

Sergeant William John Simpson

Lancaster Squadron 467



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Figure 1: Pictured Squadron 467, upper left to right: sergeant Joseph Melling, Sergeant Douglas Coombe, Sergeant Harold Boardley and Sergeant Francis Doncaster. Front row: Flight Sergeant William John Simpson, Flight Officer Gerald Sudds and Pilot Officer Cecil O'Brien. *Aircrew Remembered*. 2015. *467 Squadron Lancaster III 538 Pilot Officer Cecil O'Brien*. [Online]. [17 June 2023]. Available from: [27/28th January 1944 467 Squadron Lancaster III ED539 P/O. O'Brien \(aircrewremembered.com\)](https://www.aircrewremembered.com)

Lancaster Squadron 467 consisted of seven men: Pilot Cecil O'Brien, Flight Engineer Sergeant Douglas James Coombe, Navigator Sergeant Harold Boardley, Gerald Henry Sudds, William John Simpson, Joseph James Melli and Sgt Francis Herbert Doncaster. Squadron 467 and Sergeant William John Simpson flew to Berlin on 27th January 1944 at approximately 5.40pm.

The aircraft were placed in a dangerous position as Berlin was very overcast. The thick clouds hanging over the city meant that the Bomber Command were unable to track the exact whereabouts of the aircrafts and their corresponding squadrons. Following the raid, it was reported by local newspapers that 567 people in Berlin were killed in the course of the night, 132 of whom were foreign labourers.

The aircraft belonging to the squadron, Lancaster Bomber E539, was shot down over Berlin by the 1st Flak Division. The aircraft thereafter exploded, crashing at Berlin Köpenick. The crash site was confirmed at 8.38pm, when the aircraft was found at Wendenschloßstraße (*Aircrew Remembered*, 2023). The remains of the men were thereafter transported to the Olympia Lazarett (Olympic Village), to be buried at Elstal. Following the end of the Second World War, the bodies of the crewmembers were reburied at the 1939-1945 Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery in Berlin.

The Discovery

Flight Sergeant William John Simpson's remains, however, were never found. Simpson is therefore only commemorated by name at the Berlin 1939-1945 Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery and also at the memorial in Runnymede, Surrey, Great Britain.



Figure 2: The identification tag of Flight Sergeant William John Simpson, discovered in the area surrounding the former 1936 Olympische Lazarette, Olympische Dorf, Berlin, where it is expected that the Lancaster Bomber of Squadron 467 crashed.

Photo courtesy of museum director Jan Bejšovec.

In recent years, the identification of Flight Sergeant William John Simpson, in addition to remains of the Lancaster aircraft, were found in the former Olympische Lazarette (Olympische Dorf) in Berlin. The following photos are courtesy of Jan Bejšovec, museum director responsible for the former 1936 Olympische Lazarette, Olympische Dorf.



Figure 3: Remains of aircraft, expected to belong to Lancaster Bomber ED539 of the 467 Squadron.

Photo courtesy of museum director Jan Bejšovec.