

FS John Murdoch Thomas McKenzie 427217 RNZAF

John was born on 4 January 1917 in Makino, Feilding, New Zealand, the son of Pte John Murdoch McKenzie (Wellington Regiment NZEF, KIA 19 October 1916, France) and Ivy Winifred McKenzie nee Pilcher.

Following education at Wanganui Collegiate School, John entered Flock House under the Soldiers' Son's scheme for agriculture training. John was employed as a farmhand and tractor driver by his stepfather in Levin when, in April 1941, he volunteered for service in the RNZAF.

Called up in July 1942, following basic training in New Zealand, in November John was sent to Canada to train under the Empire Air Training Scheme. In April 1943 John was awarded his Navigator badge, and he embarked for the UK in May.

Following advanced training at 4(O) Advanced Flying Unit RAF West Freugh, Wigtown, Scotland, 11 OTU RAF Westcott, Buckinghamshire, where he converted to multi crew/multi engine ops on the Wellington, and 1657 HCU RAF Stradishall, Suffolk for conversion to the Stirling, in March 1944 John was posted to 75(NZ) Sqn at RAF Mepal, Cambridgeshire, converting to the Lancaster in April.

As part of the "Transportation Plan", the targeting of bridges and rail infrastructure in order to limit the German military response to the invasion of France, on 10/11 June 1944, 432 Bomber Command aircraft, including twenty-four 75(NZ) Sqn crews, were tasked with operations against railway targets at Acheres, Dreux, Orleans and Versailles. John's target was Dreux, Eure-et-Loir, France. Two squadron crews failed to return.

At 23:09 John, operating as the Navigator, and the crew departed RAF Mepal in Lancaster I ME702 (AA-Q)

Shortly after leaving the target in the early hours of 11 June, John's aircraft was hit twice by flak and broke up in the air, killing six of the crew. The Mid Upper Gunner survived to be taken POW. This was John's 16th op.

Also killed: FO Henry Herbert Marsh (Wop/AG); PO Lester Lascelles Bonisch RNZAF (Pilot); FS James Stuart Miller RNZAF (AB); Sgt Frank William Cousins (AG); Sgt William Thomas Reaveley (FE)

Originally buried in St Andre US Military Cemetery, Normandy, France, in June 1945 John was moved to Bayeux War Cemetery, Calvados, France.

John is commemorated on Wall Panel 209

Photo Source: aucklandmuseum.com

