

Flt Lt Eric Cecil Duke DFM RAFVR 118147

Eric Duke was a decorated wireless operator who was killed when his Pathfinder Lancaster was shot down on the night of 2/3 January 1945.

He was part of the crew of PB477 LQ-B of 405 (Vancouver) Squadron RCAF which lifted off from 405 Squadron's home airfield at Gransden Lodge to lead a force of 514 Lancasters and seven Mosquitoes which were to devastate part of the city of Nuremburg, badly damaging the factories of MAN and Siemens and wrecking the rail yards. Four Lancasters were lost and two crashed over Allied lines in France.



A few Luftwaffe night-fighters were still active, and it was one of these which caught PB477 as the Lancaster headed back across south-west Germany on the home leg, attacking from below and immediately setting the bomber ablaze. The pilot, W/C Ken Lawson (who was on his 93rd operation) immediately ordered the crew to bail out but only the flight engineer and rear gunner got clear before PB477 crashed near the village of Rohrau, near Tubingen.

Eric had served in India and the Middle East, flying in DC2s and later DC3s with 31 Squadron before returning to England and flew a tour of operations on Whitley aircraft with 51 Squadron at Dishforth before joining 405 Squadron. The award of his Distinguished Flying Medal was announced on 21 November 1941.

The others who died were the pilot W/C Kenneth Lawson DSO & Bar, navigator PO Stanley Fitzhenry RAAF, American bomb-aimer Sqn Ldr Nathan Crawford DFC RCAF, and mid-upper gunner FO Gerald Geeves DFC RCAF. All are buried in Durnbach War Cemetery in southern Germany. The survivors were the flight engineer Sgt Sidney Rhodes and rear gunner WO Donald Plyler RCAF.

Eric's name can be found on the panel 158.

Sources: Military History Forum/Aircrew Remembered/405 Squadron Association/RAF Pathfinders Archive.