FO John Patrick Custance J/8832 RCAF



John, known as Pat, was born on 18 September 1915 in New Westminster, British Columbia Canada, the son of James Harrison Musgrave Custance and Claire Edgarda Custance nee Stitt. In November 1941 he married Malvina Irene Killick in New Westminster, British Columbia.

Educated at Edmonds Public School and Burnaby High, John completed his further education in 1939 at the University of British Columbia with the award of a BA and BSc, specialising in Forest Engineering.

John was employed as surveyor and timber cruiser in the forestry industry when, in February 1941, he volunteered for service with the RCAF.

Called up in May 1941, John completed his aircrew training in Canada in October 1941 with the award of his Observer badge, granted his commission and embarked for the UK the following month.

Following advanced training at 42 OTU RAF Andover, Hampshire, in July 1942 John was posted to 614 Army Co-Operation Sqn, RAF Macmerry, Lothian, Scotland. In November 1942 the squadron moved to North Africa. In May 1943 John was posted to 18 Sqn at Souk el Khemis, known as "Kings Cross", Tunisia.

In June the squadron moved eastwards to Grombalia, near Tunis, then in August to Comiso, Sicily followed by a move to Gerbini No. 3 (Sigonella), Sicily as the front advanced in Italy.

On 27 August 1943 six 18 Sqn crews were tasked with attacking gun positions north of Reggio de Calabria, the first ops from the new base.

At 22:25 on 27 August 1943 John, operating as the Navigator, and the crew departed Gerbini No. 3 in Boston III AL742 (H).

John's aircraft departed as normal and at a height of 500' was expected to turn on a reciprocal course to commence heading towards the target. The aircraft crashed 5 miles from the flare path, 3 miles NE of Gerbini, Sicily, flying on the planned reciprocal course, killing all on board. Although no definitive cause could be established as the aircraft was destroyed by fire, it was suspected that the pilot lost height in the dark and, as the aircraft was estimated to be at cruising speed, it was concluded to be an accidental flight into ground.

Also Killed: FO Kenneth Arthur (Pilot); WO1 Donald Frank Newcombe RCAF (WOp/AG); Sgt Peter Angelo Fricker (AG)

Originally buried in Catania Military Cemetery, Sicily, in August 1944 John was moved to the Agira Canadian War Cemetery, Enna, Sicily, Italy.

John is commemorated on Wall Panel NYE

Photo Source: findagrave