

FS John Francis Stafford 1166582 RAFVR

John was born on 6 October 1920 in Eastbourne, Sussex, the son of Sydney Stafford and Aileen Helen Bethune Stafford nee Leggatt.

Apprenticed to his father as a tea trader, John joined the RAF and trained as an Air Gunner, completing his first tour with 75 (NZ) Sqn. In August 1943 he was posted to 101 Sqn at RAF Ludford Magna, Lincolnshire and commenced Special Duties Operations.

On the night of the 14 January 1944, 498 aircraft, with twenty provided by 101 Sqn, were dispatched for the first major raid to Brunswick, Germany, of the war. Brunswick was a smaller than usual target for Bomber Command and the raid was not a success. The Luftwaffe tracked the force when it was still only 40 miles from the Lincolnshire coast and fell among the bomber stream with deadly effect downing 38 Lancasters, three of which were from 101 Sqn with the loss of 24 men.

Between 16:30 and 17:10 the 101 Sqn Lancasters departed RAF Ludford Magna, Lincolnshire en-route to Brunswick. John, the Special Duties Operator, and the crew were flying Lancaster III DV287 (SR-N).

At 18:30, whilst outbound, John's aircraft was intercepted at 19,500 ft by Oblt Martin Drewes of the 11./NJG 1 flying a Lichtenstein-equipped Bf 110 from Leeuwarden airfield. Using the deadly 20mm "Schrage Muzik" upward firing cannon to deadly effect, the Lancaster's port wing and fuselage was set alight. John's aircraft was seen to descend and explode just above the ground near the Dutch border village of Klazienaveen, killing 8 of the 9 man crew. The navigator managed to bale out and evade capture with the assistance of the Dutch resistance.

Also Killed: PO Joseph Walter Slater (Pilot); PO Stanley Ernest Watchorn (AB); FS Maxwell Chambers Patterson (Pilot); Sgt Peter Mitchell (WOp/AG); Sgt George Thomas McLatchie (AG); Sgt Leonard Easdon (AG); Sgt Arthur William Louis Schneider (FE)

John is buried in Emmen (Nieuw Dordrecht) General Cemetery, Drenthe, Netherlands

John is commemorated on Wall Panel 101