

1317697 – Flight Sergeant Hiram Edwin Davies – Air Gunner, 106 Squadron, Royal Air Force

Hiram was born on 21st February 1921 to Edwin (b. 10/03/1892) and Dora Susan Davies, née Lewis (b.1894) of 2 Waterloo Terrace, Waterloo. They had married on 8th June 1919 at St James' Church, Rudry. Edwin worked at the Waterloo Tin Plate Works and we believe he served in the Merchant Navy during WW1.

Hiram's Mother Dora died on 5th June 1929 from tuberculosis and is buried at St James' Church. His father remarried Alice Mary Lewis (b. 03/11/1892) in 1930 – Alice was Dora's sister. We believe she died in 1931 and is also buried in St James' Churchyard. At that time, they were living at 7 Waterloo Terrace. Hiram's Father died in 1971 and he too is buried at St James.



Hiram joined the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve in 1940 and by 1943 was a Flight Sergeant and the mid upper turret gunner on Lancaster W4367 of 106 Squadron RAF, based at Syerston near Newark in Nottinghamshire.

Hiram's Commanding Officer was Guy Gibson, shortly to win worldwide fame as the leader of 617 Squadron, the 'Dambusters'.

Target: Gelsenkirchen

In the afternoon of Friday 25 June 1943, Hiram (age 22) and the rest of the 106 crews were briefed for the night's attack. It was to be Gelsenkirchen in the Ruhr.

This was to be a strong effort. 473 aircraft, comprising 214 Lancasters, 134 Halifaxes, 73 Stirling, 40 Wellingtons and 12 'Oboe' Mosquitoes acting as pathfinders for blind bombing as cloud cover was thought to be 7/10ths over the target.

Hiram's crew mates on W4367 were:

Pilot:	Pilot Officer Peter John Page, age 22
Flight Engineer:	Sgt. Edward Ernest Tyler, age 19
Navigator:	Flt. Sgt. James (Hank) Hancock, age 31
Bomb Aimer:	Flt. Sgt. John MacMillan Age 32
Wireless Operator:	Flt. Sgt. Joseph Pass Age 27
Air Gunner:	Flt Sgt. John Charles Welch Age 22



We believe this is a picture of Hiram's Lancaster W4367 but are still working on authenticating it.

Crews liked to stay together but casualties, rotations and replacements inevitably meant that men would regularly find themselves with new crew members. In Hiram's crew, the wireless operator, Joseph Pass was an old hand having transferred recently to 106 Squadron from 49 Squadron, where he was the W/O on the Squadron Commanders' aircraft, completing 19 sorties and 113 flying hours. Just a month before, he had been awarded the Distinguished Flying Medal (DFM).



A Lancaster of 106 Squadron is bombed up in readiness for a mission.

Hiram left his dog tags behind in his quarters, before kitting up. This decision was to have consequences later.

At dusk, they boarded Lancaster W4367 of 106 Squadron for what was to be their last flight. Fourteen Lancasters of 106 Squadron lined up on Syerston's tarmac for take-off lead by S/L Young and they all took off safely between 2230 and 2300 hours. The flight out was relatively quiet. The weather was poor with total cloud cover for most of the outbound flight.

On reaching the target, it was found to be completely covered by cloud. The Oboe Mosquitos were designed to direct blind bombing through cloud, but on this night, almost half the Mosquitos had equipment malfunctions and so the target was unable to be accurately marked. The result was a wide scattering of the main force's bombs across the Ruhr and Gelsenkirchen escaped major damage.

The 106 Squadron aircraft bombed between 0121 and 0153 hours, 26th June and those returning commented on the ferocity of the flak and the abundance of night fighters.

The German night fighters had had a frustrating night's hunting for the bomber stream on its outward flight, due to the cloud cover, lack of moon light and successful interference of their radars by British jamming. However, as the bombers reached Holland on the return flight, the moon emerged and some of the cloud cover cleared.

From the main force, thirty aircraft were lost; the highest percentage suffered by Bomber Command up to that date. 106 Squadron suffered its equal worst losses of the war to date, with four aircraft lost from the 14 dispatched.

R5572 crashed in central Holland and produced the only survivor from the four crews. Sgt. Davidson, RCAF, reported his aircraft broke up in the air and he was thrown clear. W4256 crashed in Northern Holland with the crew of Sgt. White and EE125 was lost without trace with the crew of B Flight Commander S/L Young.

Hiram's Lancaster, W4367, had almost reached the Dutch coast when it was attacked by a Messerschmitt Bf 110 G-4 night fighter flown by Oberleutnant Hans Leickhardt of Nachtgeswader 5 on detachment to NJG 1. Leickehart was to go on to become an 'ace' with 13 kills. He was to die in unknown circumstances on 5/6 March 1945.

Hiram's Lancaster crashed into the IJsselmeer with no survivors. Pilot Peter Page was from Lutterworth in Leicestershire and had only recently married. His widow Joan would remain single for the rest of her life.

After the war, the lake was reclaimed and the crash site is now in the village of Dronton, NNE of Harderwijk.

Hiram's body was never located or his remains identified, which perhaps would have been possible if he'd worn his dog tags. He is commemorated on Panel 136 of the Air Forces Memorial, or Runnymede Memorial, near Egham, Surrey, dedicated to some 20,456 men and women from air forces of the British Empire who were lost in air and other operations during World War II.

The bodies of all of Hiram's crew mates except fellow gunner John Welch were recovered and are buried in Harderwijk general Cemetery.

