

FS Keith Varndell Stafford 421784 RNZAF

Keith was born on 23 February 1918 in Dargaville, Northland, New Zealand, the son of John William Stafford and Margaret Lilian Stafford nee Carrington.

Educated at Wellington College, after leaving school Keith attended lectures on commercial subjects at Victoria University College, where he passed a section of the Bachelor of Commerce Degree. Keith was employed by the Reserve Bank of New Zealand when, in May 1941, he applied for aircrew service in the RNZAF.

Called up in March 1942, following basic aircrew training in New Zealand, in August 1942 he embarked for Canada to continue his pilot training under the Empire Air Training Scheme. When his pilot training was suspended, Keith re-mustered as navigator and in May 1943 he was awarded his Navigator badge and embarked for the UK the following month.

Following advanced training at 9 (O) Advanced Flying Unit, RAF Llandwrog, Wales, 11 OTU RAF Westcott, Buckinghamshire, 1657 HCU RAF Stradishall, Suffolk and Lancaster conversion at 31 Base RAF Feltwell, Norfolk, in April 1944 Keith was posted to 514 Sqn at RAF Waterbeach, Cambridgeshire.

On 11/12 September 1944 Bomber Command was tasked with an op against Frankfurt, the final major raid of the war on this target. A combined force of 387 aircraft, including fourteen 514 Sqn crews, was allocated to the task.

At 18:44 on 12 September Keith, operating as the Navigator, and the crew departed RAF Mildenhall in Lancaster II LL731 (JI-U).

At 23:30 on 12 September, Keith's aircraft was intercepted by Lt Fred Hromadnik of the 9./NJG4. A second claim was made by Flak of 1.-3./schw. Flak Abt. 430 (Eisb.) The aircraft crashed at Kordel 5 miles NW of Trier, Rheinland-Palatinate, Germany, killing five of the seven-man crew. The Bomb Aimer and Flight Engineer survived and were taken as POW. This was Keith's 28th op.

Also Killed: FO William Douglas Brickwood (Pilot); PO Ronald Gordon Collender RNZAF (WOp/AG); PO James Samuel Lupton RAAF (AG); Sgt William Percy Blake (AG)

Originally buried in Kordel Cemetery, Rheinland-Palatinate, Germany, in May 1948 Keith was moved to the Rheinberg War Cemetery, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Germany.

Keith is commemorated on Wall Panel 246

Photo Source: aucklandmuseum.com

