

**RANCH
MEMBERSHIP
199**

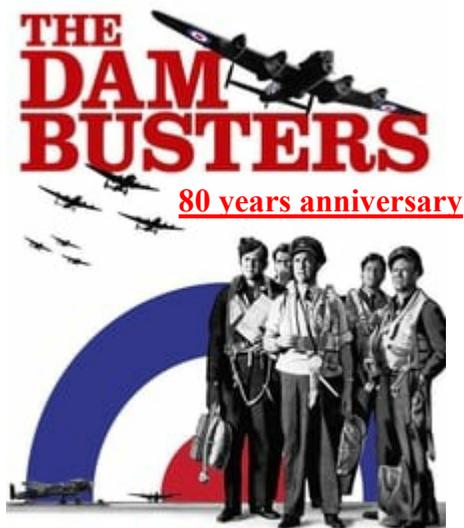
**ROYAL
AIR FORCES
Association**

The charity that supports the RAF family

RAFAGEN

THE NEWSLETTER & MAGAZINE OF THE LETCHWORTH, HITCHIN &
DISTRICT BRANCH (now with Stevenage)

SUMMER 2023



Branch formed 15th October 1946

Association Registered Charity: 226686 (England & Wales) SC037673 (Scotland)

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RAFAGEN

The official newsletter and magazine of the
ROYAL AIR FORCES' ASSOCIATION
LETCWORTH , HITCHIN & DISTRICT
BRANCH OFFICIALS FOR 2022

Now including Stevenage



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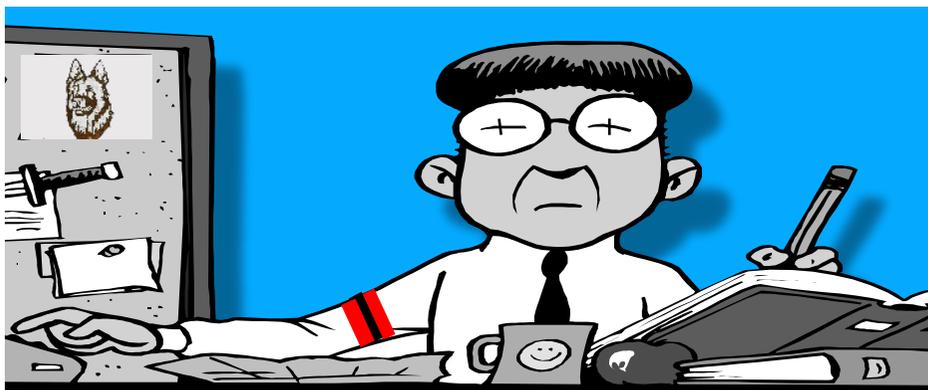
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WEBSITE

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NEWS FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

OK, I made a mistake on page two of last quarters issue might, I was confusing it with next years' issue. For it showed the Chairman as Rev. Lindsay Dew. Because of an agreement between Jim Box and Lindsay they intend to cover the post of Chairman for the next two years, and I got it the wrong way round. This means that we are covered for the post of Chairman for the next couple of years. Which is great, unless Jim likes the post so much he decides to put his name forward again.

All mistakes I make in RAFAGEN are usually picked up by our eagle eyed secretary, but this one must have passed her by, for it was Lindsay who pointed this one out.



This month we are celebrating 80 years since those Lancasters took off from RAF Scampton on the mission to destroy the dams of the Ruhr Valley. Next issue I hope to make it a birthday issue. Celebrating 77 years of the Letchworth Branch. In my archives I have many early stories, which have been handed to me over the years, but I would like your story of the Branch.. I am sure there are some good ones out there. I will try and sort out the longest living member. No it isn't me by a long way, although I feel it could be.





MORE EDITORIAL NEWS The other day I was listening to a report on the preparations for the Coronation, and the reporter referred to the military taking part as, Soldiers, Sailors, and Aviators. I must admit I cringed a little. I know that it is now the correct term for Airmen/Women, but it just didn't sound right.

I was prompted to go to my Concise Oxford dictionary. (It says New Edition, but it was reprinted in 1994) and look up the word Aviator.

Aviator /'ervi,erta r n. (*Fem aviatrix* /'erviatriks/) **an airman or airwoman** (*F. aviateur* f. *L avis* bird)

Well there you are. You learn something new everyday. I always thought an Aviator was someone who flew, and not all of us in the air force flew.

I wonder what other foreign Air Forces call their members?



ANNUAL BATTLE BRITAIN REMEMBRANCE SERVICE,
8TH OCTOBER 2023, ST THOMAS' CHURCH, BEDFORD
ROAD LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY, 15.00 hrs. SERVICE
WILL BE LEAD BY REV. TONY RUFFELL FROM RAF
HENLOW.

WE ARE COLLECTING FOR THE

ROYAL AIR FORCES ASSOCIATION'S WINGS APPEAL

IN HITCHIN TOWN CENTRE ON SATURDAY 16TH
SEPTEMBER 2023 FROM 10.00 HRS ONWARDS. PLEASE
COME DOWN AND MEET THE TEAM, OR BETTER STILL,
IF YOU CAN SPARE A HOUR HELPING TO BOOST OUR
APPEAL FUND IT WOULD BE APPRECIATED.



