

Flt Lt William Jack Grisman 45148 RAF MiD

William was born on 30 August 1914 in Hereford, Herefordshire, the eldest son of William Charles Grisman and Gertrude Ellen Grisman nee Birch. He married Marie Millicent Marchant in 1940.

Educated locally, he entered the RAF in January 1931 to train in the 23rd Entry of Apprentices at RAF Halton, and graduated as an AC2 in December 1933.

Originally posted onto 10 Sqn at RAF Boscombe Down in January 1936, he was posted to Basra, Iraq as an engine fitter before moving to the British Embassy in Baghdad as a driver. In early 1938 William joined 28 Sqn as a rigger and fitter, but was also employed as an air gunner on the North West Frontier. He enjoyed flying and was posted in December 1938 to train at RAF Mildenhall as an Observer. On 27 July 1939 he joined 99 Sqn flying Wellingtons at RAF Mildenhall before being promoted Sgt and recognised as a potential officer.



William completed his tour of operations with the squadron, being Mentioned in Despatches on 6 October 1940, and was commissioned as a Pilot Officer in December 1940. In late December 1940 William was posted to RAF Boscombe Down where experienced navigators were required for testing and developing the blind approach aid that would eventually help many night bomber crews land at airfields in bad weather. He joined 109 Sqn flying Ansons and Wellingtons, where for the next 2 years the Sqn was engaged in the development of radio counter-measures and new radar aids, notably the blind bombing system known as Oboe

At 18:30 on the 5 November 1941, William took off in Wellington T2562 from Boscombe Down on a Special Duties mission to investigate the capabilities of the German radar chain sites along the west coast of France. Whilst over the French port of Lorient, the starboard engine failed and then lost its propeller. Unable to continue the crew baled out and were taken prisoner in France. He was interrogated by the Luftwaffe before being sent to Stalag Luft I, Barth as Prisoner of War No 673, where he met Roger Bushell who later masterminded the Great Escape. He was promoted to Flying Officer in December 1941.

In October 1943 William, together with Bushell and several other prisoners were sent to Stalag Luft III in the province of Lower Silesia near the town of Sagan and the plan to get 200 prisoners out of Stalag Luft III was formed. For the Great Escape operation he was one of the leading tunnellers and was designated as a "marshal", one of the dozen men appointed to wait in the forest after escaping to collect a pre-selected group of ten men who would then be led westwards. The alarm sounded after he had been outside for only 50 minutes and was arrested quite quickly to the south of the camp on the road to Görlitz and arrived at the collecting point for recaptured officers in Görlitz prison on 28 March 1944.

William was one of 50 of the 76 escapers selected for execution by SS- Gruppenführer Arthur Nebe on the orders of Heinrich Müller, Chief of the Gestapo. On the morning of 6 April 1944, he was one of 6 men removed by truck. No firm evidence was ever found of the fate of these men and their records were marked "killed at a place unknown, on or after 6 April 1944". He was cremated at Breslau and his remains were buried at Sagan before being re-interred in the Poznan Old Garrison Cemetery.

William, already Mentioned in Despatches in 1940, was posthumously MiD a second time for conspicuous gallantry as a prisoner of war, published in a supplement to the London Gazette on 8 June 1944.

William is buried at the Poznan Old Garrison Cemetery, Poland

William is commemorated on Wall Panel 174

Photo source: <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205234801>