

Percy Pigeon—W/Op with 617 Squadron



Percy Edgar Pigeon was born to Mr. and Mrs. John Edgar Pigeon of Williams Lake B.C on June 3, 1917. Percy grew up and took his formal education in Williams Lake, where he was an honour roll student. At 150 Mile House School. He graduated in 1935

Percy was formally employed as a clerk with MacKenzies Ltd. Of Williams Lake. Percy also played hockey for the Williams Lake Stampeders in the mid thirties.

Percy joined the RCAF in Vancouver in 1941. After his initial training he was sent to No. 2 Wireless School in Calgary in October. He completed his course and was qualified as a Wireless Operator in February 1942. Percy then moved on to No. Bombing and Gunnery School in Lethbridge successfully becoming an Air Gunner on 2 March, with the rank of Sergeant. Percy was then sent to the UK where his next stop was No. 4 Signals School in June. Near the end of July, he was posted to No. 29 OTU at North Luffenham. On the 26th he had his first flight with the pilot he would fly all 53 of his operational missions, Pilot Officer John Leslie Munro RNZAF. Les Munro would eventually reach the rank of Squadron Leader.



On September 10, 1942 Bomber Command sent 479 aircraft to attack Düsseldorf. Training aircraft from 91, 92 and 93 Groups took part in this raid. Aircraft of 29 OTU being part of this effort. This was Percy's first operational mission. It was completed without incident, but unfortunately 33 aircraft were lost that night, with 16 of them being from the training units.

Three nights later training aircraft were again included in the 446 aircraft dispatched to Bremen. Percy and his crew took off in a Wellington IC (R1459) at 2347 from North Luffenham only to crash three minutes later at Empingham, 6 miles E of Oakham when the engines failed. Remarkably no one was hurt. Again, the training units paid dearly for their efforts, 13 aircraft were lost of the total of 21.

Date	Time	Aircraft	Pilot	Remarks	Time
28/8/42		Wellington	Les Munro	WLANCER 479	21.00
MONTH OF SEPTEMBER					
1/9/42	18.00	DF 801	Les Munro	WLANCER 479	4.00
2/9/42	09.15	DF 801	Les Munro	WLANCER 479	3.00
6/9/42	21.00	DF 810	Les Munro	WLANCER 479	11.00
7/9/42	18.30	DF 810	Les Munro	WLANCER 479	1.00
10/9/42	11.20	1-8802	Les Munro	WLANCER 479	1.00
12/9/42	21.20	1-8802	Les Munro	WLANCER 479	5.00
13-9-42	14.20	DF 810	Les Munro	WLANCER 479	1.30
13-9-42	12.22	2-1089	Les Munro	WLANCER 479	1.00
18-9-42	23.20	R-1459	Les Munro	WLANCER 479	4.00
18-9-42	18.45	DF 810	Les Munro	WLANCER 479	1.00

Total Time 27.25

27.25

27.25

27.25

COMMANDING
TRAINING WING NO. 29 O.T.U.

From 29 OTU it was on to 1654 HCU in early October until 9 December. Les Munro was not his pilot during his time. Percy was then posted to the Lancaster equipped 97 Squadron, where he teamed up once again with Munro who by this time had been promoted to Flying Officer. They flew their first training flight with 97 Squadron on the 13th.

Percy's first operational mission with 97 Squadron came on January 2, 1943. A minelaying operation in the Gironde. They dropped 4 mines and according to 97 Squadron's Operations Record Book: "Veg planted successfully in Deodars garden. Very dark. Pin-pointed Pt de la Coutre and made time run from there."

The crews next mission, six nights later, was another gardening trip, this time to eastern Denmark, Kalundborg Bay. This was called the Pumpkin Area. Visibility was not the best, but they dropped the 4 mines through a gap in the clouds, but one of them appeared to have exploded on contact with the sea.

