

Sgt Thomas Edward Coles 40161 RNZAF

Thomas was born on 9 July 1914 in Wellington, New Zealand, the son of Thomas Coles and Margaret Ann Coles nee De Freitas.

Educated at the Marist Brother's School, Wellington, Thomas was employed as a warehouseman and was a member of the Civil Reserve when, in January 1940 he enlisted in the RNZAF as an Equipment Assistant. In May 1941 Thomas re-mustered as an Air Gunner.

Thomas was sent to Canada under the Empire Air Training Scheme where, in March 1942, he was awarded his Air Gunner's badge and travelled to the UK the following month.

Following advanced training at 11 OTU RAF Bassingbourn, Hertfordshire, and a short period in hospital following an aircraft accident, Thomas arrived on 75(NZ) Sqn at RAF Mildenhall, Suffolk in September 1942.

On 6/7 September 1942 Bomber Command were tasked with an op against the industrial target of Duisburg, a major logistical centre in the Ruhr Area and location of chemical, steel and iron industries. A combined force of 207 aircraft, including fifteen 75(NZ) crews, were allocated to the op. Two squadron crews failed to return.

In the early hours of 7 September Thomas, operating as the Rear Gunner, and the crew departed RAF Mildenhall, Suffolk, in Wellington III BJ765 (AA-L). Thomas was shot down 11 miles South West of the target, crashing near Krefeld, killing all on board. This was Thomas's 2nd op.

Also killed: PO George William Alfred Mills RNZAF (WOp/AG); Sgt Claude Joseph Frederick Jarvis RNZAF (WOp/AG); Sgt Norman Priestley Saul RNZAF (Obs); Sgt George William Sharman RNZAF (Pilot)

Originally buried in Krefeld Main Cemetery, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Germany, in June 1947 Thomas was re-located to Reichswald Forest War Cemetery, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Germany

Thomas is commemorated on Wall Panel 146

Photo Source: IBCC

