

FS Earl Clarence Bray R/89558 RCAF

Earl was born on 10 February 1923 in Jarvis, Ontario, Canada, the son of William Bray and Pearl Edith Bray nee Lofthouse.

Educated at Walpole Public School, Earl was employed as a civilian Mess Man at RCAF Jarvis, Ontario and on the family farm when, in March 1941, he volunteered for aircrew duties with the RCAF.

Called up in April 1941, Earl was employed on ground duties until August 1942 when he re-mustered as aircrew. In December 1942 Earl was awarded his Air Gunner badge and embarked for the UK the following month.

Following advanced training at 26 OTU RAF Wing, Buckinghamshire, 1651 HCU RAF Waterbeach, Cambridgeshire and 1483 Target Towing and Gunnery Flight, RAF Stradishall, Suffolk, on 21 July 1943 Earl was posted to 218 Sqn at RAF Marham, Norfolk.

During the summer of 1943, Air Marshal Sir Arthur "Bomber" Harris determined the northern German city of Hamburg, home to many manufacturing plants, transportation centres and the Blohm and Voss shipyard, a worthy target. Planning to strike this centre of industry, Harris ordered a 10-day-long campaign targeting the city, code-naming it Operation Gomorrah (24 July to 3 August 1943), a combined RAF and USAAF op. The RAF assembled an unprecedented 3,000 bombers to attack Hamburg on four separate nights: 24, 27, 29 July, and 2 August.

The 29/30 July 1943 was the 3rd major RAF attack on the city under Op Gomorrah. A combined force of 787 aircraft, including eighteen 218 Sqn crews was allocated to the op.

At 22:35 on 29 July Earl, operating as the Rear Gunner, and the crew departed RAF Downham Market, Norfolk, in Stirling III BF578 (HA-A).

Whilst over the target, Earl's aircraft was hit by flak but attempted to return home. The damaged aircraft became an easy target and was intercepted by Uffz Walter Rohlfing from 9./NJG 3 flying a Bf110 from Stade Airfield, Lower Saxony, Germany.

The aircraft crashed at Ahrenswohlde, Lower Saxony, Germany, between Buxtehude and Zeven, SW of Hamburg, killing Earl and the pilot. Five of the crew were able to bale out and were taken as POW.

Also Killed: Sgt Raymond Stuart Pickard (Pilot)

Originally buried in Stade Communal War Cemetery, Niedersachsen, Germany, in September 1946 Earl was moved to Becklingen War Cemetery, Niedersachsen, Germany.

Earl is commemorated on Wall Panel 135

Photo Source: www.veterans.gc.ca