Percy had now been with 97 Squadron for a month. During that time, it had lost 4 crews on operations. Therefore, it probably came as no surprise, that he and his crew were picked to be one of the six aircraft detailed for an operation to Essen on the 11th. Five aircraft took off for this mission, but two returned owing to engine trouble. It is noted in his logbook the aircraft was damaged by flak, but there is no mention of it in the Squadron ORB, but it does mention "One can of incendiaries hung up." 5 Group dispatched 50 Lancasters and three were lost. Essen reported concentrated bombing in or near the city centre, with 127 buildings destroyed or seriously damaged. Back to Essen on the 13th, where he notes once again their aircraft was damaged by flak and that the opposition was heavy. 72 Lancasters from 1 and 5 Group participated in this raid, with 1 Lancaster being lost.

Now followed back-to-back trips to Berlin on the 16th and 17th. Making for four trips in six days. On the first raid to Berlin, the crew “believed” to have bombed the target. 201 aircraft went on this mission, the first attack on Berlin in 14 months. On the second, it was noted that there was no assistance from Pathfinder Force. Crews reported as compared to the previous night’s raid, that on the 17th “Defence was heavier and many fighters seen.” This is borne out by the fact that only 1 aircraft was lost on the 16th, but 22 were lost on the 17th. 97 Squadron also lost a crew on the second mission. Les Munro later commented in an interview that this was the first Percy emerged from his “office”. He took one look at all the flak, fire, and burning aircraft, and said “Jesus Christ! Have we come through this?”. He turned around and went back to his radio, never to come out again.

DATE	TIME	AIRCRAFT	PILOT	OTHER	REMARKS	TIME
21-1-43	18:30	LANCASTER W-176	W. MUNRO	W.P.F.		1:00
21-1-43	17:00	LANCASTER W-176	W. MUNRO	W.P.F.	OPERATIONS - BERLIN - OUTSIDE	1:58
21-1-43	13:00	LANCASTER W-176	W. MUNRO	W.P.F.	N.F.T.	5:45
21-1-43	17:15	LANCASTER W-176	W. MUNRO	W.P.F.	OPERATIONS - BERLIN - HAMBURG	16:42
21-1-43	17:25	LANCASTER W-176	W. MUNRO	W.P.F.	OPERATIONS - BERLIN SQUADRO BY PLAN	1:20
21-1-43	12:10	LANCASTER W-176	W. MUNRO	W.P.F.	N.F.T.	
21-1-43	17:00	LANCASTER W-176	W. MUNRO	W.P.F.	OPERATIONS - BERLIN SQUADRO BY PLAN	14:02
21-1-43	16:45	LANCASTER W-176	W. MUNRO	W.P.F.	OPERATIONS - BERLIN	8:02
21-1-43	17:10	LANCASTER W-176	W. MUNRO	W.P.F.	OPERATIONS - BERLIN	8:00
21-1-43	11:00	LANCASTER W-176	W. MUNRO	W.P.F.	REPAIR TO BRG.	1:55
21-1-43	12:00	LANCASTER W-176	W. MUNRO	W.P.F.		1:55
TOTAL TIME...						100:43

Percy and his crew now received a reprieve until the 27th, where they then did a trip to Düsseldorf, which was called “straightforward”. Not so for another of their squadron mates, fortunately, all but one became a POW. 162 aircraft were on this raid with 6 being lost, and much damage was done to the southern areas of the city. A trip to Hamburg on the 30th had to be abandoned owing to the rear turret being U/S. The Squadron lost another crew on this operation. Bomber Command lost 4 other Lancasters on this night. The major result of this raid being the destruction of a railway bridge, which caused the Hamburg network to be blocked for two days.

February opened with a trip on the 2nd to Köln. Although no reason is given, the aircraft returned on only three engines. This raid was only the second one on which H2S use. Unfortunately, the Germans recovered a set from a shot down Pathfinder Stirling that crashed in Holland. This led to the development of ‘Naxos’, which enabled Luftwaffe night-fighters to home in on to a bomber which was using its H2S set.

