

FO Clifford Arnold Watson 421946 RNZAF

Clifford was born on 18 July 1909 in Christchurch, New Zealand, the son of William James Watson and Janet Watson nee Mail, husband of Ivy Mavis.

Educated at Southland Boys' High School, Clifford was employed on the staff of the Commercial Bank of Australia when, in March 1941, he applied for aircrew duties with the RNZAF.

Called up in March 1942, Clifford completed his initial training in New Zealand before being sent to Canada under the Empire Air Training Scheme. In October 1942 Clifford was awarded his Navigator badge and granted a commission, embarking for the UK immediately.



Following advanced training at 11 OTU RAF Wescott, Buckinghamshire, and 1665 HCU RAF Woolfox Lodge, Rutland, in August 1943 Clifford 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 20:31 on 31 August Clifford, operating as the Navigator, and the crew departed RAF Mepal in Stirling III EE878 (AA-P). Moderate to heavy flak co-operating with searchlights, together with enemy fighters in great prominence were reported in the target area by returning crews.

Whilst over the target area, Clifford's aircraft was hit by anti-aircraft fire, putting the port inner engine out of action and damaging the port tailplane. The aircraft lost considerable height and were then attacked by a night fighter. The pilot was able to evade the fighter and nursed the aircraft homeward for nearly 500km, before ordering the crew to abandon the aircraft as they were nearly out of fuel. Some of the crew succeeded in clearing the aircraft before it crashed at Ahrbruck, 7 miles SW of Ahrweiler.

Due to the low level of the Stirling, although he successfully evacuated the aircraft, Clifford's parachute failed to fully deploy and he was killed on impact. This was Clifford's 5th Op.

Also killed: PO Douglas Charles Henley MiD RNZAF (Pilot); FS Hector Ross Smith RNZAF (BA)

Originally buried in Mayschoss Churchyard, Rheinland-Pfalz, in June 1947 Clifford was moved to the Rheinberg War Cemetery, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Germany

Clifford is commemorated on Wall Panel 260

Photo Source: IBCC