MORE EDITORIAL NEWS I understand that the plaque on Guy Gibson's dog, (and mascot of the 617 squadron), grave at RAF Scampton has been changed to read a more acceptable description of the dog buried there.

I think the plaque has been very well designed, but I am a little disappointed that the name of the dog is to be lost.



I have recently heard that the Royal Air Force wish to move the grave to a new site. I don't want to go down this road at the moment, as I haven't established if this is fake news.

The word "Snowdrop" used by the RAF Police could come under fire next, as it might be discriminating against the pretty little snowdrop plant.



COMMITTEE NEWS

May 2023

Other than the usual routine committee items, most of the time was taken up in preparing for Wings Appeal summer collections.

Eric (Wings Appeal Officer) had just completed a very successful day at Sainsburys' of Letchworth (£615.78), and the next event is the Armed Forces Day on the Broadway Gardens Letchworth, and this is where the problems start. We cannot (at the moment) get hold of a RAFA Gazebo. Suggestions were made, but the minutes of the meeting stated that the item was still *In hand on-going*. One thing that the committee did agree on, and that was, we should have our own gazebo, and an idea was put forward on how we might be able to afford one. More of this later in the year, as plans have to be put into action.

Eric has also booked a space on Hitchin Market place for a Wings Appeal collection. We have done quite well in Hitchin in the past. No Gazebo problem here, as Hitchin Town Centre Management loan us one.

It was confirmed that our second Battle of Britain service will be held at St Thomas' Church, Bedford Road Letchworth on 8th October at 15.00 hrs.

The meeting closed with a discussion on organising an outing for members. This could be in association with Letchworth Royal British Legion. Many ideas were put forward, but all needed further investigation, so watch this space.

The meeting closed, and we all went home.

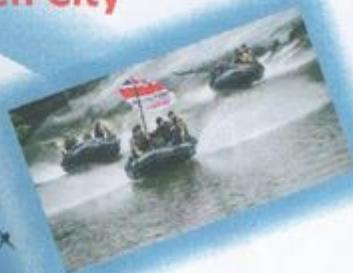


ARMED FORCES DAY

Organised By the Royal British Legion Letchworth



Letchworth Garden City



Saturday 24th June 2023

10.00 - 16.00

BROADWAY GARDENS – SG6 3PF

Military Bands – Hitchin Brass Band- Military Vehicles

Food - Stalls - Fun Fair

Cadets Challenge Shield Sponsored By Chasestead

RBL Riders & Classic Cars

Fly pass of a Vintage Plane

Other Sponsor of Event Wentworth Kitchens Letchworth

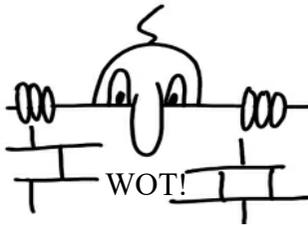
Free entry

Proceeds to local Armed Forces charities

Support *your* Armed Forces

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Information supplied by Membership Department of The Royal Air Forces Association



NO NEW MEMBERS THIS MONTH



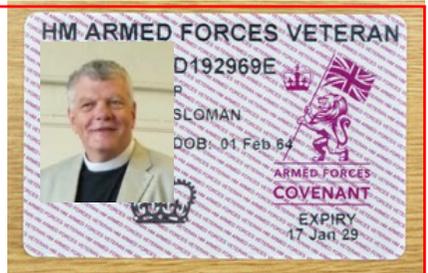
**DIMPLES Bar & Cafe. Willian Way,
Letchworth Garden City. SG6 3JH**

The home of the Branch NAAFI BREAK

Last Wednesday morning of each month 10.00 hrs til noon

ALL MEMBERS OF THE RAF FAMILY WELCOME

Upon checking to see if there have been any updates on applying for the Veteran's ID Card, I find that it has not been updated since February 2022, which has already been passed on to you. That is to say it is only being giving to serving personnel as they leave the forces.



For the Golfers amongst us

PA system at a local golf club :- **Would the golfer on the first tee refrain from playing off the ladies tee.**

Golfer :- **Would the gentleman on the PA system please be quite whilst I take my second shot.**



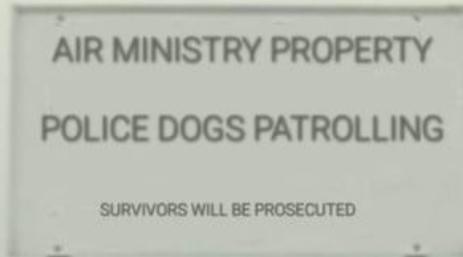
The Last Post

A chance to pause for a moment in quiet contemplation for our friends and colleagues who have passed away

Sqd Ldr David Bridger of Langford. Aged 93 Member for 24 years

Mr Howell Davies of Gosmore, Hitchin. Aged 83 Member 23 years

NAAFI BREAK GALLERY -



Cromer Heritage Open Days - Cromer Preserved Railway Signal Box



Cromer Railway Signal Box is a Grade II listed building, built by the Midland and Great Northern Railway in 1922. It has been renovated by local volunteers. It is set in a two-acre site containing railway artefacts. The box has an operational 35 lever frame, children are able to operate the levers and signals!



