

# **JOHN COATES & JOHN COATES SMITH**



Information compiled by Brad Colley,  
Perth , Western Australia 2018.

## Two soldiers and Two World Wars

Two young men from two different World Wars shared the two names, **John Coates**.

The first **John Coates** was born in 1895 in Dunnington, Yorkshire, to Albert (*Henry*) Coates and Ada *nee* Durham. In Scarborough in September 1914 John Coates enlisted in the Royal Gloucestershire Hussars and eventually achieved the rank of *Lance Corporal* , # 17496. He was made *Rough-Rider\** and *Instructor in Riding* in Scarborough for two years before being drafted to Egypt. Sadly, John was in hospital in Jerusalem when he died of wounds on 9.5.1918.

*Some of the following information came from an unknown regional newspaper of 1918.*

John Coates was a clever boxer, having won several first prizes, as well as the *welter-weight* championship in a garrison competition in 1916 . Before joining the Army John was a groom to Farmer E Easterby of Escrick village (near York) and previously with a Mr T.E Makin Fairburn. John was also a frequent competitor at district shows.

One of John's brothers was Private William Coates, *King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry*. He was born in 1888. William was killed in action on November 6th 1914 .

Another brother, *Driver* Albert Edward Coates of *The Royal Field Artillery*, was born 22.6.1897 in Flaxton, Yorkshire, and had been fighting at *The Front* since April 1915. A third brother, O.S.A (*Arthur*, born 18.5.1899?) Coates was serving in the Navy during WW1. A sister was in the *Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (W.A.A.C)* which was established in 1917, and a brother in law, Sergt T Wright, was in hospital suffering from wounds.



**Lance Corporal John Coates, # 17496 .  
Royal Gloucestershire Hussars  
1895-1918**



**Rough Rider** is a now defunct rank in the [Royal Regiment of Artillery](#) of the British Army and was a rank equivalent to Private. It was previously used in the British and British Colonial Forces and was the rank was commonly displayed as a spur. Rough rider was also later used as an appointment for what others might call 'Assistant Instructor, equitation'. This latter use could result in designations such as [Bombardier](#) 'Rough Rider'.



Rough Rider Badge



354632	8/29/54	Coates John	1/1 R. Gen. Salentine Harris 9.5.18 L/Epl 1/17496	York 21 9 8 4/8 7/18 ✓ 1 - 3	4 2 - York 9/18 11.9.18 18 7 11 m.o. 10/18 11.10.18/	R.D. York. Pa. Albert H.	4 2 - recharge. 18 7 11
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A. F. W. 5070 SENT

DATE 15-2-59

WAR GRATUITY.

Effect 18.10.18 24.

Transfer 6530. 5m 10.

Regd. Paper 21/2435.

Serial No. 24773

17 10 -

21.11.54/1 Pa. Albert H 17 10 - 80



## CENSUS OF ENGLAND AND WALES, 1911.

Number of Schedules 25  
(To be filled up by the Enumerator after collection.)

Before writing on this Schedule please read the Examples and the Instructions given on the other side of the paper, as well as the headings of the Columns. The entries should be written in Ink.

The contents of the Schedule will be treated as confidential. Strict care will be taken that no information is disclosed with regard to individual persons. The returns are not to be used for proof of age, as in connection with Old Age Pensions, or for any other purpose than the preparation of Statistical Tables.

NAME AND SURNAME	RELATIONSHIP to Head of Family.	AGE (last birthday) and SEX.	PARTICULARS as to MARRIAGE.					PROFESSION or OCCUPATION of Persons aged ten years and upwards.				BIRTHPLACE of every person.	NATIONALITY of every Person born in a Foreign Country.	INFIRMITY.	
			Write "Single," "Married," "Widower," or "Widow," opposite the names of all persons aged 15 years and upwards.	State, for each Married Woman entered on this Schedule, the number of— Completed years the present Marriage has lasted. If less than one year write "under one."	Children born alive to present Marriage. (If no children born alive write "None" in Column 7.)	Total Children Born Alive.	Children still Living.	Children who have Died.	Personal Occupation.	Industry or Service with which worker is connected.	Whether Employer, Worker, or Working on Own Account.				Whether Working at Home.
John Easterby		68	Married					Farmer	100		Employer	Wiggle, Yorks			
Mary Easterby		67	Married	45	12	10	2					Copmanthorpe, Yorks			
Walter Easterby	Son	29	Single					Farmer's Son Working on Farm	110		Worker	At Home, Colton, Yorks			
Ernest Easterby	Son	28	Single					"	111		Worker	At Home, Colton, Yorks			
Hilda Easterby	Daughter	26	Single					Dairy Maid			Worker	At Home, Colton, Yorks			
Ida M. Easterby	Daughter	24	Single					At Home			Worker	Colton, Yorks			
Miss Mary Pelfrman	Help	58	Single								Worker	Brighton, Yorks			
George Rawson	Servant	29	Single					Farm Servant (Foreman)	561		Worker	Harrogate, Yorks			
John Coates	Servant	18	Single					Crook	130		Worker	Harrogate, Yorks			
William Hunt	Servant	15	Single					Farm Servant	740		Worker	Harrogate, Yorks			
John Coates, groom for John Easterby, Mt Pleasant Farm, Escrick															

(To be filled up by the Enumerator.)

I certify that—		
(1) All the ages on this Schedule are entered in the proper sex columns.	Total	
(2) I have counted the males and females in Columns 3 and 4 separately, and have compared their sum with the total number of persons.	Males	Females
(3) After making the necessary enquiries I have completed all entries on the Schedule which appeared to be defective, and have corrected such as appeared to be erroneous.	6	4
Initials of Enumerator	P B	

(To be filled up by, or on behalf of, the Head of Family or other person in occupation, or in charge, of this dwelling.)

Write below the Number of Rooms in this Dwelling (House, Tenement, or Apartment). Count the kitchen as a room but do not count scullery, landing, lobby, closet, bathroom; nor warehouse, office, shop.

10

I declare that this Schedule is correctly filled up to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Signature John Easterby

Postal Address Mt Pleasant Escrick, Yorks



Albert Henry Coates and Ada Coates nee Durham.  
Parents of John Coates.



# Unknown local newspaper cutting of 1918,

found in the bible of my great great aunt,  
Alice Winifred (Winnie) Colley of Escrick Village  
(near York).

Our family always had an understanding that  
John Coates had been Winnie's fiancé .

