

Whitewater Region's WWII Casualties

Flying Officer Irvin John Labow

Flying Officer Irvin John Labow, son of **John Labow** and **Jemima Pearl Brannan**, was born on 18 Jun 1919 in Westmeath Twp. Both of his parents were also born in Westmeath Twp. Irvin was the oldest of three children, having a sister Irene Johnson and brother Ivan.¹ Irvin attended S.S.#9 in Westmeath Twp from 1924-1931 and moved on to Renfrew Collegiate Institute for one year. He worked as a farm labourer for his father from 1932-1938; and was a truck driver for Carl Price from 1938-1941. His sports activities included swimming, softball and hockey.²



Image 1: Irvin John Labow³

Irvin John Labow enlisted in Ottawa on May 20, 1941 and identified his interest in becoming an Aero Engine Mechanic. At the time of his enlistment, he was single and his religion was United. He was described as 5' 6 ½" tall, weighing 130 lbs. He had blue eyes and brown hair. His references included Dr. Alexander, Beachburg, Physician; John T. Collins, Beachburg, Merchant; W. N. Whitmore for whom he drove a truck for 2 winters.²

Pte. Labow trained at Paulson, Manitoba where he obtained his gunners Wing. He was posted to the UK in November 1942, and later posted to the 408 Squadron in February, 1943.⁴ He was discharged from Airmen service on his appointment to a commissioned rank of Pilot Officer on Aug 13, 1943.^{2,4} He rose to Flying Officer on Feb 14, 1943.⁴

According to notes on Find-a-grave⁵, he had a few "shaky do's", as they termed narrow escapes. Once they were so badly shot up, their bomb doors were jammed with their 2,000 lb. bomb fused to go off. They couldn't drop it or land with it. They received instructions to head for home and bale out when they were over English soil, facing the plane back to sea. Orders were obeyed with Irvin landing in an oat field where he walked to a farm house and telephoned his base.⁵



Image 2: F/O Irvin Labow³

The plane he was flying in at the time of his death was an Avro Lancaster Mk II bomber of the 408 Squadron, RCAF. They were taking part in Operation Nuremburg. It took off from Linton-on-Ouse at 22:04 with 8 crew members aboard including Ace Air Gunner, Flying Officer Labow. There had been an expected cloud cover to shield the flight, however the prediction was wrong. Consequently, the German fighters engaged the bombers before they reached the Belgian border. The clear conditions allowed the fighters to pick off bombers at will with 82 of the 95 bombers being Lost on the outbound leg. Flying Officer Labow's plane attacked three times and badly damaged by the combined efforts of two German night fighters - a Me 210 and a Fw 190. F/O Labow was in the rear turret and was heard by other members of the crew to be still firing his guns during the third attack while other members of the crew were preparing to bail out. They crashed at Gerolzhofen, Schweinfurt, Bavaria, Germany. Besides Flying Officer Labow, Pilot Officer Frank George

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Leahy and Pilot Officer Alvin Alston Patton were killed. Flight crew members Sergeant Jack Edwin Bates, Flight Sergeant John Robert Hughes, Flying Officer Gordon Schachter, Flying Officer Joseph Gordon White, and Flying Officer Gordon Leslie Wood were taken as POWs.^{2,4,6}

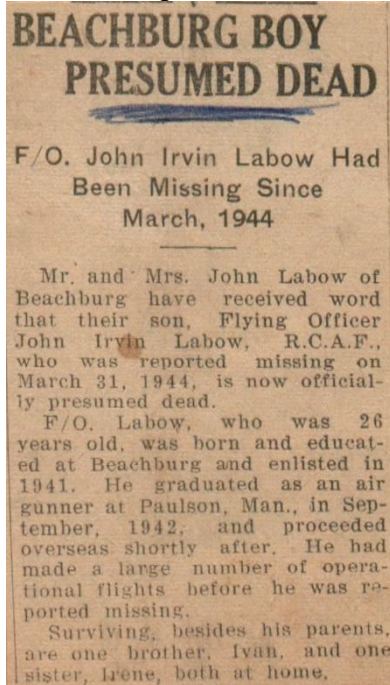
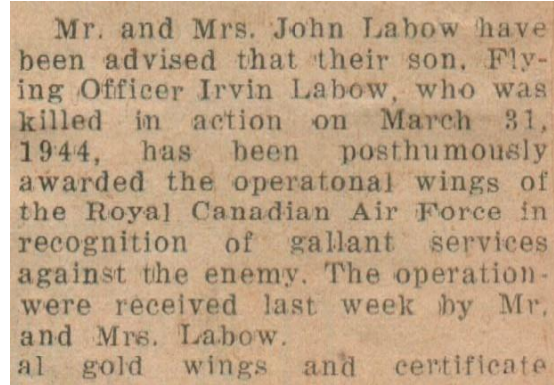


Image 4: Death Notice¹¹

The remains of F.O. Labow were initially interred at Michelau Civil Cemetery, Bavaria, near crash site. He was later buried at Durnbach War Cemetery, Gmund am Tegernsee, Landkreis Miesbach, Bavaria (Bayern), Germany.^{2,5,6,7,8}

His niece Mary provided the photographs and relates the story of friend Harold Johnson (whom most of us knew). Harold was part of the ground crew who saw them off on their mission.



F.O. Irvin Labow was awarded the operational wings and certificate of the RCAF posthumously, in recognition of his gallant services against the enemy.¹⁰ F/O Labow had flown 25 operational flights before the crash. He was an experienced air gunner⁴.

In addition to the gravestone in Durnback War Cemetery^{5,7,8}, a memorial footstone is located at Beachburg Union Cemetery¹². His name is also commemorated on the Beachburg War Memorial¹³, the Westmeath War Memorial¹⁴, the Greenwood Methodist Church WWI Memorial Tablet¹⁵, the Pembroke War Memorial¹⁶, and Canada's Bomber Command Memorial¹⁷.

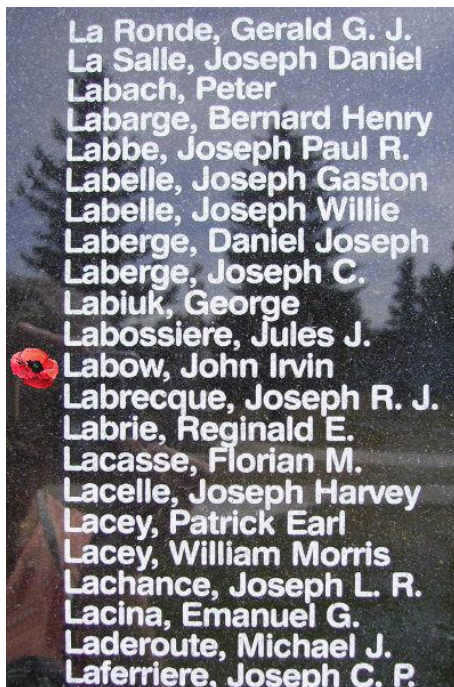


Image 6: Canada's Bomber Command¹⁸



Image 5: Canada's Bomber Command Memorial Wall¹⁷

LEST WE FORGET

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Additional information and photographs would be appreciated.

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17. *Bomber Command Museum of Canada Archives - Bomber Command*. (n.d.). https://www.bombercommandmuseumarchives.ca/menu_main_bombercommand.html
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