

FREDERICK MICHAEL “SPAM” SPAFFORD DFC, DFM. *Specialist Bomb-Aimer & ‘Dambuster’ - 617 Squadron RAF*



Portrait image of Fred Spafford (enhanced with AI) – Original Image from Jean Miller

Flying Officer Frederick Michael ‘Spam’ Spafford DFC DFM, was born in North Adelaide, South Australia on 16 June 1918. He was an only child. His father, James Michael Burke, a tannery foreman, died when Fred was only five years old and his mother, Vida Muriel Burke (nee Spafford), died three years later, in 1926. On 19 September 1929, Fred was adopted by his maternal grandfather, Frederick Blaker Spafford, a widower and ironworker, and Fred took the surname Spafford.

Unfortunately, not much is known about Fred’s early history beyond what has been able to be put together by Mrs Jean Miller. Mrs Miller’s own maternal grandfather, Walter John Spafford, was the brother of Fred’s mother Vida and therefore Fred’s uncle. Fred is known to have attended Grange Primary School and then Thebarton Technical School, where he excelled in swimming and football. He was also a member of the Grange Surf Lifesaving Club. On leaving school, Fred obtained an apprenticeship with Austral Sheet Metal at Thebarton and trained as a Fitter and Turner.



After me, the flood

Since becoming involved in the family history, Jean had begun to wonder if Fred was the son her grandparents Walter and Beat Spafford never had, having seen evidence of her grandfather at the Grange Surf Lifesaving Club, when he, nor his daughters, had any involvement in lifesaving and Walter Spafford was apparently not known to have watched his two daughters play hockey, even though they were both State players!

By 1938, Jean Miller’s mother and sister had left home but she thinks Fred was still based at her grandparents’ home at Prospect and still having contact with his grandfather, Frederick Spafford, until his grandfather’s death in March 1940.

Fred, aged 22 years, enlisted in the RAAF on 14 September 1940. At the time he named his uncle, Walter John Spafford as his next of kin. Walter Spafford, the then South Australian Director of Agriculture, had taken an immense interest in Fred, particularly during his war service with the RAAF, receiving constant updates through his contacts with consular personnel in London. Jean knew her grandfather had made contact with the families of fellow South Australian Dambusters David Shannon and Robert Hay and she was sure he relayed news of them to their families. Because of the hospitality Fred received while serving in England, Walter and Beat Spafford opened their house and hospitality to serving men and women on R&R in Adelaide.

Fred Spafford’s initial RAAF posting was to No.1 Initial Training School at Somers in Victoria. One month later, on 17 October 1940, he commenced the Wireless Operator component at No.1 Wireless Air Gunners School at Ballarat, Victoria, before moving to No.1 Bombing and Air Gunnery School at Evans Head, NSW for the Air Gunner component of the course in April 1941 and then graduating on 2 May 1941. Promoted to the rank of temporary Sergeant on 6 May 1941, he was remustered as an air gunner.

Fred embarked at Sydney on 23 May 1941, to travel to the U.K. as part of the Empire Air Training Scheme, disembarked at Belfast on 30 August 1941 and then commenced at RAF No. 25 Operational Training Unit (RAF Finningley, Yorkshire) on 8 September 1941. After completing his training with No. 25 OTU in January 1942, and by now a temporary Flight Sergeant, Fred Spafford was sent to No.5 Bomber Group, RAF, where he spent short periods of time with a number of

units before being posted to No. 50 Squadron RAF in May 1942, where he was remustered as a 'Temporary Air Bomber', effective 24 July 1942.

With No. 50 Squadron RAF, Fred flew in Avro Manchester and later Avro Lancaster heavy bombers as a 'specialist bomb-aimer.' After fifteen sorties, he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Medal (DFM) on 20 October 1942. The citation read:

"This N.C.O. is an air bomber of high merit. Has taken part in many sorties and by skill has played great part in the success obtained. Has set a praiseworthy example."

With effect from 15 January 1943, Fred was commissioned to the rank of Flying Officer. In March 1943 he accepted an invitation to join an 'elite' RAF squadron and reported for duty to 617 Squadron RAF on 25 March 1943.

Fred was selected to be the bomb-aimer in the crew of 617 Squadron's CO, Wing Commander Guy Penrose Gibson, VC, DSO & Bar, DFC & Bar, for the famous 'Dambusters raid' against the Möhne, Eder and Sorpe dams on the night of 16/17 May 1943. Nineteen Lancasters, containing 133 aircrew, took off that evening from RAF Scampton in Lincolnshire. *Operation Chastise*, commonly known as the 'Dambusters Raid', was led by Wing Commander Gibson in three waves. The first wave included Lancaster ED932 (AJ-G) 'G for George' flown by Gibson, and the crew included Fred as the bomb-aimer. Wing Commander Gibson had referred to 'Spam' Spafford as 'the best bomb-aimer there is.'



