

P/O Ernest Ian Parsons DFC 43370 RAF

Former England rugby international Ernest 'Pip' Parsons was a 27-year-old pilot who died after an heroic attempt to nurse his crippled Whitley back to England after Bomber Command's first raid on Italy in August 1940. He was the pilot of Whitley P4965 ZA-H, of 10 Squadron, that was one of 35 bombers sent to attack sites in industrial sites in Turin and Milan on the night of 13/14 August.



Ten of those Whitleys came from 10 Squadron, by then based at RAF Leeming in north Yorkshire. They staged for refuelling through the airfield at RAF Abingdon for the long trip to northern Italy. Their target was the Fiat aero engine plant in Turin and it was over the target when P4965 was badly damaged by an Italian CR42 fighter which, after running out of ammunition, eventually rammed the RAF bomber leaving the Whitley without one engine and the starboard aileron badly damaged.

Pip and his crew then nursed the damaged bomber back over the Alps and across France with the intention of crash-landing on the nearest landing place in England – the sandy beach near Dymchurch Redoubt in Kent.



They almost made it but, a mile short of their hopeful landing ground, the aileron fell off and the Whitley crashed into the sea. Pip and his co-pilot, Sgt. Alfred Campion, were killed but the other three members of the crew were rescued, two by local fishmen and the third by a local young woman who spotted the crash and headed for the wreckage in a small canoe to pick him up, an effort that earned her a British Empire Medal.

Pip was born in Christchurch, in New Zealand, and after his education at Christchurch Boys' High School and Canterbury University (where he obtained a Bachelor of Commerce degree), he worked for the Public Trust office before travelling to England to join the RAF. He trained as a pilot before leaving to become a pilot/instructor at Scottish Aviation Ltd, aircraft manufacturers in Prestwick. As war approached, he rejoined the RAF and became a Whitley pilot with 10 Squadron in 1939, firstly at RAF Dishforth and then Leeming. He was awarded his Distinguished Flying Cross on 30 July 1940.

Pip had been a noted rugby player in New Zealand and later, in England, went on to represent Yorkshire and the RAF before making his England debut (thanks to his grandparents' British ancestry) against Scotland in a Calcutta Cup match at Murrayfield, shortly before the war intervened.

Pip and his wife, Miriam, were married in Kent in October 1939 and their daughter, Tina, was born in November 1940, three months after his death. The bodies of Pip and his co-pilot were later washed ashore on the French coast and both are buried in Boulogne Eastern Cemetery.

Pip's name can be found on panel 223.

Sources: Dave Aitch at Rugby Network/Bomber Command War Diaries/Bomber Command Losses 1939-40 by Bill Chorley.