**KILLED OR DIED OF WOUNDS.**  
Lance-Corporal Harry HUNTER (24), Chesham,  
Whose relatives reside at 42 Rutland Terrace, Hurley,  
Buckinghamshire, formerly employed at the Yorkshire Cop-  
per Works.  
Private Tom BROMLEY (20), Regal Road, son of Mr.  
and Mrs. Broomley, 18, Herbert Road, Leeds.  
Lance-Corporal John COATES, Hussars, son of Mr.  
and Mrs. H. Coates, Priory Cottage, Newton, Castleford  
Company-Quartermaster-Sergeant G. R. PATERSON  
(21), Wake, eldest son of the late Mr. T. Paterson  
son and Mrs. Paterson, 20, Tempest Road, Beeston Hill,  
Leeds, and grandson of the late Mr. George Paterson,  
Leeds. Before the war he was employed in the Water-  
works Department of the Leeds Corporation.  
Private J. KING, D.L.I., son of Mr. J. King and the  
late Mr. J. King, Brigdale, Knaresborough.

## CASTLEFORD FAMILY'S DOUBLE LOSS.

### SOLDIER WELL-KNOWN IN ESCRICK DISTRICT DIES OF WOUNDS.

Mr. and Mrs. Coates, of Priory Cottage,  
Newton, Castleford, have received official  
intelligence of the death from wounds re-  
ceived in action of their son, Lance-Corporal  
John Coates. The deceased soldier was 22  
years of age;

he joined a  
regiment of  
Hussars in  
Sept., 1914,  
was made  
rough-rider  
and an in-  
structor in  
riding at an  
East Anglian  
garrison town  
for two years,  
being subse-  
quently  
drafted  
to Egypt.  
Lance-Corpl.  
Coates was a  
clever boxer,  
having won  
several



Lance-Corpl. J. Coates.

first prizes, as well as the welter-weight cham-  
pionship in a garrison competition in 1916;  
he had also entered for contests in the theatre  
of war where he was stationed, but these had  
to be cancelled. Before joining the Army  
the deceased was groom to Mr. E. Easterby,  
of Escrick, and previously with Mr. T. E.  
Makin Fairburn, and was frequently a com-  
petitor at district shows.

One of his brothers, Private W. Coates,  
King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, was  
killed in action on November 5th, 1914. Driver  
A. E. Coates, Royal Field Artillery, another  
brother, has been at the front since April,  
1915, while a third brother, O.S. A. Coates, is  
serving in the Navy. A sister is in the  
W.A.A.C., while his brother-in-law, Sergt.  
T. Wright, is in hospital suffering from  
wounds.

**COATES** John L/Cpl 17496, died 9/5/1918 age 23. Son of Henry & Ada, Priory Cottage,  
Newton, Castleford, Yorks, his brother William also fell. Native of Ledsham, South Milford.  
Buried in Jerusalem War Cemetery, Israel. O.65

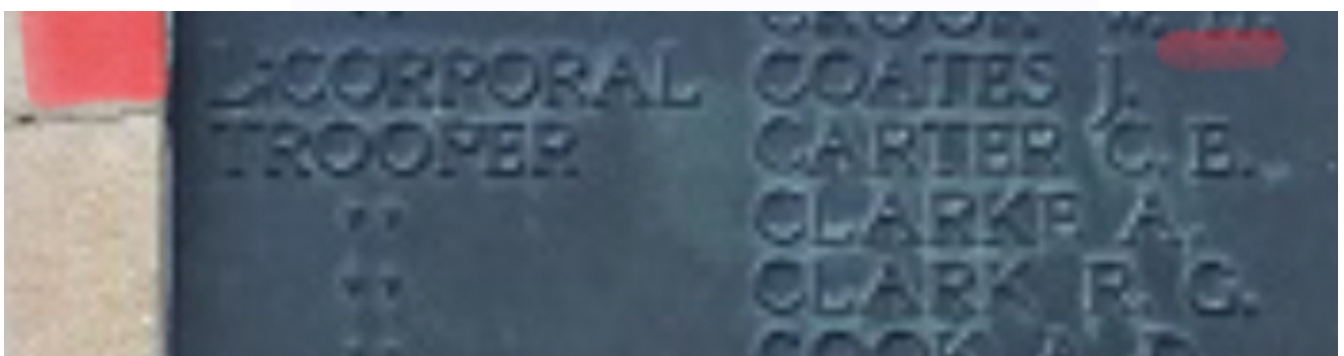




THE ROYAL GLOUCESTERSHIRE HUSSARS YEOMANRY  
WAR MEMORIAL, GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Located at College Green Gloucester next to the Cathedral

In memory of the Men of the Royal Gloucestershire Hussars  
Yeomanry  
who gave their lives in the Great War





**In Memory of  
Lance Corporal JOHN COATES**

**17496, Royal Gloucestershire Hussars  
who died age 23  
on 09 May 1918**

**Son of Henry and Ada Coates, of Priory Cottage, Newton, Castleford, Yorks. His brother William also fell.  
Native of Ledsham, South Milford.  
Remembered with honour  
JERUSALEM WAR CEMETERY, Israel**



**Commemorated in perpetuity by  
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission**

Ada & Albert Coates





Group photo Albert+Ada Coates in centre.jpg



**EXTENDED FAMILY OF JOHN COATES CELEBRATING ALBERT & ADA COATES GOLDEN WEDDING 1944.**  
*Married 26.11.1894.*





**Alice Winifred (Winnie) Colley**  
 1896-1961 Escrick Village.  
*Fiancé of John Coates 1895-1918*



**Alice Winifred Colley married George Davison  
 in Escrick in September 1939 .**  
 In the 1940's they adopted Rosemary Davison



## The Second John Coates -John Coates SMITH

**1921- 1944**



**Warrant Officer (W/O) 645575 John Coates SMITH R.A.F**

The [Royal Air Force](#) first used the ranks of sergeant-major class I and II which it inherited from the [Royal Flying Corps](#). It also first used the rank badges of the royal coat of arms (commonly referred to as the 'Tate and Lyles' - a reference to the similarity to the logo used by the [Tate and Lyle Company](#)) and the crown respectively. In the 1930s, it changed to the Army-style warrant officer class I and II. In 1939, the RAF abolished the rank of WOII and retained only the WO1 rank, referred to simply as warrant officer (WO), which it remains to this day. The RAF has no equivalent to WO2 (NATO OR-8), an RAF WO being equivalent to WO1 in the Army, Royal Navy and Royal Marines (NATO OR-9) and wears the same badge of rank the royal coat of arms. Warrant officers are addressed as "Warrant Officer" or sometimes this is abbreviated down to just "Warrant". The correct way to address a warrant officer is "sir" or "ma'am" by the airmen and "Mr or Warrant Officer -Name-" by the officers. RAF warrant officers do not hold appointments as in the Army or Royal Marines. However, the [station warrant officer](#) is considered "first amongst equals" by the other warrant officers on an RAF station. Warrant officers are the highest non-commissioned rank and they rank above [flight sergeants](#).