Wing Commander Gibson's crew boarding Lancaster ED932 (AJ-G). Gibson is in the doorway. Fred Spafford is fourth from the left.

Each of the specially modified 30-ton Lancasters carried a 4.2 ton bouncing bomb, also known as the 'upkeep mine', designed by Sir Barnes Wallis. The bombs were connected to an electric motor that introduced backspin to the bomb at up to 500 rpm and, according to calculations, the bomb had to be dropped 389 metres from the dam face, from a height of 18 metres at 390 km/h.



"Upkeep" Bouncing Bomb mounted under Gibson's Lancaster AJ-G 'G for George'. Image-IWM.

The five aircraft in wave two, which took a different route to waves one and three, took off first, commencing at 21:28 hours.

Wave one was composed of nine aircraft in three groups. Their mission was to attack the Möhne Dam first and any aircraft with bombs remaining would then attack the Eder. Wave one took off after wave two, in groups of three at 10-minute intervals, beginning with Gibson's aircraft at 21:39 hours.

Wave three, comprising of five aircraft was to remain at Scampton until after midnight, allowing for a recall if all of the objectives were to be destroyed by the first two waves. They were to follow the same route as wave one and then act as a mobile reserve, to be assigned as required according to the status of the operation at their time of arrival in enemy airspace.

To avoid radar detection, aircraft in all waves flew at around 30 metres or less across continental Europe. The skill and bravery of the pilots was astounding, flying at such low level at night with the only illumination coming from the moon. One aircraft flew so low that it hit the sea, tearing off the bomb and scooping up sea water into the fuselage. Another collided with high voltage power lines. Flight Sergeant George Chalmers, the radio operator in "O for Orange" in the third wave, described looking out through the astrodome of his aircraft and being astonished to see his pilot (F/S Townsend) was flying along a forest firebreak at below treetop height!

Gibson carried out the first attack on the Möhne Dam at 00:28 hours. The 'Upkeep' dropped by Fred fell short by between 5 and 50 yards and eye-witness testimony from German troops on the dam suggested the bomb veered to the left and detonated close to the southern sluice tower. Now that the defenders were aware of the direction the attacks were coming from and using the spotlights on the Lancasters as a reference point, subsequent aircraft received heavier anti-aircraft fire, with the second attacker, flown by F/L Hopgood, being hit before releasing the bomb too late, which skipped over the dam wall and demolished the power station on the airside.

For the third attack, made by Australian pilot F/L Mick Martin, Gibson made a pass at right angles above the dam to try and draw anti-aircraft fire away from Martin. That bomb veered dramatically off course, suggesting its entry into the water had been at an angle. The bomb exploded in the mud flats on the left bank.

The fourth attack by S/L Young's aircraft was flanked by Gibson and Martin, in an attempt to draw enemy fire away from Young. Although the best delivery so far, the bomb appeared to have failed to breach the dam wall. It was now the turn of F/L Maltby, who, as he approached the dam wall, noticed debris on the top and that a breach had appeared to have occurred. He was about to abandon his run when his bomb-aimer P/O Fort released their bomb, which after bouncing four times impacted the dam precisely as required, before sinking and exploding, thereby breaching the dam wall and releasing a torrent of floodwater down the valley.

Operation Chastise became the most celebrated feat of arms in aviation history. At a cost of eight out of 19 Lancasters lost, 53 men dead and three becoming POWs, *Operation Chastise* resulted in the breaching of the Möhne and Eder dams and superficial damage to the Sorpe. Barnes Wallis had cried when told of the deaths of so many airmen and blamed himself for their loss. Damage to German infrastructure and industry was considerable, thousands of acres of farmland and crops were buried by silt and could not be tilled for several years and food production, output from coal mines and steel and arms manufacture all suffered significantly.



Left: Gibson and his crew are debriefed following their return. Bomber Command C in C 'Bomber' Harris and Air Vice Marshall Cochrane are standing at the rear. Fred Spafford is sitting second from the left. Image from *Dambusters - The Definitive History of 617 Squadron at War 1943-1945* by Ward, Lee and Wachtel.

Winston Churchill's War Cabinet were quick to capitalize on the success of the Dams Raid and some of 617 Squadron's aircrew were sent on publicity tours with the main attraction being Guy Gibson, who was taken off operations, stood down as the commander of the squadron and sent on a "flag-waving tour."

