

Sergeant John Charles SAMUEL

Service number 1853730
Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve
153 Squadron
Killed in action on 29 November 1944, aged 21

Born in Wales, John moved to Wells in 1934 when his father took over the Rose and Crown pub in St John Street. Early in the war he joined the Wells Fire Service and then when he was 18 he joined the RAF and trained to be a flight engineer. He died on his first operation flight when his Lancaster was hit by flak while attacking Dortmund in a daylight raid.



Avro Lancaster B.I heavy bomber

Photograph by Flt Lt Bertrand J. H. Daventry, RAF official photographer © IWM CH 6071
(<https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205018420>)

John's birth was registered in Pontypridd in the third quarter of 1923. His parents were John Samuel and Winifred Rose née Osmond, who was John's second wife. John senior's first wife, Florence Louise née Mead, died in 1918, and John had two stepsisters, Mary and Mildred, and a stepbrother, William, who is also on the Wells War Memorial. In 1911, the Samuels lived at 26, Bailey Street, Mountain Ash, and John's father was then a coal miner. They may have still been at that address when John was born.

John's mother, Winifred, was born in Bridgwater and raised in Wells, where, from about 1917, her father, Charles Osmond, was the landlord of the Rose and Crown public house on St John Street. In 1934, Charles Osmond, died, and so the Samuel family moved to Wells, where John senior became the new landlord of the Rose and Crown.

John attended the Blue School, and in September 1939 was living with his parents and his sister Mary at the Rose and Crown. During the early years of the war he was in the Wells Fire Service, probably as a messenger, and his father was an ARP Warden.

The *Wells Journal* of 11 July 1941 reported that John was best man at Mary's wedding to Gilbert Warman. Gilbert was then serving in the Royal Artillery and would take over the running of the pub when John senior retired in 1955.

John enlisted into the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve at Oxford at some point after November 1942. When he had completed his initial training, he went to Number 4 School of Technical Training at St Athan to train as a flight engineer. On graduation he went to one of the Heavy Conversion Units belonging to 1 Group: 1656, 1662 or 1667 Squadron. There he met up with the crew that he would fly

with, did his type conversion onto Lancaster bombers and started to gain flying experience, as this was the first time that his training had involved flying.

On 16 November 1944, John and his crew joined 'B' Flight of 153 Squadron at RAF Scampton, about 5 miles north of Lincoln. The squadron had been reformed as a bomber squadron the previous month and flew a combination of Lancaster B.I and B.III heavy bombers

The crew's first operational flight was on 29 November 1944. They took off at 12:15 in Lancaster P4-X (a type BI, serial number PD380) with a maximum bomb load of 14,000 lbs. At this stage of the war it was possible to fly daylight raids into Germany with a heavy escort. The mission is described in the squadron's Operations Record Book:¹

The Squadron was ordered to take part in an attack on Dortmund and 20 aircraft were detailed. This was a daylight attack and the Base Column² tactics were used, with an escort of 17 Squadrons of fighters. Take-off was at noon in good conditions of visibility and clear skies. One aircraft failed to take-off owing to engine trouble. The remainder formed up in Base Column and flew over 4-6/10ths cloud on the route. The target was covered by 4-6/10ths' cloud, base 2,000 feet, tops 6-7 thousand feet. No [target] markers were seen on the run-up with a result that bombing was rather scattered, mainly to the North East of the Aiming Point. The route home was made in similar conditions and all aircraft landed safely at Base with the exception of 'X' flown by F/Lt. Pow of whom nothing was heard after take-off. Flak was very active and 5 of our aircraft were damaged, but no fighters were encountered.

The aircraft that did not return was John's aircraft. It is now known that it disintegrated after being hit by anti-aircraft fire over Horde, about three miles south of Dortmund.³ In all, 294 Lancasters and 17 Mosquitos from squadrons in 1 and 8 Groups took part in the raid and six Lancasters were lost.

The crew of Lancaster P4-X were buried by the German authorities in the Dortmund Main Cemetery. On 11 December 1946, they were moved to the Reichwald Forest War Cemetery near Kleve in Germany, and John was buried in Section 4, Row B, Grave 13, next to his crew. John is also remembered on the rolls of honour at the Blue School, Wells Town Hall and Wells Cemetery.

Strangely, given his father's position, the only mention of John's service and death was one memorial printed in the *Wells Journal* on the day after the first anniversary of his death:

Proud and treasured memories of our son, John Charles, Flt. Sgt., R.A.F. killed in operations over Germany, Nov. 29th, 1944, aged 21. Always remembered by his Mum and Dad, Sisters.

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¹ Held at the National Archives, Kew, reference AIR-27-1029-21.

² All of the bombers from Scampton flew in a loose 'gaggle' of aircraft flying behind a leading 'vic' (a leading aircraft with one on either side slightly behind it); the aim being to keep the planes together and achieve a greater concentration of bombs on the target.

³ See <http://www.rafcommands.com/database/wardead/details.php?qnum=39884>.