## The Second John Coates .

The second John Coates was **John Coates SMITH**, son of Henry (Harry) Thompson Smith and Hannah Jane (Jinnie) nee Colley.

*The following information is supplied by Robin Oldham Smith, the nephew of John Coates Smith, and myself, Brad Colley, great great nephew of Harry and Jinnie Smith.*

**John Coates Smith** was born in Yorkshire in 1921. John's mother, Hannah Jane (Jinnie) nee Colley, was the sister of Alice Winifred Colley, the fiancé of the first John Coates who died in WW1 in 1918.

To have named a son after a sister's former fiancé, shows the Colley family must have held a great deal of affection for the first John Coates. Without doubt it would have also been of great comfort to Henry and Ada Coates who lost two precious sons in the Great War.

**John Coates Smith** served in the RAF in World War II as a Warrant Officer. During the early days of the war he was based in Malta and took part in frequent bombing operations over North Africa. He was the only survivor when shot down over the Libyan desert and was not found for a month when he was in a very weak state. A great nephew of one of the fellow crew members contacted me (Brad) recently and provided the following information of this tragic event (*which suggests John was not the only survivor on this occasion at least*);

Dan Risely, of Seven Oaks in Kent is the great nephew of **Sergeant Sidney Richard Mason**, service No 1182670. Sidney was a *Forward Gunner* and *Wireless Operator* on this ill-fated operation and sadly did not survive the ordeal in the North African desert. Sidney Mason's father wrote to John in the hope of obtaining more information on the circumstances of his much loved son's death. The letter written in late July 1942 reached the home of John's father, Harry T Smith in Gate Helmsley, Yorkshire. (**See letter #1 on pages 13-14**).

In his reply letter dated 28.7.1942, Harry Smith offered his condolences and encouraged Mr Mason to not give up hope yet and to put his *trust in the Lord*. Harry said that John had been returned to his unit safe and unhurt after being missing in the African desert for one month. He also shared that another of his sons (see *Sidney Colley Smith pages 24-27*) was still missing since the fall of Singapore and no news as yet. Harry also enclosed John's contact address in the Middle East for Mr Mason to try to contact him there for any further news.

John C Smith left Egypt on 27.7.1942, the day before his father's letter to Mr Mason so unfortunately any letter to John did not reach him until his return home to England from the Middle East over 2 months later. No doubt that would have been an agonising wait for Mr Mason. John's letter dated 9.10.1942 detailed the *known* last days of Sergeant Sidney Richard Mason. (**see letter #2 pages 15-17**).

A transcript of John's letter is as follows ;

*On my return from the Middle East I have read your letter dated 26(28).7.1942 and as your son (**Sidney**) was the Front Gunner on the same crew as myself I can let you know what happened.*

*On the night 22nd May our target was "mine laying — at (?) (indecipherable) Benghazi . While over the target our controls were damaged and we were forced to bale out about 30 miles inland. Gun Observer, **Sidney**, and the Tail Gunner (named George), jumped out after each other followed by myself and Pilot. On landing we didn't see anything of the others so we started heading east .*

*We managed by various means to get back after 29 days, and on the way we met two of the others.*

*Here s the story told by our Tail Gunner who landed with **Sidney**.*

*When they landed, your son (**Sidney**) and George (T.G.-Tail Gunner) got together and not being able to find anyone else did — — — (indecipherable). Unfortunately your son (**Sidney**) was wearing flying boots and on landing hurt his leg but managed to keep on walking for about 7 days when his leg and feet became very bad and both of them (Sidney and George) were suffering from thirst and starvation , and here I am afraid **Sidney** was unable to go any further. The only thing for the chap who was with him to do was to set out leaving what water they had to try and find help from Arabs or whatever help he could get. **I am afraid that was the last time he (Sidney) was seen.** The Tail Gunner (George) was picked up 4 or 5 days later and a search was made for **Sidney**, but he was never found .*

*On my leaving Egypt on the 27th July nothing further had been heard as far as I know.*

*The rest of the crew got back and we all are very sorry to have one missing but are hoping that by some chance some Arab may have found him. If so they would help him I am sure as we found them very friendly and without them we would never have got back to British lines.*

*My father, mother and myself wish to offer our deepest sympathy and if you should hear anything further would be very pleased to know.*

*I remain, Yours sincerely, J Smith.*





Above; Hannah Jane (Jinnie) *nee* Colley and Henry (Harry) Thompson Smith .  
Parents of John Coates Smith.

R.70829 F/S. Ward, R.E.      Next of Kin :- Father.  
Mr. R. Ward,  
Regina Beach,  
Saskatchewan,  
Canada.

R.72407 F/S. Rossen, G.W.      Next of Kin:- Mother.  
Mrs. G. L. Rossen,  
330 Waverley Road,  
Toronto,  
Canada.

R.52892 W/O. Armstrong, G.A.      Next of Kin:- Wife.  
Mrs. D. W. Armstrong,  
424 Kingswood Road,  
Toronto,  
Ontario, Canada.

R.67156 S <sup>U</sup>gt. Ostrom, G.F.      Next of Kin:- Father.  
Mr. G. F. Ostrom,  
20 Cedar Street,  
Belleville,  
Ontario, Canada.

645575 Sgt. Smith, J.C.      Next of Kin:- Mother.  
Mr. H. S. Smith,  
Gate Helmsley,  
Yorks.

In Dan Risley's correspondence he also provided information of other crew members in that particular operation in addition to Sidney Mason and John Coates Smith . The information came from the group's Squadron Commander a few months after the incident.

Below; the initial email contact from Dan Ridley, great nephew of Sergeant Sidney Richard Mason.



dan Risely on 16 Apr 2018

J. C. Smith 645575

It would seem that John served with my great uncle, Sydney Mason, in 1942. Syd was lost when the crew including John had to bale out over the desert following a mine laying operation in the Middle East. I have a letter from John to my Great Grand Mother and another from his Mother, H. T. Smith. I can email a copy of these to you if that is of interest?  
Regards Dan Risely danrisely@yahoo.co.uk



28/7/42.

Gate Helmsley  
York. Yorks.

