

Philip Hartstein, 28 Sept 1920 – 9 October 1943

Philip was born on 28 September 1920 in Hackney. He attended University College School in London. His brother John recalls; *'He belonged to the Officers Training Corps since he, like me later on, was imbued with the adventurous spirit of war: we played war games together. I clearly remember his army bayonet and water bottle, and the khaki substance he used to smarten up the webbing for parades. It was the same uniform from 1914-1918 that I wore in the OTC (officers training corps) at St Paul's School.'*

He followed his older brother and enlisted in the RAFVR. After training he was sent to 75 (NZ) Squadron. *'Trained in Georgia and Alberta, it is said he received trophies for navigation, avionics etc. By all general agreement, he was in the mould of a true-classical hero.'* Philip's nephew

On the 13 July 1943, nine aircraft were detailed to attack targets at Aachen and took off from RAF Mepal. Philip was the second pilot on Stirling EE886 captained by F/O Charlie Eddy which took off at 00.10. On return from the bombing raid the aircraft crash landed at RAF Oakington, burst a tyre and the under carriage collapsed causing the aircraft to flip over and catch fire. The mid upper gunner Eric Viccars was killed on impact with the remainder of the crew seriously injured. Philip was burnt and his younger brother John stated,

'I was with him on his last sick-leave which was to recover after hospitalisation when he had to crash-land his previous aircraft (these were huge bombers). As far as I recall from what he told me, his crew were "no longer available" for his next bombing raid over Germany for which he was a pathfinder for the squadron in a Lancaster bomber. He had managed to escape from the plane with a burnt back. But, typical of Philip, he was eager to get back to flying and fighting the good fight: he had volunteered to be skipper for a new crew of young and inexperienced school-leavers and had simply bonded with the RAF crews.'

Stirling EE886 AA-L

F/O Charles 'Charlie' Eddy, RNZAF NZ39003 – Pilot. Seriously injured
Sgt. Phillip Hartstein, RAFVR 1390001/ 158031 – 2nd Pilot. Injured
P/O Arthur Wilfred Lane, RAFVR 1383885/ 139406 – Navigator. Seriously injured
F/S Homer Cecil Hurt, RNZAF NZ41589 – Air Bomber. Injured
Sgt. H. Bourgeois, RAFVR 798662 – Wireless Operator. Seriously injured
Sgt. H. Waring, RAFVR 1070627 – Flight Engineer. Seriously injured
Sgt. Eric Clifford Viccars, RAFVR 649196 – Mid Upper Gunner. Killed
F/S H.D. Lucas, RAFVR 778858/ 160135 – Rear Gunner. Injured

Charles Eddy's attempts to save his Mid Upper Gunner, Eric Viccars earned the following citation: *"One night in July 1943 this officer was the pilot and captain of an aircraft which crashed when attempting an emergency landing and burst into flames immediately. He received concussion and injuries to his scalp and spine. Despite his injuries, Flying Officer Eddy remained in the aircraft and assisted the bomb aimer from the overturned second pilot's seat. After getting clear of the aircraft, Flying Officer Eddy, on learning that one member of the crew was absent, re-entered the blazing wreckage and assisted a medical officer in a vain attempt to extricate the mid-upper gunner who was trapped in his turret. It was not until the heat, flames and smoke had made a continuance of rescue work impossible that Flying Officer Eddy was persuaded to abandon his efforts. His face was scorched whilst he was attempting to rescue the gunner and he collapsed immediately after leaving the aircraft. Flying Officer Eddy showed gallantry in dangerous circumstances and his unselfishness was instrumental in saving the bomb aimers life."*

Three months after being injured, Philip had transferred to 7 Squadron. On the 8 October 1943, Philip was the pilot of Lancaster JA706 which took off from RAF Oakington on a bombing mission to Hanover. His crew were:

Flight Sergeant Thomas O'Sullivan RAAF

Flight Sergeant William Eaton RCAF

Sergeant Eric Kempson RAFVR

Sergeant F Bryant RAFVR

Sergeant R Reeves RAFVR

Pilot Officer R Woodward RAFVR

The plane crashed at Altenhagen, SE of Stadthagen, Germany. Leutnant Werner Treusch of 6./JG 300 claimed that he attacked the plane. P/O Hartstein, Sgt Kempson, F/S O'Sullivan and F/Sgt W Eaton were all killed. Sgt Bryant, Sgt Reeves and P/O Woodward were captured and became prisoners of war in Stalag Luft 3.

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Philip's older brother Jack received letters after the war from the crew members that survived. 'I received letters after the war from their crews to describe how he died after getting their crews safely out of the aircraft – in Philip's case by parachute over Germany. As far as I can tell, he was shot in the back by a German sniper when suspended by his parachute.' His surviving Lancaster bomber-crew said he kept the plane on an even keel, after having been shot-up by German night-fighters, for them all to bail out successfully and see out the end of the war in a prisoner-of-war camp. He successfully bailed out himself, only to be shot dead by ground fire, before reaching the ground.'

He was a King's Scout Master before the war, and I remember a Memorial Service held for him at the Brondesbury Park Synagogue, in 1944; and his old troop attending to pay their respects. He was killed on the night of Kol-Nidre (Yom Kippur). He and his crew had already finished a complete tour of operations, but his commanding officer needed one more plane to make up a flight, so he and his lads were all volunteers on that fateful night. The significance of my making mention that he was an early Pathfinder pilot, was that to form the new unit, the RAF picked only their very best pilots - Grego Cowan (Philip's nephew).

Philip was 21 years old when he was killed and is buried in the Hanover War Cemetery. He is also remembered on his brother Jack's memorial stone in Golders Green Cemetery.