

Flt. Sgt. Leslie Wright DFM 1430225 RAFVR

Wireless operator Les Wright was part of a Lancaster crew which was almost unique in Bomber Command in that all seven received gallantry awards following their deaths 24 hours after the D-Day landings.

They were a vastly experienced bomber crew comprising four Englishmen, two Canadians and an Australian, who had come together the previous summer during their training and had joined 166 Squadron at Kirmington early in November 1943 after spending a few weeks at 1662 Heavy Conversion Unit at Blyton. They flew their first operation together to Berlin on 22 November and were to visit the 'Big City', as bomber crews knew it, on six further occasions during the coming winter. They were to fly on some of the toughest operations of the war, including the infamous Nuremburg and Mailly-le-Camp raids which resulted in horrendous losses for Bomber Command.

By early June 1944 they were nearing the end of their tour of operations when they took off from Kirmington in their regular aircraft, Lancaster I DV367 AS-T, shortly before midnight on 7 June. Their target was a rail junction at Versailles, south of Paris, which was being used to bring up German reserves to Normandy. The attack was one of several by Bomber Command on the key rail target.

They were to fall victim either to a night fighter or flak, crashing near the village of St-Cyr-l'Ecole, close to the target. There were no survivors and all seven were buried close to the crash site. They were later reinterred in Clichy Northern Cemetery.

Les was a Yorkshireman. His home was in Crookes, on the outskirts of Sheffield, and he was the 23-year-old son of Herbert and Hannah Wright. After his death he was awarded a Distinguished Flying Medal along with the other five NCOs in the crew, the pilot receiving a DFC. Their citations spoke of the fine example they had shown to other members of the squadron and the 'courage and devotion to duty' they had shown during their time at Kirmington.

The others who died with him were the pilot Flt. Lt. Ross Powdrill DFC RCAF, flight engineer Sgt. Henry Simpson DFM, navigator Flt. Sgt. Tom Hill DFM, bomb-aimer Flt. Sgt. Roderick Osborne, mid-upper gunner Flt. Sgt. Gordon Nordbye RCAF DFM and rear gunner Flt. Sgt. Louis Baker RAAF DFM.

His name can be found on panel 119.

Illustration: The Simpson family.

