

Discover More...



Cranwell Aviation Heritage Museum

Gallantry in the Air



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Introduction

This file contains material and images which are intended to complement the displays and presentations in Cranwell Aviation Heritage Museum's exhibition areas.

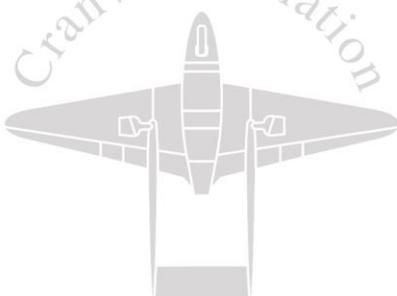
This file is intended to let you discover more about the heroism of aircrew whose acts of bravery during World War 2 resulted in them receiving gallantry awards.

Where possible all dates regarding medal awards and promotions have been verified with entries published in the London Gazette.

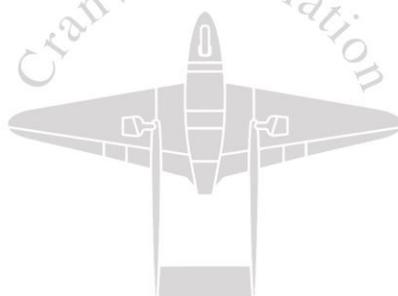
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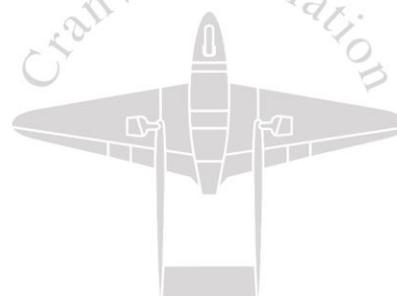
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RODERICK ALASTAIR BROOK LEAROYD

5 February 1913 – 24 January 1996

Royal Air Force

Victoria Cross

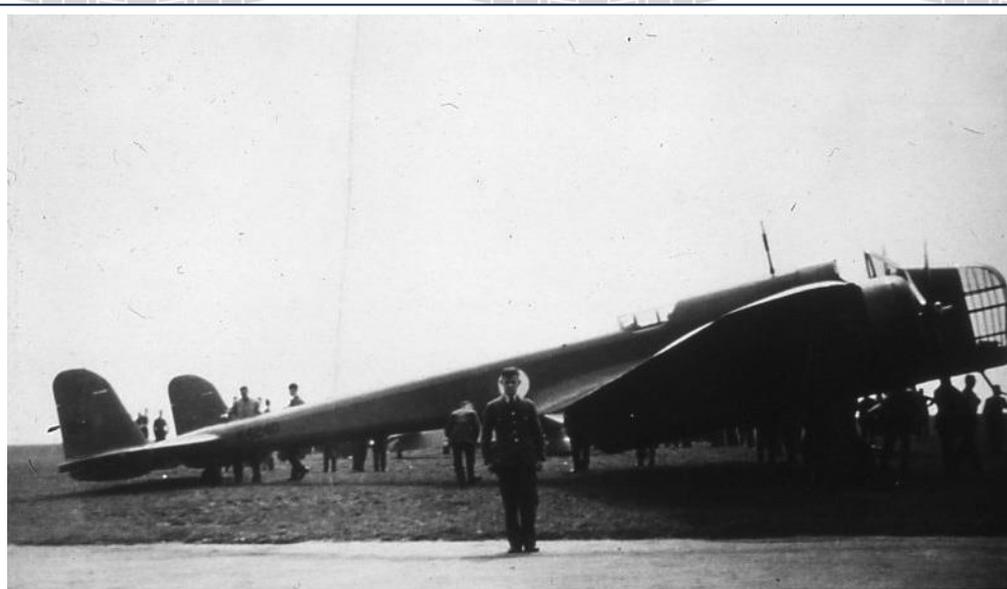
“The high courage, skill and determination, which this officer has invariably displayed on many occasions in the face of the enemy, sets an example which is unsurpassed.”

The London Gazette, 20 August 1940.

32 Victoria Crosses were awarded during 1939 - 1945. 19 went to air crew from Bomber Command. Acting Flight Lieutenant Learoyd's was the first.

Son of an Army Officer, Roderick Learoyd was born in Folkestone, educated privately, subsequently attending Chelsea College of Aeronautical and Automobile Engineering. On graduation Learoyd spent two years farming fruit in Argentina. This was followed by a brief spell as a motor engineer, before he decided to join the RAF.

Accepted in March 1936 on a Short Service Commission, he underwent elementary training, at Hamble, followed by service training at Wittering and graduated in December 1936. Learoyd's first posting was to No. 49 Squadron, Worthy Down, operating Hawker Hinds.



Handley Page Hampden
Image CAHM Archive

In March 1938, No. 49 Squadron moved to Scampton, becoming the first Squadron to re-equip with the Handley Page Hampden bomber.

After many months retraining, the Squadron's first operational mission was on 3 September 1939. Over the next 10 months, Learoyd undertook 23 bombing sorties proving himself as a cool-headed and composed pilot.

On the night of 12 August 1940, No. 49 Squadron was tasked with bombing the heavily defended Dortmund-Ems canal, specifically an aqueduct carrying the canal over the river Ems. The briefing was thorough, and the arrival time on target was crucial as the Hampdens would each be carrying a special canister bomb with a 10 minute time delay fuse. Learoyd was detailed as captain of Hampden P4403.

At 2000 hours, Learoyd took off from Scampton. He was due to be on target at 2315 hours and would be the last of five Hampdens to attack the aqueduct. Learoyd arrived on target 10 minutes before his ETA and he circled, calmly waiting his turn to attack.

Learoyd saw the first Hampden make its bombing run. The target was protected by searchlights and many mobile flak guns on both banks, meaning the planes must run a gauntlet of anti-aircraft fire. Squadron Leader Pitcairn-Hill DFC led the way, flying through flak, bullets and blinding searchlights he dropped his bomb and turned for home. The second plane was hit by flak and exploded. The third was hit in its port engine forcing its pilot, Flying Officer Mulligan to order his crew to abandon the aircraft. The fourth plane bombed successfully and left for home, leaving Learoyd to take his turn.

Learoyd commenced a shallow, diving bombing run straight along the canal. By this point the flak and searchlight operators had established the height of their attackers and were waiting for him. The flak barrage began and Learoyd was blinded by the searchlights. He ducked below the windscreen, flying solely on instruments. Two shells blasted through the starboard wing and bullets raked the underside of the plane. Learoyd held firm until his bomb was away. He then banked steeply and made for home. The raid was completely successful.

Learoyd's determined bombing run against well alerted defences earned him a Victoria Cross, which was awarded on 9 September 1940.

Learoyd continued to serve in the RAF until 14 October 1946 when he transferred to the RAF Reserve. Wing Commander Learoyd retired from the RAF in 1958.

LESLIE THOMAS MANSER

11 May 1922 – 31 May 1942

Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve

Victoria Cross

“In pressing home his attack in the face of strong opposition, in striving, against heavy odds, to bring back his aircraft and crew and, finally, when in extreme peril, thinking only of the safety of his comrades, Flying Officer Manser displayed determination and valour of the highest order.”

The London Gazette, 23 October 1942.

Leslie Manser was born in New Delhi India, the son of a civil engineer. The family returned to England when Manser was a child and he was brought up and educated in Hertfordshire.

After finishing his school education, Manser applied to join both the Army and Royal Navy, but was turned down by both. In 1940, he was accepted as a potential pilot by the RAF Volunteer Reserve and was commissioned as a Pilot Officer, in May the following year.

Manser was initially posted to No. 50 Squadron at Swinderby, flying Handley Page Hampden bombers. He subsequently served as an instructor at No. 14 Operational Training Unit, Cottesmore. On 3 April 1942, Manser was reassigned to No. 50 Squadron, which by then was based at Skellingthorpe and operating Avro Manchester bombers.

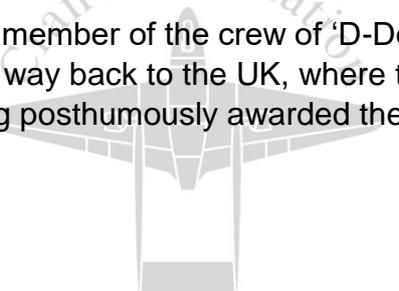
On 6 May 1942, now an experienced pilot and aircraft captain he was promoted to the rank of Flying Officer.

On 30 May, Manser was tasked with collecting Avro Manchester L7301 ‘D-Dog’ from Coningsby. That evening he took off in ‘D-Dog’ on his 14th operational sortie – the 1,000 bomber raid on Cologne.

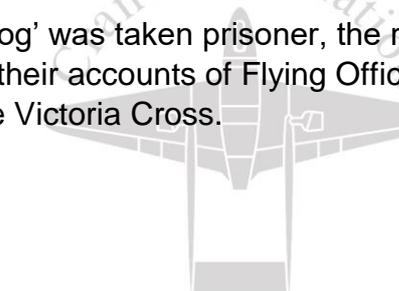
‘D-Dog’s’ engines started to overheat at altitudes above 7,000 feet but rather than abort the mission, Manser decided to continue at low altitude. On its approach to Cologne, the aircraft was detected by searchlights and drew the fire of a number of flak guns. Manser refused to take evasive action and maintained a straight and level approach until the aircraft’s bomb load had been released.

As Manser was trying to turn and climb to a safer height, 'D-Dog' suffered a direct hit. In an attempt to get away from the searchlights and flak, Manser put the aircraft into a steep dive before levelling at 800 feet. By this time, the aircraft was full of smoke and flames and was barely controllable, despite this he managed to get 'D-Dog' to an altitude of 2,000 feet. The port engine then burst into flames threatening to ignite the fuel tank inside the wing. The fire was duly extinguished and Manser ordered that anything removable be jettisoned from the aircraft in an attempt to gain enough height to reach the English coast. 'D-Dog' however continued to lose altitude and Manser gave the order to abandon the aircraft. The crew baled out leaving Manser and the co-pilot in the aircraft. The co-pilot fitted his own parachute and attempted to fit Manser's. Realising the aircraft was almost totally out of control Manser ordered his co-pilot to bale out. Almost immediately after, the aircraft crashed into the ground and burst into flames. By remaining at the controls of his doomed aircraft, Leslie Manser saved the lives of his crew, by sacrificing his own.

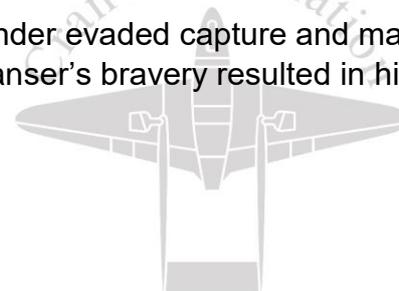
One member of the crew of 'D-Dog' was taken prisoner, the remainder evaded capture and made their way back to the UK, where their accounts of Flying Officer Manser's bravery resulted in him being posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross.



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Norman Cyril Jackson

8 April 1919 – 26 March 1994

Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve

Victoria Cross

“This airman's attempt to extinguish the fire and save the aircraft and crew from falling into enemy hands was an act of outstanding gallantry.”

The London Gazette, 26 October 1945.

As a qualified turner and fitter Norman Jackson would have been exempted from military service. Regardless of this, he volunteered to join the RAF and enlisted on 20 October 1939.

He was initially employed as a Fitter IIE (engines). In 1942, Jackson applied to be re-trained as a flight engineer. On completion of his training at RAF St Athan, Jackson was promoted to Sergeant and was posted to No. 106 Squadron, Syerston, operating Avro Lancaster bombers. In late November 1943, the Squadron was relocated to Metheringham. By this time, Jackson had flown 14 operational sorties.

On 24 April 1944, Jackson completed his 30th sortie, one more than the rest of his aircraft's crew. Two days later, he readily agreed to another mission, so that his fellow aircrew all finished their operational tour together.

