

Flt Lt Edgar (Hunk) Spottiswoode Humphreys **44177 RAFVR MiD**

Edgar was born on 5 December 1914 in Exmouth, Devon, son of Sqn Ldr William Roland Spottiswoode Humphreys AFC and Lydia Humphreys nee Brinsmead. He married Lilian Watt in 1940.

Educated in the local council school, by 1931 at the age of 16 he had gained a Class A Pilot's. He entered the RAF in 1932 to train in the 25th Entry of Apprentices at RAF Halton, and graduated as an AC2 in 1935. Edgar soon applied, and was accepted, for flying training and was promoted to sergeant after gaining his wings. He was commissioned as a PO in July 1940. Flying with 107 Sqn, he served during the Battle of France before returning with the Sqn to RAF Wattisham.

On the evening of 19 December 1940, flying Bristol Blenheim IV T1860, Edgar took off from RAF Wattisham on a night attack against a Luftwaffe airfield at Lannion in Brittany. The aircraft crashed, possibly due to Naval light anti-aircraft fire, and its crew taken prisoner of war. Allocated Prisoner of War No. 406, he was initially held at Stalag Luft I, Barth where by July 1942 he had been promoted to Flt Lt. It was at Stalag Luft I that Edgar met Roger Bushell who later masterminded the Great Escape.

In October 1943 Edgar, together with Bushell and several other prisoners were sent to Stalag Luft III in the province of Lower Silesia near the town of Sagan and the plan to get 200 prisoners out of Stalag Luft III was formed.

Allocated No.54 in the queue of officers escaping through the tunnel, Edgar teamed up with No.55 RAAF pilot Paul Royle, for no better reason than "he was next in the queue". He was one of the 76 men who escaped the prison camp on the night of 24/25 March 1944 in the escape now famous as "the Great Escape". Edgar left the tunnel at about 02:30 and into the woods with Paul Royle where the group increased to ten before they moved off westwards.

When the group split, the 2 men headed southwards. They dodged four civilians, but at 03:00 on 26 March, having crossed the Berlin to Breslau autobahn near the village of Tiefenfurt, and just 16 miles from the camp, they were arrested by a party of German Home Guard and locked up in the local prison. Other escapees were picked up and the next morning they were driven to Sagan police station. More and more recaptured airmen arrived at Sagan civil jail until they were moved by truck to be held at Görlitz prison where, eventually, the total reached thirty-five.

Edgar was last seen at Görlitz prison on the morning of 31 March 1944 being led away to a covered truck with 9 other escapers. They were all shot in a clearing off the Görlitz to Sagan road just outside Görlitz and cremated at Liegnitz. Edgar was one of 50 of the 76 escapers selected for execution by SS- Gruppenführer Arthur Nebe on the orders of Heinrich Müller, Chief of the Gestapo. He was shot by a Gestapo agent known only as "Lux" on the direct orders of Dr Wilhelm Scharpwinkel, Gestapo Chief of Breslau.

Originally his remains were buried at Sagan before being re-interred in the Poznan Old Garrison Cemetery.

Edgar was posthumously Mentioned in despatches for conspicuous gallantry as a prisoner of war, published in a supplement to the London Gazette on 8 June 1944.

Edgar is buried at the Poznan Old Garrison Cemetery, Poland

Edgar is commemorated on Wall Panel 186

Photo source: <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205234801>

