

PO Francis Max McKenzie 41344 RNZAF

Francis, known as Max, was born on 18 November 1916 in Dannevirke, Manawatū-Whanganui, New Zealand, the son of Frederick Ernest McKenzie and Alice Maud McKenzie nee Saunders.

Educated at Dannevirke High School, Francis was a junior partner in the family printing business when, in January 1940, he applied for aircrew duties with the RNZAF.

Called up in January 1941, Francis completed his pilot training in New Zealand in June 1941 with the award of his wings, and embarked for the UK in August. Francis was posted to No. 1 Air Gunners' School RAF Pembrey, Wales, where he was employed as a staff pilot until February 1943 when he was posted to ops.

Following advanced training at 11 OTU RAF Westcott Buckinghamshire and 1657 HCU RAF Stradishall, Suffolk for conversion to the Stirling, in May 1943 Francis was granted a commission and posted to 75(NZ) Sqn at RAF Newmarket, Cambridgeshire in June.



On 22/23 June 1943 Bomber Command was tasked with an op against Mulheim, a major centre of manufacturing in the Ruhr industrial region. A combined force of 557 aircraft were allocated to the task, including fifteen 75(NZ) Sqn crews. Four crews failed to return.

At 23:47 on the 22 June 1943 Francis and his crew departed RAF Newmarket, Cambridgeshire, in Stirling III BK810 (AA-G).

On the return, and in the Hüls area near Krefeld, Germany, Francis's aircraft was hit by flak and set on fire. The crew managed to get the fire under control and continued on course home. Shortly afterwards, the aircraft was intercepted by a night fighter that fired into the wings from underneath the Stirling. The fuel in the wings ignited and Francis ordered the crew to bale out. Six of the crew escaped from the aircraft before, at 02:12 on 23 June, it crashed at Oostrum, 1 mile E of Vendray, Holland. The last sight of Francis was as he was struggling to leave his seat; unfortunately, he did not make it. This was Francis's 5th op.

The remaining 5 crew were taken as POW, although two managed to evade for a few weeks.

Post war analysis confirmed this was a very successful attack, with 64% of the town reported as destroyed.

Also killed: FS John Frederick Blank RNZAF (AB)

Originally buried in Mook British Cemetery, Limberg, Netherlands, in December 1947 Francis was moved to the Jonkerbos War Cemetery, Gelderland, Netherlands

Francis is commemorated on Wall Panel 209

Photo Source: 75nzsquadron.wordpress.com