Eric Dagless (our Wings Appeal Officer) was a relief signalman at this box in the 50s and 60s, and during Cromers Heritage Weekend, Eric will be back there demonstrating to the public how it worked in the days he was a signalman. It's FREE to visit, and the weekend in question is September 8th and 9th.

If you are in the area, pop in and see Eric at work.

Operation Chastise

(DAM BUSTERS RAID)



Wing Commander Guy Gibson in 1944

Operation Chastise, commonly known as the Dambusters Raid, was an attack on German dams carried out on the night of 16/17 May 1943 by 617 Squadron RAF Bomber Command, later called the Dam Busters, using special "bouncing bombs" developed by Barnes Wallis. The Möhne and Edersee dams were breached, causing catastrophic flooding of the Ruhr valley and of villages in the Eder valley; the Sorpe Dam sustained only minor damage. Two hydroelectric power stations were destroyed and several more damaged.

Factories and mines were also damaged and destroyed. An estimated 1,600 civilians – about 600 Germans and 1,000 enslaved labourers, mainly Soviet – were killed by the flooding. Despite rapid repairs by the Germans, production did not return to normal until September. The RAF lost 53 aircrew killed and 3 captured, with 8 aircraft destroyed.

Background

Before the Second World War, the British Air Ministry had identified the industrialised Ruhr Valley, especially its dams, as important strategic targets. The dams provided hydroelectric power and pure water for steel-making, drinking water and water for the canal transport system. Calculations indicated that attacks with large bombs could be effective but required a degree of accuracy which RAF Bomber Command had been unable to attain when attacking a well-defended target. A one-off surprise attack might succeed but the RAF lacked a weapon suitable for the task.

Concept

The mission grew out of a concept for a bomb designed by Barnes Wallis, assistant chief designer at Vickers. Wallis had worked on the Vickers Wellesley and Vickers Wellington bombers and while working on the Vickers Windsor, he had also begun work, with Admiralty support, on an



anti-shiping bomb, although dam destruction was soon considered. At first, Wallis wanted to drop a 10 long tons (22,000 lb; 10,000 kg) bomb from an altitude of about 40,000 ft (12,000 m), part of the earthquake bomb concept. No bomber aircraft was capable of flying at such an altitude or of carrying such a heavy bomb and Wallis proposed the six-engined Victory Bomber for this purpose but this was rejected.[5] Wallis realized that a much smaller explosive charge would suffice if it exploded against the dam wall under the water but German reservoir dams were protected by heavy torpedo nets to prevent an explosive device from travelling through the water.

Wallis devised a 9,000 lb (4,100 kg) bomb (more accurately, a mine) in the shape of a cylinder, equivalent to a very large depth charge armed with a hydrostatic fuse, designed to be given a backspin of 500 rpm. Dropped at 60 ft (18 m) and 240 mph (390 km/h) from the release point, the mine would skip across the surface of the water before hitting the dam wall as its forward speed ceased. Initially the backspin was intended to increase the range of the mine but it was later realized that it would cause the mine, after submerging, to run down the side of the dam towards its base, thus maximising the explosive effect against the dam. This weapon was code-named Upkeep.

Testing of the concept included blowing up a scale model dam at the Building Research Establishment, Watford, in May 1942 and then the breaching of the disused Nant-y-Gro dam in Wales in July. A subsequent test suggested that a charge of 7,500 lb (3,400 kg) exploded 30 ft (9.1 m) under water would breach a full-size dam; crucially this weight would be within the carrying capacity of an Avro Lancaster. The first air drop trials were at Chesil Beach in December 1942; these used a spinning 4 ft 6 in sphere dropped from a modified Vickers Wellington, serial BJ895/G; the same aircraft was used until April 1943 when the first modified Lancasters became available. The tests continued at Chesil Beach and Reculver, often unsuccessfully, using revised designs of the mine and variations of speed and height.

Avro Chief Designer Roy Chadwick adapted the Lancaster to carry the mine. To reduce weight, much of the internal armour was removed, as was the mid-upper (dorsal) gun turret. The dimensions of the mine and its unusual shape meant that the bomb-bay doors had to be removed and the mine hung partly below the fuselage. It was mounted on two crutches and before dropping it was spun by an auxiliary motor. Chadwick also worked out the design and installation of controls and gear for the carriage and release of the mine in conjunction with Barnes Wallis. The Avro Lancaster B Mk IIIs so modified were known as Lancaster B Mark III Special (Type 464 Provisioning).

Using two spotlights to ascertain the required height, a modified Lancaster dropped a backspin drum-bomb which skipped over the torpedo nets protecting the dam. After impact, the bomb spun down to the dam's base and exploded.

