

# VISITED BY ANZAC REMEMBRANCE

LA ROCHELLE AND ÎLE DE RÉ – Nouvelle Aquitaine, France

JULY 2025



## LA ROCHELLE – ST.ELOI COMMUNAL CEMETERY



**1365038 SERGEANT JAMES WILLIAM MCLEAN MERRY - RAF  
PILOT**

James Merry was born in 1920 in the city of Hamilton in Lanarkshire, Scotland. His father was also James and his mother's name was Mary. James senior had served in the Air Force in World War I and had been discharged in November 1918. His son, James William followed in his father's footsteps.

James was the Pilot of a Armstrong Whitley V BD290 that took off from RAF St. Eval in Cornwall for an operational mission near the west coast of France. James was with No.10.Operational Training Unit but the plane was on loan to Coastal Command when it left Cornwall for an anti-submarine patrol flight that took them over the Bay of Biscay. The circumstances of the crash are unknown but the Whitley crashed into the sea near La Rochelle. There were five crew on board at the time. James was killed but the other four survived and were rescued. RAF aviators Creech, Carmichael, Johnston and Treanor were captured by the Germans and became prisoners of war.

James is buried very close to over 200 members of the French army who lost their lives in World War one. Otherwise, he rests alone... but not forgotten.



## **ARS-EN-RÉ COMMUNAL CEMETERY**





**402000 FLIGHT SERGEANT ERIC WAPLE - RNZAF  
NAVIGATOR**

Born on the 8<sup>th</sup> July 1913 and brought up in the New Barnett district of London, Eric received his secondary education in London. His father James was a solicitor in the city and his mother Agnes was the homemaker who cared for Eric, his brothers Alan, Peter and Geoffrey and his sister Lesley. Eric went on to further education and when he was 22 years old in 1935, he made the decision to emigrate to New Zealand. Arriving in Wellington, Eric began work as an Insurance Inspector and it wasn't long before he met his future wife Celia Margaret Bishop who was born on the 21<sup>st</sup> January 1917. She was the daughter of Mr & Mrs William Bishop who lived in the Wadestown area of Wellington but who had also emigrated from the United Kingdom. Celia and Eric were engaged on the 25<sup>th</sup> July 1940 and it is believed they moved to live in Whanganui.



Eric enlisted with the RNZAF at the Initial Training Wing in Levin on the 28<sup>th</sup> July 1940 to commence training. But, with time running out for the young couple to be together before Eric was shipped out to Canada, Celia travelled to Auckland and the couple were married on the 28<sup>th</sup> January 1941. Two days later, Celia was waving her new husband farewell as he headed for Canada for training as a Navigator. She would never see him again. When in England, Eric was assigned as a Navigator on flights ferrying pilots to and from Prestwick in Scotland and Gander in Newfoundland. In January 1942 he was promoted to Flight Sergeant before being posted to No.12 Squadron at RAF Binbrook in Lincolnshire where he took part in operational missions over Essen, Cologne, Hamburg and Dortmund. On the night of the 19/20<sup>th</sup> July 1942, he was assigned as Navigator on



Wellington W5414 on an operational mission to lay mines near St. Nazaire on the west coast of France. His flight did not return and he was declared missing in action. It was later that Eric's body was washed up on the shores of the Île de Ré, identified by German authorities and confirmed as being Eric by the International Red Cross. Later discovered on the beach were his Pilot John Patrick Muirhead and the flight's Air Gunner William Joseph Brazier of the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve. They lay side by side at Ars-en-Ré Communal Cemetery and were assigned a date of death of the 20<sup>th</sup> July 1942.



**100092 PILOT OFFICER JOHN PATRICK MUIRHEAD - RAFVR  
PILOT**

Born in Stirling, Scotland in 1922, John was the son of Geraldine and Brigadier John Spencer Muirhead D.S.O., M.C., T.D. John had two brothers and was awarded the D.F.C. posthumously on the 27<sup>th</sup> July 1943 with effect from 24<sup>th</sup> June 1942.

John was the Pilot of the Wellington W5414 that was on a mine-laying operation near St. Nazaire. Initially declared missing, John's body was later washed ashore on the Île de Ré and he was buried beside his Air Gunner Sergeant William Joseph Brazier and his Navigator Flight Sergeant Eric Waple.





**975641 SERGEANT WILLIAM JOSEPH BRAZIER - RAFVR  
AIR GUNNER**

William was born in 1913 in Windsor in Buckinghamshire to parents William Charles and Mary Brazier. There is very little information about William Joseph Brazier but it is known that during his adult life he married Ethel and the couple lived in Brighton, Sussex.

William was the Air Gunner of Wellington W5414 that was on a mine-laying operation near St. Nazaire. Initially declared missing, William's body was later washed ashore on the Île de Ré and he was buried beside his Pilot John Patrick Muirhead and his colleague Flight Sergeant Eric Waple who was the Navigator.



