

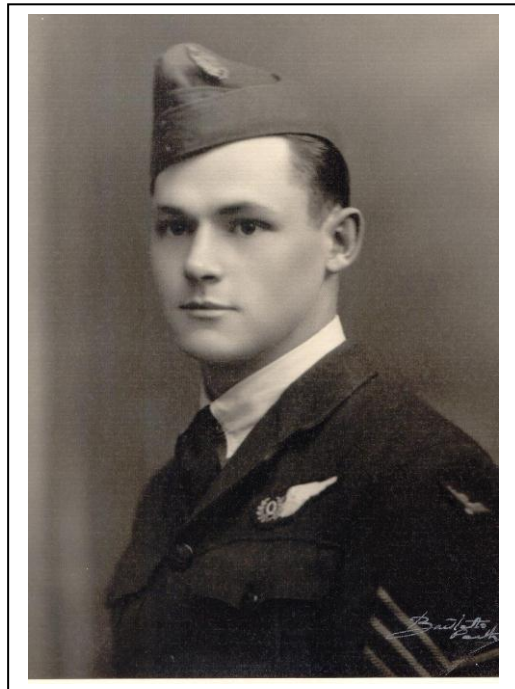


St George's College

PERTH · WESTERN AUSTRALIA

MICHAEL GODFREY BARRETT-LENNARD

13 JUNE 1920 TO 22 SEPTEMBER 1943



Michael was born at Guildford, the son of Kondut farmer Graham Barrett-Lennard and his wife Gladys. He was the fifth born in a family of seven, six of whom were boys.

Michael was not quite 10 years old when the severe effects of the 1930's Depression, and the loss by fire of the family home, made continuing the children's education extraordinarily difficult. Michael continued his schooling up to Year 10 through correspondence classes at home, alternating his studies with work on the farm, some of it beyond his years.

In 1940, following two years at Northam High School where he became a prefect, he enrolled in the Faculty of Engineering at The University of Western Australia, and came to St George's College. He only completed one year of his course before deciding, in 1941, to join the RAAF. He enlisted in Perth on 26 May.

An allotment from Michael's service pay, continuing until his death, enabled both his younger brothers to attend school in Northam after years of correspondence classes.

Like fellow Georgian Ted Parsons, Michael joined 460 Squadron RAAF which had been formed on 15 November 1941. The squadron moved from Brighton to Binbrook in May 1943, and in October it was re-equipped with Avro Lancasters and joined Bomber Command's No. 1 Group. The bulk of the squadron's operations formed part of the strategic bombing offensive against Germany. The squadron is regarded as having been the most efficient of the Australian bomber squadrons. It maintained consistently higher serviceability rates among its aircraft, set numerous operational records within Bomber Command, flew the most bombing raids of any Australian squadron, and was credited with the greatest tonnage of bombs dropped – 24,456 tonnes.

At 7pm on 22 September 1943, Lancaster bomber DV 219 took off from RAF Binbrook, laden with one 4,000lb and three 1,000lb bombs, and 64x30lb and 540x4lb incendiaries – a total load of five tonnes – heading for Hanover. At the controls was Flight Sergeant R.H. Hansen. Michael sat in the cockpit with him, as navigator. Flight Sergeant D.V. Cox was bomb aimer, and Flight Sergeant A.N.F. Rushton was an air gunner. Along with these Australians were three RAF crew: Sergeant L.O. Mott (wireless operator/air gunner), Flight Sergeant J.F. Sedgwick (flight engineer) and Sergeant N. Shepley (air gunner).

This was one of "Bomber" Harris's major missions, in which he committed almost the entire front line bombing fleet to a single raid. A total of 716 aircraft were involved - 322 Lancasters, 226 Halifaxes, 137 Stirlings, 26 Wellingtons, and 5 American B-17s that were undertaking the USAF's first night raid on Germany. This was the first of four heavy raids on Hanover, and Bomber Command tried a new tactic of using Pathfinders dropping markers on other cities as a diversion, in the hope of drawing away the Luftwaffe's night fighters.

The raid saw the loss of 3.7 percent of the force, which was lower than the recent average. However, W.A. author Peter Firkins who wrote a history of 460 Squadron, *Strike and Return*, had a different view:

It was back to business with a vengeance, however, when after two weeks' respite from ops., apart from a small mining operation, they attacked Hanover on 22nd September in great strength..... The returning crews reported good bombing results but their optimism was not substantiated by the official results, which reported very widespread bombing. The German night fighters were not fooled by diversionary raids on Oldenburg and Emden and provided bitter opposition, the squadron losing two crews, those captained by Flight Sergeants R.N. Hansen and C.K. Smith.

Nothing was heard from DV 219 after take-off, and it did not return to base.

Post-war enquiries established that the aircraft was shot down and crashed at Branstedt near Vechta at 11.30pm that night. Since the raid on Hanover had occurred some two hours earlier, they must have dropped their bombs and been on the way home. Wreckage was scattered over a wide area and all the crew were killed. The remains of the crew were recovered by the Germans and buried in Vechta cemetery. The four RAAF crew members were reinterred at the Sage War Cemetery, 21km south of Oldenburg in Germany.

In 1952 Mr & Mrs Barrett-Lennard donated a fine Hans Heysen water colour to the College in memory of Michael, and it continues to hang in the Warden's office. When it was formally installed at the College in mid-1945 the Warden, "Josh" Reynolds, remarked:

It is very easy to recall the man whom it commemorates. To know Michael Godfrey Barrett-Lennard was a special privilege – an experience always remembered. He combined, to a singular degree, attractiveness of personality and strength of character. One was instantly struck by his complete sincerity – and his natural charitableness. In the planning of his daily life, and in his career, he put the needs of others first, and then his own.

The contribution of the wider Barrett-Lennard family to the WW2 air battle was, sadly, quite remarkable. Michael was one of five RAAF cousins killed, the others being John Allen Barrett-Lennard, Francis Graham Barrett-Lennard, Bruce D. Ferguson, and John Venn.

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“He had thought out his fine ideals, it would seem, as a boy, and as an undergraduate was quietly and happily putting them into practice. To meet him was to meet someone who not only believed in goodness, but exemplified it in himself.”

The Dragon, 1940 (attributed to Josh Reynolds)