

PELDON HISTORY PROJECT

JOHN SCALES - BOMBER PILOT

Researched & compiled by Geoff Gonella

Introduction

This Profile complements the one by Edwin Sparrow (Mersea Museum https://www.merseamuseum.org.uk/mmresdetails.php?col=MM&typ=ID&pid=OOD_209).



Early days

John Scales was born in June 1920, the eldest of three sons (John, George and Arthur) of Edward Herbert Athol and Victoria Maud Scales. The family moved from London to a farm near Vange, Essex, funded by John's grandfather E.H. Scales, a New Zealander who was successful in the shipping of wool. The land turned out to be poor and susceptible to flooding, so the farm was sold and the family bought Harvey's Farm, Peldon, Essex in 1933. (1)(2)

John and younger brother George went to Colchester Royal Grammar School, where they both excelled at sports, especially running. (1)

Early work

In 1939 John was listed as a Cowman (Assisting Father), living at Harvey's Farm and single with no children. (2)



War service

By 1943 John was in the RAF Volunteer Reserve with the rank of Flying Officer, based in 466 Squadron of the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF). His Service Number was 120525.

Note. This squadron was formed in late 1942 in Driffield, Yorkshire as a night bomber squadron connected to Bomber Command. Initially it had personnel from around the Commonwealth, but towards the end of the war the pilots and crew members were increasingly Australian. At first the squadron used Vickers Wellington medium bombers. On 27 December 1942 it transferred to RAF Leconfield, East Riding, Yorkshire and flew its first operation on 13 January 1943. Its main purposes were strategic bombing of Germany and the laying sea mines in the North Sea. In 1943 the Squadron changed over to Handley Page Halifax four-engined heavy bombers, in the latest versions, II and III. (3)

There is little in the public domain about John's training, postings and flying record. All that could be ascertained was:

3 November 1943

John and another Leconfield bomber pilot, Pat Edwards, were sent to 158 Squadron at RAF Lisset near Bridlington, Yorkshire, to do '2nd pilot trips'. (i.e. being an additional pilot in another bomber on an actual raid, to get as a new pilot, the 1st raid experience). In the late afternoon they were both airborne as part of a force dispatched to bomb Dusseldorf, from which they returned safely. (4)



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

UK0965

A Halifax III bomber of 466 Squadron at RAF Leconfield

20 December 1943

On the late afternoon and evening John and his crew were part of a major bombing raid on Frankfurt. The following paragraphs are extracts from an Archive Report of another Leconfield bomber on the same raid:

"Long before dawn the teleprinters of Bomber Command were busily chattering away, conveying all the necessary instructions for another major raid on a German city. That night, a force of some 650 aircraft comprising 390 Lancasters, 257 Halifaxes, and 3 Mosquitos was to be dispatched on what would be the heaviest raid of the war on Frankfurt. Zero hour was to be 19.35.

4 RAF Mosquitos were to follow up at +40, +45, +50 and +55 aiming at fires in order to hamper firefighting efforts. A force of Lancasters and Mosquitos was to carry out a diversionary attack on Mannheim shortly before the main attack.

At 19.29 Blind Markers and Supporters were to illuminate the target followed by Visual Markers at 19.31 and Backers Up from 19.33 until 19.53.

The main attack, led by two Halifaxes and followed by 3 waves of Lancasters was timed to last for 17 minutes until 19.52 hours.

16 aircraft of 466 Squadron were ordered for this operation, the first main operation by the Squadron using Halifax IIIs. The John Scales crew was one of the 16 crews detailed for the raid. The first of the 16 Halifaxes was away at 16.44, the others following at approximately one minute intervals until by 17.05 they were all airborne. Fuel taken was 1808 gallons, which was sufficient for 6 to 7 hours flying.

Once in formation the whole bomber stream crossed the East Anglian coast at Southwold, over the North Sea, across Holland and into Belgium. Southwest of Liege the bomber stream turned eastward towards Germany and Frankfurt.

Unknown to the crews of the bomber force, the German control rooms were able to plot the bomber force as soon as it left the English coast and were able to continue plotting it all the way to Frankfurt. There were many combats on the route to the target, the first of these at 18.19 just south of Gilze en Rijen in the Netherlands. At least 10 bombers were lost to fighters on the outward journey.

The Pathfinder Force had prepared their ground-marking plan based on a forecast of clear weather, but when they arrived over the target they found it shrouded in 8/10ths cloud. The resulting marking was not good, and a German decoy fire site southeast of Frankfurt and their use of dummy target indicators compounded the problem.

Flying at between 17,000 and 20,000 feet, the first wave of 100 Halifaxes bombed the target from zero hour to zero hour+3, followed immediately by 138 Halifaxes of the second wave up until zero hour+7. In the target area the heavy flak was at first predicted, but it subsided to a moderate barrage, bursting at between 17,000 and 20,000 feet. Though this was the height at which the bombers were bombing, only 2 were seen to be brought down over the target.

