

AWM 65

[3560]

MATHERS, FRANCIS EDWIN

413221

AUSTRALIAN ARCHIVES
ACCESS STATUS

OPEN

See his Units 637 645 7W 528/9A. (CENT)

662

794

missing 5-6-9 Mather

in R.A. 3-12-43

P.D. dead 11-4-44

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE

OFFICERS AND AIRCREW

The following Biographical details are required for use at R.A.A.F. Overseas Headquarters, LONDON, :-

Surname.....MATHERS..... Number.....AUS. 413221.....
Christian Names.....Francis Edwin.....
Air Force Rank and Mustering.....SGT. PILOT.....
Degrees, Decorations, etc.....C.C.M......
Present Appointment and Location.....P.R.C. R.A.F. Bomber Command.....
Date of Birth.....24 November 1921..... Place.....Sydney N.S.W......
Educated.....Laceyville Public School Sydney.....
.....Sydney Boys' High School.....
Date of Entering Service.....16th August 1942.....
Previous Service Experience.....
.....
Places of Training.....3 I.T.S. Sandgate, 12 F.F.T.S. Bundaberg, 12 F.F.T.S. Lismore,
2 S.F.T.S. Forest Hill, 7 S.F.T.S. Devilbush.....
Civilian Career and Activities.....Bookkeeper.....
.....
Clubs, Recreations, etc.....Rugby, racing, Motor cycle racing,
M.U.I.O.O.F. Lodges.....
.....
Father.....60262, LAC MATHERS, F. Laverton, Victoria.....
Wife.....
Children.....
Home Address.....24 Birdwood Ave. Pagewood Sydney N.S.W......

Signature.....Francis Mather.....

Date.....18th August 1942.....

Date Embarked.....2nd July 1942.....

Destination.....17th August 1942.....

o.c.w.
F.H.

26/6/43 - No. 22

637

Air Ministry News Service

Air Ministry Bulletin. 10704

CRIPPLED HALIFAX DESTROYED MESSERSCHMITT

27/6/43

A Halifax, already badly damaged by flak while bombing Mulheim on Tuesday night, shot down a Me.110 while limping home over the North Sea, although the odds were all against the bomber one turret dismantled.

Shells hit the Halifax over Mulheim a second after the bombs had gone and while the bomb doors were still open. One of the starboard engines caught fire, and a few minutes later the crew saw flames coming from the port engine also. The flight engineer feathered both propellers, and the flames went out. He then found that three of the petrol tanks were badly holed, two of them being already empty.

The Halifax quickly lost height and reached the enemy coast flying at only 3,000 ft. The crew jettisoned everything loose-seats, cushions, anything that could be detached. Then the pilot decided that the mid-upper turret must go and told the crew to dismantle it. But, fortunately, the rear turret was kept intact.

The aircraft was down to 1,500 ft when the Me.110 came in over the sea, to attack. The rear gunner had only time to fire one short burst before all four of his guns were shot out of action.

The Me. attacked again, while the rear gunner of the Halifax worked on coolly repairing his weapons. When the third attack came he had two guns in service and returned the fire. There was a flash, and the Me. dived towards the sea, exploding as it hit the water.

By now the Halifax was down to 500 ft. when he prepared to land the pilot, Sgt. F.E. Mathers, of Sydney, Australia, discovered that the under-carriage had been shot out of action so the jettisoned in a slide along the ground - in a half dismantled aircraft, but with every member of the crew safe.

SGT. W.F. SPEEDIE

77 SON

AS RECORDED

Sgt. Frank W. Mathers yy Squadron 662

"A C T I O N"

Sgt. Frank W. Mathers and Sgt. W.F. Speedie.

Flight to Mulheim

As soon as we crossed the enemy coast we began to run the into/camp defences. We'd been to the Ruhr before several times and we knew what those defences were like. Pretty soon, right ahead of us, we could see the flak around the target in full operation. Practically the whole of the Ruhr is a mass of searchlight and A.A. guns. Passing Essen and Duisburg, the flak was particularly intense. All around us we could see the bursts of anti-aircraft shells, great puffs of white leaving clouds of black smoke. They were so close that we could feel the aircraft shudder from the concussion and we could even hear some of the explosions. It was like this all the way across the Ruhr to Mulheim, but we weren't seriously hit, in fact I doubt if we were hit at all, and we didn't see any sign of night-fighters.

