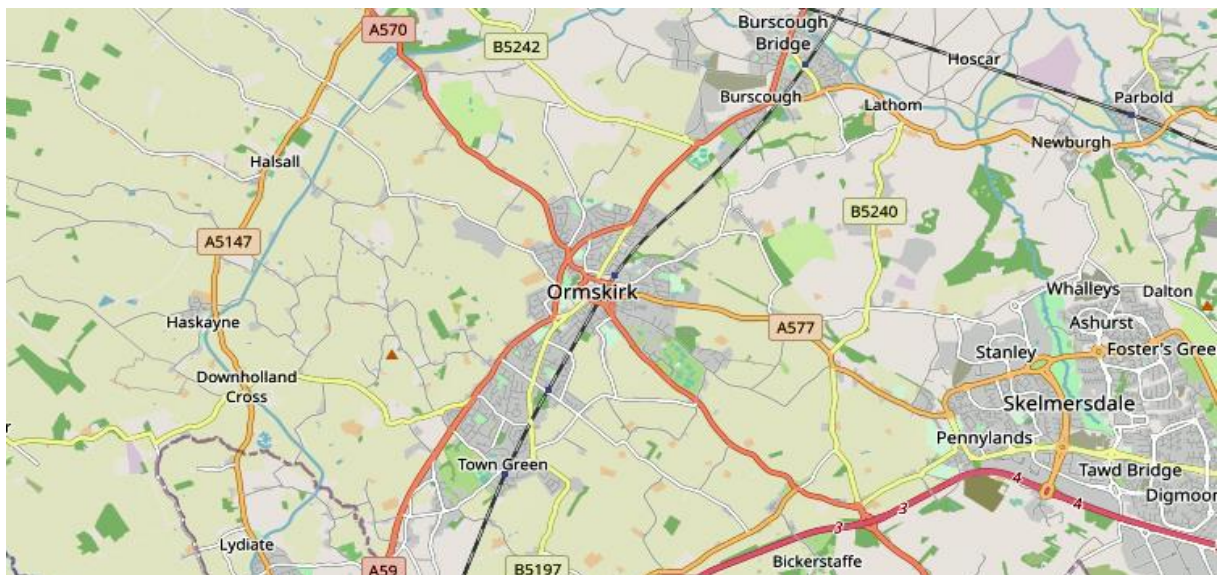


**Brookes, Wilfred**  
**Sergeant**  
**Wireless Operator/Airgunner**  
**Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve**  
**78 Squadron**  
**Royal Air Force**  
**1069578**



Nemo Non Paratus- "Nobody unprepared"

Wilfred Brookes was born in 1914 in England, the son of George and Frances Brookes. He was married to Elsie Brookes of Ormskirk, Lancashire, England, twenty-one miles north of Liverpool city center.



Wilfred Brookes enlisted in the Royal Air Force and was posted to No. 78 Squadron Royal Air Force. He trained as a Wireless Operator/ Air Gunner. Initially, the squadron flew the Armstrong Whitworth Whitley from July

1937 to March 1942. After that, the squadron was retrained to the Halifax B Mk II. Wilfred Brookes became a Wireless Operator/Air gunner on the Halifax W7698, which joined the squadron on 8 May 1942



His fellow crew members were:

- Pilot/Squadron Leader Geoffrey Douglas Leyland, Royal Air Force
- Navigator/Air Bomber Lloyd George Geddes, Royal Canadian Air Force
- Wireless Operator /Air Gunner Colin Gray Pugsley, Royal Air Force
- Flight Engineer James Edward Richard Lyons, Royal Air Force
- Rear Gunner Sergeant, James Strang, Royal Air Force

Together they successfully participated in the first "Thousand Bombers" attack on Cologne on May 30, 1942, codenamed "Operation Millennium." The 1047 bombers killed 500 people in the city. About 2500 fires broke out, and many buildings, including Cologne Cathedral, were severely damaged or destroyed.

