

John Vernon GUSTOFSON (1909 – 1943)



422656 Flying Officer

Air Bomber

L.V.GUSTOFSON

Air Bomber

Royal N.Z. Air Force

90 Squadron RAF

30th May 1943 Age 34

(No photograph available)



John Vernon Gustofson was born in 1909, the son of Daniel and Helen Mabel Gustofson of Wellington City, New Zealand.

He married Marcelle Elaine Barber and in 1935 they were living at Pembroke Street, Carterton and at this time John was employed as an Insurance Agent. Their daughter Elizabeth Margaret was born on 27 August 1936.

John Vernon Gustofson joined the RNZAF and completed training in Canada at RCAF, 6 Bombing and Gunnery School, Mountain View, Ontario, graduating on 23 October 1942. The Mountain View aerodrome opened 23 June 1941 to host No. 6 Bombing and Gunnery School (6 B&GS), one of eleven bombing and gunnery schools that opened across Canada under the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan.

He also attended RCAF, 10 Air Observer School, Chatham, New Brunswick. This was the location of training units of No 3 Training Command of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan No 10 Air Observer School from mid-1941 to the end of the war, training both navigators and wireless operators.

On completion of his training he was posted to England where he joined 90 Squadron RAF which was equipped with Short Stirling Bombers and was, at the time, based at RAF Ridgewell, an airfield which was opened in December 1942 as a satellite of RAF Stradishall.

Ridgewell airfield was an early example of stations completed to Class A heavy bomber airfield design for the RAF. It had three intersecting runways each 6,500 ft in length, thirty-six hardstands, two T-2 hangars and accommodation for 2,900 men in temporary buildings.



RAF Ridgewell

On Saturday 29 / Sunday 30 May 1943, Stirling aircraft from 90 Squadron took part in a raid on Wuppertal, Germany. In total 719 aircraft took part in this raid and of these 36 were lost.

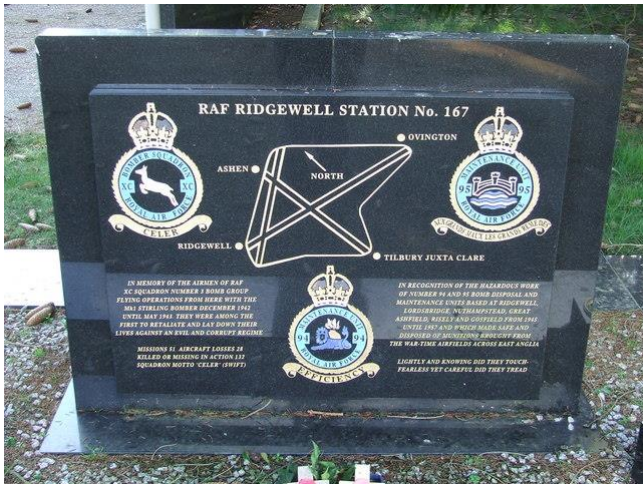
Stirling I EF397/K took off at 2310 captained by Plt Off E A Norton, RAF with John on-board. It was their first operation. On return to England the bomber was diverted to RAF Stradishall, Suffolk because the penultimate aircraft to land at RAF Ridgewell had burst a tyre and was obstructing the runway.

The Stirling flew over Stradishall, the highest point of the county, where the cloud base was down to about 500 feet. At 200 feet it then proceeded to make a circuit, but on turning back towards the airfield at 0440 it struck the ground with its port wing tip and crashed 2 miles north of the airfield. Of the seven crew, only the rear gunner survived, injured.

NZ42298 Sgt Lionel Fairfax Furner Johns, RNZAF, Navigator, NZ422656 Flight Off, Air Bomber John Vernon Gustofson, RNZAF (the only NZ'ers on that flight), together with Sgt George Arthur Francis Johnston (age 23) of Dublin, Ireland were buried in Haverhill Cemetery, Suffolk, while the other three airmen who died were all returned to their home towns in the UK for burial.

John was aged 34 years of age. It was his first operation.

The day after the raid, 90 squadron relocated at RAF Wrattling Common where it remained until 13 October 1943. From 30 June 1943, the airfield at Ridgewell was used by the USAAF 381st Bombardment Group (Heavy), arriving from Pueblo AAB, Colorado.



There is a memorial to the airmen of RAF XC (90) Squadron located on the site of the USAAF airfield hospital, where a small museum is also located.

In New Zealand his name is commemorated on the war memorial in Carterton (see photo below).

Also named on the memorial at Carterton is Flt Sgt E M Corlett RNZAF who was attached to 214 Squadron, RAF. He is also buried in Haverhill Cemetery.

The crew of Stirling I EF397/K were:

Pilot Officer 129558 Edward Norton

Flight Engineer - Sergeant 1340748 Edward George Brooke - RAFVR, 90 Squadron RAF.
Buried in Cadder Cemetery, Lanarkshire, Scotland.

Navigator - Sergeant 42298 Lionel Fairfax Furner Johns - RNZAF, 90 Squadron RAF.
Buried in Haverhill Cemetery, Suffolk.

Air Bomber - Flying Officer 422656 John Vernon Gustofson - RNZAF, 90 Squadron RAF.
Buried in Haverhill Cemetery, Suffolk.

Wireless Op / Air Gunner - Sergeant 1128694 William Christie Beck - RAFVR, 90 Squadron RAF.
Buried in Harton Cemetery, South Shields, Co Durham.

Air Gunner - Sergeant 1485790 George Arthur Francis Johnston - RAFVR, 90 Squadron RAF.
(originally from Dublin) Buried in Haverhill Cemetery, Suffolk.

Sergeant 1474536 John Olav Bradshaw RAFVR. He was injured in the crash. Sergeant Bradshaw returned to flying duties but was killed over Belgium on 14th July 1943 whilst still operational with 90 Squadron. He is buried in Heverlee War Cemetery, Belgium.

The Evening Post issue 131 on 4 June 1943 reported the death of John Vernon Gustofson.



AIR FORCE CASUALTIES

The following New Zealand air personnel, serving overseas, have been reported casualties:—

COCHRANE, Ellis A. G., Warrant Officer, missing on air operations. Mr. W. Cochrane, Parnell Street, Rawene, Auckland (f.).
GUSTOFSON, John V., Flying Officer, killed on active service. Mrs. M. E. **Gustofson**, 17 Pembroke Street, Carterton (w.); Mr. D. **Gustofson**, Rongomai, Eketahuna (f.).