

S/L William Cross Wishart
DSO, DFC & Bar 143583
RAFVR



William Wishart was one of the most outstanding navigators to fly with Bomber Command.

He was also one of the youngest squadron leaders in the RAF to be killed on operations, shot down on at least his 80th operation on his third tour of operations at the age of just 22.

He was on the strength of 97 Squadron but was flying in an 83 Squadron Lancaster shot down over Holland while attacking part of the same target where only weeks before he had earned a Distinguished Service Order, an award only surpassed by the Victoria Cross.

William was part of what appears to have been a 'scratch' crew put together by the commanding officer of RAF Coningsby, G/C Anthony Evans-Evans. 97 and 83 Squadrons shared Coningsby and both flew as 5 Group's Pathfinders. The crew was made up of 83 and 97 personnel in addition to at least one from 49 Squadron at nearby Fulbeck.

Their aircraft, NE165 OL-Y, took off at 17.07, as part of a force of 165 Lancasters and 12 Mosquitoes, to attack the Mittelland canal. Four hours later the Lancaster was attacked by a night-fighter and crashed on Gertruda Farm in the village of De Rips, 12km from Helmond. Only the rear gunner of the eight men on board survived and William and the others are all buried in Mierlo war cemetery.

William came from Banff in the north-east of Scotland where his parents, Henry and Dora, lived. His father was a quarry owner and in 1939 William won a place at Glasgow University to read science and engineering. The following year he volunteered to join the RAF, trained as a navigator and flew his first tour with the Pathfinders of 156 Squadron at Alconbury. He was awarded his first DFC in December, 1943 at the conclusion of his first tour. After a spell instructing, he joined 97 Squadron at Coningsby, gaining his second DFC in August 1944. Seventy of his operations were as a Pathfinder navigator in both Lancasters and Mosquitoes, 32 of them in the Master Bomber role. 5 Group AOC Sir Ralph Cochrane praised his 'unquenchable enthusiasm' for the role and added: 'He never made a mistake.' His DSO was announced in March 1945, days after his death and summarised a remarkable career with a remarkable airman. 'This officer,' it read 'participated in a very large number of sorties, including 11 to Berlin and many other strongly defended targets in the Ruhr. S/L Wishart has flown with great distinction to such distant targets as Peenemunde, Danzig and Gdynia. He has at all times displayed a high degree of skill, courage and determination, setting an example to all.' The citation added: 'In January 1945, S/L Wishart took place in an attack on the Dortmund-Ems canal (*the Mittelland section*) and his outstanding ability as a navigator contributed materially to the success the attack obtained.'

The others who died on NE165 were pilot G/C Evans-Evans DFC, flight engineer F/O Sidney Marsh, second navigator F/O Desmond Ball DFM, GM, bomb-aimer F/L William Fitch DFM, wireless operator Flt. Sgt. Richard Takle and mid-upper gunner F/O Clifford Coombes. The survivor was rear gunner P/O E Hansen RAAF.

His name can be found on panel 118.

Sources: 97 Squadron Association/RAF Commands/Bomber Command Losses 1945 by Bill Chorley/Facebook.