On Monday, June 1, 1942, the Halifax B II W7698 with code EY-? departed at 10:55 p.m. from Royal Air Force Base Croft in Yorkshire, England, located 4.6 miles (7.4 km) south of Darlington, County Durham, England, and 8 miles (13 km) north-east of Richmond, North Yorkshire, Six crew members were on board to participate in the second "Thousand Bombers" raid, this time targeting Essen. The start of the attack was at 00:50, in three waves. The first Group IV aircraft arrived over Essen at 00:43 to 02:27, at 14,000 feet.

The weather that night was partly cloudy to clear, with 89% full moon and



good visibility during the operation. Light winds and variable during the first part of the day, later some wind from the north up to 10-15 mph.

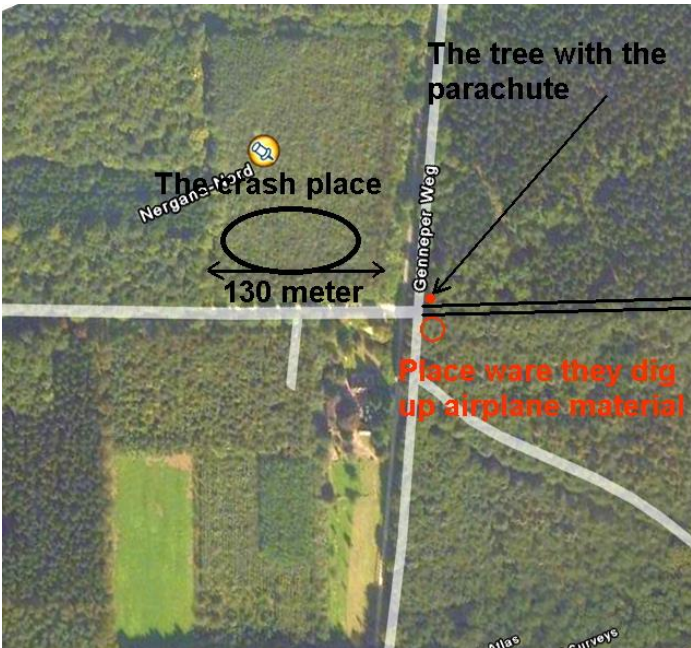
The aircraft was attacked by Oberleutnant Heinrich Alexander Ludwig Peter Prinz zu Sayn-Wittgenstein in a Junkers Ju-88 night fighter. The attack took place en route to their designated target, about 50-100 km west of Essen. This was between 00.25 am and 00.43 am. The cannon fire from the night fighter set the engines on fire, and Pilot/Squadron Leader Geoffrey Douglas Leyland ordered the crew to abandon the aircraft.

According to Lloyd George Geddes, Joseph Lyons or Colin Pugsley went to the back of the plane to check on Wilfred Brookes and James Strang, the Midd Upper and Rear Gunner.

At about 00:43 on 2 June 1942, at about 750 meters from the Dutch-German border at the intersection of Genneper-Weg and Ketel Strasse in the German Reichswald, about three kilometers SSW of Kranenburg, North Rhine-Westphalia, the Halifax crashed and exploded on impact. Sergeant James Sprang, age 30, Sergeant Wilfred Brookes, age 28, and James Edward Richard Lyons, age 40, were killed.



Location of the crash, with courtesy of John Lines



Pilot/Squadron Leader Geoffrey Douglas Leyland, Navigator/Air Bomber Lloyd George Geddes, and Wireless Operator/Air Gunner Sergeant Colin Gray Pugsley successfully exited the aircraft and were subsequently taken prisoner. The three all survived the war. Pilot/Squadron Leader Geoffrey Douglas Leyland landed near Groesbeek. He was taken to the mayor, who gave him a meal.



