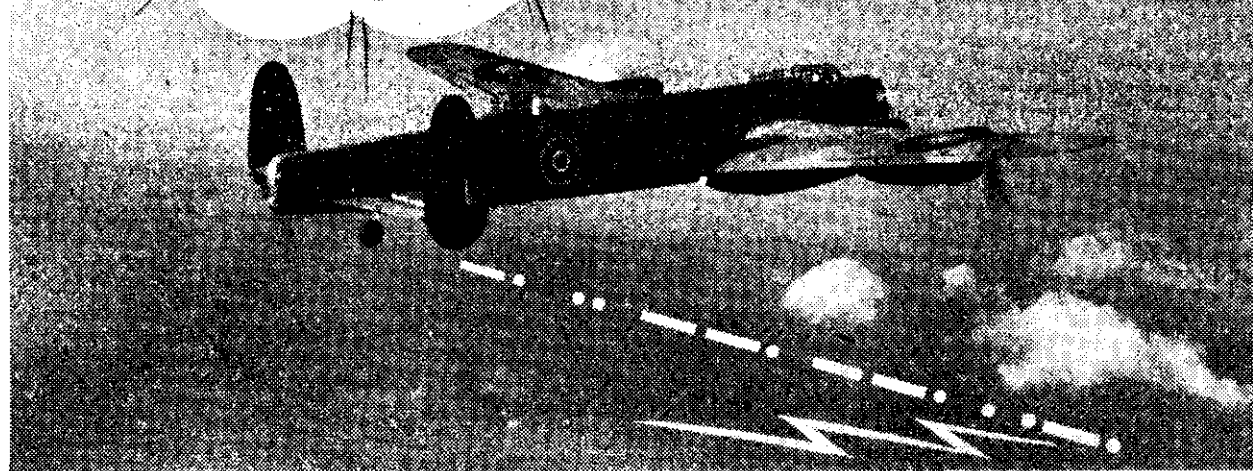


The Dam Busters



ONE summer night in 1943 the wireless operator of a Lancaster bomber circling over Germany tapped out the code-word Nigger on his Morse key. Back in England a scientist leapt to his feet and danced round the operations room. A little later the same operator tapped out another word, Dinghy. This time the Air Officer commanding leapt to his feet and almost embraced the scientist. The Commander-in-Chief picked up the telephone and asked for Washington. There was reason for jubilation. Squadron 617 of Bomber Command had just destroyed the Moehne and Eder dams, which supplied water and power for the industry of the Ruhr.

Later, in his book *Enemy Coast Ahead*, the leader of the raid, Wing Commander Guy Gibson, V.C., D.S.O., D.F.C., wrote this of the bombers' first success that night: "Now there was no

doubt about it; there was a great breach one hundred yards across, and the water, looking like stirred porridge in the moonlight, was gushing out and rolling into the Ruhr Valley towards the industrial centres of the Reich.

"Nearly all the flak had now stopped and the other boys came down from the hills to have a closer look to see what had been done. . . It was the most amazing sight. The whole valley was beginning to fill with fog from the steam of the rushing water, and down in the foggy valley we saw cars speeding along the roads in front of this great wave of water which was chasing them and going faster than they could ever hope to go. I saw their headlights burning and I saw water overtake them, wave by wave, and then the colour of the headlights underneath the water changing from light blue to green, from green to dark purple, until there was no longer anything except the water bouncing down in great waves. The floods raced on, carrying with them as they went viaducts, railways, bridges, and everything that stood in their path. Three miles beyond the dam the remains of Hoppy's aircraft were still burning gently, a dull red glow on the ground. Hoppy had been avenged."

Hoppy and his crew were not the only ones who failed to return. Eight of the 16 aircraft which crossed the coast to carry out the mission were destroyed. Fifty-three of the 56 men in them died. The others parachuted at a height of little more than 50 feet and survived by a miracle. Not all of the

aircraft detailed for the mission reached their targets. Flying at "zero" feet to avoid radar detection, one aircraft hit the sea and bounced up, losing its load of mines and its two outboard engines. It returned to base using the power of its remaining two motors. Another, piloted by a New Zealander, Les Munro, had been badly damaged by light flak and forced to return to base. A third, its pilot blinded by searchlights, plunged to the ground out of control.