The target was a factory in the German city of Schweinfurt. Having dropped their bomb load on target, Jackson's Lancaster was attacked by a German fighter. One of the Lancaster's starboard engines burst into flames and Jackson operated the aircraft's internal extinguisher system. The fire however continued to blaze, threatening to blow up the starboard wing's fuel tanks.

Jackson decided to fit his parachute, release the canopy and with other crew members holding on to the parachute's rigging, climbed out onto the wing to put the fire out using a hand fire extinguisher. It should be noted that at this time the Lancaster was flying at a speed of approximately 140 MPH at an altitude of 20,000 feet.

The German fighter returned to attack the Lancaster and Jackson fell from the wing and parachuted to the ground. His parachute was torn, holed, scorched and smouldering and Jackson was unable to control his descent. On landing, he broke one of his ankles, having already sustained serious burns to his hands and face and shell splinter injuries to his right leg and shoulder.

Meanwhile, the Lancaster pilot realised that the fire was out of control and ordered the rest of the crew to bale out. Any attempt to evade capture was out of the question and Jackson crawled to a German village to try and find medical assistance. He spent the next 10 months in a German hospital. Whilst Jackson's other injuries healed, his burned hands never fully recovered. Four other members of the Lancaster's crew survived and they too were captured by the Germans.

Once repatriated to the UK at the end of the war, the crew members were able to report Jackson's incredible gallantry. Norman Jackson was promoted to Warrant Officer and on 26 October 1945 was awarded the Victoria Cross. He was presented his medal by King George VI, at the same ceremony that Group Captain Cheshire received his.

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ARTHUR STEWART KING SCARF

14 June 1913 – 9 December 1941

Royal Air Force

Victoria Cross

“Squadron Leader Scarf displayed supreme heroism in the face of tremendous odds and his splendid example of self-sacrifice will long be remembered.”

The London Gazette, 21 June 1946.

Arthur Scarf was born and educated in Wimbledon. He was intelligent but not academic. On leaving college in 1930, Arthur worked in Insurance, but found it monotonous. He applied to join the Royal Navy, but was rejected. In 1936, Scarf applied to join the RAF and was accepted for training as a pilot.

On graduation, in October 1936 he was posted to No. 9 Squadron, Scampton and No. 61 Squadron, Hemswell in March 1937. On promotion to Flying Officer, Scarf joined No. 62 Squadron, Abingdon, operating Hawker Hind bombers.

In 1938, No. 62 Squadron was equipped with the new Bristol Blenheim I bomber, and relocated to Singapore in 1939. The Squadron spent the next two years undergoing training exercises, before finally, being sent north, close to the Siam border where a Japanese attack was anticipated. On 8 December 1941, the attack came, and by noon, the Siamese army had surrendered. No. 62 Squadron was ordered south to Butterworth, where it was tasked with attacking the Japanese airfield at Singora, the following day.

Scarf was first to take off, and circled, while the rest of the Squadron got airborne. Just as he became airborne Japanese bombers attacked, and Scarf could only watch, as the rest of No. 62 Squadron was destroyed on the ground.

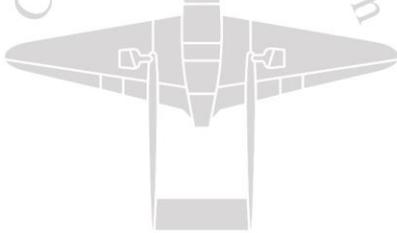
Scarf could have given up at this point, but a grim determination set in. Setting course for Singora, 30 miles behind enemy lines, he began his mission. Flying low, Scarf and his crew avoided the majority of fighters, with the aircraft's gunner Flight Sergeant Rich defending the Blenheim against any attacking aircraft. As Singora neared, fighter attacks increased but Scarf continued, on a steady and successful bombing run.

Returning to base at low altitude Scarf used all his skill to try and evade the fighters, but after repeated attacks he was grievously wounded. With a shattered arm, and bullet wounds to his back, he collapsed forward. His navigator Flight Sergeant Calder yelled for assistance, and Rich passed his arm around the chest of Scarf supporting him upright in his seat, allowing him to fly the crippled Blenheim, south, to attempt to land at Alor Star airstrip.

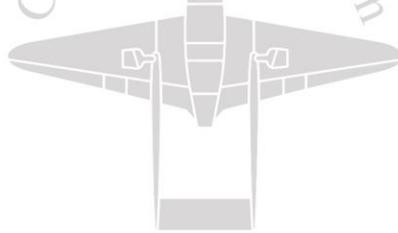
Why he did he choose this airfield? Was it because he knew that there was a hospital near the airfield, or that his wife of 8 months a nurse, was there? Who can tell, but Scarf gently landed the plane in the mud of the paddy fields, slithering to a stop 100 yards from the hospital.

Scarf had a feeble pulse and had lost an enormous amount of blood yet the hospital staff managed to stabilise him so that a two pint transfusion from his wife could take place, enabling the doctors to operate. He died in the operating theatre

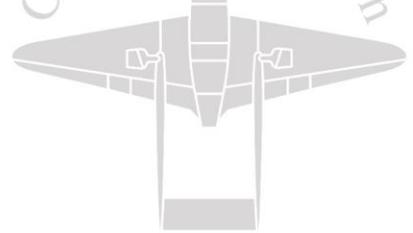
Due to the chaotic nature of the Malayan campaign, Scarf's gallantry was not brought to the attention of RAF command until 1946, when he was recommended for and awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross. His widow received the medal at an investiture on 30 July 1946.



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JAMES HARRY 'GINGER' LACEY

1 February 1917 – 30 May 1989

Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve

Distinguished Flying Medal (DFM) & Bar

“Sergeant Lacey has shown consistent efficiency and great courage. He has led his section on many occasions and his splendid qualities as a fighter pilot have enabled him to destroy at least 19 enemy aircraft.”

The London Gazette, 26 Nov 1940.

'Ginger' Lacey was one of a few RAF pilots in service on the first and last day of World War Two and was one of the highest scoring RAF fighter pilots of the war. By the end of the Battle of Britain he had been forced to bale out or make forced landings on nine occasions.

Lacey attended King James Grammar School, Knaresborough followed by Leeds Technical College. He then became an apprentice pharmacist before joining the RAF Volunteer Reserve in January 1937.

At the outbreak of war, Sergeant Lacey was mobilised and posted to No. 501 Squadron, Bristol, operating Hawker Hurricanes. The Squadron moved to Bétheniville, France in May 1940. Lacey experienced his first combat on 13 May, destroying a Heinkel He 111 and its escorting Messerschmitt Bf 109 in one sortie and a Messerschmitt Bf 110 later that day.

In June 1940, No. 501 Squadron returned to England. On 20 July Lacey shot down a Messerschmitt Bf 109E. In August, he destroyed a Junkers Ju 87 and possibly another, damaged a Dornier Do 17 and a Messerschmitt Bf 110 and possibly destroyed a Messerschmitt Bf 109. On 23 August, Lacey was awarded a DFM for having destroyed six enemy aircraft. On 30 August, he shot down a Heinkel He 111 and damaged a Messerschmitt Bf 110.

Between 2 and 5 September, Lacey shot down four Messerschmitt Bf 109s and damaged a Dornier Do 17. On 13 September, he attacked a formation of Heinkel He 111s that had just bombed Buckingham Palace, shooting one down, before baling out of his damaged aircraft.

Returning to flying on 15 September, Lacey engaged and shot down a Heinkel He 111, three Messerschmitt Bf 109s and damaged another, before attacking a formation of twelve Messerschmitt Bf 109s, destroying two of them. During a sortie on 27 September, Lacey destroyed a Messerschmitt Bf 109 followed by a Junkers Ju 88 on 30 September. During October, he destroyed five Messerschmitt Bf 109s and damaged another. On 26 November 1940, Lacey received a Bar to his DFM, for having destroyed at least 19 enemy aircraft.

In January 1941, Lacey was commissioned as a Pilot Officer. In July, he claimed four enemy aircraft shot down and one damaged. In August, Lacey was posted to No. 57 Operational Training Unit, Flintshire as an instructor and promoted to Flying Officer. In March 1942, Lacey was assigned to No. 602 Squadron, Kenley operating Supermarine Spitfires. He was promoted to Flight Lieutenant in August followed by being assigned as Chief Instructor at No.1 Special Instructors School, Milfield in November.

Lacey spent the final years of World War Two in India. In March 1943, he was posted to No. 20 Squadron, Kaylan. In November 1944, he took command of No. 155 Squadron, operating Spitfires. His final posting of the war was as Commanding Officer of No. 17 Squadron, where he claimed his last enemy aircraft, a Japanese Nakajima Ki 43, in February 1945.

'Ginger' Lacey retired from the RAF in March 1967, retaining the rank of Squadron Leader.



HUGH GORDON MALCOLM

2 May 1917 – 4 December 1942

Royal Air Force

Victoria Cross

“Wing Commander Malcolm's last exploit was the finest example of the valour and unswerving devotion to duty which he constantly displayed.”

The London Gazette, 27 April 1943.



Wing Commander Malcolm
Image Wikimedia Commons – Public Domain

Born in Dundee, Hugh Malcolm was educated at Craigflower Preparatory School followed by Trinity College, Perthshire. He decided on a career in the RAF, entering RAF College Cranwell as a Cadet in January 1936, graduating as a commissioned pilot in December 1937. Malcolm became the only Cranwell College graduate to be awarded a Victoria Cross.

Malcolm was initially posted to No. 26 Squadron, Catterick, where he flew Westland Lysanders participating in joint training exercises with the Army.

In May 1939, his career as a pilot nearly ended when his Lysander crashed. Malcolm sustained serious injuries including a fractured skull and it was four months before he was declared fit to fly.

In July 1940, Malcolm was posted to No. 4 Squadron, Linton-on-Ouse. In September 1940 he was promoted to Flight Lieutenant and posted to No. 241 Squadron, Inverness operating Lysanders. In March 1941, Malcolm was assigned to No. 225 Squadron, Thrupton, as Flight Commander of 'B' Flight.

Promoted to Squadron Leader in December 1941 Malcolm was posted to flying Blenheim IV bombers at No. 18. Squadron, Wattisham, as a Flight Commander. Soon the role of No. 18 Squadron changed from daylight raids to night intruder missions in support of main bombing forces. In August 1942, the Squadron was stood down from operational flying to prepare for service in North Africa and was re-equipped with Blenheim V bombers. Malcolm now an Acting Wing Commander became the Squadron's Commander. Prior to moving overseas, No. 18 Squadron, along with Nos 13, 114 and 614 Squadrons formed 326 Wing. The Wing moved to Blida, Algeria in November 1942.

On 4 December 1942, eleven Blenheim Vs from 326 Wing flew to a forward landing ground at Souk-el-Arba. At 0915 hours that morning, six Blenheim Vs led by Malcolm took off in search of suitable targets, finding an enemy landing strip they successfully attacked it and returned home to re-fuel. Within an hour of landing, Malcolm received an urgent request from the Army to provide close support in the area he had just attacked. This would entail a daylight raid over a fiercely contested battle zone without the benefit of fighter cover. Fully aware of the inherent risk and also his duty to support the hard pressed 1st Army, Malcolm agreed to carry out the mission.

At 1515 hours that afternoon, Malcolm along with all available Blenheims took off. They flew in tight formation, as defence against fighter attack. As the bombers reached the target area they circled to identify the target and began to bomb. They were attacked by an overwhelming force of Messerschmitt Bf 109 fighters and the ensuing battle became a massacre. One by one, the Blenheims were shot down. Malcolm's was the last aircraft to be destroyed and he and his two crewmen were killed.

Malcolm's determination to complete this ill-fated mission was recognised with the award of a posthumous Victoria Cross on 27 April 1943.

GUY PENROSE GIBSON

Royal Air Force - Reserve of Air Force Officers

12 August 1918 – 19 September 1944

Victoria Cross (VC), Distinguished Service Order (DSO) & Bar, Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) & Bar

"Throughout his operational career, prolonged exceptionally at his own request, he has shown leadership, determination and valour of the highest order."

The London Gazette, 28 May 1943.

