Flt Lt Albert John Oettle 40133 DFC RAF



Albert was born on 26 September 1916 in Surbitton, Surrey, the son of Albert Oettle and Alice Oettle nee West.

Educated at Brighton College, Albert joined the RAF and was commissioned in 1937, receiving his wings the same year. By the outbreak of war, Albert was stationed at RAF Dishforth, Yorkshire as a Whitley pilot.

On 3 May 1940, operating as 2nd pilot on a 51 Sqn Whitley, Albert flew an operational flight to bomb Fornebu airfield near Oslo, Norway. The crew successfully bombed the target but became lost on their return while flying in cloud over Yorkshire. Having contacted base and RAF Linton on Ouse for assistance, the WOp received one acknowledgement and then was unable to make further calls. When low on fuel the Captain ordered his crew bale out. At 05:05 all five airmen abandoned the aircraft at 05.05, earning Albert his caterpillar Badge.

In October 1940, Albert was awarded the DFC for his service on 51 Sqn. When the first two Whitleys were added to 419 Flt in August 1940 at RAF North Weald, Essex Albert, very experienced on type, was posted to the unit as the first qualified pilot. The flight arrived at RAF Stradishall, Suffolk in October 1940 and renumbered 1419 Flt in March 1941.

On 10 April 1941 Albert and his crew departed RAF Tangmere, Sussex on "Operation Josephine" the plan to insert six Polish saboteurs in France, their task to destroy the Passac power station in the suburbs of Bordeaux. Whilst over the Loire, an electrical fault released the containers and, as these contained equipment essential to the mission they aborted the trip and returned to RAF Manston, Kent. Whilst attempting to overshoot, Albert stalled the heavily laden Whitley at 100ft and the aircraft crashed and caught fire. The Rear Gunner and Observer were killed, four crew - including Albert - injured and the six Poles were unharmed. Albert was to spend a significant period convalescing from his injuries.

On 28 October 1941, Albert returned to duty on 138 Sqn, the unit formed from 1419 Flt. On 30 October at 11:50, Albert and the crew departed RAF Newmarket in Whitley V Z9223 (NF), a re-positioning flight to RAF Stradishall with 2 crew on board.

On final approach the aircraft stalled, an accident similar to the one that hospitalised Albert in April. All on board were killed.

Also killed : Sgt Hugh Francis Rochford DFM RNZAF (Navigator); LAC Walter John Lee (Ground)

Albert is buried in St Andrews Churchyard, Hove, Sussex; however, his grave has been lost and he is commemorated on a special memorial there.

Albert is commemorated on Wall Panel 220

Photo Source: Brighton College