



# Après Moi

The 617 Squadron  
Association Newsletter



Autumn 2018



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**Cover Photo:** F35B of 617 Squadron at RAF Marham on the occasion of the dedication parade for the new Standard. Photo by Heather Allsworth.

## Editorial

Welcome to the Autumn edition of *Après Moi*. My previous editorial was provided from sub-Saharan Africa as I enjoyed an amazing experience, supporting the Nigerian Air Force. Incredibly, NAF remains closely aligned to the RAF and the exploits of 617 Squadron are well known across their force. This edition is provided from Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama. My globetrotting continues, although this time I am studying at the USAF College, which is a challenge! I have learned that the Strike Fighter Squadron 195 of the US Navy had also adopted the nickname Dambusters. On 1 May 1951, 195 Squadron aircraft disabled the heavily defended Hwacheon Dam in North Korea, dropping aerial torpedoes from AD-4 aircraft. Clearly, not the first Dambusters, but a worthy namesake nevertheless.

This edition provides plenty of interesting material, although, as always, I am interested in hearing your story. Please get in touch via my email [clarke318@gmail.com](mailto:clarke318@gmail.com) to discuss how we may be able to incorporate your 617 Squadron experience. The feature is not just for our senior members, as I am seeking stories from across the decades. Thanks to those who have contributed already and shown the way.

I hope you enjoy this edition and would welcome any feedback.

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**Deadline for Next Newsletter**  
**31st January 2019**  
**email: [clarke318@gmail.com](mailto:clarke318@gmail.com)**

## Walters' Warblings

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Lots has happened since I last warbled and there is more happening next year. No 617 Squadron reformed on 17 April in Washington. I was fortunate to attend along with Shere Fraser and Joe McCarthy (whose fathers were both on the Dams Raid). In May we celebrated the Dams 75th in style at the Petwood. The room was filled with many descendants of the Raid's crews. We were treated to a sunset parade by the Queen's Colour Squadron and a moving flypast by the BBMF Lancaster, all in front of the Squadron Standard. The next day, we supported the inauguration of a marker stone at the runway intersection at RAF Woodhall Spa. We are all indebted to our new Social Secretary, Debby Henderson, and our General Secretary, Chris Henderson, for organising the weekend's events which ensured that the 75th did not go unmarked. The Dams Dinner was followed by a tour of the Ruhr Dams in partnership with an RAF staff ride, where we were treated to a dining-in within sight of the Möhne Dam on the anniversary itself, as well as paying our respects at all-but-one of the graves of the aircrew lost during the Raid.

As you will have seen, 617 Squadron flew the first of their state-of-the-art F35 Lightnings to their new home at RAF Marham on 7 June. Despite the workload of their operational work-up and public engagements, they found time to consecrate a new Standard on 21 September, which several Association members gratefully attended. We are extremely grateful to OC 617 Squadron, Wg Cdr John Butcher, for all his support this year.

Looking forward, the Association is planning a joint visit to Trømso with another Squadron to mark the 75th anniversary of the Tirpitz raid on 12 November 2019. We will be supporting another RAF staff ride and I hope you will be able to participate. Our Social Secretary is standing down and, although we have a replacement from next year, we need someone to lead the organisation of the Tirpitz 75th, so please do get in touch if you would like to take-on this once-in-a-lifetime event.

Yours,

**Andrew**

## Aircrew Commemorated in Bergen, Norway

In Bergen, Norway, inside Møllendal Church Cemetery there is a dedicated Commonwealth War Graves Commission plot containing 46 war graves. They comprise four Royal Navy, of whom one sailor is unidentified, two soldiers, 34 UK airmen, two airmen of the Royal Canadian Air Force, two of the Royal Australian Air Force and two of the Royal New Zealand Air Force. The non-World War II graves of three airmen of the Royal Air Force are also located in the same plot.

Each year on Remembrance Day, there is a ceremony at the War Graves where the air crews and the sailors are commemorated. It is the task of the Commandant of Bergenhus Castle to arrange the ceremony, to give a speech and to lay wreaths. Captain Åsmund Andersen, Royal Norwegian Navy has been Commandant since 2014 and has made it a habit, instead of speaking in general terms, each year to focus on one of the young men buried there.

This year Captain Andersen will tell the story of bomb aimer Flight Lieutenant George Aldred Kendrick, (Service Number 135033). Below is the story of George, based on Captain Andersen's findings



Captain Åsmund Andersen,  
Royal Norwegian Navy

George Aldred Kendrick belonged to 617 Sqn. He was a Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve and died during an attack against the German submarine pens at Laksevåg, close to Bergen.

