

WO2 Ernest Frank Henry R/139159 RCAF

Ernest was born on 27 February 1917 in St Catharine's, Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada, the son of Ernest Frank Henry and Anne Henry nee Prarie. In March 1942 Ernest married Helen Margaret Sinnicks in Niagara Falls.

Educated at Maple Street School and Niagara Falls Collegiate and Vocational Institute, Ernest was employed as a welder by the North American Cyanamid Company when, in May 1941, he applied for aircrew duties in the RCAF.

Called up in November 1941, Ernest completed his aircrew training in Canada in March 1942, with the award of his Air Gunner badge, and immediately embarked for the UK.

Following advanced training at 10 OTU RAF Abingdon, Oxfordshire, 12 OTU RAF Chipping Warden, Northamptonshire and 1651 HCU RAF Waterbeach, Cambridgeshire, in October 1942 Ernest was posted to 15 Sqn at RAF Bourn, Cambridgeshire.

In November 1942, whilst on an op to Turin, Ernest's aircraft suffered an engine failure and, due to insufficient fuel enabling a return to the UK, they set course for Spain. After crash landing on a Spanish beach on the border with France, the crew were met by the Spanish Guardia Civil and imprisoned. Released soon after and allowed to travel to Gibraltar, the crew made their way back to the UK, arriving at the beginning of February 1943. Following debriefing and leave, Ernest returned to 15 Sqn on the 18 February 1943. In May 1943 Ernest was posted to 75 (NZ) Sqn at RAF Newmarket, Cambridgeshire.

On 30/31 July 1943 Bomber Command was tasked with an op against the industrial target of Remscheid, Noord-Rhein Westphalia, the first attack on this target, and one that marked the end of the Battle of the Ruhr. A combined force of 273 aircraft, including thirteen 75(NZ) crews were allocated to the op. Two crews failed to return.

At 22:41 Ernest, operating as the Rear Gunner, and the crew departed RAF Mepal, Cambridgeshire in Stirling III BF458 (JN-P).

At 01:22 on 31 July Ernest's aircraft was intercepted by Uffz Otto Steinhagen flying a Bf109 of the 5./NJG 2. The aircraft crashed at Uerdingen, NE of Krefeld, Nordrhein-Westfalen, killing five of the seven man crew. The Navigator and Wireless Operator survived and were taken as POW. This was Ernest's 19th op.

This was a very successful attack. A post war British survey estimated that 83% of the city was destroyed and most of the town's industry lost 3 months of production, never regaining full capacity.

Also Killed: PO Frederic William Raukawa Cumpsty RNZAF (AB); PO Alfred John Thomas (Pilot); Sgt John William Gale (FE); Sgt John Hubert O'Farrell AG

Ernest has no known grave and is commemorated on the Runnymede Memorial, Surrey

Ernest is commemorated on Wall Panel 180

Photo Source: www.veterans.gc.ca

