

**FO Niels Erik Westergaard DFC
RAFVR 133578**

Oxford educated Niels Westergaard was an English-born decorated navigator who was killed during a raid on Berlin early in 1944.

He was part of the crew of Lancaster JB532 LE-X of 630 Squadron and was among eight men killed when their aircraft was shot down by flak during the raid on the night of 1st/2nd January 1944.



JB532 was part of a force of 471 bombers attacking the German capital as part of the ongoing Battle of Berlin being staged by Bomber Command. He was one of fifteen Lancasters from 630 Squadron which took off shortly before midnight from East Kirkby and was reported to have been hit by flak before crashing at Grossbeuthen, near Trebbin (south-east of Berlin). An engine was torn from one of the Lancaster's wings before the aircraft plunged into the ground.

Niels was born in Wandsworth in London in July 1922, the son of successful Danish structural engineer Otto Westergaard and his wife, Inga. The couple were married in Copenhagen but returned to live in England, leaving only for a spell in Teheran before returning to their home in Earl's Court in London. Niels, who had dual Danish-British citizenship, went to Oxford University where he joined the university's Air Squadron.

He enlisted in 1941, went to Canada for training as a navigator and returned to join 619 Squadron at Woodhall Spa and flew with them through the summer and autumn, flying some twenty-five operations before the crew was posted to East Kirkby in November to join the newly formed 630 Squadron. Niels and his crew were to fly three further operations, two to Berlin and another to Leipzig, before he was killed. Shortly afterwards he was awarded a posthumous Distinguished Flying Cross, his citation highlighted an operation in October, 1943 while he successfully navigated his aircraft back to England despite navigational aids or compasses following a raid deep in Germany. His citation added: 'Throughout his operational tour, this officer has displayed a fine fighting spirit and devotion to duty of the highest order.'

The others who died were the pilot Flt Lt Douglas Macdonald DFC RCAF, second pilot S/L Kenneth Vare AFC, flight engineer Sgt Robert Smale MiD, bomb-aimer Flt Sgt John Turnbull, wireless operator Sgt William Tyrie DFM, mid-upper gunner Flt Sgt William Jenkins and rear gunner Flt Sgt William Roche RAAF. All were initially buried in Grossbeuthen cemetery before being reinterred in Berlin War Cemetery.

Neils' name can be found on panel 114.

Sources: Danish Pilots in WW2/630 Squadron Association/Aircrew Reunited.

