

FS Eric John Roberts 417107 RNZAF

Eric was born on 18 October 1917 in Oamaru, North Otago, New Zealand, the son of Albert Harry Roberts and Gertrude Elizabeth Roberts nee Dohrmann.

Educated at Pleasant Point District High School, Canterbury, Eric was employed on the family farm in Pleasant Point when, in November 1939, he volunteered for service in the RNZAF.

Called up in December 1941, Eric completed his pilot training in New Zealand in June 1942 with the award of his Wings and embarked for the UK in September.

Following advanced training at No 15 (P) Advanced Flying Unit, RAF Ramsbury, Wiltshire, 11 OTU RAF Westcott, Buckinghamshire, and 1651 HCU RAF Waterbeach, Cambridgeshire, in July 1943 Eric was posted to 75 (NZ) Sqn at RAF Mepal, Cambridgeshire.

On 31 August/1 September 1943 Bomber Command was tasked with an op against Berlin, Germany. A combined force of 622 aircraft was allocated to the op, including eighteen 75(NZ) crews.

At 20:19 on 31 August 1943 Eric and his crew departed RAF Mepal in Stirling III EE918 (AA-D).

Whilst on the return, at 23:59 on 31 August, Eric's aircraft was intercepted by Lt Heinz Grimm of Stab IV./NJG1 flying a Bf110 from Leeuwarden Airfield, Netherlands. The aircraft flew on for a further 10-15 minutes during which time Eric requested that the Mid Upper Gunner, who was the closest to the rear gun turret, go back and check on the Rear Gunner because he had heard nothing from him since the attack. The Mid Upper Gunner reported that the Rear Gunner had been killed in the attack.

Returning to his position, there was an explosion which broke the plane into two pieces and the Mid Upper Gunner, the only member of the crew not in his position and was not in his harness, fell out of the plane which went down with the rest of the crew, all still harnessed in.

The aircraft crashed at Derental, Lower Saxony, Germany, 5 miles SSE of Hoxter, Neidersachsen, Germany, killing six of the seven-man crew. The Mid Upper Gunner was captured and was taken as a POW. This was Eric's 12th op.

Also killed: FO Robert Gorman Rainford (Nav); PO John Cecil Giles (AB); FS Darcy Leslie Conrad Haub RNZAF (AG); FS Kensington Campbell Jackson RNZAF (WOp/AG); Sgt Eric Saunders (FE)

Originally buried in Hoxter Cemetery, Neidersachsen, Germany, in October 1947 Eric was moved to the Hanover War Cemetery, Neidersachsen, Germany.

Eric is commemorated on Wall Panel 233

Photo Source: aucklandmuseum.com