According to the headstone he died on 12 January 1945, aged just 24. George was born 11 December 1921, as son of Archibald and Sara Alice Kendrick and grew up in Birmingham together with his seven-year older sister, Mary. At the outbreak of WWII in 1939 he was 17 years old and worked as a clerk at the Electric Supply Department in Birmingham. Eventually he signed up as a volunteer and served as a Lancaster bomb aimer with 617 Sqn.

On 20 January 1944 he flew on Lancaster ED918 on a training exercise off Norfolk. They were carrying out low-level dusk bombing practice over the Wash. Probably the pilot lost concentration and flew into a low hill on the beach. The Lancaster exploded killing all the crew except for Fg Off Ward and Fg Off Kendrick. George was badly injured, and no one thought he would survive. However, by pure willpower he was able to return to active duty in December 1944.

12 January 1945, only months were left before Nazi-Germany surrendered. On this date the German submarine pens close to Bergen were subjected to a third major bomb attack. This time 32 Lancasters of 617 Sqn and 9 Sqn loaded with Tallboy "Earthquake" bombs weighing approximately 10,000lbs took off from Woodhall Spa in Lincolnshire bound for Bergen. Together with them flew 14 escorts and two sea-rescue planes.

George was on board Lancaster PD233 KC-G together with his 6 crew mates. The captain was Flt Lt John Pryor. Over Laksevåg they had problems spotting the target due to clouds, fog, smoke and occasionally bright sunshine. After six runs over the target they were suddenly attacked by German Fock-Wulf 190s from nearby Herdla airfield. The Lancaster was hit and lost power on its port side. In a touch of panic, the engineer made a mistake resulting in loss of most of the power also on starboard engines. With a fire in the starboard engine and minimal engine power the Lancaster proceeded northwards. They



Flt Lt George Aldred Kendrick

managed to open the bomb hatch and dropped the Tallboy some 10km north of Bergen only 300m from a house. The windows of the surrounding houses were splintered, and a chimney blown off. The pilot managed to pull the plane up to 1500 feet and turned westward toward the open sea before he ordered the crew to bail out. They had now reached the area over the municipality of Austrheim.

George was first out. As he jumped he hit his head against the hatch. Then he was gone. The others followed. The plane rapidly lost height and the pilot was last out, just in time to open his parachute before he hit the ground. Norvald Sætre, a local from Austrheim, has told how he saw the Lancaster coming from the east over Austrheim closely followed by German Fw190s. Stunned, he witnessed the crew bailing out and that the parachute of the first one did not unfold. George had probably been knocked unconscious when he hit the hatch and therefore was unable to pull the parachute ripcord. As the Lancaster proceeded westwards on its own and crashed into the sea, the rest of the crew landed safely and were taken care of by local people. The plan was to bring them over to Shetland by boat, but soon the Germans appeared and arrested them. They were taken POW for the few remaining months of the war.

George landed on marshland close to the old schoolhouse at a place called Littlelindås. He had a severely injured head and back, but amazingly was still alive. He was carefully carried into the schoolhouse where he was taken care of and nursed by the locals as best they could. The Germans tried to pick him up several times, but the locals refused to allow them as he was in no condition

to be moved. Two days later he died from his injuries. 24 years old, George Kendrick's life ended in Austrheim, some 70km north of Bergen. His body was brought to Bergen and is buried in the grave at The Commonwealth War Graves, Møllendal Church Cemetery.

Before the wreath is laid, Captain Andersen will remind the listeners, not of the pledge made by past generations to remember a loved one, but a promise to remember all who have been lost to war and to give thanks for their valiant service in defence of our freedom and to demonstrate the value we place in those freedoms so selflessly forged.

**Captain Åsmund Andersen, Royal Norwegian Navy**

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## **617 Squadron's Standard Consecration Parade and Lightning Dinner**

**F**riday 21st September saw the presentation and consecration of a new Standard for 617 Squadron at RAF Marham, Norfolk. It marked the start of its operations as a combined RAF and Navy Lightning Force Squadron, in front line service, with the F-35B aircraft and the beginning of a new chapter in its history. This special occasion, initially planned to take place outside, was swiftly rearranged to take place in the hangar, following a deterioration in the weather. Wing Commander John Butcher - OC 617 Squadron gave a special welcome to our veterans, Wg Cdr John Bell MBE DFM Ld'H and Sqn Ldr Lawrence (Benny) Goodman. The four Lightning F-35B II's, positioned at the rear of the hangar, provided a state of the art backdrop to the parade.

