

Flight Sergeant Raymond Keating 1338063 156 Squadron Volunteer Reserve died May 1944 and buried Molenaarsgraaf Holland

Raymond A Keating was shot down and killed with five of his crew from the Lancaster ND559 on the evening of May 22nd 1944.

They were shot down by a single German ace pilot over Molensaarsgraaf Holland. Their Lancaster had just completed a successful raid on Duisburg.

Raymond was born in Tyllwyn neat Ebbw Vale, South Wales. His father John Francis was a Kerry man and served in the Boer war. He was funny, yet laid back. He was 5 years older than I.

Raymond played and loved Rugby. Along with his two closest friends he never missed a Cardiff Arms Park national match. This friendships captured in the photography, taken in 1938/9- when dreams of a future, music, girls and a career were all there to enjoy, but were snuffed out in 5 short years Both were killed before the war's end.

Raymond was a keen boxer and also attended his brother's boxing gym which my bother Terry began during the depression for young local lads.

Also attached is a photo of Raymond with a group of Ebbw Vale steel workers taking a break with their young boss- my brother who was then a surveyor and in a reserved occupation, so did not need to volunteer for active service. .

In the evenings my brother and I would roll back the rugs and dance to the radio to the popular bandleaders of the day , Ambrose , Fox , and Geraldo – great fun. Raymond would dance with me- a scrawny little girl. We all enjoyed singing around the family but to this day I cannot listen to “Danny Boy”- the memories of Raymond overwhelm me.

Raymond bought me my first “ball gown “ for my first college dance. There I met my husband of 62 happy years – he also became a pilot- F.O. Ian Laydon.

My brother so full of joy and of living, movingly expressed his empathy and compassion. One evening, it must have been 1943, he had 48 hours leave and came to visit me, by then I was a qualified teacher working in London. We were on Richmond Bridge. Suddenly the siren sounded, an air raid began, the sky was alight with search lights- guns , ours pounding- then the drone of the German bombers flying low. My brother stopped and looking at the sky he said “those poor buggers!”. I was shocked but said nothing, his humanity for his fellow man was obvious. He had been in the same situation himself on many occasions as a Pathfinder over Germany . He understood the hell they were going through.

My mother said it all in her epitaph on his grave.

“To the world and air-man
To me, my, my all”

Marie Laydon (nee Keating) Raymond's sister