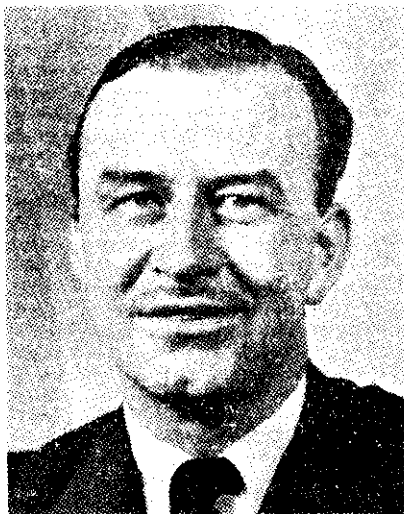
The dam-busting raid followed weary months of experiment, planning and training. A special weapon had to be evolved to blast through the 140-foot thick concrete of the barrage dams. After many heartbreaking failures, the weapon was completed. It was a mine. The inventor was one of Britain's "back-room boys" of the war, a scientist named Barnes Wallis. It was this man, also the inventor of the 10-ton "Grand Slam," who, after the war, refused a

£10,000 award from the Royal Commission on Awards to Inventors, quoting a Biblical verse: ". . . is not this the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives?"

Wallis's mines had to be dropped with extreme accuracy in order to deliver the required punch to the dam wall without at the same time destroying the delivering aircraft. The pilots of Squadron 617 had to level out over the water at exactly 60 feet, travelling at exactly 232 m.p.h. The speed was attained by constant practice; the correct height by means of two spotlights whose beams converged at 60 feet. More than one mine was required to breach each dam. That this was done, not with one dam, but with two, shows the level of skill attained by the specially chosen men of the squadron assigned to the task. Even the route to the target was practised by constantly flying a similar route mapped out over England.

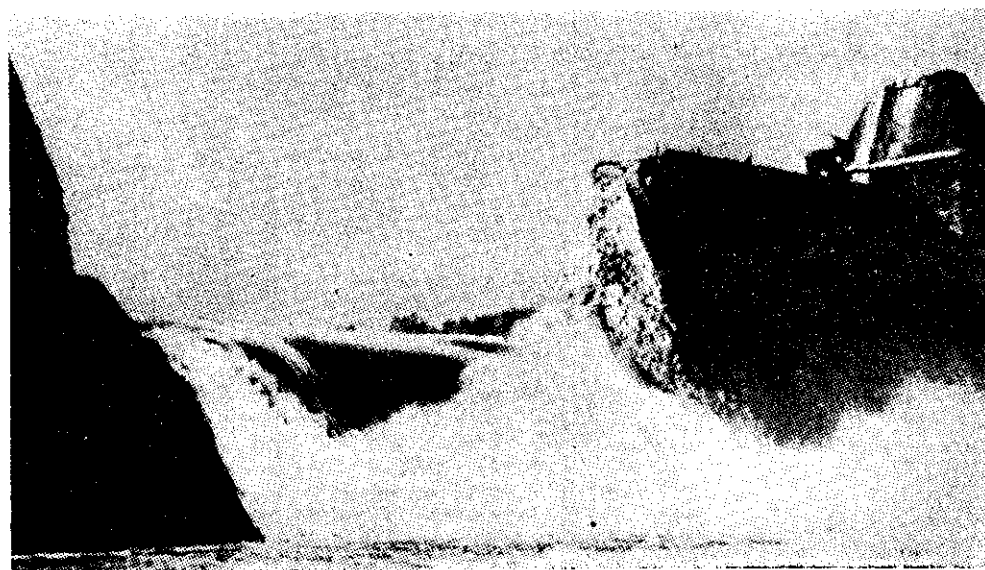
The duties of 617 Squadron did not cease with the task for which it was initially formed. Brought up to strength again, the Squadron went on to fulfil other special assignments of an exacting kind until the end of the war. Wing Commander Gibson, quoted above, was killed in an operation subsequent to the dams raid, but in a book, *The Dam Busters*, published three years ago, the Australian author Paul Brickhill enlarged on his account of the famous raid, and dealt also with the later history of the Squadron. Brickhill, formerly a fighter pilot, was shot down over Tunisia in 1943 and was imprisoned in the infamous Stalag Luft 13. There he worked with the escape organisation whose story he has told in his novel *The Great Escape*. He also met several of the "dam-busters" squadron and it is on their information, supplemented by official records and Guy Gibson's own account, that he based his book.

A one-hour BBC documentary based on Brickhill's book was broadcast by NZBS stations in 1952. Now, a full-length serial of 26 half-hour episodes, is to play from the ZB stations. It will be heard at 7.0 p.m. on Saturdays, beginning from 1ZB on May 1, 2ZB May 8, 3ZB May 22, and 4ZB June 5. The show is produced by Australasian Radio Productions, with the author Paul Brickhill as narrator.



PAUL BRICKHILL

N.Z. LISTENER, MAY 7, 1954.



Moehne Dam five hours after the raid