The 4th and 14th provided the crew with a bit of a change, two trips to Italy, Turin and Milan and on the 16th, Lorient. The Turin raid caused serious and widespread damage to the city. 142 Lancasters attacked Milan and carried out concentrated bombing in good visibility, Fires could be seen from 100 miles away on the return flight. 377 aircraft carried out the last large in a series of raids on Lorient. Bomber Command had flown 1,853 sorties in 8 ‘area’ raids in response to direct instructions from the Air Ministry. Few records are available from Lorient but it is known that the town was now almost completely ruined and deserted.

On the 19th a trip to Wilhelmshaven provided what must have been a frightening moment for the crew. Although, it is only mentioned in Percy’s logbook with the laconic entry, “hit by incendiaries”. Pathfinders claimed accurate marking in clear visibility but bombing photos showed that most of the attack fell in open country west of the target.

Then came three trips in four nights. The 25th Nuremburg, 26th Köln, and on the 28th, St. Nazaire. On the Nuremburg raid, the pathfinders were late and the bombing fell on the northern edges of Nuremburg and on the neighbouring town of Würth. 427 aircraft attacked Köln and 10 were lost. Most of the bombing fell on the south-western part of the city and reports suggest that only a quarter of the force hit the city. Even so, much damage was done. Having destroyed Lorient, Bomber Command was now ready to start on the second target on the list of French U-Boat base ports which it had been ordered to destroy. The initial raid caused widespread destruction. Local reports say that many bombs fell into the port area of St. Nazaire and that 60 per cent of the town was destroyed. F/O. Munro was promoted to F/Lt. on the 27th.

March began much like February ended, three trips in five nights, Berlin on the 1st, Hamburg on the 3rd and Essen on the 5th. Bombing photographs showed that the attack on Berlin was spread over more than 100 square miles with the main emphasis in the south-west of the city. However, because of the larger numbers of aircraft were now being used, 302 on this raid, and because those aircraft were now carrying a greater average bomb load, the proportion of the force which did hit Berlin caused more damage than any previous raid to this target. The crew reported "Too many fires to count – concentrated in target area. Glow of fires seen from Bremen."

Some bombs hit the Telefunken works at which the H2S set taken from the Stirling shot down near Rotterdam was being reassembled. The set was completely destroyed in the bombing but a Halifax of 35 Squadron with an almost intact set crashed in Holland on this night and the Germans were able to resume their research into H2S immediately.



Percy Pigeon in the cockpit of a Lancaster

The Hamburg mission gave the crew another scare, as they were "coned in searchlights". There were 417 aircraft on this operation, but the Pathfinders dropped their markers on the wrong target. Most of the Main Force bombing thus fell 13 miles downstream from the centre of Hamburg, around the small town of Wedel. The damage at Wedel included a large naval-clothing store burnt out as well as several important industrial concerns in Wedel's harbour area and this illustrated another Bomber Command view: that bombing could usually be useful even if the wrong target was hit.

The Essen raid on the 5th provides the researcher with one of those glimpses into what perhaps is a bureaucratic error. Percy's log book shows that he and the crew flew in Lancaster OF-W, W4200. His logbook is certified correct for the month of March 1943 by W/C E.F. Nind. The 97 Squadron ORB shows that this aircraft was flown on this mission by then S/Ldr. E.F. Nind. Interesting to say the least.

March 11th was a trip to Stuttgart. This raid was not successful. The Pathfinders claimed to have marked Stuttgart accurately, but the Main Force is reported to have been late arriving. The first use by the Germans of dummy target indicators is also reported. Most of the bombing fell in open country, but the south-western suburbs of Vaihingen and Kaltental were hit. The crew reported, "considerable ground and smoke haze. No T.I. markers seen when in position to bomb. Bombed where markers were last seen. About 12 good fires counted."

A trip to St. Nazaire on the 22nd was the crews last mission with 97 Squadron. 357 aircraft were sent to attack the port. 3 group sent out a recall to its Stirling's, so only 283 attacked the target. Accurate marking led to concentrated bombing of the port area.

