

Sgt. Derek Albert Gibbons
745221 RAFVR



Derek Gibbons was a 20-year-old Whitley second pilot whose exploits made headlines across Britain after his badly-damaged aircraft ditched in the Channel following surviving an air battle over Germany. But three months later Derek and three of his crew failed to survive after spending several days in a small dinghy following another ditching after being severely damaged over Berlin.

His first ditching came on the night of 9/10 June 1940 when his Whitley went to the industrial city of Wanne-Eickel in Germany. The aircraft was attacked by fighters and managed to shoot one down before being badly damaged by another, losing an engine on his Whitley. He and his crew battled to keep the bomber flying as they headed back to England, finally having to ditch the bomber off Hastings. The pilot and observer were both decorated and there was great praise for the whole crew in the national newspapers for their bravery.

On the night of 23 September, he and his crew, which included three others on board during the Hasting ditching, left Linton-on-Ouse for Berlin, the first major attack by Bomber Command on the German capital. His aircraft, P5046 KN-O, is believed to have got into difficulty over Berlin area but is reported to have dropped its bombs. With the aircraft losing fuel, the crew opted to try to land in the North Sea where they hoped the Royal Navy would be on hand.



P5046 finally ran out of fuel and at 0550 hours ditched around 80 miles off Flamborough Head and the five-man crew managed to make it into the Whitley's dinghy. At one stage they were spotted by another aircraft but it was late on 26 September when the destroyer HMS *Bedouin* found them. By that time Derek had died along with two other members of the crew. The wireless operator/air gunner Sgt. Dudley Allen and rear gunner Sgt. George Riley, were picked up and taken to Rosyth and taken to the naval hospital where Sgt Allen. died on September 26.

Derek's body was never found along with the pilot P/O Andrew Dunn and observer Sgt. Bernard Savill DFM and all are remembered on the Runnymede Memorial. He was the son of Albert and Lillian Gibbons and his home was in Slough, Buckinghamshire.

His name can be found on panel 169.

Sources: Harry Shinkfield/77 Squadron Association/Yorkshire aircraft.