

FS Donald Mackay Stewart 421336 RNZAF

Donald was born on 17 February 1914 in Stratford, Taranaki, New Zealand, the son of John Johnston Stewart and Annie Miller Mood Stewart nee Mackay.

Educated at Stratford Technical High School, Donald was employed as a farm labourer when, in May 1941, he applied for service with the RNZAF.

Called up in February 1942, Donald completed his basic training in New Zealand before he was sent to Canada to complete his training under the Empire Air Training Scheme.

In September 1942 Donald was awarded his Navigator badge and embarked for the UK immediately.

Following advanced training at 11 OTU RAF Wescott, Buckinghamshire, and 1667 HCU RAF Stradishall, Suffolk, in May 1943 Donald was posted to 75(NZ) Sqn at RAF Mepal, Cambridgeshire.

On 31 August 1943, Bomber Command was tasked with an op against Berlin. A combined force of 622 aircraft, including eighteen 75(NZ) Sqn crews were allocated to the Op. Four aircraft failed to return

At 20:32 on 31 August Donald, operating as the Navigator, and the crew departed RAF Mepal in Stirling III EH905 (AA-R). Moderate to heavy flak co-operating with searchlights, together with enemy fighters in great prominence were reported in the target area by returning crews.

In the early hours of 1 September whilst in the target area, Donald's aircraft crashed at Genshagen near Ludwigsfelde in the grounds of the DB factory, 11 miles SE of Potsdam, killing five of the crew. The Rear Gunner baled out, and the Mid Upper Gunner was blown out, both were taken POW. This was Donald's 19th Op.

There are two claims to the loss of Donald's aircraft. It is known that the Stirling was struck leading to a catastrophic failure of the flight controls. Initially, the intelligence received by 75(NZ) Sqn suggested the aircraft was hit by a bomb load released by an allied aircraft flying above. However, a post war investigation into the loss of a Bf110 from 5./NJG 1 concluded that this aircraft struck Donald's aircraft with full force, separating the wing of the fighter, leading to the crash of both aircraft.

Also killed: PO George Vincent Helm RNZAF (Pilot); FS Joseph George Arkless Fisk RNZAF (AB); Sgt Arthur John Bishop (WOp/AG); Sgt Oliver McCoo (FE)

Originally buried in the Russian Prisoner of War Cemetery, Ludwigsfelde-Heide, Brandenburg, 20 miles South of Berlin, in April 1947 Donald was moved to the Berlin 1939 - 1945 War Cemetery

Donald is commemorated on Wall Panel 248

Photo Source: aucklandmuseum.com

