Sqn Ldr Brian Edmund Wilmot J/23777 DFC* RCAF



Brian was born on 29 April 1923 in Fort William, Ontario, the only son of John Henry Allan Wilmot and Bertha Alice Wilmot nee McCully. Educated at Daniel O'Connell Catholic High School, Montreal and Kelvin Technical High School, Winnipeg, Brian was employed as a sheet metal worker by Trans Canada Airlines, Winnipeg when, in December 1941, he enlisted in the RCAF. Brian completed his flying training in Canada in February 1943 with the award of his Wings, granted a commission and embarked for the UK in March. Following advanced training at 15(P) AFU RAF Ramsbury, Wiltshire, 22 OTU RAF Wellesbourne Mountford, Warwickshire and 1664 HCU RAF Dishforth, Yorkshire, in February 1944 Brian was posted to 425 Sqn at RAF Tholthorpe, Yorkshire. In May 1944 Brian was awarded the DFC. His Citation read: *"This officer has completed many sorties during which he has attacked such well-defended targets as Berlin, Frankfurt and Dusseldorf. One night in April 1944, in a sortie against the last-named target, FO Wilmot displayed the greatest determination in pressing home his attack although one engine failed and some height had been lost before reaching the target. His fine fighting spirit has always been apparent, and he has set a most commendable example."* In July 1944 Brian was posted to 415 Sqn at RAF East Moor, Yorkshire as A Flt Cdr.

On the night of 12/13 August 1944 Brian was flying Halifax NP720 on an op to Brunswick. The aircraft was damaged by flak and attacked by night-fighters, sustaining significant damage. Brian skilfully flew the aircraft back to base. For his actions on this night, in October 1944 Brian was posthumously awarded the Bar to his DFC. The citation read: *"Since the award of the DFC S/L Wilmot has completed numerous sorties against a variety of targets. On a recent operation against Brunswick, although his aircraft was attacked and damaged by enemy night fighters, S/L Wilmot displayed great skill and determination in pressing home his attack and in bringing his damaged aircraft safety back to base. He has set a worth example."*

On the night of 10/11 August 1944 a 415 Sqn crew had flown Halifax MZ633 (QO-B) on an op to bomb U-Boat pens at La Pallice, France. Before reaching the target area, the aircraft's port outer engine caught fire. Fortunately, the fire went out after the propeller was feathered, the engine was shut down and aircraft landed at RAF Exeter, Devon. The damaged engine was replaced at Exeter, and the squadron planned the collection of the aircraft. On the morning of 21 August 1944, Halifax NA609 (QO-X) departed RAF East Moor with a crew of six, plus a second crew of six to fly MZ633 back to base. At 17:04 Brian and the crew, plus one ground mechanic, departed RAF Exeter in Halifax MZ633 flying in formation with Halifax NA609. At 18:20 the two aircraft collided and broke up in the air, crashing between the villages of West Haddlesey and Birkin, 5 miles SW of Selby, Yorkshire, west of the York to Doncaster Road, killing all 14 onboard the two aircraft. The examination of the crash sites found that the starboard aileron of Halifax MZ633 was found on the ground with the Browning machine gun from the nose of Halifax NA609 sticking through it, indicating that the nose of NA609 had struck the rear portion of the starboard wing of MZ633. One suggestion for the collision occurring was put down to a propeller of Halifax NA609 breaking off, leading to the damaged aircraft then swinging into Halifax MZ633. This suggests that MZ633 was flying as the lead aircraft and NA609 was formated on it, so when the propeller dropped off NA609 a swing would initially occur, and with the two aircraft being so close together there was no time to avoid a collision with the lead aircraft. Most of the crew lost were Section Leaders and this, combined with the loss of the Sqn CO, temporarily affected 415 Sqn's operational efficiency just 3 weeks after beginning operations in Bomber Command.

Also Killed: FO Walter Reginald Eaglestone RCAF (WOp/AG); FO John Henry Hudson RCAF (Nav); PO Thomas Earl Wiltse RCAF (AB); Sgt Norman Martin Malpass (FE); Sgt James Walton Mitchell RCAF (AG); Cpl William Rodger Dickson MiD RCAF (Ground Crew-Fitter IIE)

Brian is buried in Harrogate (Stonefall) Cemetery, Yorkshire

Brian is commemorated on Wall Panel – 266

Photo Source: caspir.warplane.com