

Flt. Sgt. Thomas Lincoln Watkins 407308 RAAF

Rear gunner Thomas Watkins was one of three young Australians killed when their Wellington crashed into the Scheldt estuary after being hit by flak.

Three others on board the 460 RAAF Squadron aircraft, Z1344 UV-W, survived when it went down into the estuary in the early hours of 2 June 1942. They were captured and taken as prisoners of war.

His aircraft had been taking part in a raid on the much-bombed city of Essen, taking off from RAF Brighton at 2321 hours on 1 June 1942. The night before, Bomber Command had attacked Cologne with over 1,000 aircraft (though not all reached the target) and the Essen raid was designed to show that this scale of operations could be maintained. In the event 956 bombers took part but haze and low cloud saw bombing scattered all across the Ruhr region at a cost of 31 aircraft, two of them from 460 Squadron.



Z1344 is believed to have been homebound when it was hit, crashing within a few seconds just off the Dutch coast. Their aircraft broke up on impact and the three survivors were pulled from the water by German sailors 15 minutes later.

Thomas is believed to have drowned when the aircraft broke up and the rear section sank. His body was recovered from the sea on 19 June and he is now buried in Vlissingen Northern Cemetery. He is also remembered on the 460 Squadron Memorial in Perth. Thomas was the 21-year-old son of Thomas and Lena Watkins and came from the Adelaide suburb of Keswick.

The others who died were the wireless operator Flt. Sgt. Dudley Beinke RAAF and wireless operator/air gunner Sgt. William Cheese RAAF. The three survivors were the pilot F/O Allan Holland, second pilot Sgt. Clifford Douglas RAAF and observer Sgt. Arthur Dansey RAAF.

His name can be found on panel 112.

Sources: 460 Squadron Association/Bill Chorley/Virtual War Memorial Australia/Aircrew Remembered.