

FS Billy Orin Gates R/74829 RCAF

Billy was born on 10 January 1917 in Berthoud, Colorado, USA, the son of Basil Roy Gates and Aletta Margaret Gates nee Lutener.

Educated at Loveland Public and High Schools, and Colorado State College, Billy joined the US Air Corps as a cadet pilot in August 1940, but was discharged in September 1940 having not made the grade. Eager to see active service, in October 1940 he enlisted in the RCAF.

Billy completed his pilot training in Canada in August 1941 with the award of his Wings, and he embarked for the UK the following month.

Whilst undergoing advanced training at 12 OTU RAF Chipping Warden, Oxfordshire, on 17 January 1942 Billy and his crew departed for a night flying exercise in Wellington X9931. On return from the cross country and flying in the circuit and to the NE of the runway, at 00:05 on 18 January the aircraft crashed near Redhill Wood, injuring the whole crew. After three weeks sick leave the crew was soon back in training, and on 6 April 1942 they were posted to 214 Sqn at RAF Stradishall, Suffolk.

On 14/15 April 1942, Bomber Command was tasked with an attack on Dortmund, located in the heart of the Ruhr Valley. Dortmund was home to steelworks, military production factories and synthetic oil plants, all vital to the German war effort. A combined force of 208 aircraft, including six 214 Sqn crews, were allocated to the op.

At 23:12 on 14 April Billy, operating as the 2nd pilot, and the crew departed RAF Stradishall in Wellington IC Z1148 (BU-L).

At 03:30 on 15 April Billy's aircraft was intercepted by Oblt Alois Lechner flying a Ju88 of the E./NJG2 flying from Gilze Rijen Airfield, and crashed at Overrepen, Tongeren-Borgloon, Limburg, killing all on board.

Also Killed: PO Robert Balfour Halliday RCAF (Obs); FS Douglas Harold Morton Jacques RCAF (WOp/AG); FS Reginald Marcus Lawrence RCAF (Pilot); Sgt Samuel Cox (AG); Sgt Eric Mason (WOp/AG)

Originally buried in St Trond (Brustem) Cemetery, Limburg, Belgium, in January 1947 Billy was moved to Heverlee War Cemetery, Vlaams-Brabant, Belgium.

Billy is commemorated on Wall Panel 168