

**408904 Pilot Officer
Max Keiran CUMMINGS -
killed in a flying accident on 18 June 1943**



Studio portrait of 408904 Pilot Officer Max Keiran Cummings, the photographer was Rembrandt Studios, Adelaide; from the Peter Cummings family collection.

Max Keiran Cummings was born at Goulburn (NSW) on 1 April 1913, the fourth of five children of Edwin Joseph Cummings and Lizzie Florence Cummings (*nee* Salmon). He was educated at Brighton Road State School after the family moved to Melbourne. Max was farming at Colac when he enlisted in the Royal Australian Air Force on 20 June 1941.

Max was selected for air cadet training and posted to No 4 Initial Training School at Mt Breckan, Victor Harbor. He was mustered for pilot training and underwent flying training at No 1 Elementary Flying Training School, Parafield from October 1941 to February 1942; he was then drafted for twin-engine aircraft training at No 6 Service Flying Training School, Mallala. Max was awarded his Flying Badge on 30 April 1942.

During his time at Mount Breckan, Max met local girl Kathleen Harrold and after a courtship they married on 2 April 1942 in Victor Harbor. On

2 July 1942, Max embarked from Sydney aboard the SS *Monterey* and sailed for England via the United States and Canada.

In England Max underwent advanced training for pilots, then was posted to No. 16 Operational Training Unit in Oxfordshire. The OTU's brought the airmen together to form an aircrew.

On 6 April 1943, Max and his crew were at 1661 Heavy Conversion Unit at RAF Waddington. These units trained the men in the operation and handling of the four-engine heavy bombers. Max was commissioned as Pilot Officer on 22 April and on 15 May, he was posted to No 467 Squadron RAAF; it was equipped with Avro Lancasters. During his short stay with 467 Squadron, Max flew four missions over enemy-held Europe - to Dortmund, Dusseldorf, Essen and Wuppertal. On 7 June 1943, Max was posted to 83 Squadron RAF, a Pathfinder unit.



War grave of PO M.K. Cummings in the Grantham Cemetery, England. The plastic mesh was placed there by Cemetery staff to prevent rabbits eating the flowers and vegetation planted in front of each war grave. This photograph was taken by Ian and Janet Milnes on 21 September 2011.

The Pathfinder Force (PFF) were the target-marking squadrons of RAF Bomber Command and

flew ahead of the bomber streams. They marked their targets with incendiaries and flares and in order to obtain accuracy, the pilots chosen for PFF were considered above average pilots. Max's flying skills qualified him for this line of hazardous flying. On the night of 16-17 June, Max and his crew formed part of an attacking force of 212 aircraft that were dispatched of which only 179 aircraft managed to attack the target of Cologne. Fifteen aircraft were lost, each with a crew of seven.

The next night, Max and his crew took off from RAF Wyton at 1010 hours in Lancaster ED439 OL-N on a training flight; there were nine airmen on board, including two ground crew. Bad weather with low cloud forced all crews to return to base. Max's aircraft had one engine on fire; as he attempted an emergency landing, one wing clipped a farm building and the Lancaster crashed killing all aboard.

Max was buried with full air force honours at Grantham Cemetery. His only child, Peter Harrold Cummings, had been born on 12 March 1943.

Two of Max's brothers served in the army during the Second World War - Keith Cummings (VX14990) and John Cummings (V390474).

References:

Alan STORR, RAAF WW2 Fatalities, volume 4 - RAF Squadrons 51 to 100, Canberra (2006).