

FO Bernard Denness 135674 RAFVR

Bernard was born on 14 December 1921 in Swanage, Dorset, the son of Sidney Harold Denness and Beatrice Mary Denness nee Walberton.

Educated locally, Bernard enlisted in the RAFVR in 1941, and following his Navigator training, was commissioned in December 1942.

Bernard and his crew came together at 1657 H.C.U. before posting to 218 Sqn at RAF Downham Market, Norfolk, in September 1943.

During the moon period of March 1944, "A" Flight, 218 Sqn was attached to RAF Tempsford, Bedfordshire to augment the two existing base SOE squadrons. On the night of the 4/5 March, Bomber Command committed 76 aircraft to SOE sorties, dropping equipment to the Resistance fighters in Europe. These operations were vital for the success of the forthcoming invasion.

At 21:14 on 4 March 1944 Bernard, operating as the Navigator, and the crew departed RAF Tempsford in Short Stirling III EE944 (HA-H). According to one of the surviving crew, the aircraft was hit by flak as they crossed the French Coast on the outbound leg, damaging the port outer engine. The crew continued until, on reaching Paris, it was clear that they were losing too much fuel and would be unable to complete the mission.

The crew reached RAF Tempsford in the early hours of the 5 March but were instructed by the Control Tower to go round, probably because they were approaching too high. The pilot opened the throttles but, at 150 feet, the engine failed. Unable to prevent the port wing from dropping, at 02:17 the Stirling side-slipped into the ground, killing 5 of the 7 man crew.

Also killed : PO Elwyn Hinton Edwards (Pilot); FS Peter Henry Kilsby (AB); Sgt Ernest Vamplough (FE); Sgt Douglas Graham Davies (WOp/AG)

Bernard is buried in Swanage (Godlington) Cemetery, Dorset

Bernard is commemorated on Wall Panel 155