In February 1943, Air Vice-Marshal Francis Linnell at the Ministry of Aircraft Production thought the work was diverting Wallis from the development of the Vickers Windsor bomber (which did not become operational). Pressure from Linnell via the chairman of Vickers, Sir Charles Worthington Craven, caused Wallis to offer to resign. Sir Arthur Harris, head of Bomber Command, after a briefing by Linnell also opposed the allocation of his bombers. Wallis had written to an influential intelligence officer, Group Captain Frederick Winterbotham, who ensured that the Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Charles Portal, heard of the project. Portal saw the film of the Chesil Beach trials and was convinced. On 26 February 1943, Portal over-ruled Harris and ordered that thirty Lancasters were to be allocated to the mission and the target date was set for May, when water levels would be at their highest and breaches in the dams would cause the most damage.] With eight weeks to go, the larger Upkeep mine that was needed for the mission and the modifications to the Lancasters had yet to be designed.

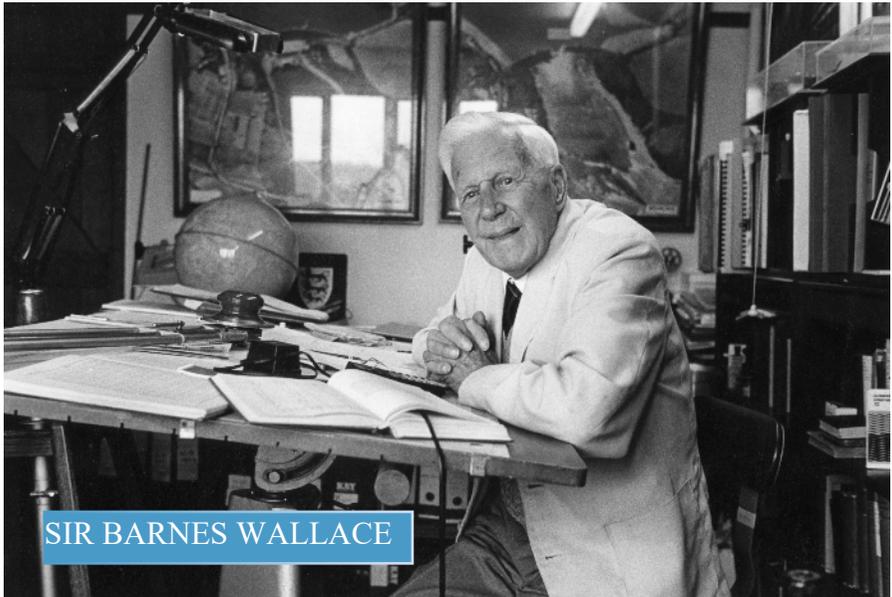
Assignment

Air Vice-Marshal Ralph Cochrane, Wing Commander Guy Gibson, King George VI and Group Captain John Whitworth discussing the Dambuster Raid in May 1943

The operation was given to No. 5 Group RAF, which formed a new squadron to undertake the dams mission. It was initially called Squadron X, as the speed of its formation outstripped the RAF process for naming squadrons. Led by 24-year-old Wing Commander Guy Gibson, a veteran of more than 170 bombing and night-fighter missions, twenty-one bomber crews were selected from 5 Group squadrons. The crews included RAF personnel of several nationalities, members of the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF), Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) and Royal New

Zealand Air Force (RNZAF). The squadron was based at RAF Scampton, about 5 mi (8 km) north of Lincoln.

The targets selected were the Möhne Dam and the Sorpe Dam, upstream from the Ruhr industrial area, with the Eder Dam on the Eder River, which feeds into the Weser, as a secondary target. The loss of hydroelectric power was important but the loss of water to industry, cities and canals would have greater effect and there was potential for devastating flooding if the dams broke.



SIR BARNES WALLACE

Preparations

Barnes Wallis and others watch a practice Upkeep bomb strike the shoreline at Reculver, Kent.

Bombing from an altitude of 60 ft (18 m), at an air speed of 240 mph (390 km/h) and at set distance from the target called for expert crews. Intensive night-time and low-altitude training began. There were also technical problems to solve, the first one being to determine when the aircraft was at optimum distance from its target. The Möhne and Eder

Dams had towers at each end. A special targeting device with two prongs, making the same angle as the two towers at the correct distance from the dam, showed when to release the bomb. (The BBC documentary *Dambusters Declassified* (2010) stated that the pronged device was not used, owing to problems related to vibration and that other methods were employed, including a length of string tied in a loop and pulled back centrally to a fixed point in the manner of a catapult.)

The second problem was determining the aircraft's altitude, as barometric altimeters lacked accuracy. Two spotlights were mounted, one under the aircraft's nose and the other under the fuselage, so that at the correct height their light beams would converge on the surface of the water. The crews practised at the Eyebrook Reservoir, near Uppingham, Rutland; Abberton Reservoir near Colchester; Derwent Reservoir in Derbyshire; and Fleet Lagoon on Chesil Beach. Wallis's bomb was first tested at the Elan Valley Reservoirs. The squadron took delivery of the bombs on 13 May, after the final tests on 29 April. At 18:00 on 15 May, at a meeting in Whitworth's house, Gibson and Wallis briefed the squadron's two flight commanders, Squadron Leader Henry Maudslay and Sqn Ldr H. M. "Dinghy" Young, Gibson's deputy for the Möhne attack, Flt Lt John V. Hopgood and the squadron bombing leader, Flight Lieutenant Bob Hay. The rest of the crews were told at a series of briefings the following day, which began with a briefing of pilots, navigators and bomb-aimers at about midday.