The briefed route for the homebound journey was to be about ten miles east of the city then north for about 35 miles, then west towards Belgium." (5)

Meanwhile, at RAF Leconfield the details of their 14 bombers that took off on this raid were logged in the Operations Record Book. The following table is a transcription of what was logged for John's aircraft and crew (6)

Date	Aircraft Type & Number	Crew	Duty	Time up	Time down	Details of Sortie or Flight
20/21 .12.43	Halifax III HX-236	F/O Scales. J	Captain	17:03	-	This aircraft took off at 17:03 hours. Nothing has been heard from it since, and it has been reported missing.
		Sgt. Headford R.T.H.	B/A			
		F/S Ferris. W	Nav.			
		F/S Matthews J.R.G.	W/AG			
		P/O Lunnis R.H.	R/G			
		Aus. 419319 F/S LeGrand A.M.	MU/AG			
		Sgt. Townson T.G.	F/E			

Note. The abbreviations used for duties are assumed as: B/A = Bomb Aimer; Nav. = Navigator; W/AG = Wireless Operator; R/G = Rear Gunner; MU/AG = Mid Upper Gunner; F/E = Flight Engineer.

John had taken off next to last of the 16 Halifaxes detailed by 466 Squadron for this operation. His bomb load was 1 x 2000 lb HC, 36 x 30 lb, 750 x 4lb and 60 x 4lb 'X' type bombs. Special equipment on board was 'Monica' - Radar fitted in the rear of the aircraft, designed to give some early warning of night fighters. HX236 was detailed to bomb in the second wave.

After being recorded as missing in the Operations Record Book there was still no contact from the aircraft, and a Consequential Report dated 22 December 1943 was communicated by the Wing Commander of RAF Leconfield to the Air Ministry in London. It confirmed that Halifax III HX-236 flown by F/O J. Scales had not been heard of since take-off.

Details of the fate of HX236 are unknown, except that it crashed on the outbound flight, presumably near Winzenheim where the crew members were buried in a collective grave (Winzenheim is approximately 40 miles west south west of Frankfurt). They were re-interred at Rheinberg War Cemetery, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Germany, on 31 March 1948 in Collective Grave XVIII.B.19-25. (7)

Memorials

John is officially remembered in:-

- 'Roll of Honour 1939-1945 The Men and Women from Peldon who served in the Forces During the Second World War' (on the wall of the Nave of St. Mary the Virgin Church, Peldon, Essex. (Mersea Museum https://www.merseamuseum.org.uk/mmphoto.php?pid=PH01_161).
- Commonwealth War Graves Commission <https://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/2032681/scales,-john/> (See Commemorative Certificate, downloadable from this website).



John Scales original grave marker at Rheinberg War Cemetery



Headstone in Rheinberg War Cemetery in Germany
With thanks to <http://466and462squadrons.com/>

The following are dedicated to 466 Squadron:

- Memorial plaque in St. Catherine's Church, Arram Road, Leconfield.
<https://www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/158575/>
- Royal Australian Air Force Memorial (includes a plaque dedicated to 462-466 Squadrons). <http://www.monumentaustralia.org.au/display/98261-royal-australian-air-force-memorial>

Sources of information:

- (1) 'Full Ahead Together - The Life Story of George Scales' (biography of George Scales, a brother of John) by Ian Baird, privately published 2005, 2nd edition 2007. No ISBN.
- (2) The 1939 England and Wales Register.
- (3) Virtual War Memorial Australia <https://vwma.org.au/explore/units/743>
- (4) 'Aircrew Remembered' website, a specific extract from an Archive Report about another pilot from 466 Squadron at RAF Leconfield. (<http://aircrewremembered.com/edwards-patrick-john.html>)
- (5) Ditto, various other extracts from the same Archive Report.
- (6) Operational Record Book for 466 Squadron, page 373 of 1329 pages refers:
<https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Gallery151/dist/JGalleryViewer.aspx?B=1191788&S=1&N=1329&R=0#/SearchNRetrieve/NAAMedia/ShowImage.aspx?B=1191788&T=P&S=373>
- (7) Additional information and photographs of grave marker & Consequential Report provided by Roy Wilcock, Senior Research Editor of Aircrew Remembered.

Acknowledgements

Extracts from the Archive Report for 466 Squadron Halifax HX273 are by kind permission of Aircrew Remembered www.aircrewremembered.com/edwards-patrick-john.html

COPY.

No. 366 Squadron, R.A.A.F.,
ROYAL AIR FORCE,
Leconfield,
East Yorks.

Aircrew Remembered

REF: 4662/2041/1/P.1.

22nd December, 1943.

Sir,

I have the honour to refer to you the signal P.59 dated 21st December, 1943, despatched by this unit.

Halifax III aircraft HX 236 captained and flown by P/O J. Soales, was detailed for a bombing attack on Frankfurt on the night of 20th December, 1943.

This aircraft took off at 17.01 hours carrying 1 x 2000 H.C., 9 B.B.C., 90 x 4; + 4 B.B.C., 8 x 30, also 1608 gallons of fuel which allowed for 6 to 7 hours flying time, and has not been heard of since.

The crew consisted of:

120525	P/O	J. Soales	Pilot
1321178	Sgt.	R.T. Headford	Air Bomber
1376974	F/Sgt.	W. Ferris	Navigator
1287658	F/Sgt.	J. Matthews	W.op/Air.
52039	P/O	R.H. Luniss	Rear Gunner
Aus. 419319	F/S	A.N. Le-Grand	Mid Upper Gunner
1804594	Sgt.	T.O. Tomson	Flight Engineer.

I have the honour to be,
Sir,
Your obedient servant,

Wing Commander.

The Under Secretary of State for Air,
Air Ministry (P.A. Casualties),
73-77 Oxford Street,
LONDON, W.1.

Halifax HX236 Circumstantial Report

Read More

John scales, Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve by Edwin Sparrow

https://www.merseamuseum.org.uk/mmresdetails.php?col=MM&pid=OOD_209