A letter was now received at the Station asking for volunteers to help form a new Squadron that would be making a special mission, but no details were given. Les Munro asked the crew if they wanted to go, and they all agreed, except the rear gunner. Percy was now a member of 617 Squadron. Its leader was arguably one of the most famous bomber pilots of the war, Guy Gibson.



From March 31st until May 14th, 1943 Percy flew in 33 training missions in preparation for the Dam's Raid. On May 13th, they got their first chance at dropping the Upkeep bomb, which had been specifically designed for the mission. This could have been disastrous as the plume of water made by the dropping of the weapon struck the aircraft causing it to lose some wing panels.



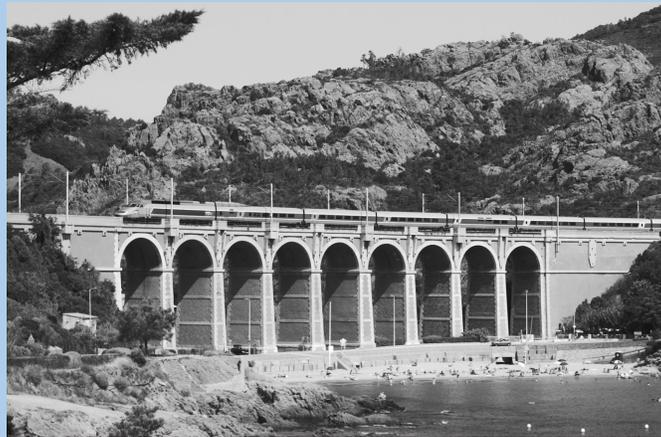
The actual raid itself turned out to be anti-climactic. Munro stated "I can well remember the breakers ahead of us and the sand dunes rising behind them. I actually had to gain height to clear the dunes and was losing height on the Waddensee side when we were hit amidships by a light flak shell from, judging by the tracer, a single gun. The shell blew a hole approximately 30 inches in diameter midway along the fuselage severing all communications and the electrical wiring systems, but without injuring any crew members." He then ordered Percy to check on the rear gunner and to see if the damage was repairable. Percy reported back saying it wasn't and Munro turned for home.

Date	Hour	Aircraft Type and No.	Pilot	Duty	Remarks	Time	Fuel
12-5-43		ED-427	FLYT MUNRO	WOLF	BOMBING - TACTICAL EXERCISE		1.30
14-5-43		ED-427	FLYT MUNRO FLYT HAY	WOLF	BOMBING	1.00	
14-5-43		ED-426	FLYT MUNRO	WOLF	TACTICAL EXERCISE		7.20
16-5-43		ED-426	FLYT MUNRO	WOLF	2000 - MANOEUVRE EXERCISE - 2000 "DAMAGED BY FLAK ON DUTCH COAST"		5.00
23-5-43			FLYT MUNRO	WOLF	FORMATION - A COUNTRY	2.00	2.00
30-5-43		ED-427	FLYT MUNRO	WOLF	FORMATION - A COUNTRY	1.20	
31-5-43		ED-427	FLYT MUNRO	WOLF	FORMATION - A COUNTRY	1.20	
31-5-43		ED-726	FLYT MUNRO	WOLF			
					MONTHLY SUMMARY		
					TOTAL FOR MAY	10.40	22.20
					TOTAL TO DATE	10.40	22.20
					FLYT-CC-BLIND		
					CC-617 24th		
					TOTAL TIME	10.40	22.20

617 lost 8 of 19 crews on the operation. Although saddened by the losses, Arthur Harris was delighted with success of the Dams Raid. He ordered that 617 be retained as a "Special Duty Squadron" within 5 Group and that it continued to be manned by experienced crews and deliver sophisticated, specialized ordinance. The Squadron was granted 7 days leave on the 18th and training resumed at the end of the month. From May 29th to July 15th, Percy flew on 44 training missions.