Guy Gibson was born in Simla, India. Failing to join the RAF at his first attempt, Gibson's second attempt in 1936 was successful. Completing flying training at Bristol Flying School, Yatesbury and service training at No. 24 (Training) Group, Uxbridge for service training, he was commissioned as an Acting Pilot Officer in January 1937.

Gibson's first posting was to No. 83 Squadron, Edinburgh operating Hawker Hinds. In March 1938, the Squadron relocated to RAF Scampton, and converted to Handley Page Hampdens. From April to September 1940, Gibson completed 34 operations, was awarded a DFC on 9 July and promoted to Flight Lieutenant on 3 September.

On 13 November, Gibson was posted to No. 29 Squadron, Wellingore operating Bristol Blenheims and flew six operations before the squadron was re-equipped with Bristol Beaufighters operating as night-fighters. He was promoted to Acting Squadron Leader in June 1941 and on 16 September was awarded a Bar to his DFC for "his utmost courage and having shot down three enemy aircraft". Gibson was then posted to No. 51 Operational Training Unit, Cranfield despite his protestations.

In April 1942, Acting Wing Commander Gibson assumed command of No. 106 Squadron, Coningsby, flying Avro Manchesters subsequently converting to Lancasters. Gibson made his first operational flight in a Lancaster on 8 July. In September, the Squadron undertook low level training in preparation for a raid on Le Creusot, France scheduled for 17 October. This was followed by raids on Genoa and Milan in Italy. In November, Gibson was awarded a DSO, for the courage and leadership displayed.

On 12 March 1943, Gibson's aircraft developed a fault en route to bombing Stuttgart. He continued on three engines to attack the target, remaining at low level throughout. In April, Gibson was awarded a Bar to his DSO.

On 18 March 1943, Gibson was selected to command the newly formed No. 617 Squadron, Scampton operating Lancasters. Their mission would be to attack dams in the Ruhr Valley, using the "bouncing" bomb developed by Barnes Wallis. This would entail a precise night time low level attack over water. Training commenced in April.

On 16 May, nineteen Lancasters led by Gibson took off to undertake the mission. The first target to be attacked was the Möhne Dam and Gibson, s was the leading aircraft. The second plane was shot down and Gibson decided to accompany each successive attack in order to draw flak whilst they made their bombing runs. The dam was breached. They flew on to the Eder Dam and they made three runs before successfully breaching the dam. What became to be known as "The Dambusters Raid" cost eight aircraft lost, fifty three air crew killed, three taken prisoner with eleven planes returning home.

Having completed a course at RAF Staff College, Bulstrode Park, Gibson was posted as a Staff Officer to No. 55 Base, East Kirkby in May 1944. In August he was assigned to No. 54 Base, Coningsby.

On 19 September, Gibson took off in a de Havilland Mosquito to mark targets for a bombing raid. His plane crashed at Steenberg, Netherlands, killing Gibson and his navigator.

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DOUGLAS ROBERT STEUART BADER

Royal Air Force

21 February 1910 – 5 September 1982

Distinguished Service Order (DSO) & Bar, Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) & Bar

"His high qualities of leadership and courage have been an inspiration to all."

The London Gazette, 15 Jul 1941.

Douglas Bader was the son of a civil engineer. In 1928, after finishing his education, Bader won one of only six annual cadetships offered by RAF College, Cranwell. Graduating in 1930, Pilot Officer Bader was posted to No. 23 Squadron, Kenley, flying Bristol Bulldogs. Bader was a daredevil, who disobeyed strict orders forbidding unauthorised aerobatics. On 14 December 1931, Bader crashed whilst attempting low altitude aerobatics, resulting in both his legs being amputated. After a long convalescence, Bader was transferred to RAF Uxbridge and fitted with artificial legs. In June 1932, Bader was assessed as being fit for active service but in April 1933, the assessment was reversed and he was placed on the Reserve List.



Bristol Bulldog
Image – CAHM Archive

In the lead up to World War Two, Bader made repeated requests to be reinstated, but was only offered the possibility of non-flying positions. Disappointed, Bader petitioned his old Commandant from Cranwell, who endorsed his aspiration to fly. In October 1939, Bader was assessed by the Central Flying School, Upavon and after refresher training in November was once again flying solo.

In January 1940, Flying Officer Bader was posted to No. 19 Squadron, Duxford and then was assigned as a Flight Commander with No. 222 Squadron, also at Duxford.

By May 1940, Bader had his first combat flight and undertook several sorties over Dunkirk. On 1 June he destroyed a Messerschmitt Bf 109. On 28 June, he was posted to No. 242 Squadron, Coltishall as an acting Squadron Leader operating Hawker Hurricanes. During the Battle of Britain (July – October 1940) he destroyed several enemy aircraft and on 1 October was awarded a DSO for having "displayed gallantry and leadership of the highest order". By January 1941, Bader had shot down at least ten enemy aircraft and was awarded a DFC.

By March 1941, following promotion he assumed command of a Wing of three Squadrons at Tangmere, Sussex. On 15 July having now shot down 15 enemy planes, Acting Wing Commander Bader was awarded a Bar to his DSO.

On 9 August 1941 he flew a sortie over France. On crossing the French coast, he spotted a formation of 12 Messerschmitt Bf 109s. Bader put his Spitfire into a fast steep dive and levelled out. He then spotted six 109s flying in pairs. Bader destroyed one aircraft and damaged a second. Banking away he collided with one of the other pairs and badly damaged, losing height Bader decided to bale out but he became trapped by one of his prosthetic legs. He deployed his parachute and the strap holding his leg snapped allowing him to escape. Captured and imprisoned Bader attempted several escapes resulting in him being sent to the infamous Colditz Castle. In September 1941 he was awarded a Bar to his DFC and remained in prison until liberation in 1945.

On returning to England, Bader became Commanding Officer at Fighter Leader's School, receiving a promotion to substantive Wing Commander in December and soon after to temporary Group Captain.

Bader retired from the RAF in July 1946.

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GEOFFREY LEONARD CHESHIRE

7 September 1917 – 31 July 1992

Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve

**Victoria Cross, Distinguished Service
Order (DSO) & 2 Bars, Distinguished
Flying Cross (DFC)**

“In four years of fighting against the bitterest opposition he has maintained a record of outstanding personal achievement, placing himself invariably in the forefront of the battle.”

The London Gazette, 8 September 1944.

Courage can be demonstrated in a single deed or numerous acts over a period of time, Leonard Cheshire who was to become the youngest Group Captain in the RAF, exemplified the latter.

Born in Chester, Cheshire attended Oxford University studying law. He joined the University Air Squadron in 1937, gaining a commission in the RAF Volunteer Reserve.

Cheshire was mobilised in 1939 to No. 9 Flying Training School, Hullavington, becoming a Flying Officer in 1940. His first posting was to No. 102 Squadron, Driffield, which was operating Armstrong Whitworth Whitley bombers. On a mission in November 1940, over Wesseling, Cologne. Cheshire experienced adverse weather, and decided to attack his secondary target the railway yards, Cologne. During the approach he experienced flak and a gigantic explosion ripped a ten foot hole in the plane's fuselage. Cheshire fought to regain control and completed his run. Cheshire was subsequently awarded the DSO for his courage under fire.

On completing his first tour in 1941, Cheshire volunteered for a second and was posted to No. 35 Squadron, Linton on Ouse, operating Handley Page Halifax bombers. He was awarded the DFC in March of that year.

In 1942, now a Squadron Leader, Cheshire became an instructor at No. 1652 Heavy Conversion Unit at Marston Moor. Despite being non-operational, Cheshire undertook four missions, including the first '1000 bomber raid'. In August of the same year he returned to operational flying for a third tour as the Commanding Officer of No 76 Squadron.

In 1943, the now acting Group Captain Cheshire became Station Commander at Marston Moor. He was only 25 years old. His new duties of Station Commander left him feeling frustrated, so when the opportunity came for operational flying, he accepted. In September 1943, reverting to the rank of Wing Commander he took charge of No. 617 Squadron, Woodhall Spa.

On 8-9 February 1944, during a raid on the Gnome-Rhone factory, Limoges, Cheshire decided to prove the efficiency of low level bomb marking, and achieved perfect accuracy, resulting in the factory's destruction. This underscored the need for the small fast De Havilland Mosquito for No. 617 Squadron.

A further test of Cheshire's techniques came on 24-25 April 1944, when four Mosquitos were tasked with marking Munich for a bombing raid by Avro Lancasters. Arriving over the heavily defended city, Cheshire's plane became trapped in searchlights. Putting his Mosquito into a steep dive, Cheshire dropped his markers. He then circled Munich at 1000 feet to confirm the effectiveness of the attack, taking a number of flak strikes in the process.

Cheshire led every No. 617 Squadron raid, and turned target marking and 'Master bomb directing' into a fine art. His attack on the 21st Panzer Division in 1944, resulting in its almost total annihilation and the daylight raid on the E-Boat pens at Le Havre in June 1944, exemplified this.

On 6 July 1944, Cheshire flew his 100th operational mission, attacking a missile site at Marquise. On his return Cheshire was informed, he was to be rested from operational flying, and recommended for a Victoria Cross, which was approved on 8 September 1944.

In August 1945, Cheshire flew his final mission, as the British observer for the atom bomb raid on Nagasaki.

In January 1946, he retired from the RAF on medical grounds, retaining the rank of Group Captain.

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FRANCIS VICTOR BEAMISH

27 September 1903 – 28 March 1942

Royal Air Force

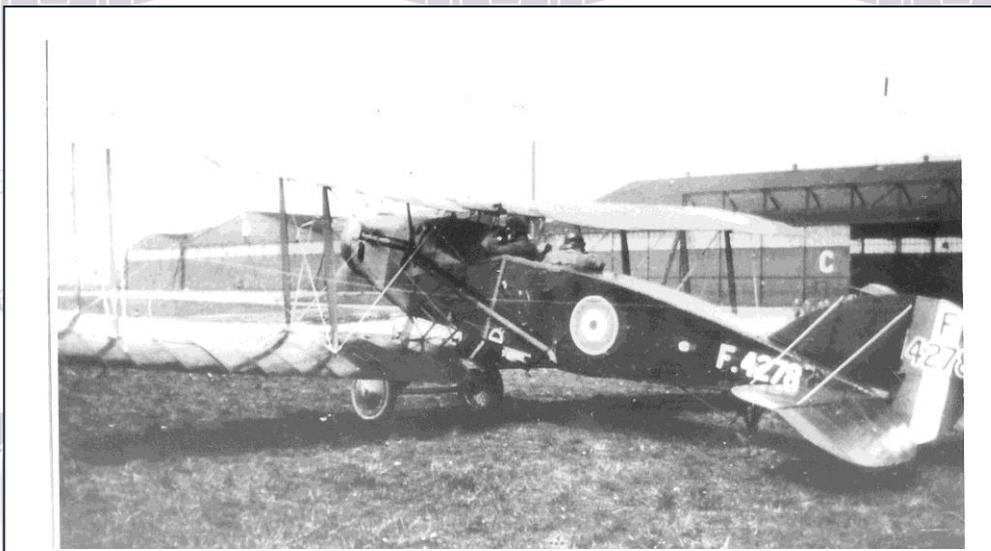
Distinguished Service Order (DSO) & Bar, Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC), Air Force Cross (AFC)

“The courage and devotion to duty displayed by Group Captain Beamish are of the highest order and he has set a magnificent example.”

The London Gazette, 2 September 1941.