Guests, at the black tie dinner, were welcomed by Air Commodore David Bradshaw MA BSc RAF Lightning Force Commander. Speakers included; Air Chief Marshal (ACM) Sir Stephen Hillier - Chief of the Air Staff, who spoke about the legacy of 617 and the precision, technology and innovation, which wrote 617 Squadron into history, and which will continue into this new era; Vice Admiral (VAdm) Mathias Winter - F-35 Project Executive Officer spoke about the joint partnership of the RAF and the Royal Navy and also spoke of our dear Sqn Ldr Johnny Johnson MBE DFM, who was sadly unable to attend. The third speaker Mr Greg Ulmer - F-35 Vice President and General Manager (Lockheed Martin) spoke about his grandfather, who flew from the UK during the war, on Flying Fortresses.

Hospitality and entertainment, given and arranged by the Lightning Team UK, throughout the day was fabulous.

This is an exciting time for the Squadron and an equally exciting time for our Association, as we look to welcome new members from the Squadron.

**Heather Allsworth & Nigel Favill**

## Lasting Images: Operation CHASTISE



Wg Cdr Gibson and his crew board their Lancaster prior to taking off on the Dams Raid.

Left to right: Flt Lt Trevor-Roper, Sgt Pulford, Flt Sgt Deering, Plt Off Spafford, Flt Lt Hutchison, Wg Cdr Gibson and Plt Off Taerum.

Seven crew members stand ready to board their Lancaster bomber as dusk gathers at an airfield “somewhere in Lincolnshire”. A scene enacted on hundreds of nights, at dozens of airfields throughout the last three years of World War II. The scene is so typical to be unremarkable, yet this photograph records the start of one of the most audacious operations conducted by Bomber Command - the raid on the major dams of western Germany by No. 617 Sqn – the Dambusters.

A picture is worth a thousand words. Many thousands of words have been written about the operation, but what do we know about this photograph and others taken that night, and what can we learn beyond the raw image?

We know when and where it was taken, and by whom: It is just after 9.00 pm on the evening of Sunday 16 May 1943; the location is the No. 5 Group airfield

at Scampton, a few miles north of Lincoln and the camera belongs to Fg Off Bellamy an official RAF photographer.

The crew is that of 24-year-old Wg Cdr Guy Gibson, Commanding Officer of No. 617 Sqn. He stands on the top of the short ladder leading to the aircraft's doorway. Lined up behind him are the rest of his crew, in set order to facilitate entry into the tight confines of the aircraft. With his foot on the bottom step is the Liverpoolian Wireless Operator, Flt Lt Robert Hutchison (25). Following him, is Flt Sgt George Deering (23) who will man the front turret. Closer to the camera is Plt Off Fred Spafford (24), the bomb aimer, ready to go up into the nose of the aircraft once Gibson is seated at the controls. Next is Sgt John Pulford (23) from Hull, the Flight Engineer, who will unfold his collapsible seat alongside Gibson, followed up the aircraft by the navigator Plt Off Torger Taerum (22), seen standing out of line, beneath aircraft serial number. Finally, the oldest member of the crew, 28-year-old rear gunner Flt Lt Richard Trevor-Roper from Shanklin, Isle of Wight, will board, turning left away from the others, to squirm his way over the tailplane spar and into his turret.

As if a microcosm of the force they represent, the crew comprises members from Britain and the Dominions. Most wear RAF Blue, but Deering from Toronto (though of Scots birth) and Taerum from Calgary wear the darker shade of the Royal Canadian Air Force, while near navy blue denotes that Spafford, from Adelaide, is a member of the Royal Australian Air Force. In the dimming evening light, the film barely picks out the differences in the colours. There is no need for thick flying jackets to keep out the penetrating cold experienced at altitude. It's been a warm day, and with the operation being flown at low level battledress will suffice. Most wear shoes, with only Pulford and Trevor-Roper opting for their familiar sheepskin lined boots. Anticipating the physical effort required for this operation, Gibson is flying in his shirt sleeves.

With them are essential items and tools of their trade. Gibson and Spafford carry their parachutes by the canvas lifting strap, taking care to avoid the metal D-ring which would deploy the parachute if pulled. Indeed, later this evening one of the Squadron's pilots, Flt Lt Joe McCarthy, will make that error while transferring from his unserviceable aircraft to a reserve machine. Pulford's canvas box contains a selection of basic tools and items with which it might be possible to make essential repairs, together with his log sheets for recording engine temperatures and settings and oil and fuel consumption throughout the forthcoming flight. During this operation, flown entirely at low level, Spafford will assist Taerum by visually map reading their route. Many bomb-aimers have made their own roller maps showing only a few miles either side of the planned route but, judging by the folded sheets underneath his arm, Spafford appears to prefer wider coverage. Should they deviate from the prepared route there is less chance of going "off the map".