Organisation

Formation No. 1 was composed of nine aircraft in three groups (listed by pilot): Gibson, Hopgood and Flt Lt H. B. "Micky" Martin (an Australian serving in the RAF); Young, Flt Lt David Maltby and Flt Lt Dave Shannon (RAAF); and Maudslay, Flt Lt Bill Astell and Pilot Officer Les Knight (RAAF). Its mission was to attack the Möhne; any aircraft with bombs remaining would then attack the Eder.

Formation No. 2, numbering five aircraft, piloted by Flt Lt Joe McCarthy (an American serving in the RCAF), P/O Vernon Byers (RCAF), [Flt Lt Norman Barlow (RAAF), P/O Geoff Rice[and Flt Lt Les Munro (RNZAF), was to attack the Sorpe.

Formation No. 3 was a mobile reserve consisting of aircraft piloted by Flight Sergeant Cyril Anderson, Flt Sgt Bill Townsend, Flt Sgt Ken Brown (RCAF), P/O Warner Ottley and P/O Lewis Burpee (RCAF), taking off two hours later on 17 May, either to bomb the main dams or to attack three smaller secondary target dams: the Lister, the Ennepe and the Diemel.

Two crews were unable to make the mission owing to illness.

The Operations Room for the mission was at 5 Group Headquarters in St Vincents Hall, Grantham, Lincolnshire. The mission codes (transmitted in morse) were: Goner, meaning "bomb dropped"; Nigger, meaning that the Möhne was breached; and Dinghy, meaning that the Eder was breached. Nigger was the name of Gibson's dog, a black labrador retriever that had been run over and killed on the morning of the attack. Dinghy was Young's nickname, a reference to the fact that he had twice survived crash landings at sea where he and his crew were rescued from the aircraft's inflatable rubber dinghy.

The attacks

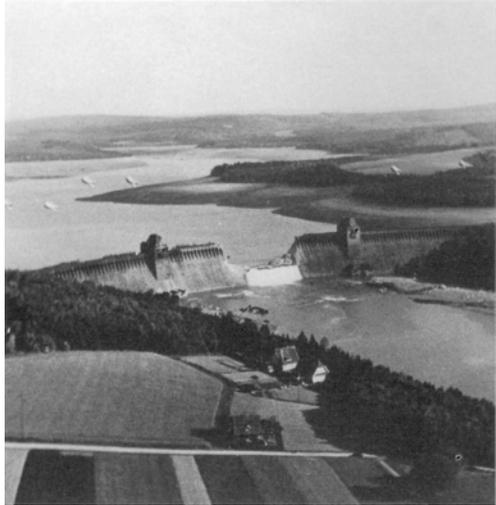
Outbound

The aircraft used two routes, carefully avoiding known concentrations of flak, and were timed to cross the enemy coast simultaneously. The first aircraft, those of Formation No. 2 and heading for the longer, northern route, took off at 21:28 on 16 May. McCarthy's bomber developed a coolant leak and he took off in the reserve aircraft 34 minutes late.

Formation No. 1 took off in groups of three at 10-minute intervals beginning at 21:39. The reserve formation did not begin taking off until 00:09 on 17 May.

Formation No. 1 entered continental Europe between Walcheren and Schouwen, flew over the Netherlands, skirted the airbases at Gilze-Rijen and Eindhoven, curved around the Ruhr defences, and turned north to

avoid Hamm before turning south to head for the Möhne River. Formation No. 2 flew further north, cutting over Vlieland and crossing the IJsselmeer before joining the first route near Wesel and then flying south beyond the Möhne to the Sorpe River. [



The bombers flew low, at about 100 ft (30 m) altitude, to avoid radar detection. Flight Sergeant George Chalmers, radio operator on "O for Orange", looked out

through the astrodome and was astonished to see that his pilot was flying towards the target along a forest's firebreak, below treetop level.

