

Flt. Sgt. Wilfred Ernest Smith
1576922 RAFVR

One of the final jobs aircrew members were asked to do before being demobbed in the summer of 1945 was dumping unused ordnance in the sea.



It was just such a task that led to the death of navigator Flt. Sgt. Wilfred Smith and the five members of his crew when their Lancaster vanished over the North Sea.

Several of the crew on board Lancaster PB344 LE-R had flown 27 operations with 630 Squadron at East Kirkby in Lincolnshire, raids from Walcheren in October 1944 to Bomber Command's final attack on Hitler's lair at Berchtesgaden in Bavaria on 25 April 1944.

So when Wilfred and his crew set off from their Lincolnshire base on the morning of 15 June, along with three other Lancasters, to drop unwanted incendiary bombs far out over the North Sea it seemed a routine task as the squadron headed for disbandment in a few weeks.

At 1147 hours a message was picked up from the veteran 630 Squadron Lancaster that the incendiaries had been dropped and they were turning for home. It was the last anyone heard from PB344. A massive air-sea rescue operation was launched but all that was found was an empty life raft and wreckage that could have come from the tail of a Lancaster.

The others who died were the pilot F/O George Cowan, flight engineer Flt. Sgt. David Currie, bomb-aimer Flt. Sgt. Jonah Rhodes, wireless operator Flt. Sgt. Frederick Reynolds and rear gunner Flt. Sgt. James Porter. They were the last of some 470 personnel lost from 630 Squadron and are remembered on the Runnymede Memorial.

Wilfred's name can be found on IBCC panel 099.

Source: 630 Squadron Association.