

Flying Officer John Raphael Kinney RCAF [J19024]

John Kinney was a Nanton-born farm boy who became an RCAF navigator and was shot down in a 10 Squadron Halifax. The sole-survivor, John suffered two broken and frozen feet and a broken back, was abused by a Nazi, and spent twenty-two months in Prisoner of War and Canadian hospitals. Following the war he attended university and raised a family, but sadly, died early of his wartime injuries.

[‘Nobody’s Hero’ -the play by Larry MacKillop](#)

AUTHORS NOTE

This play is about my desire to understand the story of an uncle and boyhood hero. The snatches of time I had with him and the evolution of my attitudes toward war are accurate but my account of what really happened during his experience are a combination of pure speculation and hard evidence obtained by the archivist at the Bomber Command Museum of Canada. There is another story I am now learning from his children who knew their dad much more intimately than I did. My cousins, whom I am meeting for the first time because I attempted their dads story, have another account of Johns escape from a falling plane. It’s what his kids heard from him...he wasn’t sure how he was spared from a doomed aircraft.

We can only wonder about a young man volunteering to serve his country and going through a horrendous experience to come home badly disabled yet managing to get an education and job, raise a family and eventually succumb to his war wounds. I believe he could not have done all this without strong character and the faith his mother passed to him.



[‘Nobody’s Hero’ -the song by Doon Wilkins](#)

Flying Officer John Raphael Kinney RCAF [J19024]

John Kinney was born in Nanton, Alberta on July 22 1918, and raised on a farm east of town that is now the site of the Coutts Centre for Canadian Heritage. He enlisted in the RCAF during August 1941. It is thought that he was then posted to a Manning Depot and Initial Training School in Ontario. Following ITS, John trained to become a navigator at #2 AOS in Edmonton.



A class of Initial Training School graduates that includes John Kinney (third from the right; middle row)



John Kinney (at right) and other newly graduated RCAF navigators in front of an Anson at #2 AOS in Edmonton.

Posted overseas in October 1942, John was posted to an Operational Training Unit where he joined a bomber crew led by Sgt. Alan Whitmarsh, who had received his pilot training under the BCATP in Canada. John was the only Canadian on the crew, the others being British. After ten weeks of operational training, likely on Wellington aircraft, the crew was posted to 10 Squadron RAF on June 10 1943.



John Kinney's crew –Sgt. Alan Whitmarsh (pilot) is third from the left; John is second from the right; As well as Alan Whitmarsh, Maurice Henry Britton (air gunner), Ronald George Edwin Buckner (wireless operator), Kenneth Seymore Lear (bomb aimer), Reginald Raymond Norton (air gunner) and Cyril Priest (flight engineer) were killed on 20 December 1943. Also killed was Sgt. Peter Mill Hayes. He is thought to have been a 'second dickie' pilot in training.

During their nine months together, the seven members of the Whitmarsh crew would have formed a powerful bond based on mutual trust, dependence, and shared experiences -both terrifying ones in the air and enjoyable ones while off duty. Their first operation was on July 13th.

Following an operation to Mannheim on August 8th, Sgt. Whitmarsh was awarded an 'Immediate' DFM (Distinguished Flying Medal). The citation reads, "This airman was the captain of an aircraft detailed to attack Mannheim one night in August 1943. When nearing the target area, one of the bomber's engines became useless. The aircraft gradually lost height but Sergeant Whitmarsh and crew flew on to the target and bombed it. During the return flight the aircraft continued to lose height, but base was reached safely where Sergeant Whitmarsh effected a masterly landing (despite limited visibility). This airman displayed great skill and determination throughout."

During an operation on September 5th, Whitmarsh's Halifax was attacked twice by enemy fighters but escaped unharmed after he took evasive action. The following night, they were attacked by a Ju88 night-fighter during the bomb-run. Both air gunners claimed hits on the enemy aircraft, but the Halifax suffered damage to its tailplane, starboard fuselage, and mid-upper turret. Searchlights were always a concern. On November 18th, Whitmarsh had to take, "continuous evasive action to avoid being coned."

On December 20th 1943, the Whitmarsh crew's Halifax Mk. II bomber (HX164; ZA-K) took off from their base at RAF Melbourne in Yorkshire at 16:37 for a raid on Frankfurt. It would be their sixteenth operation. It appears that 'ZA-K' successfully bombed the target.

