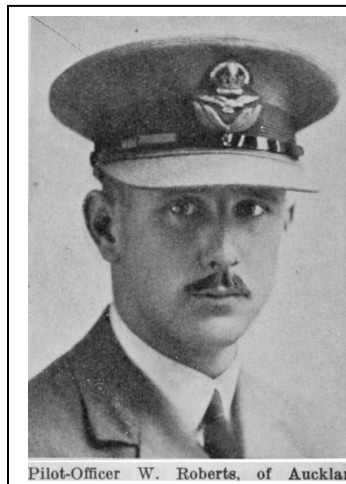


Pilot Officer Wilfred Roberts 40319 RAF



Wilfred Roberts was the 25-year-old son of William David and Ellen Roberts, of Remuera, Auckland, New Zealand. He was born at Brisbane, Australia, but educated in New Zealand. Selected for a short service commission in the RAF, he embarked for England in 1937. His number of operational flights is unknown but the first was undertaken on the first day of the war.

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 Wilfred (one of the pilots) those who bailed out were fellow pilot P/O Keith Brooke-Taylor (also from New Zealand) and observer Sgt. Andrew McNicol. 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 McNicol at Barrow-in-Furness (Thorncliffe) Cemetery.

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.

Wilfred's name can be found on IBCC Memorial Panel 091.

Image from <http://www.aucklandmuseum.com/war-memorial/online-cenotaph/record/C31321>