On July 15th, 617 was tasked with destroying two power stations in northern Italy, one near Genoa and the other near Bologna. Percy was on the latter mission. Although this attack was made from 1300 to 1600 feet. The crews found it difficult find the target due to ground haze and all reported that the use of flares would have helped. Another danger from such a low-level attack, was Percy's aircraft bomb aimer panel was damaged and the starboard tyre was burst by bomb splinters. Rather than turn back to England, the Squadron flew on to North Africa and landed at Blida, 20 miles south-west of Algiers. The return trip was made on the 24th, with the Squadron attacking dock facilities at Leghorn, but the target was covered by haze and the bombing was scattered. Although the results of the two raids were not that successful, the crews returned to Scampton with their aircraft stuffed with wine, onions, dates, oranges and other assorted fruits and vegetables that were hard to come by in war time Britain. Needless to say when another shuttle to Blida on the 29th, there was quite the competition amongst crews to go on it, even though it was a Nickel (leaflet dropping), which was not popular with the crews. Percy was fortunate as the Munro crew was chosen. Percy's log-book states "port motor failed" but no details are given. The crew returned to Scampton via Ras-el-Ma on August 8th. Percy spent a day in the hospital on the 13th, with an undisclosed ailment.

September started well for Percy as he was promoted to Warrant Officer on the 1st and on the 7th he was recommended to be commissioned. 617 returned to action with an attack on the Dortmund-Ems Canal. Percy was fortunate not to have gone on this mission as 5 aircraft were lost. This confirmed that even away from heavily defended German targets, low level attacks with heavy bombers were not viable. After this 617 began to re-train as a specialist high altitude bombing unit. Percy did take part in the attack, on the 16th, of the Anthior Viaduct near Cannes. Although visibility was good, no direct hits were made.



Anthior Viaduct today

617 spent the rest of September, all of October and the early part of November training in its new role. Incorporated into this training was the Stabilizing Automatic Bomb Sight (SABS). It was a precision instrument that had been under development for some time. It was designed to provide greater accuracy from high altitude than the Mk.XIV/T-1 bomb sight that was being used by the bomb aimers during this period of the war.

Percy's next mission was not until November 11th, and it was the Anthior Viaduct again. This time they were armed with the SABS, and it would be their first use of the 12,000 lbs. Tall Boy bomb. Unfortunately, the attack was not successful as most of the crews could not distinguish the target. Four bombed but the closest bomb struck 180 feet away. Crews that were unable to see the viaduct, tried to bomb a railway bridge near Cannes, but frustratingly, there were only near misses. Percy's crew was also frustrated, "Target located visually on approach from the sea. Attempted to bomb in formation as bombsight pressure was u/s. After two dummy runs bombs seen to explode ½ mile west of target." They went on to land at Blida, in North Africa and returned to base on the 17th.

Leonard Cheshire led his first raid as the new c/o of the squadron on December 16th. According to Percy's logbook the target was "Construction works at Flixecourt Domart en Ponthieu." This, although not known at the time, was a V-1 launch sight. The raid failed as the Pathfinder Mosquito placed its target markers 1050 feet from the target. The Munro crew noted no ground detail was visible due to haze. Following this raid and others where the 617 pilots felt that the target marking was not accurate enough, W/C Cheshire and S/Ldr. Mickey Martin began advocating that the only way to take advantage of the SABS and their squadron's precise bombing capability was to have the squadron mark its own targets from low level rather than have the Pathfinders do it for them from high level.



Group Captain Leonard Cheshire

On the 20th a mission to bomb an armament factory at Liege was abandoned as the Mosquito marking was not visible below the cloud, Percy notes in his logbook "P.F.F. failed." On the 22nd his logbook states that Flixecourt is the target, but once again cloud obscured it and prevented bombing. The 30th provided clear weather over Flixecourt but the Pathfinders dropped their markers 200 yards from the target. Although the bombing was well grouped, the target was undamaged.

As 1944 began Cheshire and Martin were becoming more and more frustrated with the lack of accurate marking. In fact, on January 4th, they both "quite unofficially" dropped markers themselves over a V-1 site (Freval) from 400 feet. However the shallow nature of their approach caused the markers to skid before burning and the raid, although effective, was not as successful as hoped.



