

LAC John Arthur Martin Harkness 617355 RAF

John was born in 1920 in Greta, Cumberland, the son of Thomas K M and Mary Elizabeth Harkness.

A highly respected member of 138 Sqn Ground Crew, John was employed as an Airframe Mechanic (Rigger), having been with squadron since its inception as 419 Flt in September 1940. Known as "Ox", he was so strong that the crew didn't use trestles to hold the back of the Lysander up for wheel change, he would instead lift it and hold it on his back.

In October/November 1941 the Lysander Flt had been building up its aircrew strength. Lt Laurent, an experienced pilot of the Free French Air Force, had recently joined 138 Sqn and was training in preparation for Lysander pick-up operations.

On 28 November 1941 John departed RAF Tempsford in Lysander IIIA T1771 (NF) on a training flight. The squadron ground crew frequently flew to advanced bases to maintain the Lysanders, flying in the rear of the aircraft. In poor daylight visibility, the pilot hit trees on Hungry Hill, north of Farnham, Surrey and crashed nearby, killing both on board.

Their Flight Commander mourned the loss of the two airmen, saying *that "Lt Laurent could eventually be replaced, but 'Ox' Harkness was one of his best riggers in the Squadron and could not be easily replaced"*.

Also killed : Lt Antoine Jean Emille Laurent Ld'H, CdG Free French Air Force (Pilot)

John is buried in Mere Knoll Cemetery, Sunderland, Durham

John is commemorated on Wall Panel 177