

From Dr David Large:

Pilot Officer Michael John David Fuller – DAMBUSTER

John Fuller was my Grandad's 1st cousin once removed, but all the family call him Uncle John. He was the Bomb Aimer in Lancaster AJ-Z, piloted by Squadron Leader Henry Maudslay, part of a team which took-off from Scampton Airfield, Lincolnshire, late in the evening of 16 May 1943, to attack 3 great dams in the Ruhr Valley of western Germany.

In the spring of 1943, a new RAF squadron was formed at Scampton. This was 617 Squadron, led by the charismatic Wing Commander, Guy Gibson, tasked with learning to fly at very low levels (60 feet), over water, at night. The mission was kept secret until the morning of the raid, only a few weeks after training had begun. The targets were the Mohne, the Eder and the Sorpe Dams in Germany, which controlled the hydroelectric supply of many huge war factories in Germany.

A new and innovative 'bouncing bomb' was designed by Barnes Wallis, to be released 60 feet above the reservoirs, to skim across the surface like a pebble across a pond, in the face of anti-aircraft fire, and explode, under water, up against the dam wall.

Gibson's team successfully breached the wall of the Mohne Dam, and millions of tons of water gushed out, flooding the land and wrecking many factories.

Uncle John's Lancaster was sent to attack the Eder Dam, by far the most difficult because of its geography. An inconvenient hill jutted-out into the reservoir, making the bombing run incredibly difficult. Unfortunately, something may have gone wrong with the bomb release mechanism, and one eye witness said there was something hanging underneath the plane which could not be identified. Whatever the explanation, the bomb exploded on the top of the dam wall, just as the plane was flying over it. The wall of the Eder Dam was smashed by other aircraft.

AJ-Z, although damaged, managed to fly back towards England, until the aircraft was shot-down near the Dutch border. Uncle John and all the crew was killed instantly, and they were buried in the Reichswald Forest British Military Cemetery, near Dusseldorf, Germany. He was 23 years old.

617 Squadron was the most famous in the RAF, and the Dambusters raid was by far the most spectacular of the war. Sadly, of the 19 Lancaster Bombers which left Scampton, 8 failed to return. Each aircraft had a crew of 7, and so 56 of the 133 young men who took part, were lost.