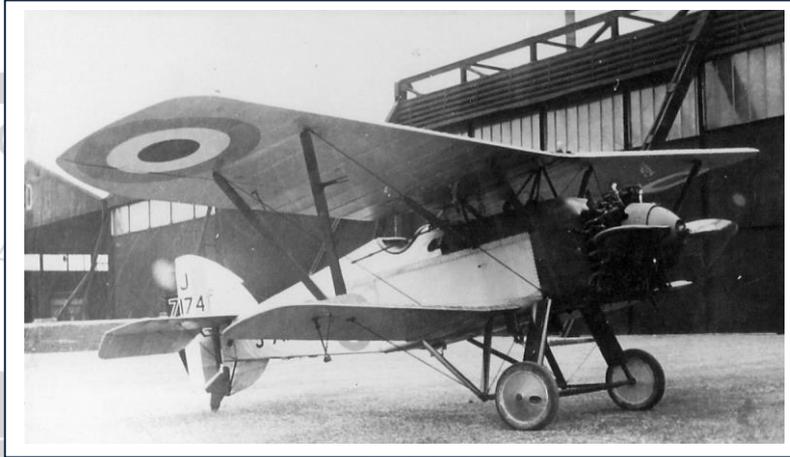
Francis Beamish was one of four brothers from County Cork, Ireland who would all become RAF Officers. He was educated at Coleraine, before enrolling as a Flight Cadet at RAF College, Cranwell in September 1921.

Graduating in August 1923, Beamish was posted to No. 4 Squadron, Farnborough, and subsequently to the RAF School of Army Co-operation, Old Sarum. In 1925 he was promoted to Flying Officer and posted to No. 31 Squadron, Ambala, India, operating Bristol Fighters. In April 1926, he was assigned to No. 60 Squadron, Kohat, India, operating de Havilland 9As.



Bristol Fighter
Image – CAHM Archive

Returning to England in October 1926, Beamish became an instructor at No. 5 Flying Training School, Sealand and in 1927 returned to RAF College, Cranwell as a member of staff. He was promoted to Flight Lieutenant in 1928 and spent the next two years on an exchange posting to Canada. In 1931, he returned to the UK as a Flight Commander at No. 25 Squadron, Hawking, which operated various fighters including Armstrong Whitworth Siskins. In January 1932, he was appointed Personal Assistant to the Air Officer Commanding at RAF Uxbridge.



Armstrong Whitworth Siskin
Image – CAHM Archive

In 1933, Beamish contracted tuberculosis and was forced to relinquish his commission due to ill health. By 1934, he was employed in a civilian post at No. 2 Flying Training School, Digby. In May 1936, he was appointed as civilian Adjutant at RAF Aldergrove and was commissioned as a Flight Lieutenant in the RAF Reserve of Officers. Beamish was reinstated onto the Active List with full flying status in January 1937. Posted to the Meteorological Flight also at RAF Aldergrove, the now Squadron Leader Beamish was awarded an AFC in January 1938.

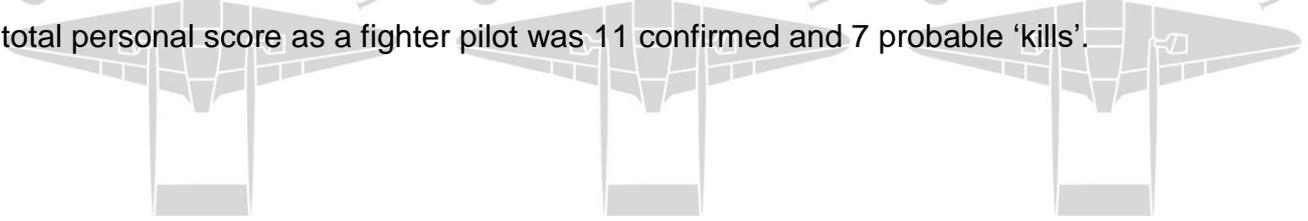
After attending RAF Staff College, Andover, Beamish was appointed to command No. 504 Squadron, Digby.

Promoted to Wing Commander in 1940, he assumed command of RAF North Weald, whose Hawker Hurricanes played a key role in the Battle of Britain. Beamish took every opportunity to fly operationally. Shooting down two Messerschmitts and a Dornier Do17 bomber in June and July 1940, he was awarded a DSO on 23 July. At the height of the Battle of Britain, he claimed a number of 'kills' and 'probable kills': including: Messerschmitts, Junkers Ju 87s, Heinkel He 111s and a Dornier Do 17. On 8 November, he was awarded a DFC.

In March 1941, Beamish was posted to HQ No. 11 Group, RAF Uxbridge. Unable to fly routinely he still seized opportunities to take part in operational sorties. In September, Acting Group Captain Beamish was awarded a Bar to his DSO. The award reflected the gallantry he had displayed in the 71 operational sorties he had flown between October 1940 and March 1941.

In January 1942, he was appointed to command RAF Kenley. On 28 March 1942, Beamish leading the Kenley Wing, engaged a formation of Messerschmitt Bf 109s and Focke Wulf Fw 190s south of Calais. In the ensuing battle, Beamish was shot down and killed.

His total personal score as a fighter pilot was 11 confirmed and 7 probable 'kills'.



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JOHN HANNAH

27 November 1921 – 9 June 1947

Royal Air Force

Victoria Cross

“This airman displayed courage, coolness and devotion to duty of the highest order and by his action in remaining and successfully extinguishing the fire under conditions of the greatest danger and difficulty, enabled the pilot to bring the aircraft to its base.”

The London Gazette, 1 October 1940.

John Hannah was to become the youngest recipient of a Victoria Cross for aerial operations. After completing his education at Glasgow Secondary School, he became a shoe salesman, before enlisting in the RAF for six years on 15 August 1939.

After initial training in: wireless, bombing and gunnery, Hannah was promoted to Sergeant on 27 May 1940. On 11 August 1940, he was posted to RAF Scampton, joining No. 83 Squadron operating Handley Page Hampden bombers, who were carrying out day and night raids on German occupied ports.

On the night of 15-16 September 1940, No 83 Squadron was tasked with bombing the port of Antwerp. For this mission Hannah was the wireless operator/gunner of Hampden P1335, flown by Pilot Officer Connor.

The outbound journey was uneventful until the approach to Antwerp, where they encountered searchlights and anti-aircraft fire. Connor began his bombing run, under heavy fire. The bomb load was successfully dropped, but before Connor could manoeuvre the aircraft to safety, they were hit in the bomb bay. Shrapnel ripped chunks out of the Hampden and pierced the wing petrol tanks, almost instantly the rear of the fuselage exploded enveloping Hannah's post in flames. Hannah saw the alloy flooring under his feet melting, the electrical wiring was alight and the extreme heat was causing the ammunition drums in their racks to explode.

Hannah informed Connor that the aircraft was on fire. The rear gunner and navigator baled out. Hannah could have acted likewise, but instead decided to remain and fight the fire. With great difficulty Hannah managed to reach the fire extinguishers which were near his post and began to fight the fire.

Hannah was being overcome by fumes and heat. Trying and failing to suck in pure oxygen through his face mask, he returned to his post, flipped open the Perspex cupola leaned out into the slipstream and gulped in air. Hannah returned to the fire, using up the extinguishers, he then tried to beat out the flames with his log book and finally with his hands, sustaining terrible injuries. Finally Hannah was able to inform the pilot that the fire had been extinguished. Connor and Hannah eventually landed, in the almost destroyed aircraft, at Scampton at 0300 hours on 16 September.

On 1 October 1940, John Hannah was awarded the Victoria Cross, while still a patient at Rauceby Hospital. After his discharge from hospital, he accompanied Connor (who was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross) to Buckingham Palace on 10 October 1940 for their investiture. Hannah never returned to operational flying but remained in the RAF undertaking instructional duties and was promoted to Flight Sergeant on 1 April 1941. Hannah's health deteriorated and he contracted tuberculosis. He was discharged from the RAF on 10 December 1942 on a full disability pension and was unable to take up full time work. John Hannah died in Markfield Sanatorium, Leicester on 9 June 1947.

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MARMADUKE THOMAS ST JOHN

'PAT' PATTLE

3 July 1914 – 20 April 1941

Royal Air Force

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Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) & Bar

"This courageous and skilful fighter pilot has now destroyed at least 23 enemy aircraft."

The London Gazette, 18 March 1941.

Pat Pattle was South African by birth. In 1933, he applied to join the South African Air Force but was rejected. In June 1936, he travelled to England in order to join the RAF and began training in Tiger Moths at a civil flying school, Prestwick, before transferring to No.10 Elementary Flying School, Ternhill, Shropshire. In August, he was commissioned as an Acting Pilot Officer and in November commenced advanced training in Gloster Gauntlets

In 1937, Pattle was posted to No. 80 Squadron, Debden operating Gloster Gladiators. In April 1938, the Squadron transferred to Egypt to defend the Suez Canal and in December he was promoted to Flying Officer.

Following the outbreak of war in 1939, the Squadron moved to the Libyan border. In August 1940, Pattle experienced his first combat against the Italians claiming the shooting down of a Breda Ba 65 and a Fiat CR 42 on 4 August. Four days later the Squadron attacked a formation of sixteen CR42s and he destroyed two more CR 42s. On 3 September, Pattle was promoted to Flight Lieutenant. On 16 November, the Squadron transferred to Athens where he achieved most of his victories. Between 19 November and the end of December, he destroyed six Fiat Cr 42s, two IMAM RO 37 bis's, one Savoia-Marchetti S79, one Savoia-Marchetti S81, probably destroyed two further Fiat CR 42s and damaged yet another Fiat CR 42, and finally claimed four shared kills of Savoia-Marchetti S79 bombers.

On 11 February 1941, having achieved several more victories Pattle was awarded a DFC. On 20 February, No. 80 Squadron was re equipped with Hawker Hurricane Mk 1s. On 27 February, he shot down a Fiat CR 42 and on the following day destroyed a further three in three minutes. March was a significant month as he was promoted to Squadron Leader, assigned to No. 33 Squadron and awarded a Bar to his DFC.

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The Battle for Greece began on 6 April and he claimed 26 aircraft shot down in 14 days, destroying 5 or more a day on three occasions. On 19 April, Pattle destroyed 3 Junkers Ju 88s, a share in another, a Henschel Hs 126, a Savoia-Marchetti SM 79 and a Messerschmitt Bf 109.

On the morning of 20 April, the Germans attacked Allied shipping in Piraeus Harbour, Athens. Flying with a high temperature and fever Pattle shot down a Junkers Ju 88 and two Messerschmitt Bf 109s. In the afternoon still ill but determined to fly he engaged a Messerschmitt Bf 109. It is not known what happened in the engagement but Pattle crashed into the sea and was killed.



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GEORGE THOMPSON

23 October 1920 – 23 January 1945

Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve

Victoria Cross

“Flight Sergeant Thompson died of his injuries. One of the gunners unfortunately also died, but the other owes his life to the superb gallantry of Flight Sergeant Thompson, whose signal courage and self-sacrifice will ever be an inspiration to the Service.”

The London Gazette, 20 February 1945.

George Thompson came from Perthshire, the son of a ploughman. On leaving school he became an apprentice grocer and completed his apprenticeship just as war was declared. He joined the Local Defence Volunteers and in the summer of 1940 he applied to join the RAF but was deferred. He volunteered again as a pilot and attended a selection board in January 1941, but was not selected. Three days later he joined the RAF Volunteer Reserve and opted to train as a wireless operator.

Thompson completed his training in October 1941 and served at Coningsby before being posted to Iraq in 1942. Eighteen months later he again applied for aircrew and this time was accepted. In August 1943 he returned to England, successfully retrained as an aircrew wireless operator and was promoted to Sergeant.

In May 1944, Thompson reported to No. 14 Operational Training Unit, Market Harborough, where he was recommended to Flying Officer Harry Denton who was forming his aircrew. He was joined by two air gunners, Sergeants Price and Potts. Training was undertaken on Short Stirling Bombers near Lincoln, followed by a conversion course to Lancasters. In September 1944, they were posted to No. 9 Squadron, Bardney to commence operations.

Thompson was promoted to Flight Sergeant in November 1944.

At 0745 hours on 1 January 1945, Denton and his crew in Lancaster PD377 'U' took off to raid the Dortmund-Ems canal. Visibility was good and Denton made a perfect approach dropping the bomb load on target but before they could turn for home they were hit by flak which damaged the pilot's Perspex canopy and set fire to one of the port engines. Denton was unaware that another shell had blown a six foot hole in the fuselage starting a fire that engulfed the dorsal gunner, Potts. Thompson could see that the fire was spreading and that both gunners were in serious danger. Without wearing gloves he went to their aid. Clinging by his fingers Thompson eased past the gaping hole to reach the unconscious Potts. With his flying suit now alight, Thompson lifted the unconscious Potts and carried him over the hole to safety. He then turned his attention to Price in the rear turret.

