

MICHAEL VON DADELSZEN

Born on 21 April 1916, Michael von Dadelszen was the second son of Herman and Winifred von Dadelszen. 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, and 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.

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 air-borne, 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 over 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. Michael's Halifax crashed near Northallerton, Yorkshire



on its return, and along with the rest of the crew, apart from the pilot, he was killed. He is buried in St John the Baptist churchyard, Leeming. Northallerton, Yorkshire on its return, and along with the rest of the crew, apart from the pilot, he was killed. He is buried in St John the Baptist churchyard, Leeming.

On a trip to Europe in 2005, his nephew Mark von Dadelszen visited his uncle's 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 (2005 photo opposite). 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. The memorial book displayed with the astronomical clock includes among its many entries my uncle's name:



Sergeant — Voller Peter H. ——— R.A.F. No. 1169 Con. Unit
Pilot Officer — Von Dadelszen Michael R.N.Z.A.F. 10 Squadron
Sergeant — Von Der Groeben Richard R.A.F. No. 51 Con. Flight

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 among a total of, with 1,850 killed, almost one in every three.

Footnote: During his teenage years, Michael von Dadelszen occasionally worked for a local, pioneering orchardist, Frank Meissner, 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, 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 Function Centre in 1999.