

Pilot Officer Ralph Henderson



Ralph Henderson: The Early Days



Figure 1: "Ralph as a young man in Blyth – probably around 1918" Photo Courtesy of Bill Dawson, Ralph Henderson's Great Nephew.



Figure 2: "Ralph with his parents – Robert William and Mary Jane – in 1920." Photo Courtesy of Bill Dawson, Ralph Henderson's Great Nephew.

On 29th March 1910, Ralph Henderson was in County Durham. His father was a Superintendent at an insurance company. Ralph grew up in a large family, being raised alongside 4 other children. In his early years, Ralph enjoyed playing sports, especially football and enjoyed playing in the streets. Ralph performed well throughout his education, excelling especially in Physical Education and Woodwork.

At the age of 16, following graduating Blyth Secondary School in 1926, Ralph travelled to Australia to participate in the 'Big Brother' farming scheme. This scheme was sponsored by the government to bolster farming in Australia. However, he soon left farming to begin a new profession in teaching. By his mid-twenties, Ralph was a head teacher.

In October 1940, Ralph left his teaching post to join the RAF Volunteer Reserve. Thereafter, Ralph was sent to Atlanta, Georgia, USA, to complete his basic flying training. Ralph excelled and was posted to the Advanced Flying Unit at RAF Leconfield in Yorkshire as a result. Ralph completed his training in Scotland between December 1942 and March 1943.

Later Years

In the final stage of his training in Scotland, Ralph began writing to Muriel, one of his mentors from his time at the Teacher Training College. After a steady course of letters, Muriel and Ralph became a couple and Muriel would frequently travel through the blackouts to spend time with Ralph.



Figure 3: Photo of Pilot Officer Ralph Henderson

Photo Courtesy of Bill Dawson, Ralph Henderson's Great Nephew.

During Ralph's second mission, his Lancaster OLB ED313 aircraft was shot down over Stuttgart by a night fighter, suspected to be Gerhard Rase. Ralph fortunately was able to parachute to safety, however his crew were not so fortunate. For the following couple of months, Ralph was successful in avoiding capture, for which he was later awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, which was presented to him by the King.



Figure 4: "Ralph and Muriel on their Wedding Day" – 4 August 1943. Photo Courtesy of Bill Dawson, Ralph Henderson's Great Nephew.

Upon finally returning home, Ralph married Muriel. A few weeks into their marriage, on 22nd November 1943, Ralph's Lancaster OLB JB424 aircraft was shot down over Berlin and he lost his life alongside all his fellow crewmembers.