**LE BOIS PLAGE EN RÉ COMMUNAL CEMETERY**





**413408 SERGEANT DOUGLAS HUNTLY GORDON - RNZAF  
PILOT**

Douglas was born in Christchurch in the South Island of New Zealand on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1922 to parents William Sutton and Mary Katherine Gordon. Unfortunately, sadness befell young Douglas when he was just three years old. Firstly, his mother died in early 1925 and just several months later, Douglas's father – who was a ship's captain – also died. Douglas was taken into the care of his Aunt Mrs. E. Styles of Christchurch who became his ward and raised him. He also had two sisters called Rona and Jean. Douglas was educated at Christchurch West High School and continued further education at Christchurch Technical College.

Enlisted at the Initial Training Wing in Levin on the 15<sup>th</sup> June 1941, Douglas commenced pilot training before he was transferred to the Elementary Flying Training School in Harewood. On the 8<sup>th</sup> November he was awarded his Flying Badge and on the 20<sup>th</sup> December Douglas was promoted to the rank of Sergeant, embarking for the United Kingdom on the 11<sup>th</sup> January 1942. Continuing his training at the Advanced Flying Unit in Grantham Lincolnshire, Douglas joined 115 Squadron on the 17<sup>th</sup> September at their RAF base in Mildenhall, Sussex. Just four weeks later, on the evening of the 16<sup>th</sup> October, Douglas was the pilot of Wellington MkIII X3946 that left RAF Mildenhall for a mine-laying operation off the coast of France near St. Nazaire. His plane, for unknown reasons, crashed into the sea. On board with him were Navigator David Buchanan and Wireless Operator and Air Gunner Cyril Parr. Initially declared missing, all three were later washed up on the shores of the Île de Ré. Although Douglas was buried in Le Bois Plage Communal Cemetery, Buchanan and Parr were found in a different location and buried at Sainte-Marie-de- Ré Communal Cemetery at the south end of the island.





**1602731 FLIGHT SERGEANT WILLIAM ERIC LEAKE - RAFVR  
NAVIGATOR**

Born in Southall Middlesex on the 18<sup>th</sup> July 1914, William's parents were Harold and Alice Leake. Sometime during his adult life he married Olive, also of Southall.

When William joined the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve, he would have been 25 years old. It is not known what training he undertook but he qualified as a Navigator. On August 13<sup>th</sup> 1944 he was the Navigator of a Bristol Beaufighter LZ295 that took off from RAF Strubby in Lincolnshire. The Beaufighter was assigned to 404 Buffalo Squadron of the Royal Canadian Air Force. The pilot of the twin seater was Flight Sergeant G.A. Crow and their mission was to attack enemy ships in the mouth of the Gironde Estuary in the southwest of France. The Beaufighter was equipped with four 20 mm Hispano cannon, six 0.303 Browning guns, optional carriage of one 1,760 lb 18 inch torpedo, eight 60 lb rockets, or four 500 lb bombs. Crow and Leake were the two crew members on the Beaufighter which was primarily a night fighter.

Unfortunately, their plane received flak from the ground and it crashed into the Gironde Estuary. Sometime later William's body was discovered on the shores of the Île de Ré at La Fontaine on the 24<sup>th</sup> August at ten o'clock in the morning by 59 year old Adrien Favreau. Pilot Crow was never found.





## **SAINTE-MARIE-DE-RÉ COMMUNAL CEMETERY**



**1189810 SERGEANT CYRIL GEORGE PARR - RAFVR  
WIRELESS OPERATOR/AIR GUNNER**

Cyril George Parr was born in the St. Thomas area of Exeter in Devon to parents George Thomas and Eveline Josh Parr. The family later moved to live in Gravesend in Kent. It was when living here that Cyril joined the Gravesend War Reserve Police. Cyril married in 1939 at the outbreak of the second World War when he was 26 years old. His wife called Gwyneth was also from Gravesend and the couple set up home at 109 Valley Drive, Gravesend. Their daughter Avril Ann was born on the 27<sup>th</sup> June 1940.

Cyril enlisted in the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve in 1940 and trained as a Wireless Operator and Air Gunner – otherwise known as a WAG. In September 1942 he joined 115 Squadron that was based at RAF Mildenhall and during the month of October was involved with his crew on six operational missions. The Wellington MK III X3946 piloted by Douglas Gordon that was on a mission to lay mines off the French coast, went down near St. Nazaire. Only Parr, his pilot Gordon and the Navigator Buchanan were found on the shores of the Île de Ré. Parr and Buchanan are buried in the same grave at Sainte-Marie-de-Ré. Gordon was laid to rest in La Bois Plage Communal Cemetery.







**1375544 SERGEANT DAVID BUCHANAN - RAFVR  
NAVIGATOR**

Sergeant David Buchanan died on the 16<sup>th</sup> October 1942 aged 29 years old.

David enlisted in the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve and trained as a Navigator. In September 1942 he joined 115 Squadron that was based at RAF Mildenhall and during the month of October was involved with his crew on six operational missions. David was the Navigator on board the Wellington MK III X3946 piloted by Douglas Gordon that was on a mission to lay mines off the French coast, went down near St. Nazaire. Only Buchanan, his pilot Gordon and the Wireless Operator/Air Gunner Parr were found on the shores of the Île de Ré. Parr and Buchanan are buried in the same grave at Sainte-Marie-de-Ré and Gordon was laid to rest in La Bois Plage Communal Cemetery.



**REMEMBERED AND HONoured IN JULY 2025 BY  
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