Dear Mr Mason

I received your letter this morning and wish to thank you very much indeed for your kind sympathy, and will you please accept my sympathy for the ~~news~~ of your Son. I am very pleased to be able to tell you that my Son returned to his Unit safe and unhurt after being missing a month, and after having a difficult time. They sent us a Telegram to say he had returned safely, and my Son has also sent a Telegram but no letter as yet. I do hope your Son will turn up too we hear tell of strange things happening, any way don't give up hope keep your heart up, and trust in The Lord. I will write and ask John if he knows anything about your Son.

Letter dated 28.7.1942.

Written by Henry Thompson Smith, father of John Coates Smith.

Sent to Mr Mason, Who had hoped for any information on the last known days of his son,  
Sergeant Sidney Mason in the North Africa desert.



in the meantime if I hear anything about  
 your Son I will let you know at once,  
 it is a very anxious time for all Parents  
 and I am very sorry for you.

I have another Son in the Royal Artillery  
~~R.A.M.~~ R. S. M. Sydney Colley Smith, and he has  
 been missing since the fall of Singapore, &  
 there has been no news of him since, but  
 the Red Cross are making all enquiries.

Have you applied to the Red Cross Society  
 they will make all enquiries for you he may  
 be a prisoner, but I do hope you have good  
 news soon, and I shall be pleased to hear  
 from you anytime. I will enclose my Son's  
 Address & if you care to write to him he  
 may be able to tell you something about  
 your Son, hoping he is safe. Thank you very  
 much for your kind letter

645575 Sgt. J. C. Smith.

Sgt's Mess

38 Squadron R.A.F.  
 Middle East.

I am Yours Sincerely,

H. T. Smith

\$ 19  
 2 50



640570 Sgt Smith J.C.  
Gate Helmsley  
York  
Yorkshire

9.10.42.

Dear Sir

On my return home from the R.F. I have read your letter dated 26.7.42 & as your son was the front gunner in the same crew as myself I can let you know what happened. On the night 22nd May our target was mine laying at Benfay, while over the target our controls were damaged & we were forced to bale out, about 30 miles inland. Our Observer, Sidney, & the tail gunner jump out after each other followed by myself & Pilot, on landing we didn't see anything of the others, so we started heading East.

We managed by various means to get back after 29 days, & on the way met two of the others.

Here is the story told by our tail gunner who landed with Sidney.

When they landed, your son & George (T.G.) got together & not being able to find anyone else disappeared.

Letter dated 9.10.1942.

Written by John Coates Smith aged 22 years,  
To Mr Mason, explaining the last known days of Sergeant Sidney Mason



Unfortunately your Son was wearing flying boots & on landing hurt his leg, but managed to keep on walking for about 7 days when his leg and feet became very bad, & both of <sup>them</sup> were suffering from thirst & starvation, & here I am afraid Sidney was unable to go any further, the only thing for the chap who was with him to do was to set out leaving what water they had & try to find help from Arabs, or whatever help he could get. I am afraid that was the last time he was seen.

The last gunner was picked up 4 or 5 days later & a search was made for Sidney, but he was never found. On my leaving Egypt on the 27<sup>th</sup> July nothing further had been heard as far as I know.

The rest of the crew got back & we are all very sorry to have one missing, but are hoping that by some chance some Arab may have found him. If so they would help him I am sure as we found them








very friendly & without them we  
would never have got back to  
British lines.

My Father Mother & Myself  
wish to offer our deepest  
Sympathy & if you should hear  
anything further would be very  
pleased to know.

I remain  
Yours Sincerely  
J Smith.

Final page of letter from John Coates Smith to Mr Mason 9.10.1942

Sergeant Sidney Mason turned 20 years old a week before this tragic event on the night of 22.5.1942

Surname	First name(s)	Mother	District	Vol	Page		
<b>Births Jun 1922</b> (>99%)							
Churchill	Mary K	Lock	<a href="#">Camberwell</a>	1d	<a href="#">1619</a>	<a href="#">Info</a>	
Hubert	Cyril H	Hubert	<a href="#">Camberwell</a>	1d	<a href="#">1619</a>	<a href="#">Info</a>	
Mason	Sidney R	Sidwell	<a href="#">Camberwell</a>	1d	<a href="#">1619</a>	<a href="#">Info</a>	
Pooley	Gladys	Barrett	<a href="#">Camberwell</a>	1d	<a href="#">1619</a>	<a href="#">Info</a>	
Smith	Alan M	Jones	<a href="#">Camberwell</a>	1d	<a href="#">1619</a>	<a href="#">Info</a>	

Sidney Richard  
Mason, born  
May 1922  
Camberwell.  
Surrey.



Telephone No. : SPRINGWELL (GLOUCESTER), 2047

Telegraphic Address :

RECORDS TELEX, GLOUCESTER.

Any communications on the subject of this letter should be addressed to :

AIR OFFICER i/c RECORDS,

Address as opposite,

and the following number quoted :—

Your Ref. : C7/1182670

RECORD OFFICE,

ROYAL AIR FORCE,

GLOUCESTER.

Date 19th October 1942

Dear Madam,

With reference to my letter of the 12th August 1942, I deeply regret to inform you that all efforts to trace your son No. 1182670 Sergeant Sydney Richard MASON, Royal Air Force, have proved unavailing.

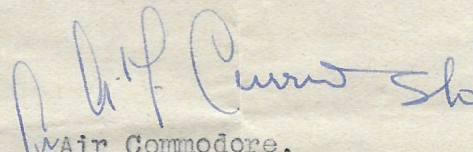
In view of the lapse of time, it is felt that there can now be little hope of his being alive, but action to presume that he has lost his life will not be taken until at least six months from the date on which he was reported missing. Such action will then be for official purposes only, and you will be duly informed.

In conveying this information I am to express the profound sympathy of the Royal Air Force with you in your anxiety and to assure you that all possible enquiries will continue to be made.

I am,

Dear Madam,

Your obedient Servant,

  
Air Commodore,  
Air Officer i/c Records,  
ROYAL AIR FORCE.

Mrs. W. J. Mason,  
116 Burns Avenue,  
Sidcup,  
Kent.





BUCKINGHAM PALACE

The Queen and I offer you our  
heartfelt sympathy in your great  
sorrow.

We pray that your country's  
gratitude for a life so nobly given  
in its service may bring you some  
measure of consolation.

*George R.I.*

Mrs. W.J. Mason.





**Vickers Wellington 38 Squadron , Shallufa, Egypt**

## **Re: J. C. Smith 645575 And Sidney Richard Mason**

Many thanks

Dan

PS

I guess along with John, Sid was in Malta in 1941, via Gibraltar before being based in Shallufa, Egypt in late '41 and '42 (presumably so as not to worry his parents, Sid skips over the "interesting Journey" there and the air raids in Malta, where the solid stone buildings ensure "it would take a very heavy bond to get through").

