

Operation

Alfie was a flight engineer in 106 Squadron on Lancaster PB303 ZN-R that took off from RAF Metherringham on 1 November 1944 on an operation to bomb Homburg.

The operations book of 106 Squadron states:

Twenty Lancasters of No. 106 Squadron formed part of a force of 226 Lancasters of No. 5 Group detailed to bomb the synthetic oil plant at Meerbeck situated about 5 miles north west of the town on Homberg. Each aircraft carried 14 x 1000 M.C. and the attack was timed to commence at 16.10 hours, 106 Squadron being in the third wave bombing from 16.14 to 16.16 hours. Unfortunately, the target area was obscured by 9/10ths to 10/10ths cloud with top about 5000 feet, and skymarkers had to be used, all crews with one exception seeing and bombing these without difficulty. Under these unfavourable conditions, no bombing results could be observed. No fighter opposition was encountered. 106/R. (F/O Symes) did not return from this operation.

1.11.44 Weather: Fine

The synthetic oil plant at Homberg was attacked in daylight by 177 Lancasters. The squadron dispatched 20 aircraft-the highest number since August. Eighteen aircraft attacked the target, bombing from 16/18000 feet. Flak was intense and accurate, but no fighters were encountered. 1 aircraft is missing, and several others damaged.

On November 1st, 1944, at 14.05, Lancaster PB303 ZN-R from 106 Squadron took off from RAF Metherringham along with 19 other aircraft heading for Homburg in Germany.

PB303

The crew of PB303 were:

Pilot: Flying Officer George Jeffrey Symes, RCAF, 27 from Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

Navigator: Sgt Cyril Ernest Bayliss, 22 from Redditch, Worcestershire

Flight Engineer: Sgt Alfred F Harris, 24 from Hatch End, Middlesex

WOp/AG: F/O Lesley W Perry, 22 from Taunton, Somerset

Air Gunner: Sgt Clifford Eugene Leroy Cook, RCAF, 19 from Belleville, Ontario, Canada

Air Gunner: Sgt John Anthony Crisp, 19 from Harrow, Middlesex

Air Bomber: F/O John Arthur Smith, 20 from West Ewell, Surrey

Over the target area, PB303 was seen to leave the formation and dive into the clouds. A photograph was taken when the Lancaster left the formation. It is clearly visible that its bomb doors are open, the port engine is missing and there is damage to the fuselage. The crew must have dropped their bombs and turned back in the direction of home. About 45 minutes later the aircraft was observed near the town of Bergen op Zoom and was on fire. It crashed close to the small village of Lepelstraat at about 17.00. The Lancaster hit the ground in a meadow alongside a small country road named Heenweg, near to a farm that at the time belonged to Mr Schot. (Pos. N 51°32'56.3" E 004°15'34.7")

Recovery of the crew was not easy and due to the difficulty in identifying their bodies, six were buried together in a collective grave at the Canadian War Cemetery near Bergen op Zoom.

Witnesses have stated that there was a ceremony at the site of the crash on 23 November 1944. It took many months to clear away the debris and locals have advised that there are still engines buried deep in the soft clay.