A little earlier, as they arrived at dispersal, Bellamy captured Gibson and Hutchison as the crew readied themselves and carried out an external inspection of the aircraft in preparation for boarding. This would be the crew's first operational flight together. Contrary to the impression created by the 1955



Flt Lt Hutchison and Wg Cdr Gibson prior to boarding

feature film, Gibson's crew was very much bespoke. Though after some 50 hours of training they were now working as a team, only Gibson and Hutchison had flown together operationally before, when Gibson was commanding No. 106 Squadron at Syerston and Hutchison had been a regular member of his crew.

The photograph was recorded officially as "Wg Cdr Gibson is assisted with his parachute harness by one of his crew before take-off." However, it will be noted that Gibson is adjusting his own chest-type parachute harness, clipping each of the four straps into the quick-release box. The two large spring-loaded hooks to which the parachute will be attached if and when required can clearly be seen. Also, clearly visible is the Luftwaffe "Schwimmweste" life jacket with its top-up

inflator tube, he wore in preference to the standard RAF issue “Mae West”. This item was acquired from an aircraft shot down by Gibson in 1941, serving as a nightfighter pilot with No. 29 Beaufighter Squadron. Closer inspection shows Gibson’s gaze focussed on Hutchison’s hand, which is clenched into a fist. It can only be conjecture, but is Hutchison about to toss a coin; part of aircrew banter to ease tension before take-off?

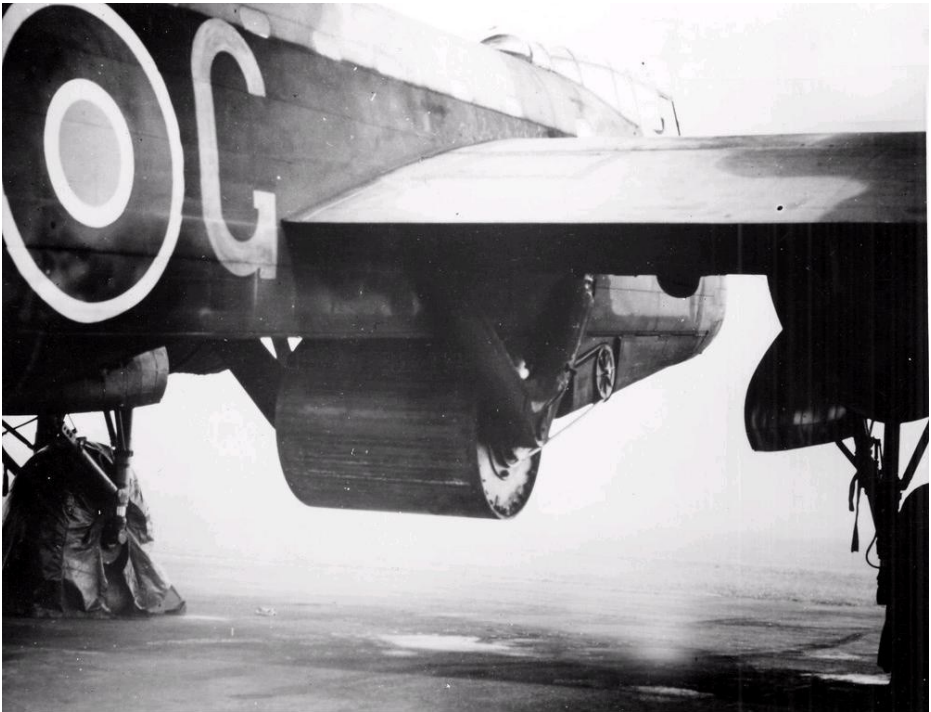
The crew have been making final preparations for most of the day, setting aside other personal preoccupations. Extraordinarily as it may seem, only hours earlier John Pulford has been attending his father’s funeral, under escort to ensure the maintenance of security. Wg Cdr Gibson, too, is lamenting the loss of his black Labrador - whose name will be immortalised as the codeword confirming the breaching of the Möhne Dam- killed by a car the previous day. Only this morning Gibson has been to see the Medical Officer regarding a painful attack of gout. While death might not be far from mind, Trevor-Roper anticipates the start of a new life; his wife is within weeks of giving birth to their son

Briefing by individual section leaders commenced at 11 o’clock. Wireless operators familiarised themselves with a plethora of code words and a special alpha-numerical code for reporting the results of their attack, navigators prepared their individual flight plans, based on the given route and timings. Three hours before this photograph was taken 133 aircrew had gathered in Scampton’s upstairs briefing room for a final briefing to go over the various elements and bring together the overall plan.

