

Sergeant

## James Strang

Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve

78 Squadron, Royal Air Force

1378938



### Personal Information

James Strang was born on the 8<sup>th</sup> May 1912 in Blantyre nr, Hamilton, Lanarkshire. He was the son of William Strang and Margaret Strang (née Robson). He married his wife Wilhelmena Strang (née McInally) on the 9<sup>th</sup> October 1935 and together they had their first and only child, Malcolm Strang, on the 28<sup>th</sup> May 1937. Prior to joining the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve, James worked as a Baker's Roundsman in the County Durham area.

### Military Service

James enlisted into the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve on the 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1940 at 9 Recruit Centre, Blackpool. On the 25<sup>th</sup> September 1940, he was recommended for training as an Air Gunner. He then moved to 6 Recruit Centre, RAF Wilmslow, on the 8<sup>th</sup> October 1940 for further training, before being moved to RAF Aberporth on the 15<sup>th</sup> November 1940.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> May 1941 he began his Air Gunner training at 5 Bombing & Gunnery School, RAF Jurby, Isle of Man. On the 11<sup>th</sup> July 1941, he moved onto the final phase of his training with 10 Bombing & Gunnery School, RAF Dumfries and the next day he

was promoted to Leading Aircraftman. He successfully completed his Air Gunner training on the 8<sup>th</sup> August 1941.

On the 30<sup>th</sup> August 1941, James was posted to 19 Operational Training Unit, RAF Kinloss, where he received training on the Medium Bomber aircraft that he would go into operational service with, the Armstrong Whitworth Whitley Mk V.

James was posted to 78 Squadron, RAF Middleton-St-George, as a part of 4 Group, Bomber Command, on the 8<sup>th</sup> October 1941 and promoted to Sergeant the next day. He flew in his first operational sortie, a bombing mission targeting Nuremburg, on the 12<sup>th</sup> October 1941. He went on to fly in a further 8 operational sorties as an Air Gunner on this aircraft. On the 13<sup>th</sup> February 1942, he flew his final operational sortie in the Whitley.



*Armstrong Whitworth Whitley V – Z9302: The aircraft James flew in during his 7<sup>th</sup> Operational Sortie – 5<sup>th</sup> January 1942.*



*78 Squadron photograph following their conversion to the Halifax.*

78 Squadron then spent the next couple of months converting to Heavy Bombers, in the form of the Handley Page Halifax B Mk II. Following the conversion onto the Halifax, James was assigned as a Rear Gunner, to Halifax W7698, which was taken on charge by 78 Squadron on the 8<sup>th</sup> May 1942.

His fellow crew members were:

45071 Squadron Leader Leyland (Pilot),  
J/4773 Pilot Officer Geddes (Navigator),  
1307368 Sergeant Pugsley (Wireless Operator/Air Gunner)  
335281 Sergeant Lyons (Flight Engineer),  
1069578 Sergeant Brookes (Air Gunner)

Together they successfully took part in the first Thousand Bomber Raid on Cologne on the 30<sup>th</sup> May 1942.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> June 1942, they flew together in the second Thousand Bomber Raid, this time targeting Essen. They took off from RAF Croft, Yorkshire, at 2255 hrs that night. The aircraft is believed to have been shot down and crashed at 0043 hrs on the 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1942 about 750 metres off the Dutch-German border at the junction of Gennepar-Weg and Ketel-Strasse in the Reichswald Forest, about 3 kilometres SSW of Kranenburg, North Rhine-Westphalia, where it exploded on impact.

As a result of this incident, James was Killed In Action, along with Sergeants Brookes and Lyons. Squadron Leader Leyland, Pilot Officer Geddes and Sergeant Pugsley managed to successfully bail out and were subsequently taken as Prisoners of War. The three all went on to survive the war.



James was initially buried in Kranenburg Civilian Cemetery, Germany before later being laid to rest in Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery in July 1945.

James left behind his widow and young son, who had turned 5 just days before he was killed.

He also left behind a legacy of family service in the Royal Air Force, with a member of every subsequent generation serving in the RAF; a tradition which continues to this day.

Life story by Alastair Sheldon, RAF Police, he is a great-grandson of James Strang.