Gibson was awarded the Victoria Cross and 33 others received decorations for their part in the

operation. Fred was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC). After the Buckingham Palace investiture on 22 June 1943 and celebrations settled down, the remaining members of 617 Squadron and new arrivals brought in to replace those lost on the raid, were subjected to four months of almost unbroken training.

Australian Mick Martin had been put in charge of the Squadron temporarily. By now recognized as the best pilot on the Squadron and having a wealth of operational experience behind him, he was considered a good candidate to replace Gibson, but it would require a jump of two ranks to bring him from Flight Lieutenant to Wing Commander. He was possibly perceived as a lax disciplinarian and his superiors possibly didn't want an Australian as the Commanding Officer. Accordingly, after only six weeks in charge, Martin was replaced by Squadron Leader George Holden DSO, DFC, who had taken over Gibson's crew, including Fred Spafford, after Gibson's departure.

Holden appeared to lack the charisma and leadership ability of Gibson and was not popular with his men. Holden's knowledge of low flying was seen as 'practically nil' whereas Martin was seen as a complete master of low flying techniques which he continued to practice almost daily. A new recruit to the Squadron was given Martin's formula for success at low level: *"Don't, if you can help it, fly over trees or haystacks, fly alongside them!"*

It appeared to pilots and crews of 617 Squadron that after being formed for one special operation against the dams, the powers that be could not seem to make up their minds what to do with the special squadron they had created. Bomber Command C-in-C Arthur 'Bomber' Harris had argued forcefully against the Dams raid, describing the idea as "tripe of the wildest description", yet hurried to Scampton to congratulate the returning heroes but later remarked that "missions where Victoria Crosses went along with high losses should not be repeated."

617 Squadron's lack of follow up operations led to jibes and insults from aircrew from 57 Squadron who shared Scampton. This included them being given the nickname 'The One-op Squadron.'

Despite his apparent scepticism about the value of a 'special squadron', two months after the Dams raid, Bomber Harris proposed using 617 Squadron to assassinate Italian dictator Benito Mussolini. In a letter from the Chief of Air Staff to the Prime Minister, it came out that Harris had sought permission to bomb Mussolini in his office and to also bomb his home in Rome simultaneously in case he was late that morning. The plan was vetoed by the Foreign Office

who were unconvinced eliminating Mussolini would guarantee an Italian surrender and they also feared that if successful, it might result in him being replaced with a more effective Italian leader.

The Squadron's two-months of operational inactivity following *Operation Chastise* came to an end on 15 July 1943 when twelve crews, led by Squadron Leader Holden, accompanied by 12 other aircraft from 5 Group undertook an operation to disrupt the Italian railway system by attacking targets at Acquata Scrivia and San Polo d'Enza in northern Italy. Holden was flying Lancaster EE931, borrowed from 57 Squadron and crewed by Gibson's former crew, including Fred Spafford as bomb-aimer.

Departing Scampton at 22:30 hours, it was more than five hours before the attacks were carried out, bombing between 800 and 1,600 feet. Pilot Officer Townsend bombed marshalling yards before Holden's arrival, causing a spectacular explosion of an ammunition train. Consequently, visibility was then poor over the target from the smoke resulting from the explosion of the train. However, Holden and Allsebrook both claimed direct hits among the pylons of the transformer station. They then machine-gunned the target before flying on to land at RAF Blida in north Africa.

A reconnaissance flight after the raid revealed hits on railway tracks at Acquata Scrivia, damage to the roof of one of the transformer buildings and craters within the transformer station perimeter. At San Polo d'Enza, damage was caused to buildings containing high frequency equipment and possibly a transformer, an adjacent railway track was hit and a pylon was brought down.

The crews remained at Blida until the evening of 24 July 1943, departing between 21:05 and 21:30 hours. On their return trip to Scampton, they had been briefed to bomb the docks and harbour at Leghorn on the western coast of Italy. Time to target was over three hours and the bombing times were spread between 00:21 and 01:02 hours. Flight Lieutenant Allsebrook was the last to bomb, struggling to maintain height with a full bomb load with only three engines. The outcome of the raid was difficult to assess, but a number of crews reported



A Lancaster thunders down the dusty runway at Blida for the return journey back to England. Image from Dambusters - The Definitive History of 617 Squadron at War 1943-1945 by Ward, Lee and Wachtel.

seeing direct hits on oil storage tanks, evidenced by red flames and thick smoke. Holden described the bombing as 'scattered'.

