

FO Hugh Powell Sands 403287 RNZAF

Hugh was born on 25 June 1916 in Aylsham, Norfolk, England, the son of Ernest Frederick James Sands and Kathleen Mary Sands nee Powell. In 1924 the family emigrated to New Zealand and settled in Auckland. In 1941 he married Doris Toon in New Zealand.

Educated at Dilworth School, Auckland, Hugh was employed as a draughtsman in the Lands and Survey Department, Auckland when, in September 1939, he volunteered for aircrew duties in the RNZAF.

Called up in August 1940, Hugh was employed on ground duties until March 1942 when he commenced basic aircrew training in New Zealand before, in May, he was sent to Canada to continue his training under the Empire Air Training Scheme. In October 1942 Hugh was awarded his Navigator badge, granted a commission and immediately embarked for the UK.

Following advanced training at 1(O) AFU RAF Wigtown, Scotland, 11 OTU RAF Westcott, Buckinghamshire where he qualified on the Wellington and 1657 HCU RAF Stradishall, Suffolk for conversion to the Stirling, in August 1943 Hugh was posted to 75(NZ) Sqn at RAF Mepal, Cambridgeshire.

On 23 September 1943 Bomber Command was tasked with an op against Mannheim, an industrial and communications centre home to vital war industries including the manufacturers of naval armaments, the Daimler-Benz works and the BASF chemical plants. A combined force of 628 aircraft, including eighteen 75(NZ) Sqn crews, were allocated to the op. Three squadron crews failed to return.

At 19:52 on 23 September Hugh, operating as the Navigator, and the crew departed RAF Mepal, Cambridgeshire, in Stirling III EH935 (JN-K).

Homeward bound, at 23:07 Hugh's aircraft was coned by searchlights and intercepted by Uffz Heinz Amsberg of 9./NJG 1 flying a Bf110 from Twente Airfield, Netherlands. The aircraft caught fire and, following unsuccessful attempts to extinguish the flames, the pilot ordered the crew to bale out. The aircraft crashed between Edesheim and Knoringen, SE of Neustadt, Rhineland-Palatinate, Germany, killing five of the crew. Only the Air Bomber and Mid Upper Gunner were able to bale out and were taken as POW. This was Hugh's 8th op.

Also Killed: FO Laurence John Kirkpatrick RNZAF (Pilot); FS William Louis Jarvis RAAF (AG); Sgt Charles Percival Ellins (FE); Sgt Joseph Edwards Hoey (WOp/AG)

Originally buried in Edesheim Cemetery, Rhineland-Palatinate, Germany, in April 1948 Hugh was moved to the Rheinberg War Cemetery, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Germany.

Hugh is commemorated on Wall Panel 237

Photo Source: aucklandmuseum.com

