

Sgt Tom Bailey Hawkes 1872798 RAFVR

Tom was born on 3 February 1922 in Luton, Bedfordshire, the son of Tom Lewis Hawkes and Lena Hawkes nee Champkin.

In civilian life, Tom was employed as a Fitter, and when he joined the RAF he trained as a Flight Engineer. Tom was posted with his crew to 138 Sqn at RAF Tempsford, Bedfordshire on 4 October 1943.

On 16 December 1943, 138 Sqn despatched six aircraft to France. Tom was in one of the 4 Halifax airframes and of these, only one returned safely.

At 22:05 on 16 December 1943 Tom, operating as the Flight Engineer, and the crew departed RAF Tempsford in Halifax II LW280 (NF-K), on Op "Marc 1", a supply and double agent drop to the French Resistance.

The mission was aborted due to ice and fog in the drop zone area, and the crew returned to England with the full load. The weather conditions in England were equally poor. Unable to land due to fogbound airfields, and running short of fuel, the crew was ordered to abandon the aircraft. The pilot gave the order for his crew to bale out, and at 05:45 the aircraft crashed at Hale Fleet, 1 mile south of Penny Hole Flats, near Halliard Way, Tollesbury, Essex.

Three crew members and one Agent were found safe in the water and were picked up by the RASC operated No 1 Motor Boat Company, but sadly the bodies of four of the crew, including Tom, were recovered from the water.

Later that day, the body of a middle aged man in civilian clothes was washed up at high tide on the beach Brightlingsea, close to the crash site. The papers on him suggested he was a War Correspondent; however, this was a cover for Lt Henri Drouilh, the director of operations for the British-based French section of SOE. Henri was due to be parachuted into France on this mission.

Also Killed: Sgt James Johnstone Hannah (WOp/AG); Sgt John Lynch (Navigator); Sgt Robert Marshall (Air Bomber); Lt Henri Drouilh (Agent)

Tom is buried in Luton General Cemetery, Bedfordshire.

Tom is commemorated on Wall Panel 179

Photo Source : historicgifts.co.uk

