

F/Sgt. Raymond Leonard Cato 42828 RNZAF

Raymond was born on 19 January 1924 in Takapau, Hawkes Bay in New Zealand, the twin son of Andrew Charles and Catherine Ada Cato (née Blair). Educated at Nelson College and Petone Technical School, prior to joining the RNZAF he was employed in a Hardware Store.

Raymond first applied to join the RNZAF in April 1941 but was not accepted until February 1942. Originally employed as an Aircraft Hand, Raymond re-mustered to Observer in June 1942 and completed his training in Canada under the Empire Training Scheme. Gunnery, Observer and Navigational training complete, Raymond was finally badged as an Air Bomber in April 1943. After arriving in the UK in June 1943, Raymond completed his conversion training and was posted to 101 Squadron at RAF Ludford Magna, Lincolnshire, in February 1944. Raymond had a total of 399 flying hours and had completed one op before he was killed.

On the night of 30/31 March 1944, 795 aircraft were dispatched for an attack on Nuremberg. This was the last act of Bomber Harris's "Battle of Berlin", an attempt to destroy German morale by battering its cities night after night before the bomber force turned its attentions to preparing the way for D-Day in June. A direct route, full moon and a new German weapon, the upward firing gun fitted to many fighters, would make this an incredibly challenging and dangerous mission. More than 200 night-fighters based around the Ruhr and the Rhine took to the skies that night. Twenty-six 101 Squadron Lancasters participated in the raid.

At 2150 hours on 30 March 1944 Raymond, operating as the Air Bomber, and the crew departed RAF Ludford Magna in Lancaster III LM463 (SR-K2), tasked with ABC duties for the raid. At 0036 hours, whilst outbound, the aircraft was engaged East of Siegen at 18,000ft by a night fighter flown by Uffz. Bruno Rupp of 4./NJG3. The aircraft crashed near Dillenburg, Hessen, killing 6 of the 8 crew; the pilot (P/O Albert Lander RNZAF) and wireless operator (Sgt. W G Clapp) survived and were captured. Seven 101 Squadron aircraft were lost on this raid, with 47 men killed.

The raid was a major disaster for Bomber Command with the loss of 105 aircraft, Bomber Command's heaviest loss of the war. There were 721 casualties: 542 men died, 6 injured, 161 POWs, with just 12 airmen evading capture. The damage to Nuremberg itself was slight - 256 buildings destroyed and 75 enemy dead.

Also killed were the navigator F/O Mervyn Hutchinson RNZAF, air gunner F/Sgt. Cyril Parkinson RNZAF, special duties operator Sgt. Alfred Clayton, air gunner Sgt. Erod Johnson and flight engineer Sgt. Alexander Johnston.

Originally buried in Dillenburg Cemetery, Hessen, Raymond and the crew were moved to Hanover War Cemetery, Niedersachsen, in April 1947.

Raymond is commemorated on Wall Panel 18.

Photo Source: aucklandmuseum.com.

