



Frederick George Shears (George)

27 April 1921 - 2 July 1942

Royal New Zealand Air Force

No 413489

Within a few days quite a number of us were sent from Ossington to Harrogate to a school of navigation. George was not one of those sent there, so we both made an application to be stationed on the same unit some time in the future because the RAF had a system where they would try to have brothers together if possible. We were all pilots and after six weeks were scheduled to sit an examination for a second-class navigation certificate. After three weeks on the course, however, and while in class one day I was sent for by the Group Captain. He informed me that my brother had been killed in a flying accident near Ossington along with two other airmen. This was on 2 July 1942. The Group Captain said, "I'll give you

seven days' leave to attend to your brother's affairs but if you need more time, send a telegram and it will be granted." In the event I was away approximately twelve days.

NEW ZEALAND POST OFFICE TELEGRAPHS

TELEGRAM

A 1/628 426 1000

55/54/1 Priority Gloucester

Priority Mrs A Shears
416 Stafford St
Timaru

(Office Stamp)
TIMARU
5 JUL 1942
TELEPHONE
EXCHANGE

Received at: 12/ Operator's Initials: A

Deeply regret to inform you that your son - No. 413489 Sergeant Frederick George Shears lost his life in an aircraft accident date of casualty unknown. Letter follows. Please accept profound sympathy under Secretary of State Air Ministry
Air Ministry
Records.
Gloucester

Tel. 142. 30,000 pades/10/40-9880

Telegram to Doug's parents from the Air Ministry Records, Gloucester. Delivered by hand, 5 July 1942

I went to Ossington where the Group Captain was very good to me and authorized all George's personal effects to be handed over, his underclothes, shoes and so on. I was grateful for these because they lasted for a number of years and George and I took the same size. The Group Captain said, "Where would you like your brother to be buried?" I asked, "Do I have a choice, Sir?" "Anywhere in the United Kingdom or Ireland but it's impossible to send him back home to New Zealand in wartime." "Could he be buried at St Mary Cray, Orpington, Kent?" I asked. He said, "No reason why that can't be done but why do you request that?" "Because our mother came from there and our grandfather is still alive and lives in the village. I'm sure that Mum and Dad and the rest of the family would be pleased if you could arrange that." On his suggestion I gave all the particulars to the Adjutant and so it was arranged. I rang Uncle Will Boyce, my mother's younger brother, and told him what had happened, asking whether the funeral could be held at St Mary Cray. He readily agreed.

I also rang George's friend Hugh Henderson from Timaru who was stationed at Heston, London. George and Hugh had worked together at Charles Begg's Music and Radio Shop in Timaru before they both joined the Air Force. The next day when I was saying goodbye to my friends at Ossington, they said "We are going to try to get down for the funeral." Three of them were able to make it, as well as Hugh Henderson. On the way to St Mary Cray, I stopped off at the Star and Garter Home in Richmond and on 5 July 1942 I wrote the following letter to my parents:

Dear Mum & Dad,

I am writing to you from Uncle Fred's home as I am staying here for a few days.

The sad loss of our dear George has been a great shock, but throughout this terrible ordeal my mind has been constantly with you, almost every minute of the day, and knowing how brave you will be has given me strength to carry out the unfortunate but necessary arrangements.

As I expect you will now know, it was an accident through no fault of George's, while they were flying over their own aerodrome. There were three occupants, and the official report is that the fault did not lie with any member of the crew.

The Air Ministry have been most sympathetic and kind in every way and we are laying George to rest at St Mary Cray, because I believe you would wish it.

The following service has been arranged with the Vicar at St Mary Cray, Parish Church: Voluntary-music, "God of our Fathers"; Hymn 217, "Thy Kingdom Come"; Psalm 90; Hymn 27, "Abide with Me"; music, "I'll Walk Beside You."

Don Galbraith, Frank Welford, and Frank Hyde are coming to act as bearers with me. Afterwards we are all going with Uncle Fred to see Auntie Flo. Naturally all the Cray family and Uncle Fred are going to be there. Grandad has expressed the wish to attend so he will be there too.

Uncle Fred got a lovely poppy wreath from the British Legion for you both, and we took it down to George at Cray on Saturday. I wrote on the card "With dearest love to our beloved eldest son, from Mother & Dad,"

and underneath I placed the words "He liveth for ever." I thought you would like that, and I am trying to do whatever you would have done. I understood that the cemetery has been extended up beside Star Lane since you were here. George will be in the Service Section among a lot of RAF boys who lost their lives in the Battle of Britain. I believe there are about 30 there. A great deal of fighting took place over the old village. I have missed you both very much these past few days, but I have lived constantly with you in thought and spirit. All members of the family have been a great help and comfort to me, and they have done their utmost to lighten my very sad task.