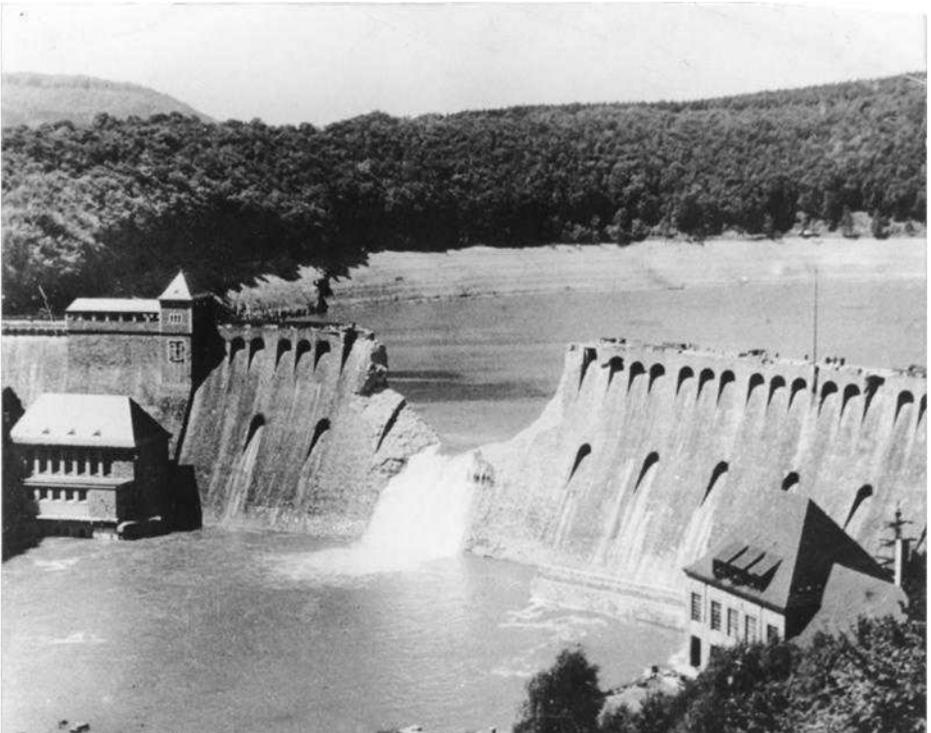
First casualties

The first casualties were suffered soon after reaching the Dutch coast. Formation No. 2 did not fare well: Munro's aircraft lost its radio to flak and turned back over the IJsselmeer, while Rice flew too low and struck the sea, losing his bomb in the water; he recovered and returned to base. After the completion of the raid Gibson sympathised with Rice, telling him how he had also nearly lost his bomb to the sea. Barlow and Byers crossed the coast around the island of Texel. Byers was shot down by flak shortly afterwards, crashing into the Waddenzee. Barlow's aircraft hit electricity pylons and crashed 5 km east of Rees, near Haldern. The bomb was thrown clear of the crash and was examined intact by Heinz Schweizer. Only the delayed bomber piloted by McCarthy survived to cross the Netherlands. Formation No. 1 lost Astell's bomber near the German hamlet of Marbeck when his Lancaster hit high voltage electrical cables and crashed into a field.

Attack on the Möhne Dam

Formation No. 1 arrived over the Möhne lake and Gibson's aircraft (G for George) made the first run, followed by Hopgood (M for Mother). Hopgood's aircraft was hit by flak as it made its low-level run and was caught in the blast of its own bomb, crashing shortly afterwards when a wing disintegrated. Three crew members successfully abandoned the aircraft, but only two survived. Subsequently, Gibson flew his aircraft across the dam to draw the flak away from Martin's run. Martin (P for Popsie) bombed third; his aircraft was damaged, but made a successful attack. Next, Young (A for Apple) made a successful run, and after him Maltby (J for Johnny), when finally the dam was breached. Gibson, with Young accompanying, led Shannon, Maudslay and Knight to the Eder.

Attack on the Eder Dam



The Eder Valley was covered by heavy fog, but the dam was not defended with anti-aircraft positions as the difficult topography of the surrounding hills was thought to make an attack virtually impossible. With approach so difficult the first aircraft, Shannon's, made six runs before taking a break. Maudslay (Z for Zebra) then attempted a run but the bomb struck the top of the dam and the aircraft was severely damaged in the blast. Shannon made another run and successfully dropped his bomb. The final bomb of the formation, from Knight's aircraft (N for Nut), breached the dam.

Attacks on the Sorpe and Ennepe Dams

The Sorpe dam was the one least likely to be breached. It was a huge earthen dam, unlike the two concrete-and-steel gravity dams that were attacked successfully. Due to various problems, only two Lancasters reached the Sorpe Dam: Joe McCarthy (in T for Tommy, a delayed aircraft from the second wave) and later Brown (F for Freddie) from the third formation. This attack differed from the previous ones in two ways: the 'Upkeep' bomb was not spun, and due to the topography of the valley the approach was made along the length of the dam, not at right angles over the reservoir.

McCarthy's plane was on its own when it arrived over the Sorpe Dam at 00:15 hours, and realised the approach was even more difficult than expected: the flight path led over a church steeple in the village of Langscheid, located on the hillcrest overlooking the dam. With only seconds to go before the bomber had to pull up, to avoid hitting the hillside at the other end of the dam, the bomb aimer George Johnson had no time to correct the bomb's height and heading.

McCarthy made nine attempted bombing runs before Johnson was satisfied. The 'Upkeep' bomb was dropped on the tenth run. The bomb exploded but when he turned his Lancaster to assess the damage, it turned out that only a section of the crest of the dam had been blown off; the main body of the dam remained.

