

Sgt. Donald Henry Stephens 1586493 RAFVR

Donald was born on 14 January 1924 in Mitcheldean, Gloucestershire, the son of Albert C Stephens and Augusta Louisa Stephens (née Davies).

Before joining the RAF and training as an air gunner Donald was employed as a labourer in the local brickworks. Donald arrived on 101 Squadron at RAF Ludford Magna, Lincolnshire, from No. 1667 CU in October 1943.

On the night of 16/17 December 1943, Donald and his crew were forced to bale out of their Lancaster close to base when, on return from Berlin, they were ordered to divert and had insufficient fuel to do so. Their next op would be their last.

On the night of 2/3 January 1944, 383 aircraft were dispatched for a second consecutive night attack on Berlin, with twelve 101 Squadron Lancasters participating in the raid. The force flew outbound via Holland and South of Bremen and, with no diversionary force to split their task, the German night fighters were flying in considerable numbers around Berlin.

Shortly before midnight on 2 January Donald, operating as the rear gunner, and his crew departed RAF Ludford Magna in Lancaster III DV269 (SR-M). They successfully reached and bombed the target, although the raid was subsequently considered ineffectual, and they headed for home.

At 0258 hours the aircraft was engaged by a night fighter flown by Oblt. Albert Walter of I./NJG6, flying a Bf110 from Mainz-Finthen an air base 320 miles SW of Berlin. The bomber crashed at Michendorff, 5 miles S of Potsdam, Brandenburg, Germany, killing 4 of the 8 crew, the survivors being taken as POWs.

Also killed were the pilot F/L Alan Lazenby DFC, mid-upper gunner Sgt. Gerald Beckett RCAF and special duties operator Sgt. Charles Brown. The survivors were the flight engineer Sgt. Charles Lindsay, navigator F/O Weston Craig, air bomber F/O James McClure RCAF and wireless operator Sgt. Albert Walton.

Originally buried in the Friedhof Michendorff Cemetery, Brandenburg, Germany, in October 1946 Donald was moved to the Berlin 1939-45 War Cemetery, Germany.

Donald's older brother, Trooper Albert William Francis Stephens, of the 2nd Royal Gloucestershire Hussars, was killed on 30 December 1941 whilst serving in Egypt. He is remembered on the Alamein Memorial.

Donald is commemorated on Wall Panel 101.