The crews have trained for eight weeks without knowing their target, although they have been aware since training began that this was to be no ordinary operation. From the start they have carrying out long cross country navigation exercises and practised low flying first at 150 feet then down to as low as 60 feet, making low level bombing runs over water. Flying in daylight, they have on occasion simulated moonlight conditions by fitting blue Perspex screens inside the canopies and wearing amber tinted goggles, while other flights have been made at night.

Only in the last few days have they been given an insight of the weapon they are to use – a unique mine developed by aeronautical engineer Barnes Wallis, but the arrival of new heavily modified aircraft from the beginning of April gave hint of that. Each aircraft’s serial number was marked with the suffix “/G” to indicate that the aircraft was fitted with special equipment and required a special guard when on the ground to discourage curious observers.

To return to the crew boarding their aircraft. Very little of the Lancaster can be seen. The serial number is visible but now, immediately prior to the operation, the suffix has been removed and the shot carefully framed to avoid showing anything that might indicate anything other than a standard aircraft. We do not see the lack of mid-upper turret, extensive modifications to the aircraft’s bomb



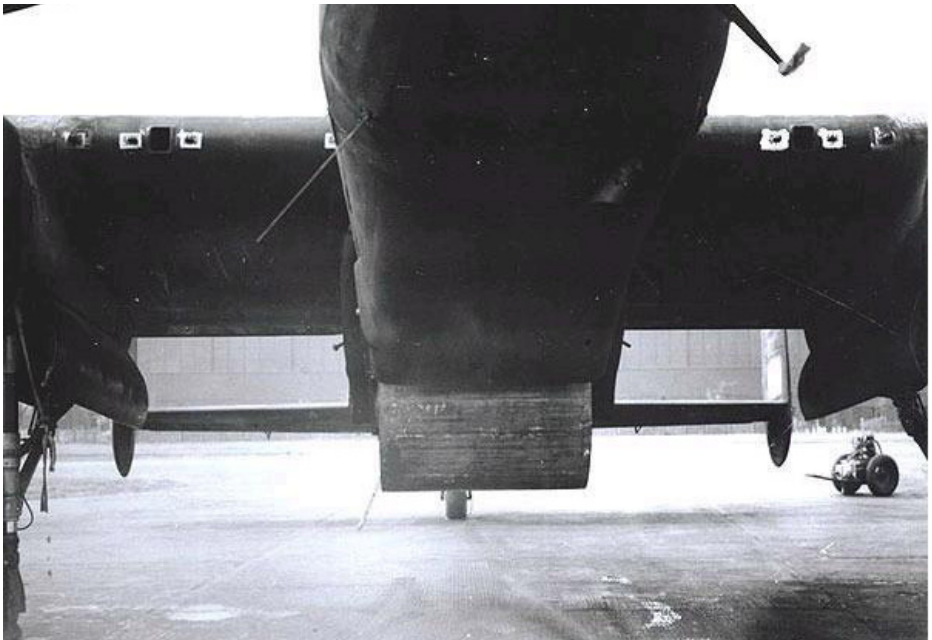
Barnes Wallis's Upkeep mine seen on Wg Cdr Gibson's Lancaster ED932 AJ-G

bay or Wallis's weapon, codenamed "Upkeep" commonly known to many as "the bouncing bomb".

Had Bellamy turned his lens to the right we would have seen a view similar to that taken of the same aircraft, possibly earlier that day. To carry Upkeep, the aircraft's bomb doors have been removed and fairings fitted fore and aft. The weapon itself, a cylinder 50 inches in diameter and 60 inches long is suspended across the bomb bay, supported by two substantial V-shaped calliper arms, each with a rotating disc at the apex fitted into a circular recess on each end of the cylinder. The right-hand disc is driven by a Fenner V-belt drive linked to a smaller pulley which was driven by a Vickers Janny variable speed hydraulic motor, originally designed for steering submarines, mounted inside the front fairing. Ten minutes before the aircraft made its attack the motor will be started to impart a back-spin of 500rpm, giving the weapon its ricochet characteristic, and which will also keep the weapon in contact with the dam wall as it sinks. The calliper arms are held under tension against springs and as the bomb aimer activates the release these spring outwards, allowing the spinning weapon to fall free.

