

Lancaster R5728 VN-L, 50 Squadron Royal Air Force

Flight Sergeant Cameron Duff Kennedy, a wool classer of Nundah, Brisbane, Queensland was just nineteen when he enlisted in the Royal Australian Air Force in August 1940. Six weeks later he embarked for Canada to completed his training with the Royal Canadian Air Force. In June 1941 he was sent to England and attached to the Royal Air Force for further training, firstly at 3 Personnel Reception Centre, Bournemouth and then at RAF Lossiemouth, Moray, Scotland, followed by RAF Yatesbury, Wiltshire and RAF Cottesmore in Rutland. On 22 April 1942, he was briefly assigned to 455 Squadron RAAF before being transferred to 50 Squadron RAF two days later. F/Sgt Kennedy was killed in action as a member of the crew of Lancaster R5728 VN-L during an air battle over Belgium on a bombing mission to Saarbrücken, Germany.

Date:	30 July 1942
Time:	03:06
Aircraft:	Avro Lancaster Mk I
Squadron:	50 Squadron Royal Air Force
Registration:	R5728
Squadron Code:	VN-L
Fate:	Shot Down
Fatalities:	All seven crew members
Location:	Braine-le-Comte, Belgium
Departure:	RAF Swinderby, Lincolnshire, England
Destination:	Saarbrücken, Germany

The Lancaster bomber of 50 Squadron RAF left RAF Swinderby shortly after midnight on 29 July 1942 and was on a bombing mission to Saarbrücken, Germany, located near the border with France. In the early stage of the mission, shortly after entering Belgium air space it was attacked by a German night fighter, piloted by Oberleutnant Reinhold Eckardt of VII./NJG 3 from St Trond suffering crippling damage and causing a fire on board.

As the Lancaster burned the bomber dropped its bomb load. Thirty fire-bombs landed at the villages of Graty and Silly in Belgium, fortunately no significant damage was done. The Lancaster flew further east finally exploding above Braine-le-Comte some 3 kilometres to the north-east of Soignies. One of the four engines broke through the roof of a boys' school that served as a shelter for German troops. Eleven soldiers of the Radfahr-Abteilung 23 (belonging to the 23 Infantry Division) were killed and another 24 Germans wounded. Three houses were set on fire.

All seven crew members on board the Lancaster were killed. Three of the crew were Australian.

Crew

- Pilot: J/16685 Sgt Leslie Foster RCAF - Braine-le-Comte Communal Cemetery Plot II Row C Grave 2.
- Flight Engineer: 1123342 Sgt Douglas John Ware - Braine-le-Comte Communal Cemetery Plot II Row C Grave 5.
- Observer: 113935 Pilot Officer Robert Hugh Curran - Braine-le-Comte Communal Cemetery Plot II Row C Grave 7.

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- Air Gunner: Aus/404406 Flt Sgt Cameron Duff Kennedy RAAF - Braine-le-Comte Communal Cemetery Plot II Row C Grave 1.
- Wireless Operator/Air Gunner: Aus/401264 Sgt Allan Wyles RAAF - Braine-le-Comte Communal Cemetery Plot II Row C Grave 4.
- Wireless Operator/Air Gunner: Aus/403451 Sgt Cyril John Stallard RAAF - Braine-le-Comte Communal Cemetery Plot II Row C Grave 3.
- Air Gunner: 1290940 Sgt Cyril Alfred Bowes - Braine-le-Comte Communal Cemetery Plot II Row C Grave 6



The bodies of the seven crew were recovered and buried in Braine-le-Comte Communal Cemetery on 1 August 1942, where 5000 Belgians gathered to pay homage to these men of the R.A.F. who gave their lives in the cause of Belgian freedom. Among those present was a member of the Belgian Royal family. The presence of German soldiers and guards could not prevent this spontaneous demonstration of respect and gratitude. Local foundryman Yvon Brancart made headstones of 'crazy mosaic glasswork', bearing each airman's name (where known) and the RAF roundel. At great personal risk – since the Germans made frequent inspections – Brancart hid the headstones in his factory until the town's liberation in early September 1944.

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Although work to confirm the identity of the bodies in the graves had occurred after the war in October 1945, there was still doubt over the precise resting place of each crew member. On 23 July 1947 the seven graves were exhumed, and work undertaken to accurately identify the grave of each airman. Fortunately, four of the graves were readily identifiable by the airmen's brevets, whilst for two others (Flight Sgt Kennedy and Sgt Stallard) dental records were used. The seventh grave, that of Sgt Alan Wyles was then identified by elimination. Subsequently permanent headstones were erected over the graves.



F/Sgt DG Kennedy; P/O L Foster; Sgt CJ Stallard; Sgt A Wyles; Sgt DJ Ware; Sgt CA Bowes; P/O RH Curran.

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Memorial at Braine-le-Comte erected by Les Insoumis, a local Résistance organisation to the crew of Lancaster R5728 VN-L of 50 Squadron RAF that crashed in the town after being shot down by a German fighter on 30 July 1942.

The text of the tablet reads:

HERE REST THE BODIES OF THE BRAVE FALLEN ON SERVICE IN A FOREIGN LAND – FROM LES INSOUIMIS TO THEIR GLORIOUS COMRADES

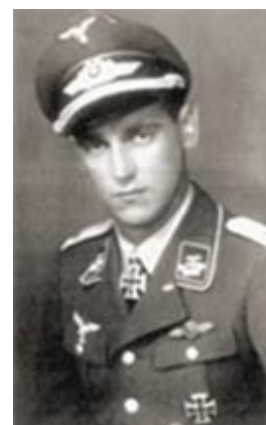


In an ironic twist, Oberleutnant Reinhold Eckardt the German Luftwaffe night fighter ace and recipient of the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross who shot down Lancaster R5728 VN-L was also killed in the early hours of 30 July 1942.

German intelligence was aware Bomber Command had organised a large raid on Saarbrücken. Eckardt took off in his Messerschmitt Bf 110 "D5+AR", with Feldwebel Frank, his radio-operator, to intercept the bomber stream. He was Staffelkapitän of the 7th Staffel of Nachtjagdgeschwader 3, and at that moment one of the most experienced night fighters of the Luftwaffe.

During that night he proved for one last time his night-fighting capabilities. At 01.20 they intercepted Stirling R9161 of 149 Sqn. Only one of the Stirling crew survived the crash, which occurred in the French Ardennes. The Germans then flew to the north, cruised the skies south of Brussels, and shot down Lancaster R5782 of 50 Sqn and Halifax R9442 of 102 Sqn. Both crews perished respectively near Braine-le-Comte and Corbais. They were Eckardt's 21st and 22nd career victories.

However, during a fourth interception the tail gunner on a British bomber hit the Messerschmitt. Feldwebel Frank was able to bail out, Reinhold Eckardt also left the cabin but was caught with his parachute in the tailplane. The damaged Messerschmitt pulled him towards a sudden death near Kampenhout, Brussels.



Credits: <http://www.inmemories.com/Cemeteries/brainelecomte.htm>
<https://aviation-safety.net/wikibase/192597>
<https://www.w1cemeteries.com/braine-le-comte-communal-cemetery.html>
http://users.telenet.be/airwareurope/en/bergingen/messerschmitt_eckardt_e.htm