38 Squadron was one of the first Squadrons equipped with Vickers Wellington Bombers in 1938 and they continued to fly these throughout the war. In '42 they would be flying in Mk III or MK IV Wellingtons as per attached photo.

Source:

[http://www.historyofwar.org/air/units/RAF/38\\_wwII.html](http://www.historyofwar.org/air/units/RAF/38_wwII.html)



In Memory of

Sergeant

# Sydney Richard Mason

1182670, 38 Sqdn., Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve who died on 22 May 1942

Remembered with Honour

Alamein Memorial



Commemorated in perpetuity by  
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission





***Above left & below: Sidney Richard Mason***



*Photos courtesy of Sidney's  
nephew John, Canada*



The Daily Mirror. 10.10.1942. The story that linked Warrant Officer John Coates SMITH of Gate Helmsley with Sergeant Sidney Richard MASON of London.

LY MIRROR

Saturday, October 10, 1942

# 150-MILE FIGHT TO LIVE

**N**EARLY starving, and suffering from thirst and exposure, five members of the crew of a British bomber who had to bale out over the Western Desert struggled against death for 150 miles—and won through to safety.

They kept themselves alive by drinking rusty water from wrecked enemy tanks, bad water from wells and goat-skins, and what the wireless operator described as "scraps of wretched food."

The plane had bombed the target during a moonlight raid but on the return the machine began to lose height.

The Captain, Sergeant R. D. Ward, of Cupar (Saskatchewan) had to order three men to bale out, and the Second Pilot, Ser-

geant G. W. Rossen, of Toronto, Observer Warrant Officer G. Armstrong, of Kingston, Ontario, and Sergeant Wireless Operator J. C. Smith, of Gate Helmsley York, jumped from a height of a thousand feet.

Ten minutes later the front and rear gunners also had to jump.

Smith and Rossen made contact after landing on a thorn bush and a pile of rocks.

The two gunners, Sergeants S. Mason, of London, and G. F. Ostrom, of Belville, Ontario, landed near each other and for five days made their way through the desert together.

On the fifth day Mason's leg gave out and Ostrom had

Five struggled a month in the desert—and won

to set out alone to look for help. But he himself became delirious and lost all sense of direction.

The observer, G. Armstrong, had set out by himself and it was after nineteen days that he climbed under a thistle bush and found Smith and Rossen. Two days later the trio found Ostrom taking shelter under the projection of a rock.

## Exhausted

Sergeant Ward, the pilot, found himself in the barren desert without food and water. He walked five days and six nights before, resigned to fate, he laid down exhausted against a telegraph pole.

Fortunately the telegraph line went out of order and a repair gang searching for the fault came across the exhausted pilot.

Sergeant Smith, who was first reported missing and then as having returned to his unit, is now home on leave.

Sailors miss  
ings

Ten years  
for two U.S.  
soldiers

Man struck  
helmet



### **More information on John Coates Smith and his brother Sydney Smith**

*Continued from page 8*

John Coates Smith returned home to England in October 1942 from Egypt after being shot down over a North Africa on the night of 22 May 1942. He then continued to take part in numerous bombing raids over Germany and occupied Europe.

John was shot down yet again, this time over the English Channel, and was picked up by the Royal Navy. Another time his plane was badly damaged by anti-aircraft fire forcing it to crash land on an emergency landing strip on return to England.

**Finally, John Coates Smith was shot down over occupied territory on 4th May 1944. None of the crew survived.**

John Coates Smith is buried at Villiers-Le-Chateau Churchyard, Marne, France. (Grave reference Mil.Plot.Row 1.coll.grave 1.) There is a memorial plaque in St. Mary's Church, Gate Helmsley, York.



**John Coates Smith.**

*Son of Hannah Jane (Jinnie) Smith nee Colley, formerly from Escrick*



THE YORKSHIRE EVENING POST, MONDAY, JUNE 8, 1942

## Yorkshire Casualties

Mr. E. Ballinger, of The Drive, Roundhay, Leeds, has news that his son, Rifleman Robert Ballinger (22),



R. Ballinger

who joined the Cameronians a few days after the outbreak of war, has been killed on active service. He was posted missing in May, 1940, and was last seen at Arras. He was previously a news-agent's assistant at Roundhay, and earlier was in the Boy Scout troop at St. Hilda's Church, Cross Green Lane.

Sergeant Pilot William Overend (19), Belgrave Road, Keighley, has been killed on active service. He was educated at the Keighley Boys' Grammar School, and was previously employed by Cryer and Kitchen, incorporated accountants.



W. Overend

News has been received by Mr. and Mrs. H. T. Smith, of Gate Helmsley, near York, that their youngest son,

Sergeant **John** Coates Smith (21), R.A.F., is missing after operations in the Middle East. He has been in the R.A.F. three years. He was employed formerly at Canham's nurseries, Hull Road, York.

Another son, R.S.M. Sydney Colley Smith, R.A., has been missing since the battle for Singapore.

Left; 1942.

21 year old Sergeant John Coates Smith, son of Hannah Jane (Jinnie) nee Colley and Harry Smith, is reported missing after operations in the Middle East. His brother Sidney Colley Smith also has been missing after the fall of Singapore.



John Coates Smith



THE YORKSHIRE EVENING POST, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 1945

# Yorkshire Battle Casualties



F. Porteus W. Barnfather J. Smith H. H. Holdsworth E. Watson A. Thornton

**Warrant Officer John Smith** (24), R.A.F., previously reported missing on operations in May, 1944, is now presumed to have been killed. He was the youngest son of Mr. and Mrs. H. T. Smith of Gate Helmsley, York.

**Grenadier Fred Porteus** (22), Grenadier Guards, whose parents live in Kendal Drive, Halton, has been killed in action in Italy. He worked at the Gloucester Clothing Co., Elmwood Lane.

Reported wounded in Western Europe are:—

**Pte. Arthur Thornton** (18); Black Watch; parents live in Hexton Place, Elland Road. Worked in Readers' Room of "The Yorkshire Evening Post." Held rank of R.S.M. in Army Cadet Force when he volunteered 15 months ago.

**Pte. E. Watson** (18), Cameron Highlanders of Skelwith Walk, Seacroft.

**Pte. Wilfred Barnfather** (32), Seaforth Highlanders; parents live Woodview Terrace, Dewsbury Road. Worked at Montague Burton's.

