

## MICHAEL VON DADELSZEN



Born on 21 April 1916, Michael von Dadelzen was the second son of Herman and Winifred von Dadelzen. He had been working in a Hastings public accountant's office and studying by correspondence in the evening before applying for aircrew training in November 1939. He began his initial training in Levin in September of the following year.

In November 1940 Michael embarked for Canada under the Empire Air Training Scheme. By February 1941 he was at the No. 4 Bombing and Gunnery School at Fingal, Ontario. A Canadian Researcher for the Aircrew Remembrance Society in the UK, Colin Bamford, lives close to Fingal and provided Mark von Dadelzen with a link to



[www.myfinepix.com/blog/381734/329203](http://www.myfinepix.com/blog/381734/329203) from which the photograph (above right) is taken. During its life the

school graduated over 6,000 non-pilot aircrew from the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Norway, Free France, and, of course, Canada. On 30 March went to the No. 1 Advanced Navigation

School near Manitoba, gaining his Air Navigator's badge on 1 May 1941 when he was commissioned in the rank of Pilot Officer with effect from the same date. After further training in Scotland with the 19 Operational Training Unit, on 18 August 1941 he was posted to RAF No.10 Squadron, based at Leeming, Yorkshire. He had 248 hours as a navigator and took part in operational flights over various targets over Berlin, Mannheim, Hamburg and Nurnberg in Germany and Brest and Boulogne in France.



[From Michael's photograph album, taken in Canada, Michael on the right]

On an evening in November 1941 he watched raiding aircraft take off, and wrote that he was "much moved by the whole business."



The evening I was looking on was fine, with the sun just setting in a wintry yellow glow, and half the sky a remote blue, and the other half banked high with dense shining cloud. One by one the motors were started up around the airfield and run until they were at working temperature. Their steady drumming was constantly punctuated by the short staccato roar of the four gun turrets being tested, earth spurting from the ground where the bullets converged. Then as the time of

takeoff approached, these great black machines started moving in two long lines toward the leeward end of the runway, looking rather like good natured, clumsy beetles. The first machine took off, the rest following at short, regular intervals, and all taking the full length of the runway before getting airborne, being heavy with a full load of bombs and petrol. They cleared the boundary fence with the great, full throated roar of motors wide open and climbed over the aerodrome in wide circles before setting course for the distant target area. A heavy bomber taking off gives a tremendous impression of power just as it clears the runway, and quite often your body picks up the vibrations caused by the air screws. ... I watched until the last plane was in the air and the last wave of good luck had been given by the boys on the ground, and walked slowly away in a very thoughtful mood. I knew where they were going, and it was a long trip and rather a difficult one, and I wanted more than anything that all these blokes should get back in good time for their egg and bacon, nine hours later. I looked out to the east, and there I saw standing in relief against the cloud bank a great line of our bombers reaching away to the horizon, each a little smaller than the one behind it. From where I was the sun had set, but it still gleamed warmly from the rear turrets of those planes heading east.

Just two months later, on 15-16 January 1942 Michael was the navigator of a Halifax bomber on a bombing raid to Hamburg (which, ironically, his forebears had left some 120 years earlier). The raid involved 96 aircraft, with 4 bombers lost and 8 further aircraft crashing in England.

According to <http://www.yorkshire-aircraft.co.uk/aircraft/yorkshire/york42/19622.html>:

On the 15th of January 1942 this aircraft had taken off from Leeming at 18.12hrs for Ops to Hamburg. The aircraft suffered engine trouble outbound and after jettisoning the bombs over the North Sea they made for home. The weather in Yorkshire was poor during the month with deep snow having laid over the county. Flying in poor visibility the aircraft crashed at 23.30hrs a mile north of Northallerton, only a few miles from base, and burst into flames. The crew had all sustained very serious injuries. Oddly the RAF's Form AM1180 is left blank so no proper details of the loss are yet known.