When we arrived the target was well alight. We dropped our bombs. Before we closed our bomb doors, a burst of flak caught our starboard outer engine and set it alight. We feathered the engine, and the fire went out as the engine stopped. Of course that meant that it was now out of action for the rest of the flight. Almost immediately, our port inner engine was hit and burst into flames too. Again, we feathered it and the fire immediately went out. Before we got away, we had other damage done to the aircraft. The worst was when three of our petrol tanks were hit and two of them drained immediately. The controls also were hit and made it almost impossible for us to turn to the right. Some of our equipment was also put out of action.

Things didn't look too pleasant for us as we turned away from the target and headed for home. We had to get out of the Ruhr defences and with two engines gone, we were losing height steadily all the while. Fortunately, no one had been injured and

everyone seemed pretty happy although it looked like a certain ditching in the Channel if we were able to get as far as that. We had to lighten the aircraft as much as possible, so I started the crew to work with axes to jettison everything possible except the absolute essential equipment. We threw overboard our seats, cushions, the navigator's table, portion of a turret, some of the guns, some instruments, oxygen bottles and many other things. This kept them busy all the time.

By the time we had reached the enemy coast, we had dropped to 3000 feet and we were still getting rid of equipment, but we had been lucky to dodge any further damage although the flak had been heavy in places. But as we crossed the enemy coast, I ordered the Wireless Operator to tell them back at base what state we were in and what we were trying to do, that is, to get as close as we could to the English coast before we ditched. As he was sending his message, he saw tracer bullets shooting past the aircraft. They told their own story. A Me 110 had come up from astern and was attacking us. The Wireless Operator tacked on to the end of his message 'Fighter attacking'. Just before that, the rear-gunner had told me on the Inter-com. system that the Me. was approaching from dead astern but the Wireless Operator couldn't hear that message. The first burst from the Me. went through the aircraft - it came through the rear turret up past my seat and went out through the front and side, but no one was injured and no great damage was done in the front of the Halifax. However, the rear-gunner was silent. I tried out the Inter-com. and the signal lights and they seemed to be in order, but there was no reply on either from Sgt. Speedie. The Me. attacked again, but I could only tell by the tracer bullets ripping through the wings and the body of the Halifax. He made three attacks altogether and then I saw no more signs of him. Meanwhile, the Wireless Operator had continued sending messages back to base and we had continued losing height until by the end of the attacks we were down to 400 feet. When the attacks began,

the men who were busy throwing out the equipment to lighten the aircraft, had gone off the Inter-Com. system and didn't know the Me. was coming. The first sign they got was the tracer ripping through the aircraft past them. One man had something in his hand which he was about to jettison. A bullet knocked it out of his hand through the hatch and saved him the trouble of throwing it out. They threw themselves flat on the floor of the aircraft. However, with the Me. attacking I couldn't afford to have the rear turret unmanned so I sent two of them back to the rear turret to rescue Sgt. Speedie and one of them to take his place. When they got there they found him very much alive and all they got was a peremptory and lurid request to get out of his way as he was busy. Well, here's Bill himself to tell you what happened from his point of view. By the way, I don't think you'll need to be told that he is a Scotsman who comes from Fifeshire.

Sgt. Speedie

Well, I had a pretty quiet trip with nothing to do at all until we crossed the enemy coast on our way back home. I had a good view of all the flak and I couldn't leave my post to help throw things overboard to lighten the aircraft. I knew what was happening, and I'd made all my preparations for when we ditched. I was pretty sure that Frank - Sgt. Mathers - would get us down pretty safely. Then I suddenly saw the tail of the night-fighter slipping underneath following their usual tactics. They often try to sneak up on the bombers unobserved, get underneath on the blind side, and come up as close as possible. Then suddenly they attack unseen from below. The bomb aimer from the under blister saw him and identified him as a Me. 110. The Captain took what evasive action he could with the damaged aircraft. Just then the Me. climbed up and opened fire. The first burst came in all around me. As he climbed up, I got in one short burst before he broke away slightly above us. We'd had to jettison the other guns and so no one else could attack him. He climbed away and came back again/made a second attack from dead astern. I looked down to check that my guns were in order

and discovered that the first burst had hit my ammunition and put my guns out of action for the time being. While I was re-loading them with fresh ammunition, the Me. got in his second burst. We were still taking slight evasive action, the most we could do, this second burst hit the aircraft - I saw my side panel go - but it didn't seem to do very much damage. It was close enough, however, because I had a piece of my Mae West jacket torn off my left shoulder by a bullet.