**Flying Officer H. H. Holdsworth** (22), R.A.F., V.R., son of Mrs. M. Holdsworth, of Greenside Terrace, Lower Wortley, has been wounded on air operations. He is an old boy of West Leeds High School, and worked at Whitfield and Co., chartered accountants, Park Row. He was commissioned in 1943.

THE YORKSHIRE POST AND LEEDS MERCURY, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 1945

## Presumed Killed

**Warrant Officer John Smith** (24), R.A.F., Gate Helmsley, York.

## Killed

**Grenadier Fred Porteus** (22), Kendal Drive, Halton, Leeds.

## Died of Wounds

**Pte. George Roland Shucksmith** (27), St. Margaret's Walk, Ashby, Scunthorpe.



## **Sydney Smith , the brother of John Coates Smith**

*The following information comes from the Colley/Smith Family History, a remarkable and very comprehensive booklet compiled by Robin Oldham Smith of Chester, England, nephew of John Coates Smith. With many thanks.*

2. Sydney Colley was born on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1910 at Tadcaster. After leaving school at Gate Helmsley he worked for the village Blacksmith and a local builder until he was old enough to join the Army.

In 1930 he went with the Army to Hong Kong for 5 years and then served in Palestine, Gibraltar and Southern Ireland. He was in France from the first day of World War II, evacuated at Dunkirk and rescued after his ship was sunk by the Germans when returning from France a second time. He married Gabriel Veronica Maxim (Gay), who was born 9<sup>th</sup> March 1918, daughter of Cepha Maxim, a descendent of a 19<sup>th</sup> Century Maxim emigrant from Russian Georgia on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1940 at Cambridge Register Office. Gay was a taxi driver during the War at Cambridge. Syd left for the East in October 1941. After Syd left Gay lived with her Aunt Thirza and her husband Charles Legerton-Holmes in Essex. Gay also lived with her Aunt Bet in Cambridge.

In Bombay he was diagnosed as an insulin dependent diabetic and unfit for active service but instead of sailing home an administrative error sent him to Singapore where his ship was sunk by Japanese bombers on Friday 13<sup>th</sup> February 1942, two days later Singapore surrendered to the Japanese. He spent 6 months at Changi, Singapore island before being sent to the 'Railway of Death' in the Thailand Jungle for the remainder of the war. He suffered starvation, hard labour, disease and numerous infections and as Senior Officer in many prison work camps, much extra brutal treatment. He took control of his captors at the end of the war and his evidence helped convict several Japanese war criminals. On return to England he was found unfit for further military service and lost his career as a commissioned officer.

Syd then worked for 28 years as a Civil Servant and lived in Cambridge with Gay who died of cancer on 10<sup>th</sup> May 1973 at home (20 Godwin Way, Cambridge). Their only child Wendy was born 26<sup>th</sup> July 1955 at Millroad Maternity Hospital, Cambridge. Wendy worked as an insurance clerk. She married (1) 24<sup>th</sup> August 1974 in Cambridge and divorced 1981. No children from marriage (1). She married (2) Kevin Willsher, born 14<sup>th</sup> May 1956 at Hammersmith Hospital, London, a textile technologist/engineer on 13<sup>th</sup> June 1987 at Poynton Methodist Church. They have two children, a daughter Lyndsey born on 19<sup>th</sup> June 1989 at Stepping Hill Hospital, Stockport and a son Jonathan born 15<sup>th</sup> April 1993 at Stepping Hill Hospital, Stockport. The family live in Poynton, Cheshire.

Syd moved to Chester about 1986 and about 1991 moved to Poynton and again in 1993 to be near Wendy and family. Syd died of multiple strokes on 28<sup>th</sup> December 1996 at Macclesfield Hospital. He was godfather to his niece Alvina.



**PLEASE NOTE MY GRATEFUL THANKS TO ;**

**\*\* ROBIN & SANDY SMITH OF CHESTER , ENGLAND, FOR THEIR  
REMARKABLE RESEARCH INTO THE COLLEY/SMITH FAMILY HISTORY,**

**\*\* DAN RISELY, OF SEVEN OAKS, KENT, WHO CONTACTED ME 'OUT OF  
THE BLUE' AND PROVIDED AMAZING INSIGHT INTO THE EVENTS THAT  
CONNECTED HIS FAMILY WITH OURS OVER 76 YEARS AGO,**

**\*\* THE SEVERAL COATES FAMILY MEMBERS WHO WERE GENEROUS  
ENOUGH TO PROVIDE ACCESSIBLE INFORMATION ON GENEALOGICAL  
WEBSITES SUCH AS ANCESTRY.COM .**

**WE HUMBLLY REMEMBER THOSE WHO HAVE GONE BEFORE  
AND FAITHFULLY GAVE THEIR LIVES FOR US.**

**Brad Colley  
Perth, Western Australia.  
April 2018.**

**bradjc8@bigpond.com**

**FOOTNOTE**

**WHAT COULD HAVE HAPPENED ?**

**IF JOHN COATES SURVIVED WWI AND MARRIED ALICE WINIFRED COLLEY, HE WOULD  
HAVE BECOME MY 2 X GREAT UNCLE , (MY GRANDFATHER'S UNCLE).**

**WOULD MY GRANDFATHER'S COUSIN , JOHN COATES SMITH,  
HAVE BEEN GIVEN A DIFFERENT NAME?**



## Additions and corrections

**1) Correction to page 20 ;Line 3 should read;**

*"it would take a very heavy **BOMB** to get through." (as per corrected text following)-*

I guess along with John, Sid was in Malta in 1941, via Gibraltar before being based in Shallufa, Egypt in late '41 and '42 (presumably so as not to worry his parents, Sid skips over the "interesting Journey" there and the air raids in Malta, where the solid stone buildings ensure "it would take a very heavy bomb to get through").

38 Squadron was one of the first Squadrons equipped with Vickers Wellington Bombers in 1938 and they continued to fly these throughout the war. In '42 they would be flying in Mk III or MK IV Wellingtons.as per attached photo.