The raid report for the operation refers to enemy fighters arriving in strength over the target and, "thereafter their efforts continued unabated until our bombers had flown over 100 miles on the return route. Fighter flares were dropped over the whole of this area." These flares, suspended by parachutes and released above the altitude that the bombers were flying at, would have made them easily seen by the fighters.

Sgt. Whitmarsh's Halifax was attacked by two separate enemy night-fighters after leaving the target. Both Luftwaffe pilots Uffz. Hermann Bottcher and Fw. Gunther Bahr claimed 'Full Victories' at 20:00.

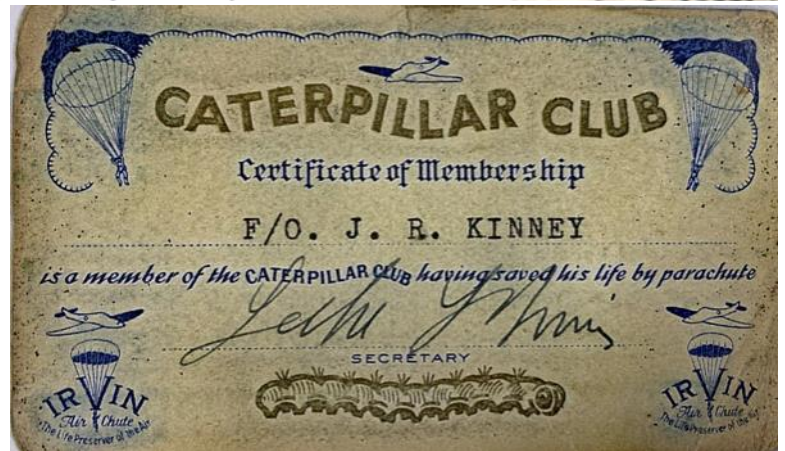


10 Squadron operated the Halifax Mk II, their squadron designation being 'ZA'.

Halifax II. HX164 'K'	PO. H. Whitmarsh, Cpt. Bombing PO. Kinney, J. Nav. PO. Lear, K. A/B Sgt. Buckner, W. W/O Sgt. Britton, R. H/O PO. Priest, G. P/S Sgt. Norton, R. T/O Sgt. Hayes, P. 2nd Pilot.	1637	-----	Missing. No news after take off
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The bomber was almost certainly set on fire and Whitmarsh must have ordered the crew to abandon the aircraft. The fire must have spread quickly or perhaps the bomber was impossible to control.

John was the lone survivor of the eight-man crew, likely because the escape hatch is adjacent to the navigator's position in a Halifax, so he would be the first to leave the aircraft if the pilot gave the order to abandon it. It is likely that his parachute was damaged while exiting the aircraft, or for some other reason the parachute did not fully open resulting in a very hard landing during which John was badly injured –both his feet were broken and his back fractured. The Halifax crashed near the village of Dahlenburg, Germany.



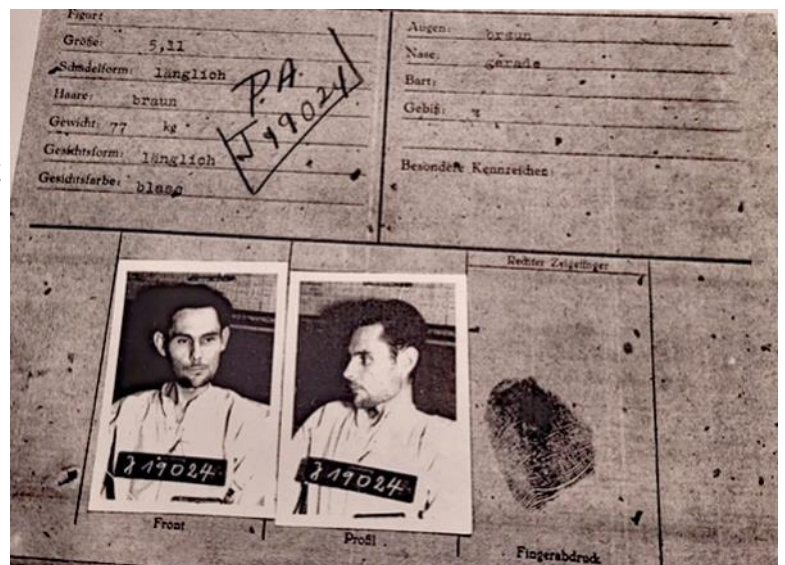
Following the war, John was admitted to the 'Caterpillar Club'.