An Australian rear gunner dismissed this as 'a stooge trip' saying, *"We screamed across France at practically zero level, climbed like a bat out of hell to get over the Alps, and then screamed down onto St Polo and completely obliterated the unfortunate power station without seeing a single aircraft or a single burst of flak."* However, other 617 Squadron crews would have been grateful for even that level of activity, with one pilot complaining that after two months of inaction, when they finally did get an op it was *"to bomb Italy ... with leaflets!"*

The operation the pilot was talking about took place on 29 July 1943. Nine 617 Squadron crews performed a special leaflet drop over the northern Italian cities of Milan, Bologna, Turin and Genoa. Fred Spafford flew in Holden's crew and dropped leaflets in small bomb canisters over the city of Genoa. The crews again returned via RAF Blida in north Africa.



Gibson's leadership of 617 Squadron came to an end on 3 August 1943 when he was officially posted from the Squadron to join the Prime Minister on a trip to Canada where Gibson was to conduct a lecture tour. Wing Commander George Holden was confirmed as Gibson's successor. The previous day, on 2 August 1943, Gibson, Holden and Gibson's dam crew enjoyed a farewell cross-country flight together in Lancaster ED 933.

Between 25 and 30 August 1943, 617 Squadron moved from Scampton to Coningsby where they would have the advantage of concrete runways rather than the grass strips they had been using at Scampton. The move was considered necessary with the squadron's Lancasters carrying increasingly heavy fuel and bomb loads.

Wing Commander Gibson (left) and his crew photographed at Scampton in July 1943. Missing are F/Sgt Pulford and F/Lt Roper. Fred Spafford, wearing a darker coloured RAAF uniform, is to the immediate right of Gibson. Image Pen and Sword Books, The Dam Buster Raid, A Reappraisal 70 Years On.



A final photo of Gibson with his aircrew and groundcrew before he left the squadron. Fred Spafford is second from the right. Image from Dambusters - The Definitive History of 617 Squadron at War 1943-1945 by Ward, Lee and Wachtel.

In the meantime, plans were being drawn up for 617 Squadron to attack the Dortmund-Ems Canal, a 160-mile waterway linking the Ruhr valley with eastern Germany and the ports of the Baltic and North Seas, making it a vital artery feeding Germany's war industries with strategic materials and transportation of finished products ranging from arms and munitions to prefabricated U-boat sections. The canal was seen as most vulnerable north of Münster where it ran in twin aqueducts over the river Glane. Either side of the aqueducts the canal was carried in embankments that were raised above the level of the surrounding land. The intention was to employ newly developed light case 12,000 pound High-Capacity (HC) 'blockbuster' bombs, of which three-quarters of the weight was high explosive, compared with half that in smaller bombs, against the canal embankments and 'Upkeeps' against the viaducts.

Training with 'Upkeeps' began on 4 August 1943 and a second trial was carried out on 12 August 1943. The results were inconsistent and disappointing and it was decided not to employ 'Upkeeps' against the viaducts.



*A 12,000 lb HC bomb being made ready for loading in front of JB-144 KC-N at Scampton.
Image from Dambusters - The Definitive History of 617 Squadron at War 1943-1945 by Ward, Lee and Wachtel.*

On 14 September 1943, eight crews in two sections of four Lancasters took off for the attack on the Dortmund-Ems canal on what was to be only the second operation for 617 Squadron over Germany in the six months since it had been formed. While over the North Sea, a recall signal was sent after a weather Mosquito reported poor conditions in the target area. During the process of turning his heavily laden Lancaster back towards England, Squadron Leader Maltby appeared to have lost control of his aircraft which cart-wheeled into the sea with the loss of all on board. Although the official accident report mentioned 'some obscure explosion and fire' before the fatal crash and it was believed for many years that Maltby had simply misjudged his height and dipped a wing into the sea, a recently advanced theory claimed he may have collided with a Mosquito from 139 Squadron that was returning from a separate raid on similar routing and was also lost without trace that night.

The operation was rescheduled for the following night (15 September 1943), with Flight Lieutenant Martin and his crew taking the place of Maltby. Around midnight, within a few minutes of each other, the first section of four Lancasters, led by Wing Commander Holden, and the second section, led by Flight Lieutenant Allsebrook, took off from Coningsby. Six Mosquito fighter-bombers, three each from 605 and 418 Squadrons, followed approximately 30 minutes later. Their role was to deal with any flak hot-spots enroute.

Wing Commander Holden was flying Lancaster EE144 and Fred Spafford was on board as the bomb-aimer.

The first section of four Lancasters, led by Holden, was to take an almost identical path to that of the second wave for *Operation Chastise* and to approach the target at extreme low level, flying 30 feet over Holland and Germany before climbing to 150 feet to bomb.