Source:

**2)** Photos & information on pages 22-23 (and following), courtesy of John Lawson in Canada, nephew of Sidney Richard Mason . John discovered the Wellington aircraft's number and the name of the German (*Wehneyer*) who claimed shooting it down ;

**Sergeant Air Gunner Sidney Richard Mason, May 22, 1942**

<https://books.google.ca/books?>

[id=wBriCwAAQBAJ&pg=PT833&dq=22+May+1942+wellington+bomber+lost+over+benghazi+1942&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEWiWgoKqhs7aAhVJMGMKHb6wAq8Q6AEIKTAA#v=onepage&q=22%20May%201942%20wellington%20bomber%20lost%20over%20benghazi%201942&f=false](http://id=wBriCwAAQBAJ&pg=PT833&dq=22+May+1942+wellington+bomber+lost+over+benghazi+1942&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEWiWgoKqhs7aAhVJMGMKHb6wAq8Q6AEIKTAA#v=onepage&q=22%20May%201942%20wellington%20bomber%20lost%20over%20benghazi%201942&f=false)

A History of the Mediterranean Air War, 1940-1945: Volume 2:  
North African ...

By Christopher Shores, Giovanni Massimello.

"Friday-Saturday May 22-23, 1942

Five Wellingtons of 38 Squadron took off for Benghazi to lay mines. One aircraft went in below the safety height and suffered severe damage. The pilot ordered the crew to bale out, which they did to the southeast of the target, but he then managed to maintain control for three hours before baling out himself; he was picked up on the 29<sup>th</sup> near Wadi Natrun in a weak condition.

The rest of the crew were helped to eventual safety by local Senussi, although one of their number died before assistance could arrive.”

## British Casualties

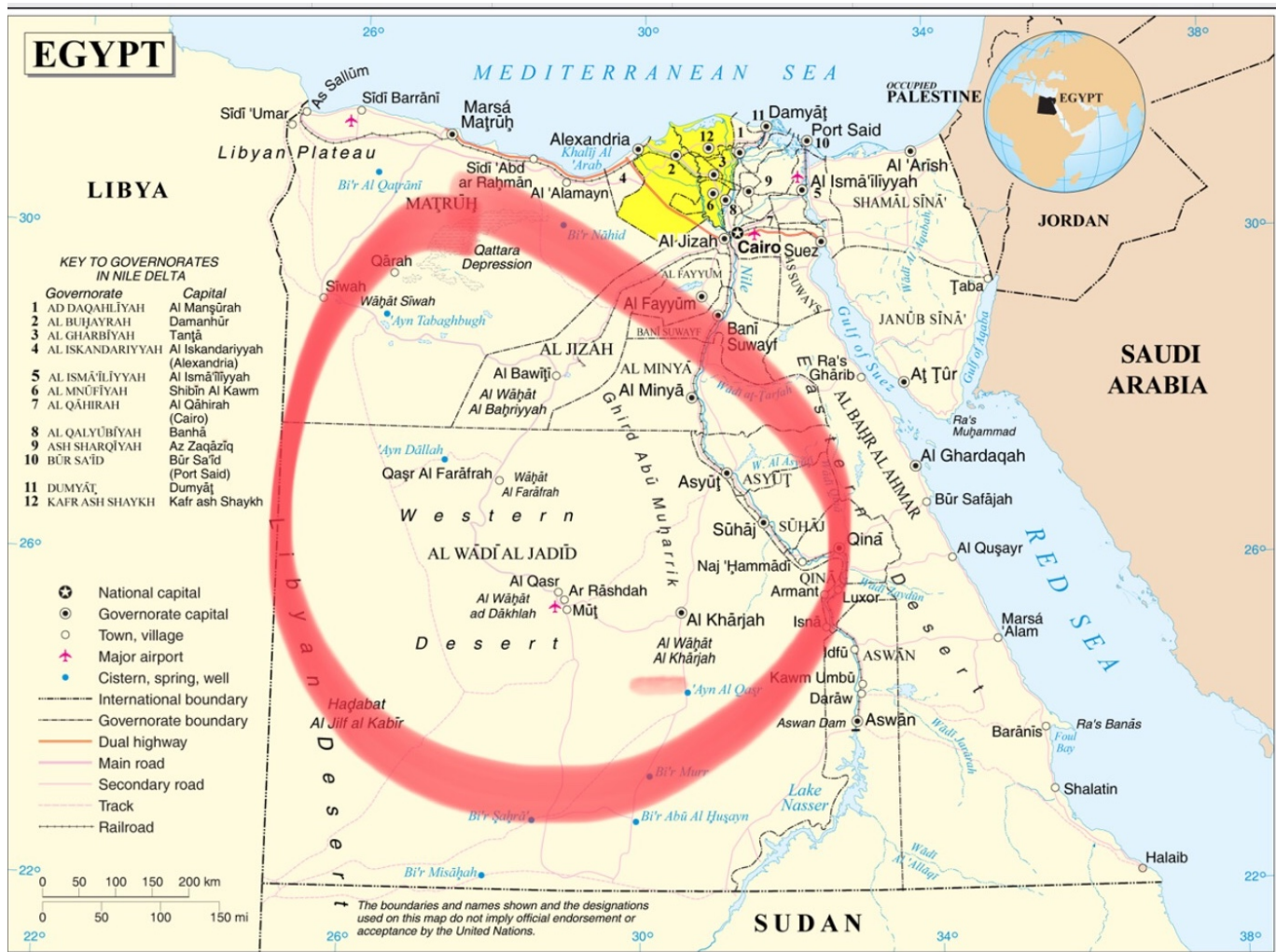
38 Sqn Wellington 1c BB484 'X' laying mines outside  
Benghazi Harbour; badly damaged, crash-landed at Wadi  
Natrun. Flt Sgt D.R. Ward and four safe; one died.

## German Claims

III./ZG 26      L.1 Alfred

Wehneyer                      Wellington        night





July 2011. Adapted from Map No. 3795 Rev. 2 UNITED NATIONS  
January 2004. Every effort has been exercised to ensure the accuracy of this map; however, there might be some inconsistencies as administrative  
boundaries have changed since, and I am not a professional cartographer.

Department of Peacekeeping Operations  
Cartographic Section

Wadi Natrun (Desert) South-east of Benghazi, where crew (including John C Smith & Sidney Mason of the Wellington Bomber baled out on night of 22.5.1942





**Below:** Oberleutnant Alfred Wehmeyer shot down the Wellington aircraft crewed by John Coates Smith, Sidney Richard Mason and others on the night 22nd May 1942 - The day after Alfred's 23rd birthday .

Sidney Mason had only turned 20years old the week before the incident that would cause his death about 1 week later. Alfred Wehmeyer also only lived for 10 days after he shot down the aircraft.

## Alfred Wehmeyer

**Alfred Wehmeyer** (21 May 1919 – 1 June 1942) was a German [Luftwaffe ace](#) and recipient of the [Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross](#) during World War II. The Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross was awarded to recognise extreme battlefield bravery or successful military leadership. Alfred Wehmeyer was credited with 18 aerial victories, all against Western forces. His [Messerschmitt Bf 110](#) was shotdown by British antiaircraft fire near [Tobruk, Libya](#) on 1 June 1942. He was posthumously awarded the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross on 4 September 1942.