With fondest love to you both,
Doug

I had the idea that a New Zealand flag would be available from New Zealand House for use at the funeral, which it was. When I arrived at New Zealand House in London I asked for the High Commissioner, Mr Bill Jordan. Mr Jordan was not available, so I was shown into his deputy's office. He asked me what I wanted and when I told him the story he said "That's no trouble at all. I'm very sad about what has happened." About that time Mr Jordan arrived and I was shown into his office by his deputy, who stayed with us. The High Commissioner expressed his sympathy on George's death. I then told him that some of my Timaru friends at Ossington had said that the wing on George's plane had collapsed because inferior glue had been used to join certain parts of the wing. I had quite a few old friends at Ossington and some of them were from Timaru and they all believed that this was the cause of George's accident. When told this, the High Commissioner said "We are losing too many young New Zealand men through accidents. I will find out what happened and if anyone is to be blamed for this, the person will be punished. Unfortunately, you will have to wait for the verdict in due course." I have no doubt that Mr Jordan saw that justice was carried out in the case of George and his companions who were killed with him. A book called *For Your Tomorrow* by Errol W. Martyn, published in 1998, issued an official list of casualties suffered in the RNZAF and Allied Air Services from 1915 - 1942 and there the circumstances of George's death were clearly depicted, exactly as my mates in Ossington had told me (p.218). Nothing was covered up.

Old Parish Church, St Mary Cray, Kent



George's funeral service was held at St Mary Cray Parish Church on 7 August 1942. From memory the church would be about the same size as St John's Anglican Church in Timaru, New Zealand. It was conducted by the Vicar of St Mary Cray, the Rev. Ray F Galer M.A., and he was assisted by a chaplain from the nearest Royal Air Force Station, Squadron Leader David Evans. The High Commissioner

and the Government of New Zealand were represented by Mr J. Balfour. A cousin of mine from Canada, George Briant, also attended the funeral. George's coffin was draped with the New Zealand flag.

Mum had several brothers and sisters and their families still living in the area as well as her father, Granddad Boyce (Fred). She was remembered by many folk in St Mary Cray as she had only been away 25 years. A lot of her school friends were still living in the Cray Valley area and were corresponding with her regularly so there was a good turnout of relatives and friends for George and I was surprised at the numbers. Aunt Elizabeth, who lived at Portland, Dorset and arrived with her husband for the service, asked "Will you be at the funeral with the family?" I said "Certainly I will. I will be a pall-bearer," not realising that the custom in the area was very different from what we were used to in Timaru. When the undertaker had asked if he should supply pall-bearers I had said "I have five of George's friends who will be at the funeral and I would like us all to be pall-bearers. I will be the sixth." He had readily agreed as this was a Royal New Zealand Air Force funeral. The pall-bearers were Frank Welford, Frank Hyde, Don Galbraith, Stan Watson, Hugh Henderson and yours truly. Five of us had been at Timaru Boys High School with George and Hugh Henderson had worked with him for several years in Timaru. Aunt Elizabeth was very put out when she knew I was to be a pall-bearer because it was not the way things were done in this part of Kent. Family were never pall-bearers. It was left to the undertaker to arrange these things and the pall-bearers were usually casual workers hired by him when necessary. When I pointed out to Uncle Will that this was how Mum and Dad would like it to be, he told Aunt Elizabeth to mind her own business! "It's a New Zealand funeral and Doug will arrange it according to their own customs." One of the popular tunes of the time was called "I'll Walk Beside You." It was a semi-religious song and was a favourite of George's so I asked the Vicar whether it would be suitable for the service. He was quite happy to use it but they did not have the music and as I was going up to London that day I went to Chappell's, the music people, and managed to get a copy of the sheet music. After the funeral, on 9 July 1942, the Rev. R.F. Galer, Vicar of St Mary Cray Church, kindly sent the sheet music to Mum and Dad and wrote them the following letter:

Dear Mrs Shears,

May the peace of Christ that holds all loving hearts be with you and yours at this time.

We laid your dear boy to rest on Tuesday July 7th at 12 pm. Amongst those who attended were men of the New Zealand RAF, a representative of the New Zealand House in London, and an RAF Padre, who read the Lesson from the Revelation of St John the Divine. The procession was met by the Cross Bearer and the Sentences were said as they passed up the Old Churchyard into the Old Church, which dates back to the year 1250.

In Church the organist played Kipling's Recessional Hymn. Then Hymn 217 A & M was sung, next Psalm 90 was said. The Lesson followed, read by the RAF Padre, the Rev. Evans. The two prayers for those in the Great Beyond and those on this earth were said. Hymn 27 A & M was then sung, followed by the "Nunc Dimittis."

The procession reformed and processed up to the cemetery where the words of Committal were spoken, but before we left the Church there was a little pause, for we remembered you all "Out There." His body lies in a quiet spot in the fair land of the County of Kent – it is all so peaceful there. So much like Old England and the peaceful countryside. And one felt that as his spirit lives in Paradise yet his earthly body rests in the old homeland

– the land of his people – and in wishing you all sincere sympathy and a joyful “reunion,” may I end up with the words of R.L. Stevenson:

Here he lies where he wished to be.

Home is the sailor, home from sea,

And the hunter home from the hill.

Believe me to be

Your very sincere

Ray F. Galer MA

Vicar of St Mary Cray

George was buried at St Mary Cray cemetery (Servicemen’s Section) in an area where a lot of pilots who had been shot down during the Battle of Britain were also buried. At the opposite end of the Servicemen’s Section were four graves of German aircrew who had been shot down during an attack on the London area. After the funeral, Great Aunt Paulette arranged for a reception to be held at her house in Orpington and invited all of those who attended the funeral. I was amazed at the variety of food and refreshments provided by her through the catering people who had somehow managed to put on a good spread even in wartime. All the Timaru contingent went to the gathering and were treated very well by all the local people.

George’s grave, St Mary Cray, Kent

