Cpl Geoffrey Arthur Rigby 532880 RAF



Geoffrey was born in 1916 in Huddersfield, Yorkshire, the only son of Francis Arthur Rigby and Edith Ridley Rigby nee Packett.

Educated at Oakes Council School and Huddersfield College, Geoffrey joined the RAF in 1936.

In April 1940, 98 Squadron moved from England to Chateau Bougon, near Nantes, France as a supporting unit to the AASF fighting squadrons, supplying replacement crew and aircraft as needed. The Squadron was also involved in the receiving of Aircrews from England, consisting of Pilots, Observers and Air Gunners, and completing their training in France before sending them to Operational Squadrons in the forward area. Geoffrey, a WOp/AG, was one of these airmen.

When France capitulated, the AASF began the withdrawal to England. Just two weeks after Dunkirk, Operation Aerial was launched - the evacuation of the servicemen and civilians who had been left behind and involved over 130 British and allied vessels. There were an estimated 40,000-60,000 men, women, and children waiting to be rescued at St. Nazaire, Brittany.

On 15 June 1940, the CO of 98 Sqn left Chateau Bougon Aerodrome, Nantes in the last aircraft belonging to the squadron. The Adjutant was left in charge of the remaining personnel, numbering 13 officers and 230 other ranks. The party was given orders to proceed to St Nazaire on 16 June to embark for England.

RMS Lancastria arrived in the mouth of the Loire estuary late on 16 June. Her normal complement in troopship configuration was 2,180 including 330 crew; however, the Captain was told to take as many as he possibly could.

Troops were ferried out to Lancastria and the other larger ships by destroyers, tugs, fishing boats and other small craft, a round trip of three or four hours, and by mid-afternoon of 17 June she had embarked an unknown number (estimates range from 4,000 up to 9,000).

At 15:50 the Lancastria was within minutes of hauling up anchor when a lone JU88 bomber from Kampfgeschwader 30 began its bombing run. Lancastria was hit by three bombs and sank within 20 minutes. Estimates of the death toll vary from 3,000 - 6,500, the largest loss of life in British maritime history.

Geoffrey was one of at least ninety-six 98Sqn personnel lost in the sinking of the Lancastria.

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

Geoffrey is commemorated on Wall Panel 232

Photo Source: Huddersfield and Holmfirth Examiner