FO Walter Reginald Eaglestone J/26854 RCAF



Walter was born on 8 January 1917 in Readlyn, Saskatchewan, the son of Walter Arthur Eaglestone and Marianne Jackson Eaglestone nee Sanderson. In December 1942 he married Frances Barkwell in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Educated at Readlyn Public and High Schools, Saskatchewan, Walter was employed as a storekeeper, handling aircraft supplies, by Prairie Airways in Regina, Saskatchewan when, in April 1942, he enlisted in the RCAF.

Walter completed his flying training in Canada in May 1943 with the award of his WOp/AG badge, was granted a commission and embarked for the UK the following month. Following advanced training at 6(O) Advanced Flying Unit RAF Moreton Valence, Gloucestershire, 23 OTU RAF Pershore, Worcestershire, 22 OTU RAF Wellesbourne Mountford, Warwickshire and 1664 HCU RAF Dishforth, Yorkshire, in February 1944 Walter was posted to 425 Sqn at RAF Tholthorpe, Yorkshire. in July 1944 Walter was posted to 415 Sqn at RAF East Moor, Yorkshire.

On the night of 10/11 August 1944 a 415 Sqn crew had flown Halifax MZ633 on an operational flight to bomb U-Boat pens at La Pallice, France. Just before reaching the target area, the aircraft's port outer engine caught fire. Fortunately, the fire went out after the propeller was feathered and the engine was shut down, and a precautionary landing was made at RAF Exeter, Devon. The damaged engine was replaced at Exeter, and the squadron planned the collection of the aircraft. On the morning of 21 August 1944, 415 Sqn aircraft Halifax NA609 departed RAF East Moor with a crew of six, plus a second crew of six to fly MZ633 back to RAF East Moor. Arriving at RAF Exeter without incident, the repaired aircraft was signed over to them. At 17:04 Walter and the crew, plus one ground crew mechanic, departed RAF Exeter in Halifax III MZ633 (QO-B) flying in formation with Halifax III NA609 (QO-X). At 18:20 the two aircraft collided and then broke up in the air, crashing between the villages of West Haddlesey and Birkin, 5 miles SW of Selby, Yorkshire, west of the York to Doncaster Road, killing all 14 onboard the two aircraft.

The subsequent examination of the crash sites found that the starboard aileron of Halifax MZ633 was found on the ground with the Browning machine gun from the nose of Halifax NA609 sticking through it, indicating that the nose of NA609 had struck the rear portion of the starboard wing of MZ633. One suggestion for the collision occurring was put down to a propeller of Halifax NA609 breaking off, leading to the damaged aircraft then swinging into Halifax MZ633. This suggests that MZ633 was flying as the lead aircraft and NA609 was formated on it, so when the propeller dropped off NA609 a swing would initially occur, and with the two aircraft being so close together there was no time to avoid a collision with the lead aircraft. Most of the crew lost were squadron Section Leaders and this, combined with the loss of the Sqn Commanding Officer temporarily affected 415 Sqn's operational efficiency just 3 weeks after beginning operations in Bomber Command.

Also Killed: Sqn Ldr Brian Edmund Wilmot RCAF DFC* (Pilot); FO Henry Hudson RCAF (Nav); PO Thomas Earl Wiltse RCAF (AB); Sgt Norman Martin Malpass (FE); Sgt James Walton Mitchell RCAF (AG); Cpl William Rodger Dickson MiD RCAF (Ground -Fitter IIE)

Walter is buried in Harrogate (Stonefall) Cemetery, Yorkshire

Walter is commemorated on Wall Panel – 159

Eaglestone Lake, Saskatchewan is named in his honour

Photo Source: findagrave