Three of the reserve aircraft had been directed to the Sorpe Dam. Burpee (S for Sugar) never arrived, and it was later determined that the plane had been shot down while skirting the Gilze-Rijen airfield. Brown (F for Freddie) reached the Sorpe Dam: in the increasingly dense fog, after 7 runs, Brown conferred with his bomb aimer and dropped incendiary devices on either side of the valley, which ignited a fire which subsequently lifted the fog enough to drop a direct hit on the eighth run. The bomb cracked but failed to breach the dam. Anderson (Y for York) never arrived having been delayed by damage to his rear turret and dense fog which made his attempts to find the target impossible. The remaining two bombers were then sent to secondary targets, with Ottley (C for Charlie) being shot down en route to the Lister Dam. Townsend (O for Orange) eventually dropped his bomb at the Ennepe Dam without harming it.[18]

Possible attack on Bever Dam

There is some evidence that Townsend might have attacked the Bever Dam [de] by mistake rather than the Ennepe Dam.[24] The War Diary of the German Naval Staff reported that the Bever Dam was attacked at nearly the same time that the Sorpe Dam was. In addition, the Wupperverband authority responsible for the Bever Dam is said to have recovered the remains of a "mine"; and Paul Keiser, a 19-year-old soldier on leave at his home close to the Bever Dam, reported a bomber making several approaches to the dam and then dropping a bomb that caused a large explosion and a great pillar of flame.

In the book *The Dambusters' Raid*, author John Sweetman suggests Townsend's report of the moon's reflecting on the mist and water is consistent with an attack that was heading to the Bever Dam rather than to the Ennepe Dam, given the moon's azimuth and altitude during the bombing attacks. Sweetman also points out that the Ennepe-Wasserverband authority was adamant that only a single bomb was dropped near the Ennepe Dam during the entire war, and that this bomb

fell into the woods by the side of the dam, not in the water, as in Townsend's report. Finally, members of Townsend's crew independently reported seeing a manor house and attacking an earthen dam, which is consistent with the Bever Dam rather than the Ennepe Dam. The main evidence supporting the hypothesis of an attack of the Ennepe Dam is Townsend's post-flight report that he attacked the Ennepe Dam on a heading of 355 degrees magnetic. Assuming that the heading was incorrect, all other evidence points toward an attack on the Bever Dam.

Townsend reported difficulty in finding his dam, and in his post-raid report he complained that the map of the Ennepe Dam was incorrect. The Bever Dam is only about 5 miles (8 km) southwest of the Ennepe Dam. With the early-morning fog that filled the valleys, it would be understandable for him to have mistaken the two reservoirs.

Return flight

On the way back, flying again at treetop level, two more Lancasters were lost. The damaged aircraft of Maudslay was struck by flak near Netterden, and Young's (A for Apple) was hit by flak north of IJmuiden and crashed into the North Sea just off the coast of the Netherlands. On the return flight over the Dutch coast, some German flak aimed at the aircraft was aimed so low that shells were seen to bounce off the sea.

Eleven bombers began landing at Scampton at 03:11 hours, with Gibson returning at 04:15. The last of the survivors, Townsend's bomber, landed at 06:15. It was the last to land because one of its engines had been shut down after passing the Dutch coast. Air Chief Marshal Harris was among those who came out to greet the last crew to land.

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Photographs by Flying Officer Jerry Fray RAF - Chris Staerck (editor), Allied Photo Reconnaissance of World War II (1998), PRC Publishing Ltd, ISBN 1571451617, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=2511220> and By unknown Official RAF photograph - National Archives (AIR 14/840) and IWM HU 69915, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=11152059>



RAF SCAMPTON

Memories by Ken Needham

After my tour in the Far East, I had four months left to serve before demob, and for those last few months, I was posted to RAF Scampton. As my trade was RAF Police Dog Handler, I was expecting to finish my time as Station Police, on Guardroom duties, for the time was too short to take on another dog, but to my surprise I was to remain as a dog-less, dog handler, looking after the admin side and cleaning kennels etc., but I didn't mind, as I was still with the dogs.

When I first arrived at Scampton, one of the handlers took his dog around the airfield, and asked if I would like to go with him, and he would show me some places of interest.

As we continued walking around, his dog, although off the lead, had never left his side. When we came to the hangers we walked on the grass between the hanger and the roadway. We were talking away about our experiences in the R.A.F., when his dog left his side, and walked on the road. I didn't think anything of it, and we kept on walking. A few yards further on the dog re-joined us, and continued walking by the side of his handler. "Notice that"? Enquired the handler, "None of our dogs will walk across that piece of grass. Remember the story of the Dam Busters, when Guy Gibson's dog gets run over and killed at the camp gates"? I'd seen the film, so I agreed. "That piece of grass is where they buried the dog". I looked back. The stretch of grass looked no different to any of the grass sections by the hangers.

Many years later our Branch made a visit to RAF Scampton, and that piece of grass is now fenced off and has a plaque stating the story of this famous dog. I told my story to our guide, and he said that he had heard the story many times from visiting dog handlers.

There are many stories of the dog's ghost, but I never saw a ghost whilst I was stationed at Scampton.

LETCWORTH'S CONNECTION WITH THE DAM BUSTERS SGT FRED TEES



During the Second World War, Tees joined the Royal Air Force in 1941 with the service number 1332270. Tees was posted to No. 207 Squadron on 12 November 1942, before transferring to No. 617 Squadron on 6 April 1943.

Tees took part in Operation Chastise, the famous "Dam Busters" raid on 16–17 May 1943. Sergeant Tees, who was 20 years old at the time of the raid, was the rear gunner in Lancaster AJ-C, piloted by Pilot Officer Warner Ottley, in the third and final wave of aircraft from No. 617 Squadron to leave from RAF Scampton. AJ-C never made it to its target and was shot down near Hamm.