Roger Cole's research locally in his book "Northallerton and District" draws upon memories from J.F Sedgwick who lived locally to the accident. Mr Cole's book states that aircraft was not heard to crash but the huge fire that developed awoke three local farmers (Mr Godfrey Sedgwick, Mr Harold Swailwell and Mr John Walker) and along with two men on a passing lorry they went to the burning aircraft where they found one airman (almost certainly the pilot) sitting next to one of his crew who he would almost certainly have pulled clear himself. A further four of the crew were found and dragged clear. The seventh were found in the wreckage and was sadly dead and beyond help. The passing civilians loaded the six airmen onto the back of one of their lorries and drove to the Friarage Hospital in Northallerton. So seriously injured were five of the six that they died before dawn. The only survivor was the pilot who recovered from his serious injuries and returned to operational flying.

The sole survivor of the crash was Sgt. Murray (Buck) Schneider, later promoted to the rank of Squadron Leader, who piloted a Lancaster of RCAF 405 Sqn shot down by a night fighter and killed during a raid on Hannover on the night of 8-9 October 1943. Michael's family understood that the surviving pilot had no memory of the cause of the crash, and the website confirms what we had always understood, that bad weather caused the crash, but, oddly, the website records that "the RAF's Form AM1180 is left blank." The reason for that may now be known. In February 2012 Colin Bamford's research turned up a letter, almost 70 years old, dated 18 May 1942 from one of the

pilot's colleagues who recorded that after two months his memory had returned and the letter records:

He was just going to land after asking permission when one of our own nite fighters shot him down at 4000 ft.

Michael is buried in St John the Baptist churchyard, Leeming, Yorkshire (the black and white photograph is of his grave shortly after he was buried, marked with a wooden cross, and the colour photograph was taken in 2005 with the permanent gravestone.).

On a trip to Europe in 2005, his nephew Mark von Dadeltszen visited the grave on the Tuesday after Battle of Britain Sunday:



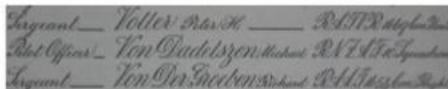
My parents, brother and sister-in-law had visited before, and I had always wanted to pay a personal tribute to my uncle. Eileen and I arrived in Leeming in the morning, and the airfield is now an operational NATO base, part of No. 11/18 Group within Strike Command and home to two Tornado F3 Squadrons.



We found the churchyard with about 20 World War II graves, half British, half Canadian, and one Kiwi, my uncle. While we were there a NATO jet took off and I regarded that as a fitting memorial fly-past for my uncle. We also received a text message from one of our children in New Zealand while there, and it made me think of the delay in 1942 before the Telegram advising of my uncle's death was received by my grandparents.

In York Minster cathedral we found an astronomical clock erected in memory of Commonwealth airmen based in Yorkshire who were killed during the war.

The memorial book displayed with the astronomical clock includes among its many entries my uncle's name:



To get a feel for what my uncle and other young New Zealand airmen went through I've been reading *Night after Night* by Max Lambert, an account of some of the Kiwis who flew in bomber command – about 6,000 airmen with 1,850 killed, almost one in every three.

On our return to New Zealand, and just before Anzac Day 2006, I provided an article to our local newspaper about the experience of visiting my uncle's grave. I was rung by a woman

who was in the plotting room for bomber raids who told me that it was a long time since she had cried, but reading my article caused her to cry. She remembered the raid well – her commanding officer said before the raid that it should not have been allowed to go as the weather forecast was terrible – and a very high proportion of the bombers could not find their bases on return, many like my uncle's crash-landing.

**Footnote:** During his teenage years, Michael von Dadelszen occasionally worked on the Havelock North orchard of a local, pioneering orchardist, Frank Meissner (born in Austria), who imported a German-built Steinway Orchestral Grand Piano in 1960. At that time it was reputed to be the only piano of its type in Hawke's Bay, and the only one privately owned in New Zealand. Frank Meissner was an accomplished pianist who particularly loved the music of Beethoven and Chopin, and his piano was played by many visiting professional pianists (including Lily Kraus), much to his delight. In its obituary following Frank Meissner's death in May 1969, the *Hawke's Bay Herald-Tribune* poignantly recorded that he "...played his favourite composers at his home in Te Mata Road, Havelock North, last night. Gently he closed the keyboard and retired. A few hours later he was dead." Mark von Dadelszen arranged for the purchase of this piano for the Havelock North Community Centre in 1999.