FS James Douglas Woodburn R/54201 DFM RCAF



James was born on 8 December 1914 in Cyrville, Ontario, Canada, the son of Henry Paden Woodburn and Mary Woodburn nee Blair.

Educated at Gloucester Township School, Lisgar Collegiate Institute, Ottawa and the University of Toronto where he gained a BSc (Agriculture), James was employed as a plant chemist by Libby, McNeill & Libby of Canada Ltd, Food Producers, Ontario when, in February 1940, he volunteered for service in the RCAF.

Called up in September, James completed his flying training in Canada in March 1941 with the award of his Wings and embarked for the UK in May. Following advanced training at 13 OTU RAF Bicester, Oxfordshire where he converted to the Blenheim, in July 1941 James was posted to 18 Sqn at RAF Horsham St Faith, Norfolk.

In August 1941 James was awarded the DFM. His citation read:

"On the morning of 12 August 1941 Blenheim bombers carried out simultaneous attacks on the great power stations near cologne. A strong force attacked the station at Knapsack, whilst a smaller force attacked 2 stations at Quadrath. These missions involved a flight of some 250 miles over enemy territory which was carried out at an altitude of 100 feet at Knapsack. The target was accurately bombed and machine gunned from between 200 and 800 feet and at Quadrath both power stations were hit from the height of the chimneys. The turbine house at one of the 2 stations was left a mass of flames and smoke. The success of this combined daylight attack and the coordination of the many formations of aircraft depended largely on accurate timing throughout the flight. That complete success was achieved despite powerful opposition from enemy ground and air forces is a high tribute to the calm courage and resolute determination displayed by the following officers and airmen who participated in various capacities as leaders and members of the aircraft crews".

In October 1941 18 Sqn was sent to RAF Luqa, Malta in support of the African Campaign.

On 22 October 1941, 18 Sqn were tasked with "Op HOMS", allocating 6 Blenheims to bomb the Axis Military Barracks at Homs on the Mediterranean Coast of Libya.

On the morning of 22 October James and his crew departed RAF Luqa in Blenheim IV Z7898 (-W).

On the run in to the target, James's aircraft ran into a 40lb bomb, fitted with a parachute, that had been dropped by a lead aircraft. The Blenheim exploded in the air and crashed at Khims, Libya, killing all on board.

Also Killed: Sgt Lawrence Lawson (Obs); Sgt Geoffrey Robinson (WOp/AG)

Originally buried locally, in January 1945 James was moved to the Tripoli War Cemetery, Libya

James is commemorated on Wall Panel NYE

Photo Source: veterans.gc.ca