

Flt. Lt John (Jack) Francis Williams 106173 MiD RAFVR

John, known as Jack, was born on 7 July 1917 in Clapham, London, the only son of John Williams and Bertha Ada Williams nee Beazley.

Educated at Battersea Grammar School, Jack was initially employed by the Milk Marketing Board until, shortly before the outbreak of war, he began working in his father's engineering company. Despite working in a reserved occupation, Jack volunteered to join the RAF in June 1940 and trained as an Observer. On completion of his training he was posted to 107 Sqn.

At 1422 hours 27 April 1942, Jack and the crew departed RAF Great Massingham, Norfolk in Boston III Z2194 as part of a 12 aircraft formation from 107 Sqn, accompanied by a fighter escort, detailed to attack the power station at Sequedon, Lille, France. The attack went to plan but at 1550 hours, whilst still in the target area, the formation was attacked by Fw109s from Stab1./JG26 and four Bostons were hit. Unable to fly the badly damaged aircraft, the pilot ordered the crew to bale out and Jack managed to do so. The aircraft was now too low for the pilot and Wop/AG to safely escape, although they both survived the crash landing. The crew were picked up and taken prisoner about 3 miles south of Dunkirk.

After processing at the POW holding camp Dulag Luft at Frankfurt-am-Maine, John was sent to the recently opened Stalag Luft III in the province of Lower Silesia near the town of Sagan, SW Poland, the camp that would gain fame as the home of the "Great Escape". The other two crew, both non-commissioned, were sent to a separate camp.

John's role in the "Great Escape", the plan to get 200 POWs out of the camp, was as a "Penguin", secretly dispersing tons of soil that was excavated from the tunnel through special pouches under his clothing.

On the night of 24/25 March 1944, 76 men escaped from the north compound via the tunnel "Harry". Jack, who had drawn lot 67, was one of a party assembled by Flt. Lt. Bethell (no 46) and they commenced walking westwards through the woods. The alarm was raised at 0500 hours when the 77th POW was spotted emerging from the tunnel. Jack was arrested close to Sagan and arrived at the collecting point for recaptured officers in Görlitz prison on 28 March 1944.

Jack 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. On the morning of 6 April 1944, he was one of 6 men removed by truck. No firm evidence was ever found of the fate of these men and their records were marked "killed at a place unknown, on or after 6 April 1944". He was cremated at Breslau and his remains were buried at Sagan before being re-interred in the Poznan Old Garrison Cemetery.

Jack was posthumously awarded a MiD for conspicuous gallantry as a prisoner of war, published in a supplement to the London Gazette on 8 June 1944.

Jack is buried at the Poznan Old Garrison Cemetery, Poland

Jack is commemorated on Wall Panel 265

Photo source: Surrey Comet