Price had decided to bale out but on opening his hatch he was enveloped in a rush of flame. He closed the hatch and heard Thompson knocking from inside the plane. Thompson assisted the burned and shocked Price from his turret and through the fuselage to join Potts. Meanwhile Denton managed to control the crippled plane which came under further flak whilst crossing the Rhine, this time a starboard engine was damaged. A Spitfire Squadron saw the crippled plane and attempted to guide it to their base. But by now PD377 'U' was only feet above the ground and Denton successfully crash landed in a field.

The three badly burned crew men were initially evacuated to a hospital in Eindhoven. Potts died from his injuries. Price eventually made a full recovery. Initially, Thompson started to recover but contracted pneumonia and on 23 January 1945 he died.

Flight Sergeant Thompson was posthumously awarded a Victoria Cross on 20 February 1945.



WILLIAM REID

21 December 1921 – 28 November 2001

Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve

Victoria Cross

“Wounded in two attacks, without oxygen, suffering severely from cold, his navigator dead, his wireless operator fatally wounded, his aircraft crippled and defenceless, Flight Lieutenant Reid showed superb courage and leadership in penetrating a further 200 miles into enemy territory to attack one of the most strongly defended targets in Germany, every additional mile increasing the hazards of the long and perilous journey home. His tenacity and devotion to duty were beyond praise.”

The London Gazette, 14 December 1943

William Reid was from Glasgow and the son of a blacksmith. Educated at Coatbridge Secondary School, he joined the RAF Volunteer Reserve in April 1941.

He underwent initial pilot training at Newark. This was followed by postings to Canada and America to complete his training. At this time Reid held the rank of Sergeant. In June 1942, he was commissioned as a Pilot Officer, returned to the UK and was posted to Little Rissington to be trained on Airspeed Oxfords. In September 1942, he arrived at North Luffenham, to be ‘crewed up’ prior to operational postings. His skill as a pilot however led to him being assigned to instructional duties.



Airspeed Oxford
Image – CAHM Archive

In July 1943, Reid was sent to 1654 Conversion Unit, Newark to train on Avro Lancasters. He was then posted to No. 61 Squadron, also at Newark, where his first missions were on targets including: Hanover, Mannheim, Munich, and Stuttgart.

On 3 November 1943, now an acting Flight Lieutenant Reid took off in Lancaster LM360 'O' on his 10th operational mission, a raid on Dusseldorf.

Crossing the Dutch Coast, his aircraft was attacked by a fighter, the windscreen shattered and Reid suffered shrapnel wounds to his head, face and shoulders. The compass and port elevator were destroyed and the hydraulics were damaged but Reid regained control and continued his mission. Reid's Lancaster was then attacked by a Focke-Wulf Fw 190 which raked the length of the fuselage with cannon shell. The navigator was killed, the wireless operator and flight engineer were wounded and Reid suffered further injuries. The oxygen system was ruptured and the hydraulics sustained further damage. The flight engineer fitted an oxygen bottle to Reid's line and they continued the mission using the pole star for navigation. Reid held the control column by wrapping both arms around it, to keep the plane steady and the bomb load was dropped on target.

On the homeward journey Reid became weaker from a lack of oxygen, and the plane again encountered flak, but thankfully received no further damage. Over the North Sea all the engines cut out. Reid was slow to react, but the engineer, instinctively switched to the reserve fuel supply.

In view of the damage and lack of fuel, Reid made for Wittering with its long runway, but on seeing the searchlights over Shipdham, Norfolk they crash landed there. To Reid's personal astonishment on 14 December 1943 he was awarded a Victoria Cross for this mission.

Reid was hospitalised and on discharge reported to No. 617 Squadron, Woodhall Spa, where he participated in numerous raids including several using the 'Tallboy Bomb'.

On 31 July 1944, whilst undertaking a raid on Rilly la Montagne, Rheims, Reid released his bomb load and felt his aircraft shudder. A bomb from a fellow bomber above had smashed through Reid's plane causing massive damage.

Reid gave the order to bale out. He was captured, imprisoned and repatriated in May 1945.

Reid was demobilised in 1946. He retained his commission in the RAF Volunteer Reserve until January 1949.

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KENNETH CAMPBELL

Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve

21 April 1917– 6 April 1941

Victoria Cross

“By pressing home his attack at close quarters in the face of a withering fire on a course fraught with extreme peril, Flying Officer Campbell displayed valour of the highest order.”

The London Gazette, 13 March 1942

Kenneth Campbell was born in Ayrshire and attended Clare College, Cambridge. He joined the University Air Squadron and in 1938 was commissioned as a Pilot Officer in the RAF Volunteer Reserve. Mobilised in September 1939, Campbell underwent a brief course of service training at Cranwell. In September 1940 now a Flying Officer he was posted to No. 22 Squadron, North Coats operating Bristol Beauforts. A number of the Squadron's Beauforts were deployed to St. Eval, Cornwall to be in range of ports and harbours around the Bay of Biscay.

Britain was dependant on supplies imported by sea. The Germans attempted to starve Britain into submission by attacking the convoys, using battle cruisers including the *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*. Neutralising the threat was a British priority.

In March 1941, the *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* moored in Brest harbour. Bomber Command raided the harbour but no serious damage was inflicted to the ships. A bomb fell close to *Gneisenau* failing to explode and the ship was moved to Brest harbour so that the bomb could be defused. On 5 April, the *Gneisenau's* vulnerable position was identified by a reconnaissance flight. Beauforts from No. 22 Squadron at St. Eval were tasked with attacking the following day.

The mission was to be carried out by six bombers, three would bomb the protective torpedo nets and three would torpedo the *Gneisenau*. Brest harbour was well defended with three harbour flak vessels and some 1000 guns in the surrounding hills providing impenetrable cross fire.

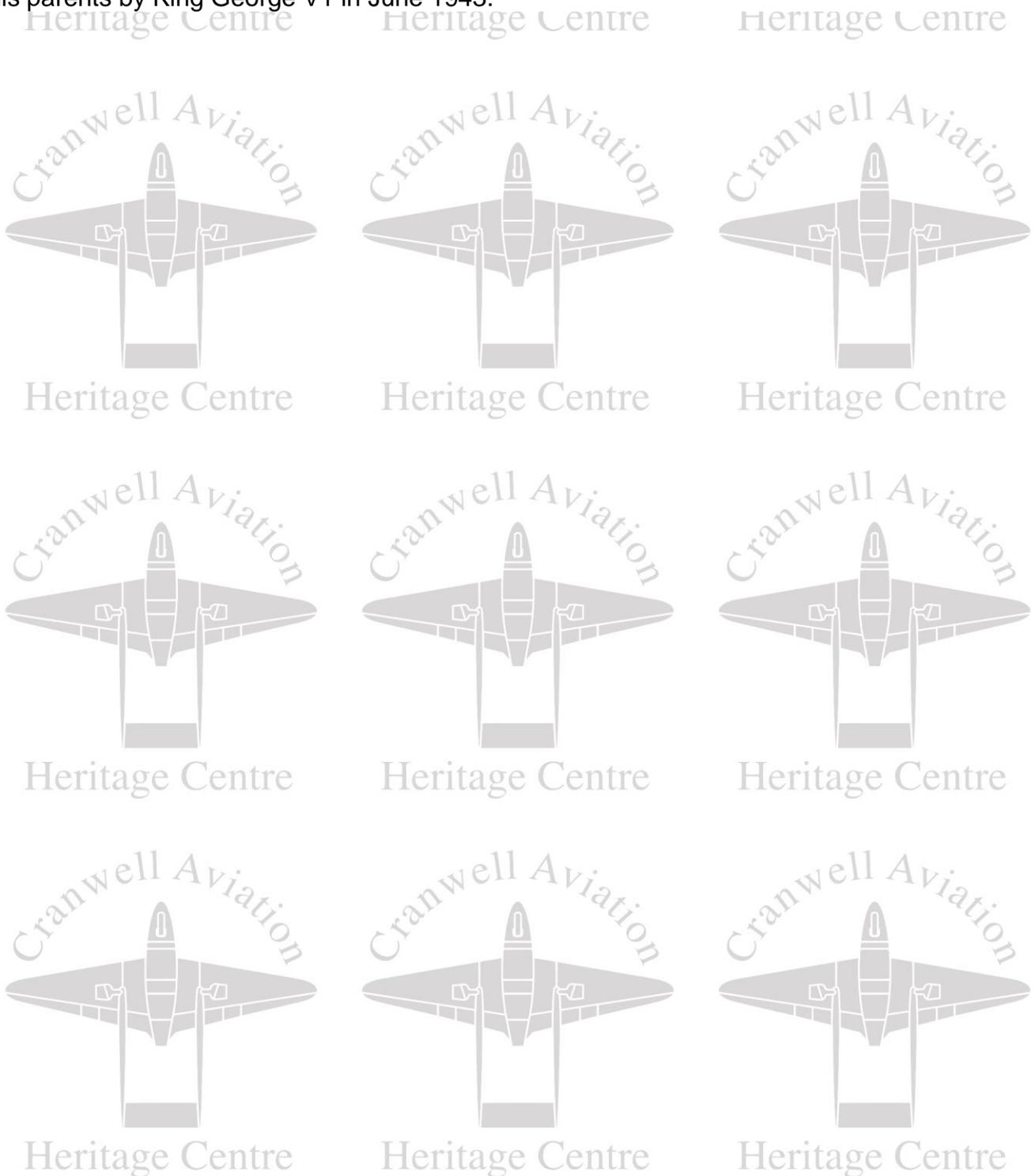
Flying Officer Hyde DFC, Sergeant Camp and Campbell flying his twentieth operational mission were selected to attack the ship. They were to take before the bombing trio and fly independently to the outskirts of Brest. Once there they were to wait until the bombers had attacked the torpedo nets. Their take off was staggered at intervals between 0430 hours and 0500 hours. Campbell was the first to take off.

The bombing failed, two Beauforts bogged down in mud were unable to take off and the third failed to reach Brest by the scheduled time.

Reaching the outskirts of Brest, Campbell circled waiting to hear explosions caused by the bombing trio. Close to daybreak and becoming visible to the enemy, unaware if Hyde and Camp

had made it to Brest, he decided to attack. Approaching the harbour at 300 feet diving to less than 50 feet, racing between the flak ships masts he reached the stone mole protecting the inner harbour. His torpedo needed to be dropped immediately and on release Campbell put his Beaufort into a climbing turn to seek cover in the clouds. At that exact moment the harbour defences successfully fired on Campbell's aircraft and he crashed into the harbour. Campbell and his crew were killed.

Campbell's torpedo inflicted serious damage to the *Gneisenau* and eight months later the ship was still in dry dock. Reports of Campbell's bravery eventually filtered back to the UK via the French Resistance and he was subsequently awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross, which was presented to his parents by King George VI in June 1943.



JAMES BRIAN TAIT

9 December 1916 – 31 August 2007

Royal Air Force

Distinguished Service Order (DSO) & 3 Bars, Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) & Bar

“This officer has displayed conspicuous bravery and extreme devotion to duty in the face of the enemy, constantly exemplified over a long period of operational flying.”

The London Gazette, 9 January 1945.

Born in Manchester, James Tait was inspired to join the RAF after visiting a Schneider Trophy event in 1928. He attended RAF College, Cranwell and on graduation was commissioned as a Pilot Officer on 1 August 1936.

Tait's first posting was to No. 51 Squadron, operating Armstrong Whitworth Whitley bombers. He was promoted to Flying Officer in February 1938. Tait undertook numerous operations during 1940 including several raids on Berlin, and the first British raid on Turin, Italy. He was promoted to Flight Lieutenant in February 1940. In October that year, the now Acting Squadron Leader Tait, was awarded a DFC.