Once at the target, flying at 150 feet, at a speed of 180 miles an hour, they were to drop their bombs on a precise aiming point within 40 feet of the west bank of the canal until a breach had been achieved. The remaining bombs were then to be dropped on alternate banks of the canal, moving north at 50-yard intervals to ensure as widespread destruction of the canal embankments as possible. However, even one bomb breaching the embankment would be sufficient to drain the canal, halting the flow of barge traffic and flooding the surrounding area. Unfortunately, the HC bombs were like 'elongated dustbins', built without any streamlining and only small fins to enable them to fit into the Lancaster bomb-bay. This made them unstable in-flight and hard to drop accurately.

It was a beautiful and clear moonlit night. Holden led the first section formation, with Flight Lieutenants Martin on his starboard flank and Knight on his port flank. Rear gunner Tom Simpson heard Martin and his bomb-aimer, Bob Hay, complaining that Holden was flying too high.

The following is taken from Paul Brickhill's *The Dambusters*:

"The bombers crossed the Dutch coast and there was no sign of flak. Holden seemed to be flying the perfect course, which was just as well because the moon was up and it was full, throwing soft light over the fields as they moved towards Germany and Ladbergen.

Ahead of them a small town loomed up and high chimneys and a church steeple seemed to be rushing at them. Martin waited for Holden to swing to one side, but Holden elected to bore straight across and climb to clear the steeple till he was about 300 feet. The more low-flying-wise Martin dropped right down to rooftop height and, on the other side of Holden, Knight and Wilson did the same, till even from the ground they were nearly invisible against the horizon. Holden was limned against the moonlight.

There was one light gun in Nordhoorn and its crew had been alerted. Holden was halfway across when a procession of glowing red balls streamed up, and in the shaven fraction of a second Toby Foxlee was firing back, so that only about five shells pumped up before Foxlee's tracer was squirting down and the gun abruptly stopped.

One of the five shells punched into Holden's inner starboard wing tank. There was a long stream of flame trailing back beyond the tailplane; the aircraft showed clearly in the glow and they could see it was going down. The port wing was dropping and then the nose; she was falling faster, slewing to the left, right under Wilson and Knight with a 12,000-pounder on-board! Martin yelled sharply over the R/T: "Break outwards!"

Wilson was just turning away when Holden's aircraft hit on the edge of the town almost under him; the 12,000-pounder went off and the town and the sky were like day.

Martin called the other two anxiously. Knight came right back and said he was all right, but it was 20 seconds before Wilson answered, a little shakily, saying they were jarred by the explosion but he thought nothing serious was broken. A little later they were back in formation, Martin leading. They swept into Germany, grimmer now. Gibson's crew had been in Holden's aircraft. Spafford, Taerum, Fulford, Hutchinson; they were all gone."

Brickhill's book was first published in 1951. More recent information and eyewitness reports tend to suggest that it was only the aircraft exploding that was witnessed by the surviving aircrew and not the 12,000 lb bomb. The aircraft crashed within feet of the home of Herr Hood who was six years old at the time. According to the sequence of events, as told to Herr Hood by his father and appearing in *Dambusters - The Definitive History of 617 Squadron at War 1943-1945* by Chris Ward, Andy Lee and Andreas Wachtel:

"Aircraft were heard approaching from the general direction of North-West, towards the farm, which lies about half a mile south-east of the town. A burst of tracer travelled from left to right from the factory roof on the south-eastern outskirts of Nordhorn, and was seen to hit one of the aircraft which immediately began to burn fiercely. The aircraft continued on its way past the farmhouse but, as it did so, the port wing dropped and the aircraft turned back on itself before plunging into the ground nose first within feet of the farmyard and its buildings. As the wreckage burned, Herr and Frau Hood led their six children into the cellar beneath the farmhouse, planning to spend the night there. After a few minutes though, the parents decided to venture back up into the house to fetch additional night clothing for the children. Frau Hood was about to re-enter the cellar from a doorway in the centre of the house when the 12,000-pounder went up about 15 minutes after the crash.

The bombs in use on this night contained a delay fuse timed to detonate between 26 and 90 seconds after release. In the case of a crash with the bomb still attached, if the arming wires remained intact, the weapon would technically be safe until 'cooked' in any ensuing fire. The effect on the Hood Homestead was catastrophic. It left every building in the farmyard flattened and on fire. The house, the outbuildings and a line of substantial oak trees were destroyed. A small section of the house wall was all that remained upright."



The Church spire at Nordhorn that contributed to the demise of Wing Commander Holden and his crew. This Image from Dambusters - The Definitive History of 617 Squadron at War 1943-1945 by Ward, Lee and Wachtel.

