

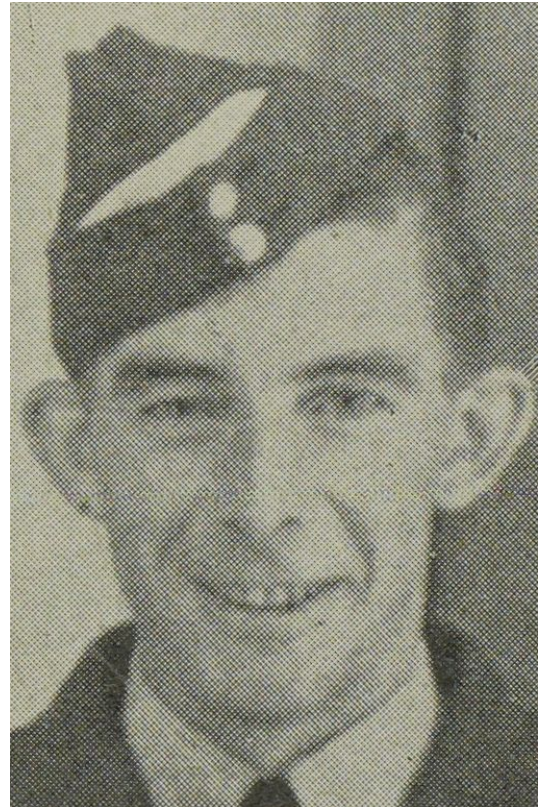
FS William Simpson McIlraith 428982 RNZAF

William was born on 12 September 1916 in Waimate, Canterbury, New Zealand, the only son of William McIlraith and Georgina Easton McIlraith nee Wright.

Educated at Waimate High School, William was employed as a tractor and lorry driver in Waimate when, in February 1941, he volunteered for service in the RNZAF. Called up in August 1942, William was employed on ground duties until November when he commenced basic flying training in New Zealand. In February 1943 William was sent to Canada to continue his training under the Empire Air Training Scheme.

William completed his aircrew training in Canada in July 1943 with the award of his Air Bomber badge, and he embarked for the UK in September.

Following advanced training at 5 (O) Advanced Flying Unit, RAF Wigtown, Dumfries, Scotland, 84 OTU RAF Ossington, Nottinghamshire, 1653 HCU RAF Chedburgh, Suffolk and 31 Base RAF Feltwell, Norfolk, on 10 July 1944 William was posted to 514 Sqn at RAF Waterbeach, Cambridgeshire.



On 20/21 July 1944, Bomber Command was tasked with an operation to target the Steinkohlen- Bergwerk Rheinpreussen plant located in Mors-Meerbeck, Nordrhein-Westphalia, Germany, near the Rheinpreussen coal mine, where it converted coal into petroleum and other oil-based products.

A combined force of 158 aircraft, including twenty-four 514 Sqn aircraft was allocated to the op. Four 514 Sqn crews failed to return.

At 23:08 on 20 July William, operating as the Bomb Aimer, and the crew departed RAF Waterbeach in Lancaster I LM181 (JI-E).

Several claims were made for the loss of William's aircraft. Between 01:16 and 01:34 on 21 July William's aircraft was reported as intercepted by Fw Klaus Moller of the 12./NJG3, Fw Hubert Allemeier of the 8./NJG2 and Ofw Heinrich Schmidt of the 2./NJG3. An additional claim was made by the anti-aircraft unit, Flak Abt.401, at Neukirchen at 01:22.

William's aircraft crashed at Neukirchen, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Germany, killing all on board. This was William's 1st op.

Also Killed: FO Lamont Weir McLean RNZAF (pilot); FS Thomas Kerr Durie RNZAF (WOp/AG); FS Arthur Thompson Stone RNZAF (Nav); Sgt George William Bumstead (FE); Sgt Ronald Ernest Digby (AG); Sgt Malcolm Duncan (AG)

Originally buried in Neukirchen Communal Cemetery, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Germany, in June 1947 William was moved to Reichswald Forest War Cemetery, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Germany.

William is commemorated on Wall Panel 209

Photo Source: www.aucklandmuseum.com