Shortly after landing, F/O Kinney was captured by a lone Nazi soldier who was in charge of a Prisoner of War work crew. Although obviously badly injured, John was kicked by the soldier and thrown into a nearby barn. The farm family was ordered not to give him food or water (although John remembered the farmer's daughter bringing him some water). He was held captive for two days in this isolated barn in below freezing temperatures during which his injuries were further aggravated by the severe cold and inhuman treatment.

Following the war, John was contacted by the War Crimes Tribunal. One of the prisoners in the work crew, a Frenchman, had reported the atrocities of the Nazi work gang leader –his treatment of John being only one of a number of crimes. The Nazi soldier who so wilfully physically abused John was eventually tried and convicted at the War Crimes Trials held in Germany following the war.

John officially became a Prisoner of War on December 23rd and was transferred to a hospital camp where his injuries were assessed. Both his feet were frozen and his back was broken. Due to infections, it was necessary to amputate a portion of his left leg. Extensive surgery was done to save his right foot and a body cast was required for the broken back. After the war, John always had high praise for the German doctors who worked tenaciously, attempting to save his left leg.

John's mother, Anna, was advised that he was 'missing following operations' and later, on February 19th 1945, received a telegram from the International Red Cross stating he had, "lost his life."



John's 'Prisoner of War' card with his service number, J19024 noted on it.



RAILWAY TELEGRAM

BE BRIEF

TIME FILED
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54/53 E EX GB REPORT DELIVERY

RCAF OTTAWA ONT FEB 19/44 1904.

MRS. W. P. KINNEY,
NANTON ALTA.

M9516 REGRET TO ADVISE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS QUOTING GERMAN INFORMATION STATES YOUR SON PILOT OFFICER JOHN RAPHAEL KINNEY LOST HIS LIFE DECEMBER TWENTIETH BUT DOES NOT GIVE ADDITIONAL PARTICULARS STOP PENDING FURTHER CONFIRMATION YOUR SON IS TO BE CONSIDERED MISSING BELIEVED KILLED STOP PLEASE ACCEPT MY SINCERE SYMPATHY STOP LETTER FOLLOWS.
RCAF CASUALTIES OFFICER.

Then, after believing for three months that her son had almost certainly been killed, Anna was notified that he had survived and was a Prisoner of War.

Through the International Red Cross, badly injured Prisoners of War were sometimes repatriated to their home country. On February 3rd 1945, Anna received word that John was in southern France. John was then repatriated to Canada on the Red Cross hospital ship 'Gripsholm' He was placed in the Christie Street Military Hospital in Toronto during February 1945. Following eight months there, he was discharged on October 16, 1945 –following a total of twenty-two months of hospitalization.

Nanton Flier Now Prisoner of War

NANTON, April 5—Word has been received by Mrs. A. Kinney of Nanton that her son, P/O John Kinney, reported missing Dec. 20, is now a prisoner of war in Germany.

P/O Kinney enlisted as a navigator in August, 1941, and graduated a year later at Edmonton. He was posted directly overseas and was commissioned last August.



P/O KINNEY

At the time his plane was forced down he was nearing the end of an operational tour and had been awarded the 1943 star.

52/51 2 EXA GB REPORT DELIVERY

RCAF OTTAWA ONT FEB 3/ 45 305PM

MRS ANN KINNEY
NANTON ALTA.

M9951 YOUR SON FLYING OFFICER JOHN RAPHAEL KINNEY DESIRE THE FOLLOWIN MESSAGE FROM HIM TO BE CONVEYED TO YOU QUOTE ARRIVED SAFELY MARSEILLE HOPE TO BE HOME SOON UNQUOTE.
RCAF CASUALTIES OFFICERS.





John attended the University of Western Ontario where he obtained an Honours BA (English and Philosophy) and an MBA. Following his graduation, he worked as the Secretary of Kinsmen Clubs of Canada.

He was married to May, a nurse who he had met while a patient at the Christie Street Military Hospital. They had two daughters and four sons.

Sadly, John Kinney passed away during 1980, while undergoing surgery which was directly related to his wartime injuries.



*(l-r) John, Cecilia, Frank, and Bernard Kinney
in High River*