

Sgt. Walter Cotton 1392583, Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve.



Walter Cotton (or Wally, as he was known) was born on 15 November 1921 and was the son of John and Hilda Cotton of Notting Hill in London. He was the youngest of three brothers who served in the Second World War – one brother, George, served in the RAFVR as a wireless operator throughout the war serving in Gibraltar and North Africa, and his other brother, William (Bill) served in the British Army.

Having enlisted into the Royal Air Force, he undertook basic and advanced training gaining qualification as a Wireless Operator/ Air Gunner. He was then posted to 434 Squadron.

434 (Bluenose) Squadron was, at the time, equipped with the Handley Page Halifax V bomber, and operated out of RAF Croft, in Yorkshire.

On 18 March 1944 Wally Cotton was the Wireless Operator/ Air Gunner and part of the crew of eight, which took off at 1834 hours from RAF Croft, Yorkshire, in Halifax LL178, Code WL-R, (which bore the name "The old straw Hat"), to undertake a mine laying operation in the Heligoland area. This operation was a diversionary raid whilst Frankfurt was being bombed by 846 other aircraft. This aircraft was one of 98 which had taken off for this diversion.

All went well on the outward trip, with the mines being successfully dropped. Returning home the crew were advised that bad weather had developed over Croft. For reasons unknown, LL178 descended through cloud over the North Yorkshire Moors, something they and all crews were briefed not to do. The crew may have thought that they were over the last hill and in poor visibility began their descent to land. The aircraft struck the ground and crashed near Kepwick Bank Top, 7 miles ESE of Northallerton, at 2300 hours killing all on board. The crash report stated that the aircraft crashed whilst flying at a steep angle.

Wally Cotton was twenty-two years old.

He is buried in the Chelmsford (Writtle Road) Cemetery, Essex.

He is commemorated on IBCC Panel 149.

Photo source: www.yorkshire-aircraft.co.uk