bomb-aimer who had flown during the Battle of Britain. He died when his bomber crashed in the North Sea after developing engine problems during a raid on Bremen in the early hours of 5 September 1942.



He was part of the crew of Wellington Z8595, of No. 12 Squadron, which had taken off from RAF Binbrook at 0025 hours as part of a 251-aircraft force heading for the port of Bremen.

As Z8595 approached the Dutch coast, it developed serious problems and the crew decided to turn back, dumping their bombs in the sea. The aircraft still struggled to maintain height and, finally, at 0230 hours the Wellington crashed about 20 miles off Cromer.

Only the pilot, Sgt. Tom Smith, managed to get clear and despite being injured climbed into the bomber's dinghy. He was found three hours later by the Harwich-based destroyer *HMS Hambledon* and later taken to hospital in Felixstowe.

Frank had joined the RAF at the very start of the war, initially as an aircraft-hand before being posted to RAF Yatesbury to train as a wireless operator. This was in the very first days of radar and he was sent for training and then posted to 604 Squadron as a radar operator at RAF Gravesend and later Middle Wallop, flying Blenheims and later Beaufighters in the first radar-equipped aircraft as the first radar-equipped night-fighters. Frank was later posted to a radar station on the island of Islay in Scotland before finally posted to 12 Squadron at Binbrook.

The others who died with him were the observer P/O Arthur 'Sandy' Needham, wireless operator/air gunner Flt. Sgt. Russel Mills RCAF and rear gunner Sgt. Stanley Bland. Their bodies were never recovered and all are remembered on the Runnymede Memorial (panel 93).

Frank's name can be found on panel 098.

Sources: London Battle of Britain Memorial/Aviation Safety Network/Bomber Command Losses 1942 by Bill Chorley.