

S/L George Johnstone Laird DFC J/4896 RCAF

It was a cruel fate which befell a Halifax of 427 (Lion) RCAF Squadron from Leeming and a Lancaster from 622 Squadron at Mildenhall as they both returned from Bomber Command's worst raid of the war.

Both were heading back to England from the mauling the bombers had taken during the raid on Nuremburg on the night of 30/31 March, 1944 when they collided, crashing close to the border of Luxemburg and Belgium. Only one of the 15 men on board survived as they became the 89th and 90th Bomber Command losses on the night.



Pilot of the 427 Halifax III LV932 ZL-W was the squadron's 29-year-old B Flight commander George 'Turkey' Laird DFC. His aircraft crashed at Rachecourt on the Luxemburg border, close to the attractive Belgian Ardennes town of Arlon. Only the rear gunner survived and evaded capture.

They had taken off from Leeming at 2200 hours one of 795 bombers heading to the southern Germany city. Ninety-five were lost, including three from 427 Squadron. 'Turkey' Laird was one both the squadron's flight commanders to be killed.

He headed a very experienced crew, most of which were well into completing their tours of operation. George was born in Winnipeg and later lived in Toronto with his wife, Elma, and his parents, George and Isabella. He had been educated at the Britannia School and St James College, enlisting in August 1940 and spent some time as an instructor before volunteering for operational duties.

George was awarded his DFC in November 1943 when his Halifax was badly shot-up during a raid on Kassel. His flight engineer (who was awarded a Conspicuous Gallantry Medal) was badly wounded but helped his pilot to fly back to England, safely landing at Leeming. His citation spoke of his 'super effort' to reach base and his 'outstanding skill, courage and tenacity'. Two of his crew were with him on board for the Nuremburg raid, one surviving.

The others who died were the second pilot Flt. Sgt. Arthur Stainton RCAF, flight engineer P/O John Morrison DFC, navigator F/O William Soeder RCAF, bomb-aimer P/O Joseph Corbally RCAF, wireless operator Flt. Sgt. Bill Clapham and mid-upper gunner P/O Lloyd Smith RCAF. The surviving rear gunner was P/O Jim Moffat RCAF. Six of those, including 'Turkey' Laird, are buried in Hotton War Cemetery while the flight engineer, who died on 20 April of his injuries while baling out, is buried in Arlon Communal Cemetery.

His name can be found on panel 195.

Sources: 427 Squadron Association/Canadian Veterans/Yorkshire Aircraft/Bomber Command Losses 1944 by Bill Chorley/The Nuremburg Raid by Martin Middlebrook.

