

and every one of them an old hand at the game.

My speech to them was short. I said: "You're here to do a special job. You're here as a crack squadron. You're here to carry out a raid on Germany which will have tremendous results. What the target is I cannot tell you, nor can I tell you where it is. All I can tell you is you will have to practice low flying all day and all night until you know how to do it with your eyes shut."

Then I went down to London, and there I met a man of whom I shall say very little. He was as much responsible for the success of this operation as all the pilots and air crews put together. He is one of the real backroom boys of whom little can be told until after the war, and even then I am not sure that you will hear a great deal of their story.

We met together in a small, dark office. He pulled out a drawing and gave me a short lecture on the science of damology—which is, of course, the science of breaking down dams.

He said: "Now you may think me a stupid old man, but wait until I tell you what I know about the Möhne Dam. It is a military objective which I have been studying ever since the war began. This dam"—and he pulled out some pictures—"is some 850 yards long, 150 feet thick, and it is as high as it is thick. You can imagine that many attempts have been made," he went on, "to try to evolve some method of breaking down these walls, but it is not so easy as it looks. When you consider that we in London here think ourselves safe from an ordinary explosive bomb when we are behind 3 ft. of concrete, you will begin to realize what I mean when I talk about shifting 150 ft. of the stuff."

At that time a certain County Council in the Midlands of England had just built a new dam to supply their town with water. We heard about it and wrote to them and asked them if we could knock down their old dam so that the water would run into their newly built one. They replied that this was fine because they wanted to knock it down anyway, and so the scientist and I went to work.

For many days this man worked and I flew. He modified and experimented, and

I watched and watched. Then suddenly one morning in April, on one of the first days of spring, I flew over and dropped one which worked. The man on the ground danced and waved his hands in the air. I could see him from my cockpit as I banked around after my run, and I waved back at him and shouted into the noise of the engines; and I believe that the man on the ground threw his hat into the air, for that was a wonderful moment.

After all that, I took myself back to my squadron. By now the boys had made themselves very proficient in flying at low level around the country-side, and they found that navigation in itself was no longer a problem. We therefore turned ourselves to practising a special form of attack, which we should have to make on the dam walls. Night after night, day after day, we went flying up and down lakes in Scotland, in the Midlands, and in Wales, practising this very special form of attack. One of our hardest problems, we found, was to fly at 45 ft. above the water: to fly at exactly 45 ft., not 44 ft. or 46 ft., but 45 ft. It is a very difficult thing for a pilot to judge his height above calm water, and many a flying-boat has crashed as a result.

After two months of continuous hard training, involving at least 150 hours of flying for each person, I considered that my squadron was fit to undertake the operation.

At the same time we had reconnaissance aircraft flying out over Germany watching these dams as a cat watches a mouse.

On 16th May, reconnaissance aircraft reported that the water-level was just right for the attack. It was a great moment when the public address system on the station said: "All crews of No. 617 Squadron report to the Briefing Room immediately."

The boys came in hushed, having waited two and a half months to hear what it was that they were going to attack. There were about 175 young men in that room, rather tousled and a little scuffy and perhaps a little old-looking in spite of their youth. But they were experts, beautifully trained, and each one of them knew his job as well as any man had ever known any job which he was to do. I let the scientist tell them all about it.