

Sergeant Andrew McNicol 563207 RAF



Andrew McNicol was the 26-year-old son of Hugh and Florence Rose McNicol, of Barrow-in-Furness.

RAF records show Hampden L4054 of No. 83 Squadron left RAF Scampton on the night of 6 April 1940 at 1915 hours, for a security patrol and offensive operations against the enemy in the vicinity of the Sylt coast in north Germany. The aircraft was fired on in that area and nothing was heard again until the bomber was sighted in the vicinity of St Mary's Lighthouse at 0245 hours the next day. She circled for about one-and-a-half hours, signalling SOS repeatedly on a lamp. The SOS was challenged by the lighthouse keeper, Harold Hall, who after receiving the correct reply, contacted the authorities.

No other Morse signal was picked up from the aircraft. Standard procedure to aid lost aircraft was followed. Searchlight beams over a wide area were trained towards Acklington, the nearest RAF base equipped to land the stricken aircraft. The base lit the flare path at 0300 hours and instructions on how to find Acklington, approx. 15 miles to the north, were transmitted to the bomber by Morse lamp.

The aircraft continued to circle until one engine appeared to fail, and shortly after 0400 hours three of the four crew left the aircraft by parachute before she crashed and exploded. As well as Andrew (who was the observer) those who bailed out were the two pilots P/O Wilfred Roberts and P/O Keith Brooke-Taylor (both from New Zealand). Sadly they all drifted out to sea and were drowned, their bodies subsequently being recovered and buried – Keith Brooke-Taylor and Wilfred Roberts at Chevington Cemetery and Andrew at Barrow-in-Furness (Thornccliffe) Cemetery, Sec. 3. C. of E. Grave 2621.

The fourth crewman, AC1 Denis Sharpe (21-year-old wireless operator/air gunner), is listed as missing and commemorated on Panel 26 of the Runnymede Memorial. Subsequent research has ascertained that he may well have been fatally wounded and unable to exit the aircraft, his body being lost when the Hampden exploded. On 12 April 2008, a memorial plaque, presented by Air Crash Investigation and Archaeology Group, The Friends of St. Mary's Island, and the Family of Denis Sharpe, was unveiled at St Mary's Lighthouse.

Andrew's name can be found on IBCC Memorial Panel 072.

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