By the end of 1940, Tait was commanding No. 51 Squadron and in February 1941 he led an operation which flew from Malta to drop paratroopers in Southern Italy, earning him a DSO. In March 1941, he was given a temporary promotion to Squadron Leader which was later made substantive.

Tait then joined No. 35 Squadron, Linton-On-Ouse, operating Handley Page Halifax. He was awarded a Bar to his DSO for leading a daylight raid on Kiel in June 1941. Subsequently he was rested from operations. Despite this, he took part in three of the 'Thousand Bomber Raids' in early 1942.

Tait assumed command of No. 78 Squadron in 1942, and was made a temporary Wing Commander in June of that year. In 1944, he was assigned as the non-flying, Base Operations Commander, Waddington. However, he continued to fly missions and was promoted to substantive Wing Commander in March 1944. On returning to operational duties in May 1944, Tait became Master Bomber of No. 5 Group. His gallantry whilst in this post resulted in him being awarded a second Bar to his DSO.

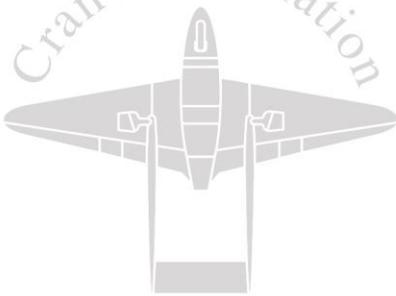
In July 1944, Tait succeeded Leonard Cheshire as commander of No. 617 Squadron, Woodhall Spa, operating Avro Lancasters. The Squadron undertook several raids on V1 and V2 sites using

the 'Tallboy bomb'. He was awarded a Bar to his DFC for a low level daylight raid on the Kembs Dam, Germany.

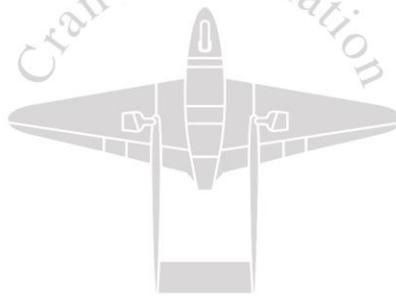
On 15 September 1944, Tait led a formation of Lancasters from No's 617 and 9 Squadron on *Operation Paravane*. Flying from an airfield in Russia, they attacked the German battleship *Tirpitz*. The ship was badly damaged and was moved to Tromsø, Norway. On 28 October, he led his force on an unsuccessful second raid on the *Tirpitz* when heavy cloud obscured the target. On 12 November, Tait led his force against the *Tirpitz* for the third time, achieving three direct hits causing the ship to capsize.

In December 1944, after completing 101 missions Tait was grounded, and posted to train Canadian bomber crews. Recommended for a Victoria Cross, for the bravery he had shown throughout the war, Tait was awarded a third Bar to his DSO instead, which is unique to any member of the RAF.

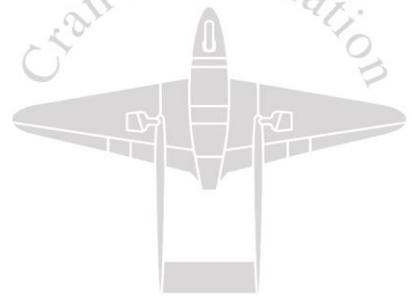
He remained in the RAF after the war, finally retiring as a Group Captain in 1964.



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JOHN RANDALL DANIEL BRAHAM

6 April 1920 – 7 February 1974

Royal Air Force

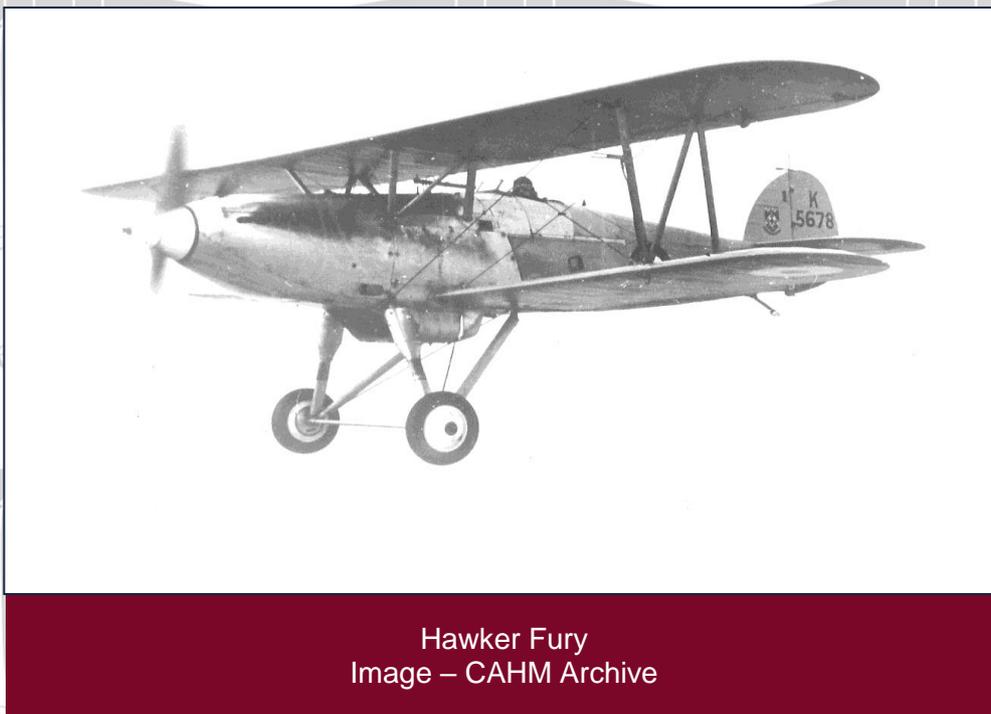
Distinguished Service Order (DSO) & 2 Bars, Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) & 2 Bars, Air Force Cross (AFC)

“This officer has displayed the highest qualities of skill and leadership and his achievements are a splendid testimony to his courage and fighting spirit.”

The London Gazette, 13 June 1944.

John Braham was the son of a Methodist Minister. On leaving public school he worked as a clerk in the Greater Manchester Police Force, until joining the RAF on a Short Service Commission in 1937.

In December 1937, Braham began flight training at No. 7 Elementary Flying School, Desford and completed his first solo flight in a Tiger Moth in March 1938. In May, Braham commenced Officer training at RAF Uxbridge. This was followed by fighter pilot training using Hawker Harts and Furies. In December 1938, he was posted to No. 29 Squadron, West Malling operating Hawker Demons and later Bristol Blenheims.



Hawker Fury
Image – CAHM Archive

During the Battle of Britain (July to October 1940), No. 29 Squadron relocated to Wellingore and on 24 August Braham shot down his first enemy aircraft, a Heinkel He III. In September, the Squadron was re-equipped with Bristol Beaufighters. During 'The Blitz' (September 1940-May 1941), Braham claimed the destruction of two aircraft. Flying Officer Braham was awarded a DFC in January 1941.

Braham continued to operate as an anti-intruder pilot encountering Dornier Do 17s and Heinkel He IIIs. He became an ace in September 1941, having shot down five enemy aircraft. In November 1941, now a Flight Lieutenant he was awarded a Bar to his DFC, for having shot down "6 hostile aircraft, bringing his total victories to at least 7 destroyed, 1 probably destroyed and a further 2 damaged."

In October 1942, Acting Squadron Leader Braham was awarded a DSO for having shot down a total of 10 enemy aircraft and was by this time one of the RAF's most successful night fighter pilots.

Braham was assigned to command No. 141 Squadron, which by May 1943 was based at RAF Wittering. The Squadron's role was to fly intruder sorties over occupied Europe. In June 1943 now an Acting Wing Commander he received a second bar to his DFC reflecting his having destroyed 11 enemy aircraft damaging a U-Boat and destroying an E-Boat. In the following months Braham shot down a further five aircraft and in September, he was awarded a Bar to his DSO.

In February 1944, Braham was posted to the operations staff at No. 2 Group, where he was only permitted to fly the occasional sortie. This didn't deter him and he flew several missions in de Havilland Mosquitos, shooting down numerous enemy aircraft. In June 1944, having destroyed a total of at least 29 enemy planes, Braham was awarded a second Bar to his DSO.

Later that month, whilst on a sortie over Denmark he was shot down by a pair of Focke-Wulf Fw 190s. Braham was captured and sent to a Prisoner of War camp in Germany until being liberated in May 1945.

After the war Braham stayed in the RAF joining the Night Fighter Development Wing. In January 1951, he was awarded an AFC. In May 1952, Braham retired from the RAF, retaining the rank of Wing Commander.

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JOHN DERING NETTLETON

28 June 1917 – 13 July 1943

Royal Air Force

Victoria Cross

“Squadron Leader Nettleton, who has successfully undertaken many other hazardous operations, displayed unflinching determination as well as leadership and valour of the highest order.”

The London Gazette, 28 April 1942.

Born in Natal, South Africa, John Nettleton was the grandson of Admiral ATD Nettleton, Royal Navy. He applied to join the Royal Navy but failed the entrance exam. In 1938, whilst on holiday in England, Nettleton decided to join the Royal Air Force and underwent basic pilot training at No. 8 Elementary and Reserve Flying Training School, Reading and was accepted into the RAF on a Short Service Commission. He underwent subsequent training at No. 12 Flying Training School, Grantham and No. 11 Flying Training School, Shawbury.

Graduating as a pilot in July 1939, Nettleton was posted to No. 207 Squadron, Cottesmore. In November 1939 he joined No. 185 Squadron, an operational training unit also at Cottesmore. Nettleton was then posted to various instructional establishments until in June 1941 he joined No. 44 (Rhodesia) Squadron, Waddington operating Handley Page Hampden bombers. In September 1941, he was promoted to Flight Lieutenant. Later that year the Squadron was re-equipped with Avro Lancasters.

On 3 March 1942, Nettleton took part in the Squadron's first mission using Lancasters, a mine drop on Heligoland Bight, Germany.

On 17 April 1942, the Squadron was tasked with a daylight raid on the diesel engine factory at Ausburg, Germany. At 1512 hours, Acting Squadron Leader Nettleton took off in Lancaster R5508 B, one of six Lancaster from 44 Squadron rendezvousing with six more Lancasters from 97 Squadron, Woodall Spa led by Squadron Leader JS Sherwood DFC. They flew in V formations of three aircraft. Spitfires and Boston Bombers flew ahead to distract any enemy from the Lancasters' route.

On crossing the French coast, Nettleton's six aircraft had drawn ahead but Sherwood did not try to catch up as the mission plan included the option of separate attacks. No opposition was met until Nettleton's V formations (now well ahead of Sherwood) skirted Beaumont le Roger airfield, where Messerschmitt Bf 109s and Focke-Wulf Fw 190s were in the process of landing after having attacked the diversionary force, and some of them engaged Nettleton's flight. The rear formation of three aircraft was destroyed and one of the front trio was also shot down. The German fighters

ceased the attack due to running low on fuel and the two remaining Lancasters completed a successful bombing run but both were severely damaged by anti-aircraft fire. The Lancaster accompanying Nettleton crash landed.

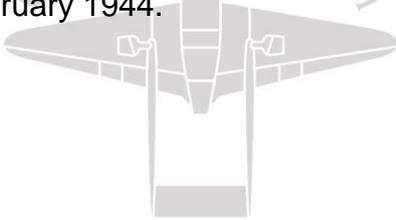
Sherwood's formation began their run. Sherwood's plane was hit, burst into flames and flew into the ground, miraculously Sherwood survived. Another of his Lancasters was also shot down but the remaining four bombed the target and turned for home.

Nettleton successfully returned his damaged aircraft and crew home, landing near Blackpool at 0100 hours.

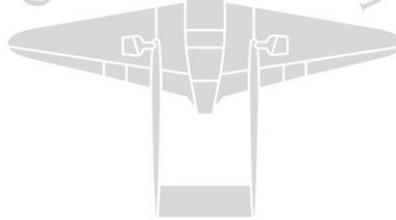
Of the twelve aircraft on this mission seven failed to return.

