

PO Douglas Charles Henley MiD 414622 RNZAF

Douglas, known as Doug, was born on 19 October 1919 in Helensville, Auckland, New Zealand, the son of William James Henley and Mabel Alice Henley nee Pinnock.

Educated at Seddon Memorial Technical College, Auckland, Douglas was working as a salesman when, in August 1940, he applied for aircrew duties with the RNZAF.

Called up in August 1941, Douglas completed his pilot training in New Zealand in December 1941 with the award of his wings, and embarked for the UK in February 1942.

Following advanced training at 11 OTU RAF Wescott, Buckinghamshire, and 1665 HCU RAF Woolfox Lodge, Rutland, in August 1943 Douglas was posted to 75(NZ) Sqn at RAF Mepal, Cambridgeshire. Douglas was granted a commission on 30 August 1943

On 31 August 1943, Bomber Command was tasked with an op against Berlin. A combined force of 622 aircraft, including eighteen 75(NZ) Sqn crews were allocated to the Op. Four aircraft failed to return

At 20:31 on 31 August Douglas and his crew departed RAF Mepal in Stirling III EE878 (AA-P). Moderate to heavy flak co-operating with searchlights, together with enemy fighters in great prominence, were reported in the target area by returning crews.

Whilst over the target area, Douglas's aircraft was hit by anti-aircraft fire, putting the port inner engine out of action and damaging the port tailplane. The aircraft lost considerable height and was then attacked by a night fighter. Douglas was able to evade the fighter, and nursed the aircraft homeward for nearly 500km, before ordering the crew to abandon the aircraft as they were nearly out of fuel. Some of the crew succeeded in clearing the aircraft before it crashed at Ahrbrück, 7 miles SW of Ahrweiler. Douglas stayed at the controls in order to give his crew the chance to escape. This was Douglas's 6th Op.

In June 1946 Douglas was posthumously Mentioned in Despatches for his actions during this Op.

Also killed: FO Clifford Arnold Watson RNZAF (Nav); FS Hector Ross Smith RNZAF (BA)

Originally buried in Mayschoss Churchyard, Rheinland-Pfalz, in June 1947 Douglas was moved to the Rheinberg War Cemetery, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Germany

Douglas is commemorated on Wall Panel 180

Douglas's older brother, FO William John Henry Henley DFC RNZAF, was killed in action on 30 August 1945

Photo Source: IBCC

