

417113 Warrant Officer George James RONEY RNZAF

No 33 Squadron RAF



George James Roney was born in Oamaru, NZ on 1st January 1922, to George and Rosannah Roney. His father was a baker from Adelaide, and George was one of six children (2 girls, 4 boys). His early education was at Oamaru North, followed by a secondary education at Waitaki Boys' High School where George attained matriculation standard. George Roney's name is on the Honour Board of Waitaki Boys' High School and he obviously had considerable sporting ability, being a member of his school's first rugby fifteen, and taking what was described as an 'outstanding part' in athletics. He went on to win the Junior Otago High Jump Championship in 1941 and tied equal for the North Otago Championship as a member of the North Otago Amateur Athletic Association. He also belonged to the Athletic Football Club and to the Oamaru Miniature Rifle Club.

After leaving school, George was apprenticed locally as a motor mechanic. He joined the Territorials for 2 years and moved with them up to Christchurch where he enlisted for air crew training in the Royal New Zealand Air Force on 21 December 1941. While a newspaper report says he was a member of the Methodist Church, his application for enlistment gives his religion as Church of England. His enlistment application also tells us he was just shy of 6' tall with dark hair, hazel eyes and a fresh complexion with no scars.

After considerable training in the North Island he was awarded his flying badge on 19 Oct 1942 and received a promotion to Sergeant. Leaving New Zealand in January 1943 he went first to New York before continuing on to England where he furthered his training as a Spitfire fighter pilot both there and in Scotland. George was promoted to Flight Sergeant on 19 June 1943.



Stationed in France he saw that country liberated. While in France he was amongst a group of RNZAF Spitfire pilots who were visited by the NZ High Commissioner from his London home¹. This visit was shortly before he participated in an armed reconnaissance operation over Western Holland on 6th October 1944, where his squadron encountered heavy flak. Two of the aircraft

¹ Auckland Star 29 Sept 1944 pg 3

were hit and had to make a forced landing, while a third in which Warrant Officer Roney was the pilot, was shot down. His father duly received the dreaded 'Missing, presumed dead' telegram, and the NZ Evening Post of 12th September 1945 listed him, along with numerous others, on their Air Casualties Roll of Honour.

It was not until 9th June 1948 that a Dutch Military Salvage Squad, alerted by a farmer, located the wreckage of George's aircraft where it had crashed in the hamlet of Steenhoven. His remains were identified, exhumed and given a proper burial in Grave 303B of Schoondijke General Cemetery, Zeeland, Netherlands.

Sadly, I did not get to meet this uncle of mine as I was not born until just 3 weeks after he was shot down. Like many young men of his time, I'm sure George left NZ with a spirit of adventure mixed with a sense of pride and duty at the opportunity to serve his country. Again, like many of those young men he was not to return to his homeland, nor have the opportunity of leaving descendants who would remember his heroism and sacrifice – such a full and active life cut so incredibly short.

Lest we forget.

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Postscript:

Sadly, George's niece, the author of this piece, did not get to meet her uncle as she born just 3 weeks after he was shot down. On 24th September 2015 she made the journey with her husband from Australia to Europe, and was able to visit her Uncle George's grave and lay a NZ flag along with a knitted poppy, as shown on this photograph.

417113 WARRANT OFFICER
G. J. RONEY
PILOT
ROYAL N.Z. AIR FORCE
6TH OCTOBER 1944 AGE 22