Pilot/Squadron Leader Geoffrey Douglas Leyland was later arrested and taken to Amsterdam and then remained in the following POW camps until after the war:

Dulag Luft, Oberursel, Frankfurt, 4 June 1942 to 5 June 1942;  
Stalag Luft 3 at Sagan, southeast of Berlin, 5 June 1942 to September 1942 (now Żagań, Poland); Oflag XXI B Schubin, Poland, September 1942 to April 1943; Stalag Luft 3, Sagan, southeast of Berlin, April 1943 to January 1945; and Marlag Milag Nord in Westertimke, near Bremen, February 1945 to April 1945.

Wireless operator/Air Gunner Colin Gray Pugsley was arrested near Xanten (Germany) on June 2, 1942.

He remained in the following POW camps until the end of the war:

- Dulag Luft in Frankfurt.
- Stalag Luft 3 in Sagan, southeast of Berlin.
- Stalag Luft 6 in Heydekrug, close to the Baltic Sea.
- Stalag 357 in Thorn, Poland.
- Stalag XI B in Fallingbostal, in the state of Nedersaksen, Germany.

He was later liberated on April 16, 1945, by the British.

Navigator/Air Bomber Lloyd George Geddes of Canada was arrested on the German-Dutch border near a windmill on 2 June 1942, slightly injured in one leg. He stayed in the POW camps until the end of the war:

- Dulag Luft, Frankfurt.
- Stalag Luft 3 Sagan, in Sagan, southeast of Berlijn.
- Marlag und Milas, near Westertimke in Noord-Bremen

He was liberated on April 27, 1945, by the British.

Sergeant Wireless Operator/Mid Upper Gunner Wilfred Brookes and the Rear gunner Sergeant James Strang were found at the crash scene. Both were killed during the dogfight with the night fighter.

Flight Engineer Sergeant James Edward Richard Lyons was found hanging from his parachute in a chestnut tree at the crash site. He did not survive and died at the age of 40.

The three crew members were buried in the General Cemetery in Kranenburg, Germany. In July 1945, the three crew members were reburied at the Canadian War Cemetery in Groesbeek.

James Strang rests in grave VI.A.2. Sergeant Joseph Edward Richard Lyons and Sergeant Wilfred Brookes, aged 28, in a joint grave **VI. A. 3-4**



*Place where the three crew members were buried Kranenburg, Germany, with courtesy of John Lines.*

Several eyewitnesses confirmed the following:

Mr. Gerard Koch, who lived in Kranenburg, and his father buried the three crew members with the undertaker. As an 8-year-old boy, he was at the crash site and the funeral.

Oberleutnant Heinrich Alexander Ludwig Peter Prinz zu Sayn-Wittgenstein was recognized at the crash site one or two days after the Halifax W7698 crashed.



*Oberleutnant Heinrich Alexander Ludwig Peter Prinz zu Sayn Wittgenstein at the crash site, photo with courtesy of John Line*

Mr. Edward Heinen, who lived in Kleve at the time of the crash of the Halifax W7698 on June 2, 1942, was 16 years old and was obliged to work for the fire brigade through the Hitlerjugend.

He arrived at the crash scene for one day and regularly had to extinguish the blazing flames of the incendiary phosphorus.

Edward Heinen also confirmed that he heard the aircraft was on its way and that the bomb load had exploded.

It took several days to extinguish the fires. He also said that he saw one victim hanging in a chestnut tree.

Navigator/Air Bomber of the Halifax W7698 Lloyd George Geddes, resident in Canada, also confirmed several facts about the crash of Halifax W7698 on June 2, 1942, in Kranenburg, Germany.



**FACES TO GRAVES**

Stichting Faces to Canadian  
War Graves Groesbeek

Life story: Gijs Krist, Research Team Faces To Graves, in collaboration with cooperation with John Lines, Australia.

Sources:

Commonwealth War Graves

Library and Archives

Canada

Special thanks to: John Michael Lines

Special thanks to: Dick Breedijk



*Photo : Gijs Krist*

\* Do you have a photo of this soldier or additional information please contact [info@facestograves.nl](mailto:info@facestograves.nl)