On 28 April 1942, Nettleton was awarded a Victoria Cross.

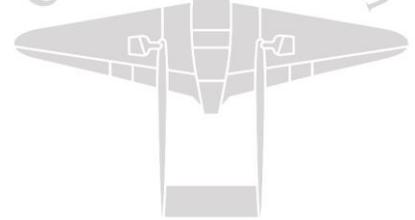
On the night of 12-13 July 1943, Nettleton took off to raid Turin and failed to return. It was assumed that he was shot down off the French coast and he was officially presumed dead on 23 February 1944.



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ADRIAN WARBURTON

10 March 1918 – 12 April 1944

Royal Air Force

Distinguished Service Order (DSO) & Bar, Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) & 2 Bars

"This officer has carried out many missions each of which has demanded the highest degree of courage and skill".

The London Gazette, 20 March 1942.

Adrian Warburton was born in Middlesbrough, the son of a Naval Officer. He joined the RAF and after flight training became a Pilot Officer in October 1939. Warburton was then posted to No. 605 Squadron, North Yorkshire operating Blackburn Bothas. His criticisms of the aircraft resulted in a transfer to 431 Flight, RAF detachment, Malta as an Observer in Martin Maryland aircraft.

Within four days Warburton was reinstated as a pilot and rapidly gained a reputation as a bold and unconventional flier. In October 1940, he shot down an Italian Z.506B seaplane. Days later he was injured and became unconscious after being hit by a bullet from an enemy aircraft, remaining aloft only with the aid of a crewman.

On 10 November 1940, 431 Flight located Italian Battleships in Taranto harbour, Italy. A night attack was ordered and Warburton flew the reconnaissance mission the following day but his cameras failed and he decided to fly at such a low altitude that his Observer was able to identify the targets by name. The intelligence gathered resulted in the torpedo attack being successful. Warburton was promoted to Flying Officer in December.

In January 1941, Warburton was awarded a DFC for "devotion to duty". His reputation as a reconnaissance pilot had developed such that his superiors overlooked his eccentricities. The Maryland's armaments were mainly for defence but this didn't prevent Warburton from claiming eight "kills", five of which were in the air and the remaining three were targets on the ground or afloat. He was awarded a Bar to his DFC in September 1941. In December he was promoted to Flight Lieutenant.

Warburton was then sent on detachment to Egypt where he "acquired" a Bristol Beaufighter which he stripped of armour and guns, equipped it with a camera and flew it back to Malta. He used it until it was destroyed on a mission.

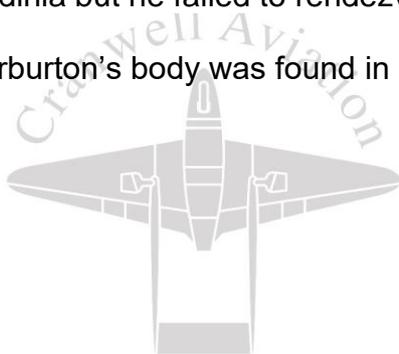
Warburton ended his second tour in March 1942 and was awarded a DSO. In October, now an Acting Squadron Leader he won a second Bar to his DFC.

In February 1943, Warburton became a substantive Squadron Leader, reconnoitring the Sicily beaches prior to invasion was his mission. In August, commanding No. 683 Squadron and now an Acting Wing Commander he was awarded a Bar to his DSO. In October, Warburton was assigned to command a new Photo-Reconnaissance Wing.

By the beginning of 1944 Warburton had flown 400 missions, claimed nine enemy aircraft "kills". In April, he was posted as RAF Liaison Officer to the 7th Photographic Reconnaissance Group USAAF, Mount Farm Oxfordshire.

On 12 April, Warburton flew one of two Lockheed F-5Bs on a mission over Germany. The aircraft separated north of Munich to carry out their tasks, planning to meet and proceed to a US base in Sardinia but he failed to rendezvous.

Warburton's body was found in his crashed plane near Munich in 2002.



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BRENDAN EAMONN FERGUS FINUCANE

16 October 1920 – 15 July 1942

Royal Air Force

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**Distinguished Service Order (DSO),
Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) & 2
Bars**

"This officer has led his flight with great dash, determination and courage in the face of the enemy."

The London Gazette, 9 September 1941

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Brendan Finucane was born in Ireland, moving in 1936 to England, he finished his education and became an accountant. Finucane joined the RAF in June 1938, training at No. 6 Elementary and Reserve Flying Training School, Sywell operating Tiger Moths. In October he was commissioned as an Acting Pilot Officer and sent to No. 8 Flying Training School, Montrose, operating Hawker Harts and spent the winter of 1939-40 as co-pilot in a Vickers Virginia. In June 1940, he was posted to No. 7 Operational Training Unit, Hawarden for conversion to Supermarine Spitfires, and in July to No. 65 Squadron, Hornchurch.

On 12 August, the Squadron engaged 30 Messerschmitt Bf 109s, Finucane dived at the formation, firing, causing one to crash. He returned to base and whilst re-fuelling, Messerschmitt Bf 110s and Dornier Do 17s attacked. Finucane managed to get airborne and engaged, claiming one as probable kill, and another damaged. Between 13 and 27 August, he destroyed one Messerschmitt Bf 109 and one Bf 110, one probable Messerschmitt Bf 109 and the shared destruction of a Junkers Ju 88. On 28 August, the Squadron moved to Turnhouse, Edinburgh, where Finucane was promoted to Flying Officer and in November, they moved to Tangmere, Sussex.

In early 1941, Finucane shot down a Messerschmitt Bf 110 and the shared victory of a Junkers Ju 88 and was posted as a Flight Commander to No. 452 Squadron and promoted to acting Flight Lieutenant. Finucane was awarded a DFC on 13 May 1941. In July, No. 452 Squadron was moved to Kenley, joining two other squadrons to form the 'Kenley Wing'. Finucane was awarded a Bar to his DFC on 9 September, quickly followed on 26 September by a second Bar.

During the period between 4 January and 13 October, Finucane claimed 20 aircraft destroyed, the shared destruction of three, two damaged and a further two probably destroyed, and was awarded a DSO on 11 October 1941.

In January 1942, Finucane was posted to No. 602 Squadron, Redhill as commander, and was promoted to Squadron Leader, on the arrival of the new Station Commander, Group Captain Beamish. In June, he became the youngest Wing Commander in the RAF and leader of the 'Hornchurch Wing'.

During January and June 1942 Finucane destroyed six Focke Wulf Fw 190s, damaging four, claiming two probable destructions and two shared, along with one shared destruction of a Junkers Ju 88 and one destruction and a shared destruction of Messerschmitt Bf 109s.

On 15 July 1942, Finucane took off with his flight to target a German Army Camp at Étapes, France. His Spitfire was damaged by ground fire, and Finucane attempted to fly back to England, but was forced to ditch in the sea. In October, a Casualty Communique stated that Acting Wing Commander Finucane was 'missing believed killed in action'.



ERIC STANLEY LOCK

19 April 1919 – 3 August 1941

Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve

Distinguished Service Order (DSO), Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) & Bar

“This officer has shown exceptional keenness and courage in his attacks against the enemy....His magnificent fighting spirit and personal example have been in the highest traditions of the service.”

The London Gazette, 17 Dec 1940.

Eric Lock was born in Staffordshire to a farming family. After leaving school he worked on the family farm before joining RAFVR as an Airman in February 1939, and training at 28 Elementary and Reserve Flying Training School, Stoke-on-Trent. Lock was mobilised on 1 September 1939 as a Sergeant Pilot, and sent to No 6 Service Flying Training School, Little Rissington. On graduation in June 1940, he was commissioned a Pilot Officer and posted to No 41 Squadron, Catterick operating Spitfires.

Early in the Battle of Britain No 41 Squadron, was largely unaffected. Until, on 15 August 1940 the enemy attacked targets in Northern England. It was in this offensive that Lock experienced combat. Spotting a formation of Messerschmitt Bf 110s and Junker Ju 88s an attack was ordered and Lock shot down a Messerschmitt Bf 110 followed by a Junker Ju 88.

With a need for more Squadrons in the South, No 41 Squadron was transferred to Hornchurch in September 1940. On 5 September, flying as Red 2, Lock shot down two Heinkel He 111s followed by a further two Messerschmitt Bf 109. He claimed his seventh victory the following day, a Junker Ju 88. Between 9 and 11 September, he claimed two more Messerschmitt Bf 109s, a Messerschmitt Bf 110 and Junker Ju 88. Lock was awarded the DFC on 1 October 1940 for “great vigour and determination in pressing home his attacks”.

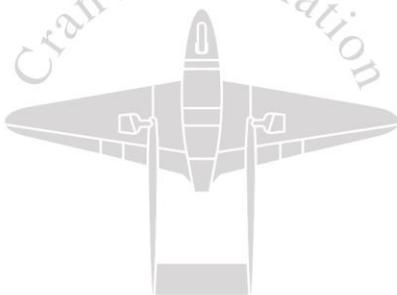
Continuing his victories, Lock claimed four Messerschmitt Bf 109s, a shared victory on a Dornier Do 17, and probable victories over two Messerschmitt Bf 109s between 14 and 18 September. On 20 September he filed a report claiming attacks on three Heinkel He 113s, one of which he shot down, and a Henschel Hs 126 which he pursued before shooting it down too. On landing Lock learned that he had received a Bar to his DFC for ‘15 victories in 19 days’.

On 5 October, he is credited with a victory and two probable victories over Messerschmitt Bf 109s, and between 9 and 20 October three victories and a probable victory against Messerschmitt Bf

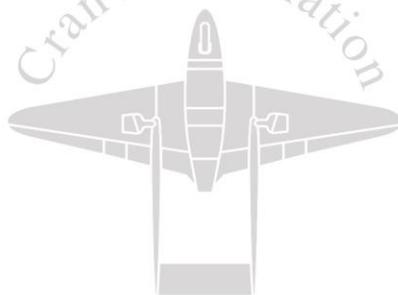
109s, bring his tally to twenty. On the 25 October, he shot down a Messerschmitt Bf 109, bringing his total to 21 victories during the Battle of Britain.

On 17 November after engaging an enemy formation and destroying two Messerschmitt Bf 109's Lock came under attack and was wounded. He managed to land, but it took several hours before Lock was rescued. Unconscious due to blood loss, he was taken to Princess Mary's Hospital, Halton, where he spent several months. Lock was awarded a DSO on 17 December 1940. In June 1941, Lock was promoted to Flying Officer and reported back to No 41 Squadron, The following month he was promoted again to Flight Lieutenant, posted to No 611 Squadron in command of 'B' Flight, and shot down three Messerschmitt Bf 109s.

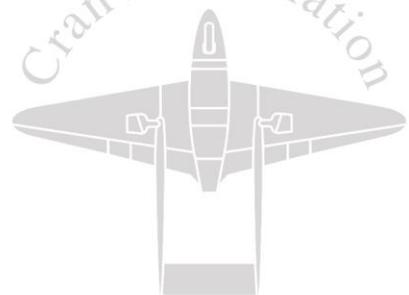
On 3 August 1941, Lock was returning from a mission over France when he spotted a column of German troops, peeling off, he prepared for a ground strafing attack. Lock is believed to have been shot down and killed but his body and aircraft have never been located.



