

Section Officer Joan Marjorie Easton MiD 2986 WAAF

Joan, known as Jo, was born on 30 May 1917 in Charlton, Greenwich, London, the daughter of John Ogilvie Hood Easton and Victoria Clementina Easton nee Jamieson.

A shorthand typist in civilian life, by September 1943 Joan was serving at RAF Mepal, Cambridgeshire.

On 8 September 1943 Bomber Command was tasked with an op against the port area of Boulogne, including the specific target of a long-range gun battery. A combined force of 257 aircraft, including seventeen 75 (NZ) crews, were allocated to the op.

At 21:55 the crew of Stirling III BK809 (AA-T) lined up for departure from RAF Mepal. Whilst on the take-off run, the heavily laden aircraft was caught by a slight cross wind and veered sharply to starboard when the pilot was believed to have overcorrected. The aircraft struck a petrol bowser, and finally came to rest on the far side of the perimeter track between two houses in the village of Sutton where it burst into flames, killing one civilian.

Quickly on the scene were members of the local civilian National Fire Services, rescue personnel from RAF Mepal, and two other service personnel - Joan, and an off duty 75 NZ Sqn Navigator who was nearby. Despite knowing of the dangers from the heavily armed aircraft, all of the rescuers approached the crash site and endeavoured to free the trapped aircrew and the civilians from the houses. Unfortunately, part of the bomb load exploded, killing the pilot, the Bomb Aimer and three of the rescuers - Joan, the Navigator and a civilian fireman. The Flight Engineer succumbed to his injuries later that day.

For their bravery, in January 1944 Joan and the off duty Navigator were posthumously Mentioned in Despatches.

Also killed : FO Norman Hathway Gale (Air Bomber); FO Ian Robert Menzies RNZAF (Pilot); FS Peter Gerald Dobson MiD RNZAF (Navigator); Sgt Albert Leslie Mellor (FE)

Joan is buried in Charlton Cemetery, Greenwich, London. The adjacent grave is that of her brother, Sgt Eric John Easton, a Hurricane pilot who died on 30 April 1941.

Joan is commemorated on Wall Panel 159