Other modifications can be seen in a companion photograph viewing the nose of the aircraft. Apart from the weapon itself the most obvious feature is the

front mounting for the pair of spotlights used to determine the 60 feet dropping height. Located in the position normally occupied by the bombing camera, a tube shield has been fitted to screen the lamp from those on the ground, its angle indicating the beam's direction to starboard and slightly ahead of the aircraft, to be observed by the navigator watching from the starboard cockpit blister. On the starboard lower part of the nose is the whip aerial for the VHF radio with which the Chastise aircraft were equipped for Wg Cdr Gibson to control the operation. The leading edges of the wings reveal a further modification – the small rectangular panels are additional barrage balloon cable cutters. These can also be observed, if rather out of focus, on the aircraft in the photograph of Hutchison and Gibson. Finally protruding from the calliper arms and visible just beneath the training edge of the wing can be seen the ends of the spring-loaded struts which comprised part of the release mechanism. The Squadron's hangar can be seen in the background, refuting claims in some sources that these photographs were taken during dropping trials at RAF Manston. On the concrete beneath the aircraft can be seen what appears the faint outline of the letter "G". Not apparent from these photographs is that the front fairing is split down the centreline and each side hinged in the manner of the original bomb doors in order to permit access to the motor drive. Beyond the port fin stands a ubiquitous "trolley Ac". Prior to start-up this will be plugged into a socket in the wheel well behind the port inner engine to provide an external power source, alleviating load on the aircraft batteries.



A view from the front of Wg Cdr Gibson's G for George

At 21.39 half an hour or so after Bellamy captured the crew boarding ED932, G-George was airborne, setting course for Germany. Bellamy took one photograph of a Lancaster taking off that evening, although its identity cannot be determined.



Fg Off Bellamy captures an unidentified Upkeep Lancaster as it takes off for the dams

Gibson and his crew returned some seven hours later, at 4.25 the next morning. Bellamy was not there as they climbed stiffly out of their aircraft having witnessed events almost beyond imagination.

He was, however, in the briefing room where he captured for posterity the changed appearance of the men he had seen depart the previous evening.

The photograph shows the crew seated around a table in the upstairs room as they relate their experience to Sqn Ldr Townson, Scampton's Intelligence Officer. In the background, the raised dais from which Gibson, Cochrane and Wallis had earlier addressed 133 young men, 53 of whom were now dead with only three, badly shaken but alive, facing an uncertain future as prisoners of war.

Standing watching them are Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Harris, Commander-in-Chief, Bomber Command and Air Vice Marshal the Hon. Ralph Cochrane, Air Officer Commanding No. 5 Bomber Group. Both had followed the progress of the night's operation listening to spasmodic radio transmissions in the underground confines of No. 5 Group Headquarters' operations block attached to a large

Victorian House on the outskirts of Grantham before driving to Scampton to meet the returning crews. Now they are hearing first-hand from the leader of the attack.



Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Harris, AOC-in-C Bomber Command and Air-Vice Marshal the Hon Sir Ralph Cochrane (standing); (Seated) Left to Right: Sqn Ldr Townson, Plt Off Spafford, Plt Off Taerum, Flt Sgt Deering (hair only), Wg Cdr Gibson, Flt Lt Hutchison (hat), Flt Lt Trevor-Roper.

The thick blackout curtains have yet to be opened and Bellamy's flash bulb casts the group's shadows across the austere wooden trestle tables and onto the far wall, to which briefing materials are fixed. In the harsh light the faces of the crew reflect different reactions – Spafford the most animated, but with a look that suggests relief at their return. Next to him, perched on the end of the table, Terry Taerum his gaze focused across the room and his thoughts elsewhere. Across the table Deering, identified by his hair and right side parting, is seated next to Gibson, whose furrowed brow and sunken eyes are testimony to the

physical and mental effort of piloting the heavily laden Lancaster to the targets and back, not to mention seeing two, possibly three crews, of his Squadron meet their end in a sudden flash of flame. Bob Hutchison, seated to Gibson's left, is identified only by his officer's hat. His face is obscured by the sharply defined profile of rear gunner Trevor-Roper, cigarette in hand and large mug of rum laced tea near his elbow, appreciating that he too has survived to see his 29th birthday in two days' time.

On the table are the paraphernalia of debriefing. Visible is a sheet from the Eder Dam target folder - a pre-war German photograph of the dam, a view of the target from above Waldeck Castle used for briefing the crews as to the line of attack. Also visible is the ubiquitous grey and purple shaded target map, the white serpentine reservoir showing starkly against the darker terrain. The Intelligence Officer leafs through his notes, possibly reviewing the pro-forma questionnaire specially produced for this operation.

The typed record of this debrief is succinct: Gibson reported that visibility was excellent during the bombing run: "Saw the whole thing", picking up the target "from three-four miles" with his Upkeep making three bounces before detonating with an "enormous column of water". According to the crew "There are two holes in the dam" though subsequent photographs clearly show only one breach, and in his account in "Enemy Coast Ahead", written a year later, Gibson only refers to one "great breach 100 yards across." Gibson was complimentary about the use of VHF radio to control the operation – summing it up in a single word: "Perfect". His gunners likewise, praised the decision to use 100% daylight tracer in their guns: "Very satisfactory effect against gun positions. No dazzle, perfect for this job", a view not shared by all gunners on the raid, some of who found the constant stream of brightly burning rounds too bright, diminishing their night vision. With regard to the attack on the Eder, the notes are brief – "A large hole was definitely knocked in it and a great deal of water was seen flowing out."