After Martin took over as leader of the first section, the remaining aircraft ran into low-lying mist and fog over the Dortmund area, at times reducing visibility to as little as 500 yards, with the haze reflecting the moonlight. They were unable to spot the canal unless directly overhead at which point it was too late to drop their bombs. They kept circling, hoping for a break in the fog that would give them a sight of the target, while at the same time making themselves easy targets for the air defences and any prowling night-fighters.

They lost a second Lancaster, piloted by Flight Lieutenant Wilson, to anti-aircraft fire and another, flown by Flight Lieutenant Knight, hit treetops causing damage to the tail and both port engines that had to be shut down.

The starboard inner engine then began to fail also. Knight attempted to nurse his battered aircraft back to England. He was able to maintain a height of 1,200 feet at 140 mph but with both port engines out of action he was finding it difficult to fly on a straight course. With the rear turret unserviceable, resulting from the port engine being feathered (which controlled the turret's hydraulics), the rear gunner Sergeant Harry O'Brien came forward to the bomb aimer's compartment where he sat facing his pilot and pulled hard on the rudder bar with all of his strength while Knight pushed with his left foot. They continued like this for 20 minutes. If they kept up this pressure it was possible to maintain a fairly straight course but when they relaxed for a moment the aircraft veered off course.

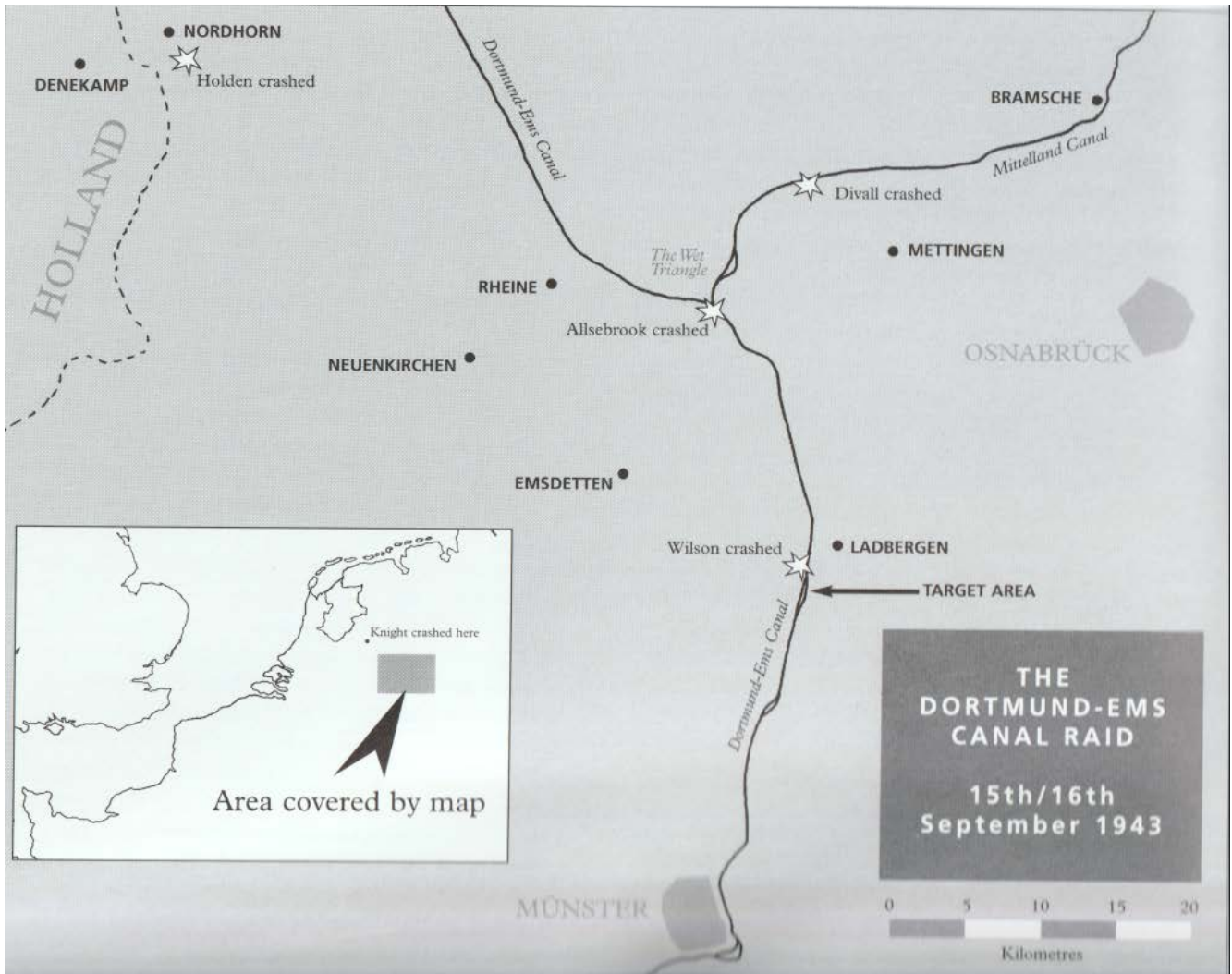
When about 30 miles inside Nazi-occupied Holland, realising he could not control the aircraft much longer, Knight ordered his crew to bail out. After his crew had left the aircraft, Knight attempted a forced landing, but the aircraft hit trees, crashed and burst into flames, killing Knight instantly.

