

Sergeant Arthur George Henry FORD

Service number 921623
Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve
158 Squadron, RAF
Killed in action on 22 June 1943, aged 30

Arthur was born in Wells. When the war started he was an assistant manager at an insurance office. He was married with a daughter, and they lived in Bristol. He joined the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve and trained as a Flight Engineer. In June 1943 he was posted to 158 Squadron, RAF. On 22 June 1943, while on his first operational sortie, his Halifax bomber was damaged by flak over Krefeld. He bailed out and was killed aged 30.



A Halifax Mk II bomber

Photograph by a Royal Air Force official photographer © IWM CH 11324
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Arthur was born in Wells on 30 July 1911 to Tom Ford and Elizabeth Jane née Williams, and was baptised at St Cuthbert's Church on 10 September. His father was a boot maker and he had two brothers and three sisters.

On 8 December 1934, he married Kathleen Vowles, of Sadler Street, at St Cuthbert's Church. After a reception at 'The Four Tubs' they went to London for their honeymoon. Arthur then worked for Pearl Assurance and was a member of the St Cuthbert's Bible Class.

In 1937 their daughter Vera was born, and in December 1938 they were living at 4, Herbert Terrace. At the start of the war, they were living at 1, Cottrell Avenue, Bristol, where Arthur was an assistant manager in an insurance office.

Arthur enlisted into the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve at Uxbridge before June 1940. After his initial training he went to Number 4 School of Technical Training at St Athan to train as a flight engineer. On graduation he went to 1658 Heavy Conversion Unit at RAF Riccall (near Selby in North Yorkshire). There he met up with the crew that he would fly with, and did his type conversion onto Halifax bombers and started to gain flying experience.

On 15 June 1943 Arthur and his crew were posted to 158 Squadron at RAF Lissett (west of Bridlington, East Riding of Yorkshire). The squadron was then flying Halifax Mk II heavy bombers.

The crew's first operation flight was on the night of 21/22 June 1943. They took off at 23.32 in Halifax Mk II JD116 NP-A to bomb Krefeld in Germany. The squadron's Operation Record Book¹ describes what happened over Krefeld:

Target not identified. Bombed red T.I. [target indicator] one burst. Many large fires, concentrated. Captain states: "At 0210 hrs. approx. 18,000ft. in heavy flak and caught in searchlights. Aircraft came down to 13,000ft. Inter-comm. u/s [unserviceable] after hearing Navigator say he had been hit." Captain managed to control aircraft and observed Engineer [Arthur] leaving aircraft. Found later that the Navigator, W/Op [wireless operator], Bomb Aimer and Engineer had all bailed out. R/Gnr [rear gunner] sustained a light facial injury.

The aircraft landed safely back in the UK. Of the four who bailed out, two became prisoners of war, and two died. Sgt Denys Floyd was found dead and was buried in Düsseldorf. Nothing is known of Arthur's fate but it was assumed that he too had died.

Arthur has no known grave but is remembered on Panel 149 of the Air Forces Memorial at Runnymede. The memorial was unveiled by the Queen on 17 October 1953, and Arthur's wife and daughter were there. He is also remembered on the rolls of honour at Wells Town Hall and Wells Cemetery.

¹ Held at the National Archives, Kew, reference AIR 27/1048/35