

Ralph Holland Tye Royal New Zealand Air Force.

Ralph Holland Tye was born in Northcote, New Zealand, on the 5th of November, 1912. He was the son of George William and Sarah Tye. His ancestors were British, having emigrated to New Zealand from the Midlands, many years before.

Ralph attended the Hamilton Technical High School and was noted as being a very good football player. For a number of years after leaving school, he was employed in farming in Waikato.



As soon as war broke out in September 1939, Ralph like many young Commonwealth men with British ancestry, decided to join the New Zealand armed forces. He chose the Royal New Zealand Air Force and hoped to train as a pilot.

He enlisted officially on the 21st. of September 1939 and was at this point described as a truck driver for a company called Maxwell and Wilson of Te Awamutu.

On the 27th of October 1940, he was enrolled on the Initial Training Wing at Levin. From here, he proceeded on the 24th of November, to No. 3 Elementary Flying School, Harewood, where he began his flying training.

On the 18th of January 1941, he moved on to a course of training at the Service Flight Training School, Blenheim. Here in April, he was awarded his flying badge and was promoted to the rank of Sargeant.

On the 29th of April 1941, he embarked for the United Kingdom by way of Canada and eventually arrived at No.3 Personnel Reception Centre in Bournemouth, on the 27th of June.

On the 4th of July, he was sent to Operational Training Unit 23, based at Pershore in Worcestershire. Here, he joined a crew and completed his training as a Wellington bomber pilot.

Finally, in August 1941, he was transferred to 75 Squadron which was a R.N.Z.A.F. unit based at Feltwell in Norfolk, where he went into active service. As a freshman, he was given the role of 2nd. Pilot to the famous Squadron Leader Frederick John "Popeye" Lucas D.F.C. who was also of the R.N.Z.A.F. and whose bomber was decorated with a very large painting of Popeye the sailor. Later, a book was written about Popeye Lucas and Ralph Tye was mentioned.



One of his first missions with Popeye Lucas was Cologne. This was followed by Mannheim, Frankfurt, Kiel and Genoa.

In October 1941, he took control of his first aircraft. On the 1st. of November 1941, he was promoted to Flight Sergeant and completed 33 Ops. including Cologne, Mannheim, Frankfurt, Kassel, Kiel, Hamburg, Bremen, Dusseldorf, Essen, Berlin and Emden. He also flew over France and Italy, completing his first operational tour safely. He was by this time, a very experienced and capable Wellington Bomber Pilot.

On the 3rd. of May 1942, he was awarded a Commission and was posted to 27 O.T.U. in Lichfield as a Staff Instructor Pilot on Wellington's. However this was not a reward for completing his first operational tour, nor was it a rest period.

In fact, he was in just as much danger. Training accidents, many of them fatal, were commonplace in Operational Training Units like 27 O.T.U. and many fledgling crews lost their lives together with the highly experienced instructors flying with them. There was very little that even an experienced instructor could do, if a serious error was made.

This is exactly what happened to Ralph on that fateful day; the 11th of January 1943.

The official report noted that Wellington 111 BK405 took off from Church Broughton, a satellite airfield to R.A.F. Lichfield, at 15.35 with the intention of carrying out circuits and landings, combined with single engine flying.

At around 15.50, the pupil pilot went through the drills in readiness to shut down the port engine when tragically, he feathered the starboard propeller.

Immediately, the bomber spun out of control and crashed at Boylestone, 7 miles south of Ashbourne in Derbyshire and just 3 miles from Church Broughton Aerodrome where they had taken off. The aircraft was observed to spin and crashed in a stalled position. All of the members of the crew lost their lives.

Ralph was buried alongside two of the Australian members of the trainee crew, at nearby Scropton Cemetery.



Ralph Tye (second from left) flying as second pilot



Ralph Tye (second from right) in front of Wellington Bomber, 1942. This crew flew at least 12 missions.