Other observations would have been recorded: route planning and navigational details, the location of flak along the route, Gibson had witnessed the demise of Flt Lt John Hopgood, a close companion from his days commanding No. 106 Squadron and the man who had converted him to the Lancaster. Hopgood had been making the second attack on the Möhne Dam when his aircraft was hit and set on fire. His mine overshot the dam detonating on the powerhouse beyond, as the stricken Lancaster exploded in mid-air three miles beyond. Gibson's crew had also seen Sqn Ldr Henry Maudslay's mine detonate on the parapet of the Eder Dam, just behind the tail of his Lancaster and believed that they had witnessed his final moments (although Maudslay's aircraft survived only to be brought down by light flak near Emmerich on the return route with the loss of all aboard). Near Hamm they had witnessed another aircraft go down in flames. Concern was doubtless raised about the fate of Sqn Ldr Young who

had accompanied Gibson to the Eder dam and who should have arrived back at about the same time as Gibson, but of whom nothing had been seen or heard.

Within a few hours it would be confirmed that only 11 of the 19 aircraft that departed Scampton had returned. As the surviving crews drifted away from debriefing a curious atmosphere of elation and sadness began to pervade Scampton. The "Committee of Adjustment" began its rounds of messes and barrack blocks collecting the effects of those who had failed to return. Flt Lt Harry Humphries, the Squadron Adjutant began the unenviable task of preparing the telegrams for despatch to next of kin, a task he would repeat over the next few days, producing the subsequent confirmatory letters for Gibson to sign.

The success of the Dams Raid brought 617 Sqn recognition and adulation. 34 members received awards for their part in Operation Chastise. Wg Cdr Gibson received the Victoria Cross, Hutchison a bar to his Distinguished Flying Cross while Spafford, Taerum, Trevor-Roper and a recently commissioned Deering received the DFC. Sadly, none was destined to see the end of the war.

Spafford, Taerum, Deering and Hutchison would be killed during a low-level attack on the Dortmund Ems Canal on 15/16 September 1943. Pulford died when the Lancaster he was flying in flew into a cloud shrouded hilltop in Sussex on 12 February 1944. Trevor-Roper transferred to the Pathfinder Force and was one of those who failed to return from the attack on Nuremberg 30/31 March 1944 which cost Bomber Command 96 aircraft. Wg Cdr Gibson was taken off operations immediately after the Dams Raid and sent on a tour of North America. Returning to the UK and a succession of ground roles he appointed himself as Master Bomber for an attack against Munchen Gladbach and Rheydt on 19/20 September 1944. After directing the bombing he headed for home, but his Mosquito crashed on the outskirts of Steenberg in Holland, killing him and his navigator Sqn Ldr Jim Warwick.

**Dr Robert Owen**

**POST SCRIPT :** Seventy-five years later such is the resonance of Fg Off Bellamy's photograph of Wg Cdr Gibson and his crew boarding their aircraft that it was re-created in a tribute paid last year by current members of the new Squadron as they began their work- up at Beaufort Marine Corps Air Station in South Carolina along with other representations echoing photographs taken of Squadron personnel during the summer of 1943. [See Autumn 2016 issue of *Après Moi.*]



# Final Landings

## Ken Pilbeam

Ken Pilbeam joined the RAF in 1953 at the age of 18. After serving in the ranks he was commissioned as a Pilot Officer in October 1962, being awarded the Sword of Honour as Best Cadet. Having flown Shackletons with No. 206 Sqn, with whom he provided SAR for the Christmas Island nuclear tests during 1956-57, he had converted to Vulcans and arrived on the Squadron on 23 March 1963 as an Air Electronics Officer with Flt Lt David Pownall's crew. Their arrival brought the strength of the Squadron, at this time commanded by Wg Cdr Harry Currell, up to 10 crews.

Although crews were generally "constituted" in order to build team co-operation and excellence, however the Squadron records show that Ken spent a reasonable amount of time flying as AEO with a number of other crews during his early time with the Squadron, though it does not appear to have had any adverse effect on his training or status. By September he was flying sorties with a Blue Steel training round and the following month he was promoted to Flying Officer.

Blue Steel was a notoriously temperamental weapon as Ken was soon to find out. Flying with Flt Lt Bill Watford on 27 November the crew were one of two Vulcans detailed to participate in a Groupex requiring dummy Blue Steel attacks. In the event both of the Squadron's aircraft were forced to return to base owing to missile malfunctions.