Tees should have been the nose gunner but had changed places with Sergeant Harry Strange in the rear turret. Had he not done so Tees would have been killed as the aircraft was picked out by enemy spotlights and hit with anti-aircraft fire. Tees later recalled that as the aircraft began to rapidly descend, Pilot Officer Ottley said over the intercom "I'm sorry boys, they got us". The aircraft then crashed.

Tees managed to escape from the rear turret and was found unconscious and badly burnt on the ground and was taken prisoner of war. He was the sole survivor from the crew of seven. He required extensive treatment and was imprisoned at Heydekrug POW Camp L6 for most of the war.

In 1967 he took part in the Dam Busters reunion held on the 24th anniversary of the raid at Scampton in Lincolnshire.

Later in life Tees lived at 12 Wilbury Hills Road Caravan Site and ran a gentlemen's barber shop in Station Road in Letchworth, Hertfordshire. He committed suicide on 15 March 1982.

Fred was a member of this branch.

No. 617 Squadron Royal Air Force

Number 617 Squadron is a Royal Air Force aircraft squadron, originally based at RAF Scampton in Lincolnshire and currently based at RAF Marham in Norfolk. It is commonly known as "The Dambusters", for its actions during Operation Chastise against German dams during the Second World War.

In the early 21st century it operated the Panavia Tornado GR4 in the ground attack and reconnaissance role until being disbanded on 28 March 2014.

The Dambusters reformed on 18 April 2018, and was equipped at RAF Marham in June 2018 with the Lockheed Martin F-35B Lightning, becoming the first squadron to be based in the UK with this advanced V/STOL type. The unit is composed of both RAF and Royal Navy personnel, and operates from the Royal Navy's Queen Elizabeth-class



Eric Coates' brilliant theme to the 1955 film, *The Dam Busters*, is now so popular in its own right that it's often played at military flypasts in the UK. It's not surprising, given its catchy tune



Just down a country lane on the south side of R.A.F. Scampton, is a little village pub. But this is not just any country pub, this is the DAMBUSTERS pub.

The most striking feature of the pub is the unique collection of memorabilia and information about 617 Squadron and the famous bombing raid.

I have been on a couple of occasions after showing friends around the museum on the camp, and would never get bored in visiting it time and time again. There is so much to see.

The layout of the bars is no different to many country pubs in Great Britain, but the difference about The DAMBUSTERS is in memorabilia, on the walls, on the ceiling, as a matter of fact everywhere there is space..

The pub includes a museum with more than 600 pieces of memorabilia from 617 Squadron and has been visited by the famous Dam buster Johnny Johnson.



I haven't been for a long time now, but judging by the photo on the previous page, which was taken for the Queens Jubilee, (That's the Landlord in uniform) it was still going strong then.

Just one word of warning if you are thinking of seeing for yourself, check before you set off, as places change, especially with the closure of the camp. I hope this is one pub that hasn't and won't change.

Appearance on Desert Island Discs

On 19 February 1944, Guy Gibson appeared as the castaway on Desert Island Discs with Roy Plomley.

His musical choices were:

Disc 1 :- Warsaw Concerto by Richard Addinsell played by London Symphony Orchestra

Disc 2 :- "Where or When" (from Babes in Arms) played by Jack Hylton & His Orchestra

Disc 3 :- "A Thousand and One Nights Waltz" by Johann Strauss II: Symphony Orchestra Conductor: Johann Strauss III

Disc 4 :- The Flying Dutchman overture by Richard Wagner played by Berlin State Opera Orchestra

Disc 5 :- "If I Had My Way" performed by Bing Crosby

Disc 6 :- "The Marines Hymn" performed by Fred Waring & His Pennsylvanians

Disc 7 :- "Royal Air Force March Past" performed by The Central Band of The Royal Air Force

Disc 8 :- "Ride of the Valkyries" (from Die Walküre) by Richard Wagner performed by Queens Hall Orchestra



Left :- Guy Gibson's desk at RAF Scampton.

A few of our members may recall the visit to R.A.F. Scampton, and sat at the desk.



Guy Gibson was killed in an air crash on 19th September 1944 near the town of Steenberg in Germany. Jim Warwick was also killed in the crash, and they were buried side by side in the town cemetery.

The grave of Guy Gibson's dog, along side one of the hangers at RAF Scampton. Today marked with a stone inside a fenced area.



Guy Gibson's Medals

The RAFAGEN is produced every quarter and sent to members of the Letchworth, Hitchin & District branch of the Royal Air Forces Association.

If you would like to tell your story in RAFAGEN or have any comments about the magazine, the branch or the Association, we would like to hear from you. It can either be by hard copy through the mail, (any photographs will be returned immediately) to Ken Needham 68 Broadwater Avenue, Letchworth Garden City, Herts SG6 3HJ, or via email to kwn056@btinternet.com

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NAAFI BREAKS for the next few months are as follows :-

Wednesday September 2023

Wednesday October 2023

Wednesday November 2023

Should you wish not to receive the regular issues of RAFAGEN, would you please advise the branch secretary on secretary@rafa-letchworth.org.uk, who will arrange for your address to be deleted from our list.

