

## **FS James Leonard Richards 404946 RNZAF**

James was born on 24 January 1918 in Rakaia, Canterbury, New Zealand, the son of Henry Edward Harrison Richards and Jessie Elizabeth Richards nee Tait. Educated at Methven District High School, James was employed on the family farm when, in September 1939, he applied for aircrew duties with the RNZAF.

Called up in December 1940, James commenced pilot training in New Zealand; however, when his training was terminated in April 1941 he re-mustered as Observer and was sent to Canada to train under the Empire Air Training Scheme. In November 1941 James was awarded his Observer badge and, after completing further Air Bomber training, he embarked for the UK.

Following advanced training at 11 OTU RAF Bassingbourn, Hertfordshire, in September 1942 James was posted to 75(NZ) Sqn at RAF Mildenhall, Suffolk. When the squadron changed from the Wellington to the Stirling, James moved with the squadron to 1657 HCU RAF Stradishall, Suffolk for conversion training, before returning to RAF Newmarket, Cambridgeshire.



On 10 April whilst on an op to Frankfurt, James's aircraft was hit over the target by flak and further engaged in running battles with fighters whilst on return. This additional flight time caused the aircraft to run short of fuel over the English Channel and the aircraft had to ditch 3 miles off Shoreham-by-the-Sea, Sussex. The wireless procedure had been perfect, and Spitfires escorted it over the French coast, and a Walrus Flying Boat was waiting for it to crash land. The crew completed the dingy drill perfectly after an immaculate ditching. Unfortunately, the Walrus collided with the dinghy knocking all the crew in the water; however, all were subsequently rescued safely and were soon back on ops.

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 23:48 on the 22 June 1943 James, operating as the Bomb Aimer, and the crew departed RAF Newmarket, Cambridgeshire, in Stirling III EH889 (AA-Z).

At 02:26 on 23 June, James's aircraft was intercepted by FW Heinz Vinke flying a Bf110 of II./NJG 1. The aircraft crashed into the IJsselmeer, 5 miles E of Oosterland, Zeeland, killing all on board. This was James's 9th op.

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

Also killed: Flt Lt Thomas Fraser McCrorie (Pilot); PO William Stuckey MiD (Nav); WO2 Richard Douglas Tod RCAF(WOp/AG); WO2 Robert Ernest Tod DFM RCAF (WOp/AG); Sgt Eric Grainger (FE); Sgt Raymond Anthony Kennedy (AG)

James has no known grave and is commemorated on the Runnymede Memorial, Surrey

James is commemorated on Wall Panel 232

Photo Source: IBCC