The second section appeared to have got lost and ended up north of where they were supposed to be, in the region of where the Mittleland and Dortmund-Ems canals joined at Bergeshövede, a passing zone and harbour for canal traffic.

Flight Lieutenant Allesbrook had dropped his bomb and then directed two others on target before he was seen to be hit by anti-aircraft fire and on fire. Allesbrook's aircraft crashed near Bergeshovede in the German district of Recklenberg.

Pilot Officer Divall's Lancaster JA874 was the next victim, set on fire by light flak and crashing further north on the Mittleland canal.

The attempts to damage the Dortmund-Ems canal, one of which was aborted resulting in the crash of Maltby, had been a total disaster. Five Lancasters and their crews had been lost for a nil result. The operation was further confirmation to 'Bomber' Harris that low-level operations in heavy bombers were too expensive and it would be more than 12 months before 617 Squadron attempted anything like this again.



Map showing locations of crash sites relative to the target area. From *Dambusters - The Definitive History of 617 Squadron at War 1943-1945* by Chris Ward, Andy Lee and Andreas Wachtel



The Grave of Flying Officer Frederick Michael Spafford. Image Virtual War Memorial Australia.

The crew of Lancaster EE144 AJ-S, flown by Wing Commander Holden included Taerum, Hutchinson, Deering and Fred Spafford from Gibson's Dams crew. All of the crew were initially buried at the Neuer Friedhof cemetery at Lingen. After the war their remains were moved to the Reichswald Forest Commonwealth War Graves cemetery.

To commemorate the 80th Anniversary of *Operation Chastise*, a service was hosted by The Air Force Association (SA Division) and the RAAF. It was held at the Air Force Memorial, Torrens Parade Ground, Adelaide, South Australia on 17 May 2023.