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JAMES EDGAR 'JOHNNIE' JOHNSON

9 March 1915 – 30 January 2001

Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve

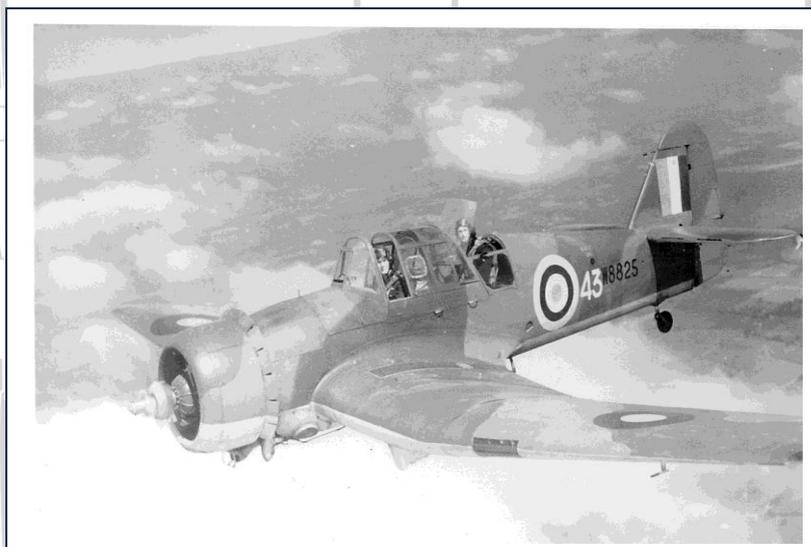
Distinguished Service Order (DSO) & 2 Bars, Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) & Bar

"This officer has led a wing on a large number of occasions and has displayed outstanding skill and gallantry."

The London Gazette, 4 June 1943.

James Johnson was the son of a police officer in the East Midlands. He completed his education at the University of Nottingham, qualifying as a civil engineer.

Johnson's first three attempts to join the Auxiliary Air Force failed and he joined the Leicestershire Yeomanry. Whilst on manoeuvres he saw a Hawker Hurricane, and decided to apply to join the RAFVR. Johnson was accepted in August 1939, commenced training at North Weald, in Tiger Moths, then moved on to No. 2 Initial Training Wing, Cambridge. He was promoted to Sergeant, and posted to No. 22 Elementary Flying Training School, Cambridge in December 1939. After transfers to No. 5 Flying Training School, Sealand and No. 7 Operational Training Unit, Hawarden operating Miles Master's Johnson completed training in August 1940.



Miles Master
Image – CAHM Archive

In September 1940, Pilot Officer Johnson was posted to No. 616 Squadron Coltishall, to begin operational flying in Spitfires. On 15 January, defending a convoy off North Coates, the controller indicated the presence of a Dornier Do 17, Johnson attacked, and was credited with damaging it. In early 1941, the Squadron moved to Tangmere to fly as part of Douglas Bader's Wing. On 26 June, Johnson attacked a Messerschmitt Bf 109E gaining his first aerial victory. Between early July and late August five victories followed against Messerschmitt Bf 109Es, as well as one probable victory and damage to a Messerschmitt Bf 109. On 30 September Johnson was awarded a DFC.

On 31 January 1942, the Squadron moved to Kings Cliffe, and on 15 April Johnson claimed a victory over a Focke-Wulf Fw 190. In June, acting Flight Lieutenant Johnson was awarded a Bar to his DFC, followed by promotion to Squadron Leader and command of No. 610 Squadron in July. On 19 August, he took off in support of a raid on Dieppe, encountering formations of Messerschmitt Bf 109s and Focke-Wulf Fw 190s, Johnson shared in a victory over one Messerschmitt Bf 109 and shot down a Focke-Wulf Fw 190. For the remainder of 1942 the Squadron was moved to RAF Castletown to protect Scarpa Flow.

After Christmas, Johnson took command of No. 127 Wing RCAF, Kenley, operating Spitfire Mk IXs and gained a probable victory against a Focke-Wulf Fw 190 in February 1943. During the next few weeks, the Wing escorted USAAF bombers to targets in France and Johnson achieved another victory against a Focke-Wulf Fw 190. The summer of 1943 was busy for acting Wing Commander Johnson, receiving a DSO in June and taking 14 victories, one shared victory and a damage claim against Focke-Wulf Fw 190s as well as three victories and a shared victory against Messerschmitt Bf 109s. In September 1943, Johnson was awarded a Bar to his DSO.

Immediately before the D-Day landings, Johnson shot down three Focke-Wulf Fw 190s and after the landings he shot down a further three Messerschmitt Bf 109s and two Focke-Wulf Fw 190s. On 7 July 1944, Johnson was awarded a second Bar to his DSO.

Johnson's Wing was the first to be stationed on French soil after the invasion, and his victories continued; taking two more on 21 August. His final victory was on 27 September 1944 when he shot down a Messerschmitt Bf 109 over Nijmegen, Netherlands.

Johnson was promoted to Group Captain taking command of No. 125 Wing, which moved to Celle, Germany in April 1945.

Johnson continued his RAF career serving in the Korean War and retired in 1966 as an Air Vice Marshal.



GEORGE LEONARD 'JOHNNY' JOHNSON

25 November 1921 – to date

Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve

Distinguished Flying Medal (DFM)



Squadron Leader Johnson (far left)
Image – Wikimedia Commons – Public Domain

Johnny Johnson was born in Horncastle, the son of a farm manger. He attended boarding School in Hampshire with the intention of making a career in horticulture or farming. At the outbreak of World War Two he decided flying was to be his future.

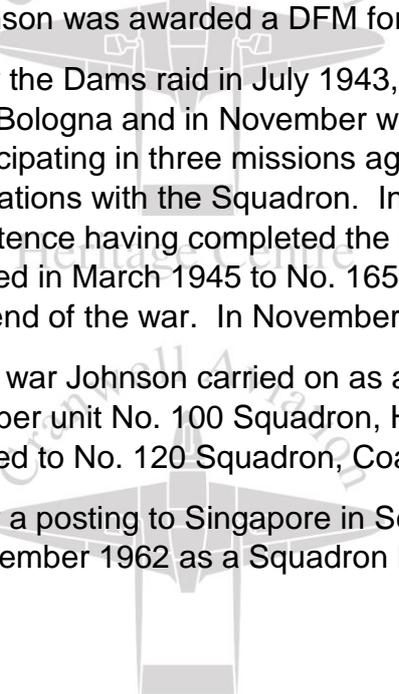
Johnson volunteered for the RAFVR in 1940 as aircrew, and after attending the Initial Training Wing was posted to the USA for further pilot training where he decided to re-muster as an Air Gunner. Returning to England, he was posted to No. 1654 Conversion Unit, Wigsley operating Lancasters and Manchesters and then in July 1942 to No. 97 Squadron, Coningsby where he retrained as a Bomb Aimer joining the crew of Flying Officer Joe McCarthy.

McCarthy's crew participated in 30 raids on German and Italian targets before being selected in March 1943 to become part of No. 617 Squadron, Scampton. McCarthy piloted one of the Lancasters that attacked the Sorpe Dam on 16 May 1943. Visibility over the dam was bad and it took half an hour and several approaches before releasing their bomb damaging the dam. Johnson was awarded a DFM for his contribution to the operation.

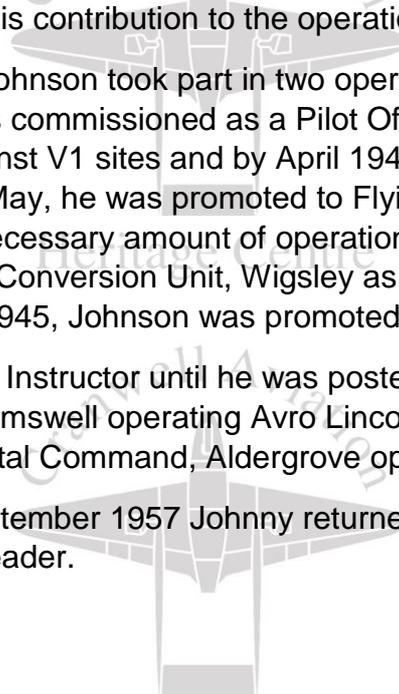
After the Dams raid in July 1943, Johnson took part in two operations against Italian targets Livarno and Bologna and in November was commissioned as a Pilot Officer. December saw Johnson participating in three missions against V1 sites and by April 1944 Johnson had completed 19 operations with the Squadron. In May, he was promoted to Flying Officer and at his captain's insistence having completed the necessary amount of operations for a second tour, Johnson was posted in March 1945 to No. 1654 Conversion Unit, Wigsley as an Instructor where he stayed until the end of the war. In November 1945, Johnson was promoted to Flight Lieutenant

Post war Johnson carried on as an Instructor until he was posted in January 1949 to a front line bomber unit No. 100 Squadron, Hemswell operating Avro Lincolns. In April 1950, Johnson was posted to No. 120 Squadron, Coastal Command, Aldergrove operating Shackletons.

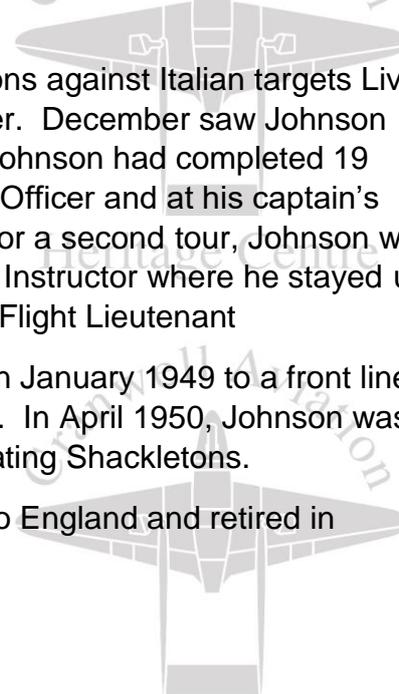
After a posting to Singapore in September 1957 Johnny returned to England and retired in September 1962 as a Squadron Leader.



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LESLIE CHAPMAN

1922 - 1 February 1945

Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve

Conspicuous Gallantry Medal (CGM)

“Sergeant Chapman also proved himself to be a gallant member of the aircraft crew.....he set a splendid example”

The London Gazette, 9 May 1944.



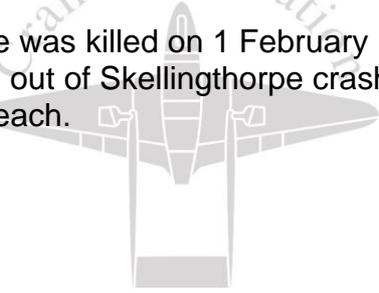
Flight Sergeant Chapman
Image – DG Patfield

Leslie Chapman was born at Moulton Marsh, Lincolnshire and served in the RAFVR with No. 61 Squadron, Coningsby operating Lancaster's.

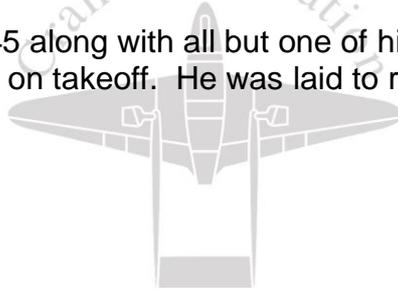
During an operation to bomb Nuremburg in March 1944 Flight Sergeant Chapman was the Wireless Operator in Lancaster R5856 whose pilot was Pilot Officer Freeman. Their aircraft was attacked north of Frankfurt by several Junker Ju 88's and Messerschmitt Me 110's. The Lancaster was damaged on the starboard wing, flaps and mid-upper and front turrets. Four of the crew were wounded including Chapman. The damage was so grave that Freeman decided to jettison his bomb load and return to base. Chapman remained at his post obtaining location readings despite being badly wounded in the back, neck and head in order to get the Lancaster back home. For his actions Flight Sergeant Chapman was awarded the CGM, and Pilot Officer Freeman received a DFC in the same action.

The CGM was the other ranks equivalent of the Distinguished Service Order and Chapman was one of only 89 Bomber Command recipients during WW2.

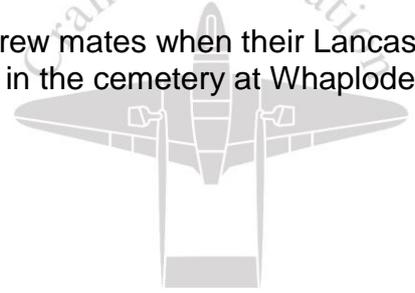
Leslie was killed on 1 February 1945 along with all but one of his crew mates when their Lancaster flying out of Skellingthorpe crashed on takeoff. He was laid to rest in the cemetery at Whaplode, Holbeach.



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