

Sgt George Hawkins DFM 510166 RAF

George was born in 1909 in Aynho, Brackley, Northamptonshire, the son of George Henry Hawkins and Catherine Ellen (Nelly) Hawkins nee Harding. In 1934 he married Antonia Calleja in Valetta, Malta and they had one son. Educated locally, before joining the RAF in 1929, George was employed as a farm worker.

In March 1940 George (at that time LAC) was awarded his DFM, presented on an airfield in France by Air Marshall A S Barrett, Chief of the BAF in France. George's DFM was awarded for gallantry and devotion to duty in the execution of air operations, particularly for his actions during a highly successful reconnaissance flight over NW Germany on 31 October 1939 when he was described as *"instrumental in the success of the flight and the safe return of the aircraft"*. Among the exploits mentioned was that he *"withstood intense anti aircraft fire over the Siegfried line and elsewhere with coolness and alertness for the safe descent of his aircraft"*. The award was also in part due to two and a half years outstanding service on 18 Sqn where *"he has proved himself to be an Air Gunner and Wireless Operator of exceptional ability. Since the outbreak of hostilities he has taken a very great part in the training of Wireless Operators and Air Gunners posted to the Sqn and has been a never failing source of encouragement to others."*



At the outbreak of war, 18 Sqn was sent to France as part of 70 Wing of the BEF in the reconnaissance/bombing role. Initially based at Beauvraignes, they moved to Meharicourt in October 1939 and were heavily involved in the Battle of France which commenced on 10 May 1940. Following heavy losses, the Sqn was withdrawn to RAF Watton, Norfolk on 20 May 1940. The ORB for 21 May states the Sqn had only 8 operational pilots.

At 12:00 on 21 May 1940, George, operating as the WOp/AG, and the crew departed RAF Watton in Blenheim IV L9325 (WV-V) on a reconnaissance mission over Douai-Arras-Amiens-Abbeville, France. The aircraft failed to return and the crew were reported as missing believed killed and their names were recorded on the Runnymede Memorial.

Extensive post war research finally discovered the fate of the crew. The aircraft crashed at La Priez Farm, between Combles and Rancourt, Somme and was believed to have been shot down by anti-aircraft fire near Arras. The location was confirmed by the emergence of photographs of a crashed Blenheim in that place taken by German troops which clearly show the identifying number L9325. The crew had been buried at the nearby Military Cemetery in Rancourt and, until 2015, their graves had been marked as "Unknown Airmen of WW2".

In June 2015, sufficient satisfactory evidence was provided to the CWGC and the three anonymous graves in Rancourt Military Cemetery were confirmed as the crew of Blenheim L9325 and named headstones were finally installed.

Also killed: PO Cyril Light (Pilot); Sgt Arthur Ernest Craig (Observer)

George is buried at Rancourt Military Cemetery, Somme, France

George is commemorated on Wall Panel 179

Photo Source: Aircrew Remembered