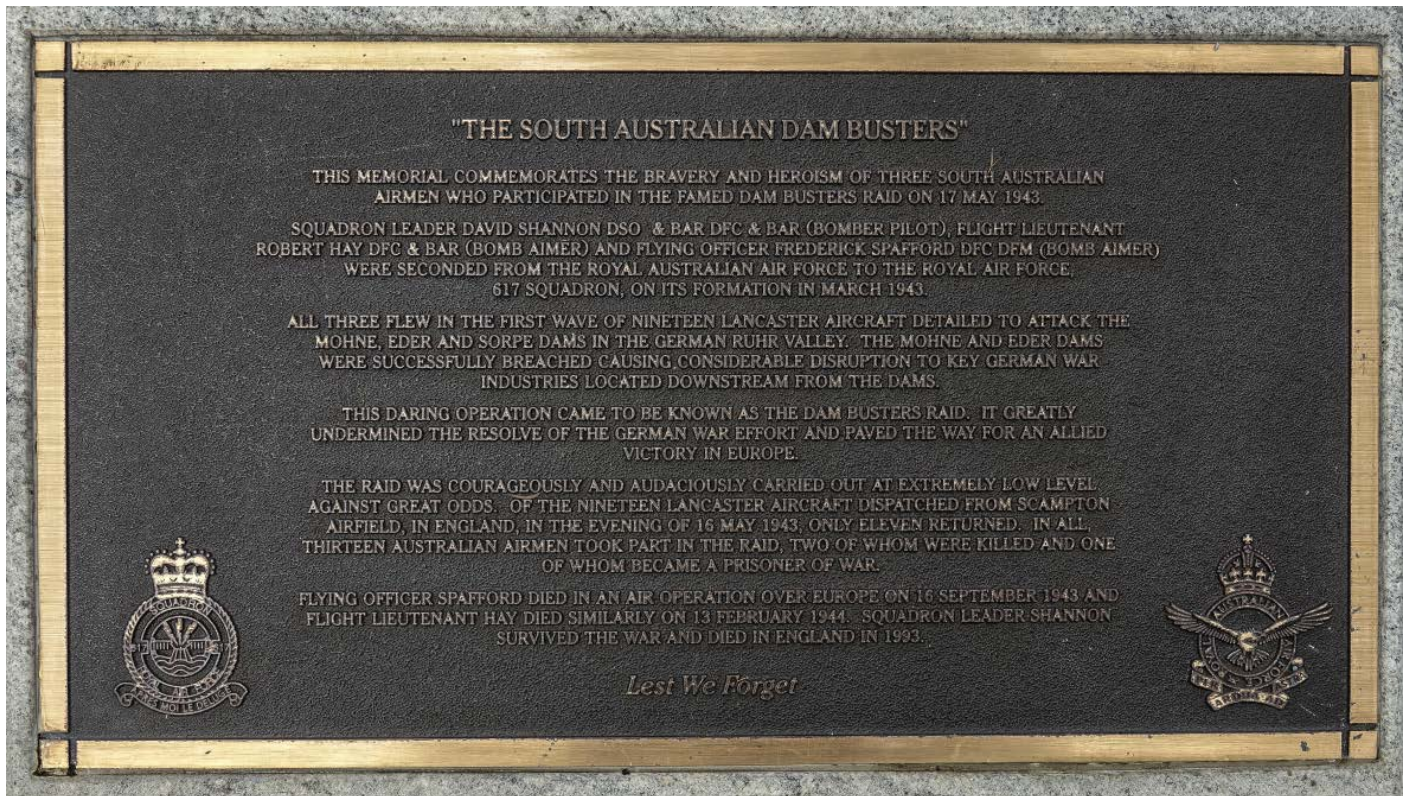
Special guests at the service included Ms Nikki King, the daughter of Squadron Leader David Shannon DSO & Bar, DFC & Bar and Mrs Jean Miller, the niece of Flying Officer Frederick Michael Spafford DFC and DFM. Ms King and Mrs Miller subsequently placed a wreath on The South Australian Dambusters Memorial located on the Pathway of Honour at Torrens Parade Ground which is adjacent to Government House. The Memorial honours the three South Australians who flew in the Dambusters Raid (David Shannon, Robert Hay and Frederick Spafford).



After laying a wreath, Air Commodore Adrian Maso, Senior Air Force Representative South Australia, is shown saluting the plaque dedicated to No. 617 Squadron and the Australians who were lost while serving with the squadron. Image – The author.



Ms Nikki King (left), the daughter of David Shannon and Mrs Jean Miller (right), niece of Fred Spafford, after laying a wreath at The South Australian Dambusters Memorial, located along the Pathway of Honour at Torrens Parade Ground and adjacent to the wall of Government House. The Memorial honours the three South Australians (David Shannon, Robert Hay and Fred Spafford) who flew in the Dambusters Raid. Image – The author.



Plaque on the South Australian Dambusters Memorial, honouring South Australian Dambusters David Shannon, Robert Hay and Fred Spafford. Image – The author.

Jean Miller believed the formal adoption of Fred by his grandfather, after the deaths of both of Fred’s parents, was:

“to give some stability, a sense of belonging and identity and legalising it. The thought of Fred being orphaned in those times is always heart wrenching to me, and yet he always had a smile on his face. He was popular, a very likeable lad, capable, had such a rotten start in life, and yet always had a smile on his face, contributed so much in the Air Force and was gone by 25! One of many.”

SOURCES:

Special thanks to Mrs Jean Miller for providing the background information on Fred’s early life and some images.

Books:

- The Dam Busters* by Paul Brickhill.
- Dambusters - The Definitive History of 617 Squadron at War 1943-1945* by Chris Ward, Andy Lee and Andreas Wachtel.
- After The Flood - What the Dambusters Did Next* by John Nichol.
- 617 Squadron – The Dambusters at War* by Tom Bennett.
- Chastise – The Dambusters Story 1943* by Max Hastings.
- Beyond the Dams to the Tirpitz – The Later Operations of the 617 Squadron* by Alan Cooper.
- Dambusters: The Forging of a Legend – 617 Squadron in World War II* by Chris Ward and Andy Lee.
- Breaking the Dams – The Story of Dambuster David Maltby and his Crew* by Charles Foster.
- Enemy Coast Ahead – The Illustrated Memoir of Dambuster Guy Gibson.*

Wikipedia:

Operation Chastise https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Chastise

Other Websites:

- 1 W.A.G.S. Memorial Website - www.1wags.org.au,
- engineeringclicks www.engineeringclicks.com/bouncing-bomb/

Gary Petts
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