

FS Stephen Astley Cook 421142 RNZAF

Stephen, known as Steve, was born on 24 April 1923 in Gore, Southland, New Zealand, the son of David Cook and Lillias McGregor Cook nee Smaill.

Educated at Southland Boys' High School, Stephen was employed as a clerk by the Land and Income Tax Department, Wellington when, in April 1941 he volunteered for aircrew duties in the RNZAF.

Called up in February 1942, following basic pilot training in New Zealand, in June 1942 Stephen was sent to Canada to train under the Empire Air Training Scheme.

In October 1942 when his pilot training was terminated, Stephen re-mustered as Air Bomber and was awarded his badge in March 1943 and immediately embarked for the UK.

Following advanced training at No 9 (Observer) Advanced Flying Unit, RAF Penrhos, Gwynedd, Wales, 11 OTU RAF Westcott, Buckinghamshire where he converted to multi engine/multi crew ops and 1657 HCU RAF Stradishall, Suffolk for conversion to the Stirling, in October 1943 Stephen was posted to 75(NZ) Sqn at RAF Mepal, Cambridgeshire.

At the end of March 1944 Stephen converted to the Lancaster at No. 3 Lancaster Finishing School, RAF Feltwell, Norfolk before returning to the squadron.

On 27/28 May 1944 Bomber Command was tasked with a raid on the Rothe Erde Railway Yards, East of Aachen, Nordrhein-Westphalen, Germany. A combined force of 170 aircraft, including eighteen 75 (NZ) crews, were allocated to the op. Two crews failed to return.

At 00:45 on 28 May Stephen, operating as the Bomb Aimer, and the crew departed RAF Mepal in Lancaster III ND802 (AA-D "The Flying Scotsman").

At 02:07 on 28 May Stephen's aircraft was intercepted 25 miles NW of Eindhoven by Obstlt Gunther Radusch flying a Ju88 of Stab/NJG2 from Deelen Airfield. Fire broke out mid-fuselage and in the port wing and port-inner engine. The aircraft began to break up in flight and the Captain ordered the crew to bale out whilst he tried to hold the aircraft steady. Six of the crew, including Stephen, were able to do so before a fuel explosion blew the Lancaster apart in mid-air.

The aircraft crashed in a forest near Gilze, 6 miles W of Tilsburg, North-Brabant, Netherlands, killing the pilot and Wireless Operator. Shortly after Stephen landed, the Lancaster's bombs detonated and he was killed in the blast, the remaining five were taken as POW. This was Stephen's 27th op.

Also killed: FS Ronald Edward Howson (WOp/AG); Sgt Francis Alexander Jack Scott RNZAF (Pilot)

Stephen is buried in Gilze-en-Rijen Roman Catholic Churchyard, Noord-Brabant, Netherlands

Stephen is commemorated on Wall Panel 147

Photo Source: findagrave

