

BELL, ROBERT RONALD – 28th August 1941 aged 23

567353: Flight Sergeant 97 Squadron RAF - Rear gunner



Photograph courtesy of Ann moss, daughter of his sister Marion

Ronald was born on 9th March 1918 the only son of John (a farm labourer from South Killingholme) and Mary Ann (nee Allison, of Manton) Bell. He had five older sisters named Alice, Annie, Emily, Kathleen (who died aged 8), and Edith Marion. His baptism was at St. Peter's Church on 14th April 1918 and the family lived at Scotterthorpe.

Ronald attended the Queen Elizabeth Grammar School in Gainsborough and then joined the Royal Air Force in the mid 1930s, working as an apprentice at RAF Halton.

On 2nd August 1937, he and his father were the witnesses at the wedding of his sister Marion to George Herbert Walker, an excavator operator from Messingham.

By 1940 he was at RAF Hemswell with 61 Squadron and the next year was based at RAF Coningsby with 97 Squadron, part of 5 Group, Bomber Command, who were flying Avro Manchester bombers.

On 6th August 1941 he married Joan Radley of Morton near Gainsborough at her local church. The day before he had been on a mission attacking the docks of Dunkirk and 24 hours later was recalled to duty. His young bride never saw him again.

Just after midnight on the morning of 8th August 1941 he and his crew flew

in Hampden AE303, with 4 other bombers (AE292, AE300, AE301, and AE302 from the Squadron, in an attack on the Krupp armament works at Essen, Germany. They linked up with planes from other airfields and headed East.

The Operation Records book states: 'Missing from ops - no news after leaving base.'

Believed spotted by an enemy radar post (post TIGER on Terschelling) and shot down by a night fighter operating from the German Frisian islands, the aircraft crashed into the North Sea, north of Terschelling, West Frisian Islands (approximate Coordinates: 53°24'N 5°19'E) at 05:59 hours local time.

It was four months before the Air Ministry confirmed that his body had been recovered from the North Sea. The rest of the crew were never found, and are commemorated on the Runnymede Memorial. They were:-

60563: Pilot Officer Benjamin Bernard Hunter Rodwell - Pilot

994392: Sergeant Gerald Percy Imison – Bomb Aimer

553279: Flight Sergeant Maurice Charles Harvey - Wireless Operator/Air Gunner

Flight Sergeant Ronald Bell was buried at Terschelling (West-Terschelling) General Cemetery on the island off the north coast of Holland. PLOT – Grave 33

His burial was witnessed by Second Officer Sundermeyer, of the Dutch Navy, and his fiancé who were walking in the sand dunes. They got in touch with Ronald's family and the Sundermeyers continue to visit the grave which is looked after by a teacher and school children of the island.

Ronald is remembered on the gravestone of his parents in Scotter Cemetery. His sacrifice, and that of Dennis Edgar, is also commemorated at Queen Elizabeth Grammar School, Gainsborough.



Photograph by kind permission of the Longway Terschelling project.

Source: <https://longway-terschelling.nl/graven/g033.html>