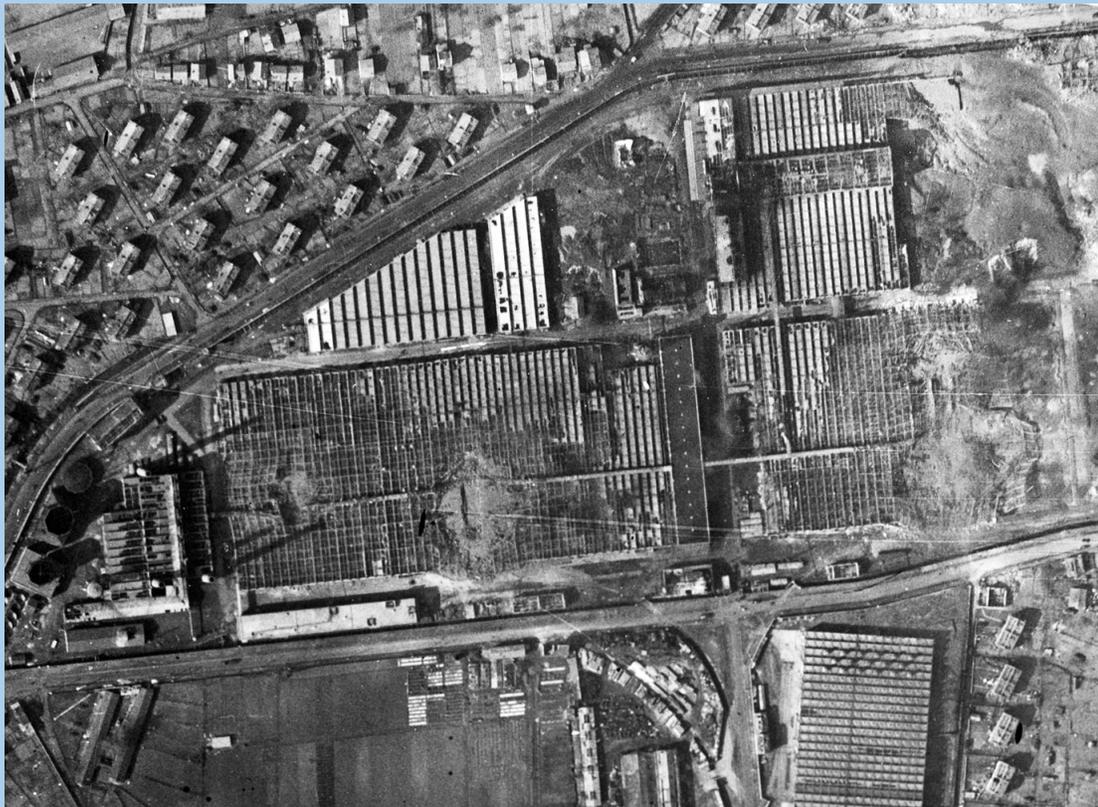
Squadron Leader 'Mickey' Martin

Percy's next operation was on January 21st and was the first for the squadron while operating from Woodhall Spa. Twelve aircraft attacked a V-1 site and Micky Martin "unofficially" tried out a new target marking technique. He noted that he could bomb targets as small as clumps of seaweed in the sea by using his Lancaster as dive-bomber provided, he dove low enough. So, he marked the target by accurately dropping markers from 400 feet while in a high-angle dive. The remainder of the force then dropped their bombs with great accuracy and inflicted a massive amount of damage to the site. This raid was a turning point as henceforth the squadron was permitted to continue with this new technique.

January 25th was a return to Freval, with W/C Cheshire doing the marking. He reported, "Marking above cloud not possible; Marking below cloud difficult because speed flares (the ones used to illuminate the target) drifted across target." The raid was still somewhat successful.

Percy only flew only on one mission during February, another attempt at the Anthior Viaduct. Again, it was unsuccessful despite low-level runs by both Cheshire and Martin. The sides of the valley were very steep, and the target was well defended by guns which damaged both their aircraft. The Munro crew reported "Bombed visually on orders from Leader, bomb believed to be an overshoot."