Before he broke away, I got in another short burst. I'm sure I hit him again but like the first time, I didn't seem to do any serious damage. He broke away above.

Meanwhile, I realised that the first attack had smashed the inter-com and signalling system so far as I was concerned because I couldn't get any message through to the skipper to let him know what was happening. But I was too busy watching for the Me. to worry about it at that stage. Pretty soon he came back for the third attack, again dead astern. He opened fire just before me, then I got in a short burst with all four guns, then two of them cut out and left me with only two firing. I got him well lined up in the sights and gave him a long burst from these two guns. I saw an explosion take place in the fuselage of the Me., he swerved off his course a bit and lost height. I followed him down with my guns and saw him hit the sea. When he hit the sea he burst into flames. The bomb aimer from his under blister got a grandstand view of the whole proceedings, so he told me afterwards. I resumed my look-out for any other night-fighters that might be prowling ~~around~~ around but just then there was terrific banging on my turret door. The mid-upper gunner and navigator had come to see what was wrong because the inter-com and signal system was working except for my bit and they thought I would have been badly wounded. I told them to get out and they seemed quite glad to leave me alone.

Sgt. Mathers

Yes, only they didn't say he'd put it as nicely as all that. As a matter of fact when an action is on we're all apt to

use fairly strong language. I'm told I'm no exception to the rule! Anyway, we were mighty glad to know that Bill was alright and that he had got the Me.

By then we were about half an hour from the English coast and as I said, we were down to about 400 feet. I found that I was able to maintain that height, mainly I think because we'd jettisoned enough equipment to reduce the weight of the aircraft. Our two sound engines were functioning perfectly without losing further height and we finally crossed the coast and I made for the nearest aerodrome. All the while, our Wireless Operator - who did a marvellous job all through - had kept in touch with base so that they knew where we were and that we needed to make an emergency landing. This was urgent because just as we crossed the coast our petrol gauges showed zero. I got in touch by radio with the nearest aerodrome. They got my message though I couldn't receive a reply from them. As we approached the aerodrome they signalled us in and I went straight down. I tried to get my under-carriage down but it had been damaged and wouldn't lower. So the only thing left was to belly-land and trust to Luck as I didn't have enough petrol to stay in the air/^{to try}and get the under-carriage to work. Actually, it turned out all right, not nearly as difficult as I thought it would be. No one was hurt, not much more damage was done to the aircraft and she slid along smoothly to a standstill. Bill says, although I don't know how I ought to take it, that it wasn't much different from one of my normal landings!

We hopped out of the Halifax pretty quickly as there is always a chance of fire and that reminds me I made a mistake. I said that no one was hurt. That's wrong. I was so anxious to get out in a hurry that I bruised my hand trying to break the escape hatch open. That was our only casualty in the whole crew. When we looked at the aircraft afterwards, there were dozens of holes in it.

It looked like a sieve and it seems to me remarkable
that not one of us was hit. We were soon back in the mess
having a much needed breakfast.

15/7/43.

527A

Conspicuous Gallantry Medal (Flying).

of Sydney.

Aus. 413221 Flight Sergeant Francis Edwin MATHERS, Royal Australian
Air Force, No. 77 Squadron.

One night in June, 1943, Sergeants French and Spedie were the wireless operator/air gunner and rear gunner respectively of an aircraft piloted by Flight Sergeant Mathers, which attacked Mulheim. Whilst over the target area, the bomber was subjected to heavy fire from the ground defences and was repeatedly hit. Two engines were rendered unserviceable in quick succession, while the starboard aileron control was shot away and three petrol tanks were pierced, all of which leaked rapidly. In spite of this, Flight Sergeant Mathers flew clear of the defences and set course for this country. On the return flight, the bomber gradually lost height and all moveable equipment, including the guns of the mid-upper turret and some ammunition, were jettisoned. Shortly after crossing the enemy coast, the disabled aircraft was intercepted by an enemy fighter. In the ensuing engagement, Sergeant Spedie skilfully used his guns and, eventually with a devastating burst from close range, he shot the attacker down into the sea. The bomber was down to 500 feet but, displaying superb airmanship, Flight Sergeant Mathers, receiving much assistance from Sergeant French who diligently worked his wireless apparatus to obtain direction fixes, struggled on to reach an airfield near the coast. Although the undercarriage could not be lowered, this pilot successfully effected a crash-landing. In most harassing circumstances, Flight Sergeant Mathers displayed exceptional skill, courage and fortitude, while Sergeants French and Spedie displayed conduct worthy of the highest praise.

