

F/Eng Sgt Milton Harold 'Mick' Bender DFC RAF (1800537)

Milton was born on 9 August 1923 in Whitechapel, London to Samuel and Rose nee Rosenberg. Samuel and Rose married in London City in 1919. They had three children, Cecil Aubrey born 1921 and twins Milton and sister Sheila in 1923.

Milton's father Samuel was born on 3 May 1898 in Whitechapel. In 1901 he was living at 49, Mile End Road, Mile End Old Town. His father, Isaac who was born 14th July 1873 in Poland, was a boot shopkeeper. Samuel's mother Annie was born the same year in Poland, and they married in Whitechapel in 1891. Milton's mother Annie Steinkel was the daughter of Moritz Steinkel who was born in 1841 in Russia, a barber and Nahra who was born in 1848 in Russia. In 1891 they were living at Black Lion Yard, Whitechapel. Sister Betzie (1871) was a dressmaker, Annie (1873) and Eve (1876) were both tailoress, brother Marks (1879) and sister Kathi (1886) were at school.

Their daughter Fanny was born 1893, Esther in 1895, Marks in 1897 and Samuel in 1898 were all born in Mile End. In 1911 the family had moved to No 51 on the same road and Isaac obtained his naturalisation in 1906 and was at that time working as a plywood manufacturer. They stated that in 1911 they had been married 20 years. Fanny was working as a clerk, Esther a dressmaker, Marks was working with his father and Samuel was still at school. Another son Joseph was born in 1906. Marks (Jack) served in WW1 in the 8th Battalion, Royal Fusiliers. He was a Lance Corporal when he was killed in action on 20 July 1915 in Houplines, France.

<https://www.jewsfww.uk/jack-bender-2560.php>

In 1939 the Bender family were living at 68 Amhurst Park, Hackney, London. Rose was looking after the home; Cecil was a manager in the clothing trade and Sheila was a millinery apprentice. In 1946 Sheila married Raymond Smith in Willesden, Middlesex. Samuel was staying with his father when the census was taken, and it states that Isaac Bender was widowed and a director of a ladies' gown manufacturer. Samuel was listed as a manager of a ladies' gown manufacturer. Their address was 1A Portland Avenue, Hackney.

Milton Harold Bender

Milton attended Marylebone Grammar School and is remembered on their Roll of Honour. He is also remembered on the Golders Green Synagogue Memorial.

Milton and his crew were posted in to 460 Squadron from 1667 HCU on 17th September 1943.



Back row: (L-R) Bender, Billett, Chapman, Hodge. Front row (L-R): Crosby, Robb, Suffren. Photo from 'www.ozatwar.com'

On his 2nd operation with the squadron he was onboard Lancaster JA680 which took off on the night of 27/28 September 1943 from RAF Binbrook at 19.49 to undertake an operational flight to bomb Hanover. On the return flight the aircraft's navigational equipment failed and in poor visibility they drifted too far north, crossing the East Yorkshire coast instead of the Lincolnshire coast. The crew were able to get a weak signal from their base but were unable to see anything so the pilot instructed the crew to prepare to abandon the aircraft, immediately they received an instruction from their base to descend to 400 feet. Believing they must be over the Binbrook area they came down through cloud and after descending the navigator fired a yellow flare cartridge. They then realised that they were only flying around ten feet off the ground. At this stage, the aircraft was being flown so slowly that it would not climb so the pilot belly landed the aircraft in a field near the village of Aldbrough at 03.20hrs.

The crew were:

Pilot - F/Sgt Peter Alan Crosby RAAF (416656). Of Seacliff, South Australia.

Wireless Operator / Air Gunner - F/Sgt Leslie Harold Chapman RAAF (410641), of Stawell, Victoria, Australia.

Flight Engineer - Sgt Milton Harold Bender RAFVR (1800537), of Golders Green, Middlesex.

Bomb Aimer - F/Sgt Clive Billett RAAF (414191). Of Brisbane, Queensland, Australia.

Navigator - F/Sgt Charles Edward Suffren RAAF (409280), of Ballarat, Victoria, Australia.

Air Gunner - P/O Laurence William Robb RAAF (418879), wife of Ivanhoe, Victoria, Australia.

Air Gunner - Sgt Stanley Frederick Hodge RAAF (426100).

On their 20th operation, Lancaster ME663 took off 21.20 on the 9 April 1944 from RAF Binbrook to lay mines in Baltic waters. The aircraft was shot down on its homeward bound journey by a night-fighter and crashed at 03.30 on the 10 April 1944 near Gunderup, Denmark. Five of the crew were killed and are buried in Esbjerg (Fourfelt) Cemetery, Denmark. Stanley Hodge eventually became a Prisoner of War. F/O Charles Suffren DFC landed heavily and broke his back, he was also taken Prisoner of War but died in hospital in Germany on 16th February 1945 and he is buried Durnbach War Cemetery.

Milton Bender received a commission on 23rd February 1944. Both he and Peter Crosby were awarded a posthumous DFC which was gazetted on 21st December 1945 but back dated to 8th April 1944.

Milton is buried in Esbjerg (Fourfelt) Cemetery in Denmark Grave A 7 11 with the inscription: - 'Dearly Loved and Sadly Missed by His Heartbroken Mum, Dad, Sister and Brother.'

Letter To Mrs Henriksen from Mrs Rose Bender 11th June 1946 (courtesy:-

<https://www.airmen.dk/a014195.htm>)

Dear Mrs Henriksen, First I must introduce myself as the mother of Pilot Officer Milton Bender, who was the flight engineer of the plane that came down over Horsens on April 10 1944, where unfortunately all the darling boys got killed, except Stanley Hodge of Australia with whom you have been in touch.

My son was the only English boy of the crew, all the others being Australians. I have therefore been in touch with all the mothers out there since the tragedy, and we write to each other quite a lot.

Before I proceed any further with my letter, I want to tell you how wonderful you were to have located Stanley. When I heard all about it, it absolutely thrilled me to the bone. Stanley came up to see me after he came back from Germany, and when I opened the door to him it was like seeing somebody coming back from the dead.

In Mrs Crosby's last letter to me she told me that a Danish friend of hers wrote to you for her, and that she had received two very nice letters from you. I immediately wrote back to Mrs Crosby and asked her to let me have your address, as I wanted to write to you. Her letter came yesterday, and in it she mentioned that you sent her a map of Denmark showing where the plane came down. That's why I know it was Horsens. I myself had a letter from the Air Ministry here telling me where the darlings were buried. It is in a cemetery called Gravelund Cemetery, Esbjerg. They gave me the plot number etc.

I myself would very much like to go over to Denmark to visit the graves of our darling boys. I got in touch with the Danish Consul, but they advised me not to make any attempt at going over unless I can get somebody out in Denmark to try and fix me up with accommodation. When I definitely make up my mind to go, and let you know the date, I wonder if you would be good enough to try and get me fixed up in a hotel or even some private accommodation out there. I understand it will take me about a day and a half each way, and I should therefore probably want to stay for a couple of nights or so...