

Sgt Francis Rex Pickering 1166528 RAFVR

Francis was born on 14 July 1910 in Alderwasley, Derbyshire, the son of Francis Pickering and Mary Elizabeth Pickering nee Waterfield. In 1942 he married Sissy Joan Hughes in Lincoln, Lincolnshire.

Educated locally, in 1939 he was employed as a Clerk in a Hosiery Factory. Francis joined the RAF in 1940 and trained as a WOp/AG.

On 31 October 1942, seventeen Bostons from 88 and 107 Sqns were tasked with attacking the power stations in the vicinity of Lille (Rijsel) and Bethune, France. Francis and the crew from 107 Sqn were flying an 88 Sqn airframe. Four Bostons aimed for Mazingarbe, four to Gosnay, six to Pont-a-Vendin and three to Comines. Ronald and his crew were headed for Pont-a-Vendin.

At 11:27 Francis, operating as one of the two WOp/AGs, and the crew departed RAF Great Massingham, Norfolk, in Boson III Z2179 (RH). Whilst over Jonkershove, Belgium the aircraft was attacked by two FW190s of 8/JG26s from

Wevelgem-Kortijk, Belgium. The lead aircraft was piloted by Lt Paul Galland, the younger brother of the air ace Adolph Galland. Although Francis and the other air gunner returned fire, the shells from Galland's guns had set the aircraft on fire. An eye witness on the ground reported that, before the final fatal landing, the pilot had made an attempt to land the aircraft but was forced to pull up due to a row of trees blocking the approach. After this failed attempt, the aircraft was flown towards Noordschote. The eyewitness saw the burning aircraft crash land near Jonkershove, Belgium, sliding along the field until it flipped over and exploded. All on board were killed.

This was Lt Galland's seventeenth victory and his last. Five hours later he was killed when he was shot down into the sea by a Spitfire whilst returning from an escort mission for the bombers to Canterbury.

Also killed : FO Henry Philemon Collings (Pilot); Sgt Stanley Walter Nash (WOp/AG); Sgt Ronald Tebbutt (Navigator)

Originally buried in Woumen Churchyard, Diksmuide, Belgium, in August 1967 Francis and the crew were transferred to Adegem Canadian War Cemetery, Oost-Vlaanderen, Belgium.

Francis is commemorated on Wall Panel 226

Photo Source: Aircrew Remembered