March 1944 proved to be a very busy month for Percy and the Munro crew, with seven missions flown. On the 2nd an aero-engine factory at Albert, France, was wiped out. Two nights later it was a needle bearing factory at St. Etienne. Although the star-board inner engine failed, the crew carried on, only to find the target totally obscured by clouds. They returned on the 10th and this time the attack was highly successful. Every building in the works was destroyed except one. Poor weather on the 15th foiled plans for bombing an engine factory at Woippy, north of Metz. The next night proved successful as the Michelin tire factory at Clermont-Ferrand was, in the words of W/C Cheshire "Bombing well concentrated; Smoke up to 6500 feet; Huge explosion in target area. Hits on every building; Largest hit by two heavy bombs; Half of the plant making inner tubes was destroyed."



There were a few difficulties at the opening of the attack, with the markers of the *Oboe* Mosquitoes being a fraction late and with communications between the various controlling aircraft being faulty, but these difficulties were soon overcome and both parts of the bombing force achieved extremely accurate and concentrated bombing. In fact, remarkably, the average bombing error by 5 Group in the next few months would be 380 yards, compared to 680 yards on an *Oboe* led attack.

The Munro crew continued in their new role on the 22nd to Brunswick. This raid is of importance in the history of the bombing war because it was the first time that the 5 Group low-level marking method was used over a heavily defended German city. The raid was not successful. The initial marking by 617 Squadron Mosquitoes was accurate but many of the main force bombers did not bomb these, partly because of a thin layer of cloud which hampered visibility and partly because of faulty communications between the various bomber controllers.

To Munich on the 24th in another 5 Group method raid on a major German target. The marking and controlling plan worked well and accurate bombing fell in the centre of Munich. The intense Flak and searchlight defences did not prevent the low flying Mosquito markers from carrying out their task properly. The crew reported "Red spotfires were definitely on target. Bombing was concentrated around markers, with occasional scattered bombs. Some very large fires seen."



Percy Pigeon, front right.

Percy did not get back in the air until May 9th. This was the start of an intensive training period in preparation for D-Day. 617's role in the great invasion was to simulate itself as a naval armada. A theory had shown that a number of aircraft flying low over the sea in elongated, overlapping circuits parallel to the coast, gradually closing inwards towards the shore, and gradually increasing the amount of window (strips of aluminum foil that were excellent radar reflectors) dropped at precisely timed intervals would create the illusion on radar screens based on shore that a large number of ships were approaching.

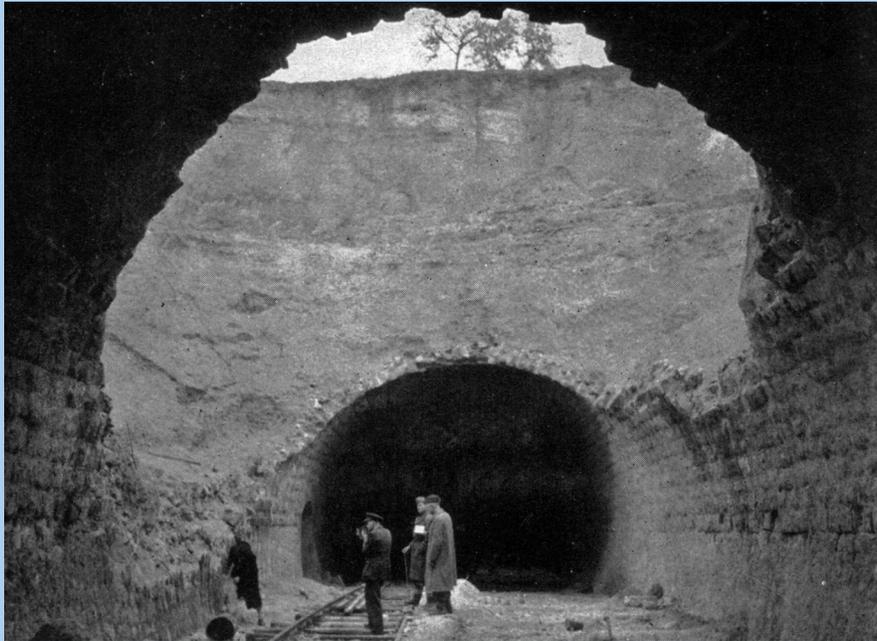
617 Squadron was tasked to create this diversion. A group of eight aircraft would fly the pattern and drop the window. Then after three hours of this, a second group of eight aircraft would take over. This was the trickiest part of all because the replacement aircraft had to come in directly behind with split second timing to carry on the diversion, creating no disruption in the enemy's radar images. This task was given the name Operation Taxable.

