

FO Laurence John Kirkpatrick 414990 RNZAF

Laurence was born on 8 February 1923 in Gore, Southland, New Zealand, the son of Matthew Kirkpatrick and Grace Kirkpatrick nee Woodruffe.

Educated at Gore High School, Laurence was employed as a shepherd on the family sheep station when, in July 1940, he volunteered for aircrew duties in the RNZAF.

Called up in September 1941, Laurence completed his basic flying training in New Zealand before, in December, he was sent to Canada to continue his training under the Empire Air Training Scheme.

In April 1942 Laurence was awarded his Wings and, following training in the use of wireless aids in air navigation at No.1 Wireless School, Montreal, Quebec, in December he was granted a commission and embarked for the UK the following month.

Following advanced training at 15(P) AFU RAF Greenham Common, Berkshire, 11 OTU RAF Westcott, Buckinghamshire where he qualified on the Wellington and 1657 HCU RAF Stradishall, Suffolk for conversion to the Stirling, in August 1943 Laurence was posted to 75(NZ) Sqn at RAF Mepal, Cambridgeshire.



On 23 September 1943 Bomber Command was tasked with an op against Mannheim, an industrial and communications centre home to vital war industries including the manufacturers of naval armaments, the Daimler-Benz works and the BASF chemical plants. A combined force of 628 aircraft, including eighteen 75(NZ) Sqn crews, were allocated to the op. Three squadron crews failed to return.

At 19:52 on 23 September Laurence and his crew departed RAF Mepal in Stirling III EH935 (JN-K).

Homeward bound, at 23:07 Laurence's aircraft was coned by searchlights and intercepted by Uffz Heinz Amsberg of 9./NJG 1 flying a Bf110 from Twente Airfield, Netherlands. The aircraft caught fire and, following unsuccessful attempts to extinguish the flames, Laurence ordered the crew to bale out.

The aircraft crashed between Edesheim and Knoringen, SE of Neustadt, Rhineland-Palatinate, Germany, killing five of the crew. Only the Air Bomber and Mid Upper Gunner were able to bale out and were taken as POW. This was Laurence's 8th op.

Also Killed: FO Hugh Powell Sands RNZAF (Nav); FS William Louis Jarvis RAAF (AG); Sgt Charles Percival Ellins (FE); Sgt Joseph Edwards Hoey (WOp/AG)

Originally buried in Knoringen Cemetery, Rhineland-Palatinate, Germany, in April 1948 Laurence was moved to the Rheinberg War Cemetery, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Germany.

Laurence is commemorated on Wall Panel 194

Photo Source: aucklandmuseum.com