March 1963 saw Ken teamed up with Peter Odling's crew, but a month later he was again with the Watford crew for Exercise "Nursemaid" a station missile generation exercise. Its purpose was to exercise the station organisation in the generation and simulated dispersal of eight Vulcan/Blue Steel weapons systems under observed conditions. Ken's crew was one of 3 from the Squadron's crews which flew recovery flights at the termination of the exercise.

Reverting to the Watford crew, further Blue Steel Training sorties were flown throughout 1964, interspersed with Group exercises, the later involving simulated Blue Steel attacks against Kenley and Glasgow. Two Exercise Kinsman, involving use of Scampton's dispersal airfields at Burtonwood and Lossiemouth took place in July 1964, added pressure being placed on the first exercise by Wg Cdr Currell, the detachment commander, joining the crew as co-pilot with the Watford crew.

Blue Steel training continued throughout the remainder of the year. While the Vulcan's role was still to deliver Blue Steel, tactics were now being reconsidered in the light of strengthening Soviet missile defences. Training sorties were now

conducted at low level, flying at 1,000 feet before making a “pop up” attack and diving back to the relative security of the ground.

In November 1964 Flt Lt Watford was posted to Leconfield and his crew, including Ken were detached to No. 230 OCU at Finningley to join the flying phase of No. 49 Course with Flt Lt A G Box as their captain. On conclusion of the course on 6 January 1965, the crew returned to Scampton. Training returned to its routine of high and low level Blue Steel sorties, interspersed with fighter affiliation and practice diversions.

Relief was provided in June when the Box crew got their chance to fly a long-awaited Goose Ranger, only to be thwarted by bad weather at Goose Bay, which meant that they were only able to fly two out of their planned three low level sorties before returning to Scampton eight days later.

A Mickey Finn dispersal to Burtonwood was flown at the beginning of the following month before Ken was detached again to No. 230 OCU for a four day AEO's Refresher Course. Rejoining his crew, practice scrambles were the order of the day during August in preparation for the crew's participation in the Finningley Battle of Britain display on 18 September. A further demonstration scramble should have been performed by two aircraft for a party from the RAF Staff College, on 5 October. However, the first aircraft failed to get airborne due to a wet start, leaving the Box crew to uphold the Squadron's honour by making their getaway in smart order from the ORP.

A fortnight before Christmas the crew were able to escape the grey Lincolnshire winter when they were given one of the first Med Ranger flights. En route to Malta, the crews carried out simulated attacks on Kenley and Naples. Flying from Luqa the crew flew the Libyan low level route before returning to the UK the following day. A further opportunity for some Mediterranean sun arose in the new year when, at the end of January, the crew were given a three day Lone Ranger to Akrotiri.

February saw a Kinsman dispersal exercise to Bedford, followed by the usual continuation training and a Mickey Finn exercise. Ken was promoted to Flt Lt in April 1966. Life took a further change in September when Sqn Ldr Box was posted to High Wycombe and Ken joined Don Exley's crew temporarily for a further Goose Ranger.

Following a further AEO's Refresher Course at No. 230 OCU in December 1966, Ken joined the crew of Flt Lt Ken Pollard. They would fly together for four months, then after before a brief spell flying with a number of captains, Ken became part of Bill Taylor's crew in the autumn of 1967. He remained their AEO, participating in the display at Scampton to commemorate the formation of Strike Command on 29 April 1968, until he was posted from the Squadron to No. 230 OCU in July 1968.



Sqn Ldr Ken Pilbeam (centre) takes command of No 1 GSU from Sqn Ldr Vic Ayres in January 1980. Holding the bottle is Flt Lt John LeBrun. The two ladies are Betty Mattocks and Cathy Fleckney, secretaries on the unit

Ken was designated specialist aircrew (as Flt Lt) in October 1973 and promoted to Sqn Ldr in January 1977. Three years later he was given command of No. 1 Group Standardisation Unit, Scampton. Promoted to Wg Cdr in January 1988 he finally retired from the Service in October 1993 having enjoyed a flying career that encompassed some of the best-known post-war multi-engined types, including the Lancaster, Shackleton, Hastings, Vulcan and Nimrod.

After he retired from the RAF, Ken became a volunteer guide at Lincoln Cathedral.

**Dr Robert Owen**

## Dams Dinner 2019

The 2019 Dams Dinner will be on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> May 2019, at the Petwood Hotel. A memorial service will be held at the Squadron Memorials on the Sunday. A limited number of rooms at the Petwood Hotel will be reserved for Association members at a special reduced rate per person for bed and breakfast.

# 617 Squadron Association

Registered Charity No 1141817

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