### Awards

- [Anschluss Medal](#) (8 November 1938)
- [Flugzeugführerabzeichen](#) (1 February 1940)
- [Front Flying Clasp of the Luftwaffe](#) in Gold (18 December 1941)
- [Ehrenpokal der Luftwaffe](#) (21 March 1941)
- [Iron Cross](#) (1939)
  - 2nd Class (26 August 1940)
  - 1st Class (30 September 1940)
- [Wound Badge](#) (1939)
  - in Black (23 February 1941)
- [German Cross](#) in Gold (25 February 1942)
- [Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross](#) on 4 September 1942 as *Oberleutnant* and *Staffelkapitän* of the 7./Zerstörergeschwader 26 "Horst Wessel"<sup>[1]</sup>
- [Silver Medal of Military Valor](#) (5 November 1941)
- [Ärmelband Afrika](#)

Alfred Wehmeyer	
<b>Born</b>	21 May 1919 <div>Vienna, Austria</div>
<b>Died</b>	1 June 1942 (aged 23) <div>Tobruk, Libya</div>
<b>Allegiance</b>	<span><span></span></span> Nazi Germany
<b>Service/branch</b>	<a href="#">Heer</a> (1938–39) <a href="#">Luftwaffe</a> (1939–42)
<b>Years of service</b>	1938–42
<b>Rank</b>	<a href="#">Oberleutnant</a>
<b>Unit</b>	Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 100 <a href="#">ZG 26</a>
<b>Battles/wars</b>	<a href="#">World War II</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">Annexation of Austria</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Battle of France</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Battle of Britain</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Invasion of Yugoslavia</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Battle of Greece</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Battle of Crete</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Operation Crusader</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Battle of Gazala</a></li></ul>
<b>Awards</b>	<a href="#">Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross</a>



# 103 SQUADRON - RAF

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**W/O Ronald H Boyd RAAF - 103 Squadron - RAF Elsham Wolds - 1944 - Air Bomber.**

**Missing - 3/4th May 1944 - S/L H Swanston RAFVR and crew - Lancaster III - ND905 - Op Mailly-Le-Camp.**



Ronald Howard Boyd was born in Knightsbridge ( now Leabrook ), Adelaide, South Australia on the 11th November 1911. His parents were Mr and Mrs Edward James Boyd.

Educated at Norwood High School from 1925-29 he attended Adelaide University in 1929 to study as a teacher, gaining degrees in Chemistry 1, Geology 1, Geography 1, and Education. In addition he was also a qualified woodwork teacher.

Ron undertook compulsory 6 months military training and was also a member of the 10th Battalion Senior Cadets for 2 years from 1927 to 1929.

After completing his University studies he was appointed as a teacher at Wilkawatt in the South East of the State.

On the 2nd July 1940 Ron applied for enlistment to the Royal Australian Air Force. On the 3rd March 1941 he was accepted and was posted to the No 4 Initial Training School at Mount Breckan, Victor Harbour with the rank of Aircraftsman II.

He married his fiancée on the 24th April 1941 and on the 26th April he was promoted to Leading Aircraftsman.

After completion of 2 months basic training he was posted to No 2 Air Observers School at Mount Gambier and then, on the 24th August, was posted to No 2 Bombing and Gunnery School at Port Pirie where he gained his Air Observers Badge on the 18th October 1941.

Ron was then posted to No 2 Air Navigation School on the 20th October and successfully completed an Astro Navigation Course and was promoted to Temporary Sergeant on the 13th November.

On the 21st November he returned to Adelaide to await further orders and on the 1st February 1942 underwent further training at No 5 SFTS, at Uranquinty NSW securing a promotion to Flight Sergeant on the 13th May 1942.

From the 22nd May to the 29th May Ron was to spend some time at home with his wife and was able to visit his family.

In August 1942 Ron embarked for Britain and, on arrival was posted to RAF Bournemouth. On the 29th March 1943 he was posted to 1 Advanced Flying Unit and on the 27th April 1943 to 27 Operational Training Unit at RAF Wigtown in Scotland. It was here that he was promoted to Warrant Officer on the 13th May 1943.

After 8 months he was posted again to 30 Operational Training Unit at Lichfield in Staffordshire, England and, on the 15th February 1944, to 11 Base at RAF Lindholme.

On the 12th April 1944 Ron and the rest of the crew of which he was a part were posted to 103 Squadron at Elsham Wolds.

Air Gunner - **Sergeant G F Casey RCAF** Age 32

Air Bomber - **Warrant Officer R H Boyd RAAF** Age 32

Wireless Operator - **Warrant Officer J C Smith RAFVR** Age 23

Air Gunner - **Sergeant H Rankin RCAF**



**Above - Swanston crew - Front Row L to R - Dane, Swanston and Boyd. Back Row L to R - Hadden, Casey, Rankin and Smith.**



**George Casey RCAF**



**Jack Rankin RCAF**

Squadron Leader Swanston was the new commander of A Flight of 103 Squadron. This crew participated in a raid on the railway yards at Rouen, France on the night of the 18/19th April 1944. They did not fly again until the night of the 3/4th May 1944 when they took part in an attack on an important German military base at Mailly-le-Camp in France. This proved to be a very costly attack for Bomber Command. A serious and unforeseen communication problem meant the Main Force Controller was unable to give the bombers the orders to commence their attack after the target had been precisely marked by the Pathfinders. Whilst the bombers orbited their holding point the German night fighters made contact in strength. Many Lancasters were shot down during this period and after the order to attack was finally given. The target was, however, accurately bombed and much damage was caused to the German base.

42 Lancasters were lost out of a total of 346 taking part in the raid amongst them Lancaster ND905 flown by Squadron Leader Swanston and crew. The Lancaster was almost certainly a night fighter victim and crashed near Chalons-sur-Marne in the area of Villers-le-Chateau.

Ron Boyd is buried, along with the rest of this crew, in the churchyard at Villers-le-Chateau.

**Keith Bailey.**





Above - Swanston crew - Front Row L to R - Dane, Swanston and Boyd. Back Row L to R - Hadden, Casey, Rankin and Smith.





**W/O John Coates Smith**

**Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve**



**W/O Ronald Howard Boyd.**

**Royal Australian Airforce**





**Sergeant George F Casey  
Royal Canadian Airforce.**



**Air Gunner -Sergeant H Jack Rankin  
Royal Canadian Airforce.**