Flt Lt William Frank Barton 34213 RAF



William Frank Barton was born on 7 April 1913 in Brentford, Middlesex, the only child of Frank Ernest Barton and Elsie Lucy Barton nee Standfield. William's father was killed at Passchendaele in 1917, fighting with the Royal West Surrey Regiment.

William entered the RAF as a Pilot on a Short Service Commission in August 1934 and had reached the rank of Flt Lt in February 1939.

When war was declared on the 3 September 1939, William was a pilot on 107 Sqn based at RAF Wattisham, Suffolk. The Sqn was tasked with flying the first bombing operation of the war the following day.

A reconnaissance flight on the day war was declared had observed the German "pocket" battleship Admiral Scheer, cruiser Emden, and other warships anchored at the German naval base at the entrance to Wilhelmshaven on Germany's north coast. Orders were issued by 2 Group Bomber Command that fifteen Blenheims were to attack the warships, five from each of 107, 110, and 139 Sqns.

The morning of 4 September 1939 was cloudy over southern England with heavily overcast skies and a strong NW wind. Together with four crews from 107 Sqn, William took off from RAF Wattisham at 1600 hours in Blenheim IV N6184. Poor weather conditions over the Channel forced the aircraft to fly at very low level and the five aircraft from 139 Sqn jettisoned their bombs and turned back after failing to locate the warships; however, 110 squadron aircraft found the targets.

The Blenheims hit the Admiral Scheer with at least four bombs, although none exploded, probably because of the extremely low altitude of the attack and the battleship's thick armour plating. When the 110 Sqn Blenheims headed home, the 107 Sqn aircraft prepared to attack. Having lost the element of surprise, the flak was now heavy and well directed. William's aircraft was hit by anti-aircraft fire from the Admiral Hipper and crashed into the Harbour, killing all on board. Three of the four Squadron aircraft were shot down during their low level bombing runs.

William and his crew are believed to be Bomber Commands first casualties of WW2 whilst on the first Bomber Command raid of the war.

Also killed were : FO John Frederick Ross (Observer), Cpl James Leslie Ricketts (WOp/AG)

William is buried in the Sage War Cemetery, Niedersachsen, Germany. His remains were transferred in July 1947 from his original burial place in Wilhelmshaven German Military Cemetery, Bremen.

William is commemorated on Wall Panel 128

Photo source: Royal Air Force Museum