The Squadron would create this deception to the north of the invasion beaches and further north still, Short Stirling aircraft of 218 Squadron would do the same in what they referred to as Operation Glimmer. Thus, three invasion fleets would appear on enemy radar screens during the night prior to the invasion.

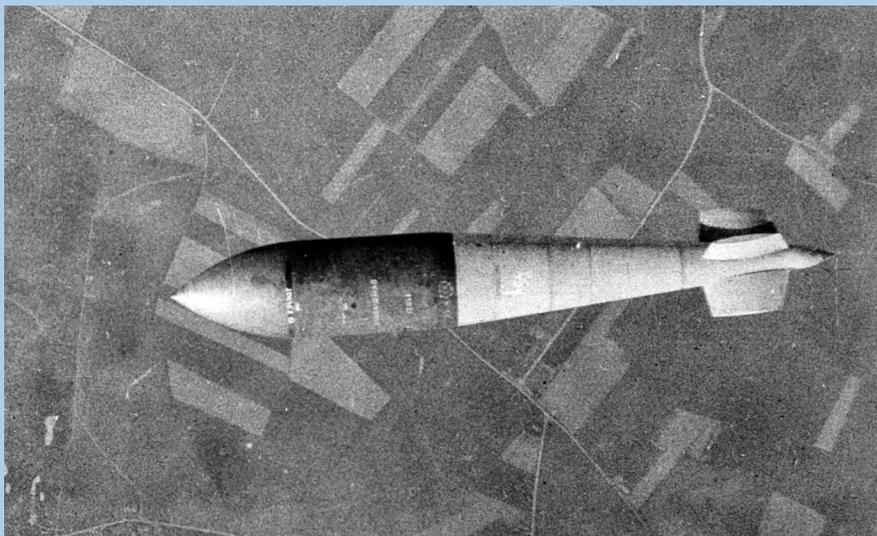
June 5th was not only a momentous day in history, but it was also Percy's 50th operational mission. The crew was increased to 13, with Munro and Cheshire splitting the pilot's duty. Afterwards showing his frustration at not having a more important attacking role in the great event, Munro stated in his logbook: 'Ops. The creation of a tactical surprise to support the landing of troops on the opening of a Second Front. The most hazardous, difficult and most dangerous operation ever undertaken in the history of air warfare, involved flying within at least 9 miles of the enemy coast without fighter cover and in conditions of bright moonlight and at a height of not more than 3,000 feet at which the aircraft was open to attack by the deadliest of weapons - light flak. Believed successful.' This sentiment was somewhat reflected in Percy's logbook as well: 'OPS The creation of a tactical surprise to support landing of troops on the opening of the Second Front. Believed successful.'

Date	Hour	Aircraft Type and No.	Pilot	Duty	Time carried forward—	
					424:15	418:30
REMARKS (Including results of bombing, gunnery, exercises, etc.)					Flying Times	
					Day	Night
JUNE 3.		W-LM482 LANCASTER	S/LDR MUNRO	WOP/AG.		
JUNE 5		W-LM482 LANCASTER	S/LDR MUNRO. W/COMR CHESHIRE.	WOP/AG.		
JUNE 8.		W-LM482 LANCASTER	S/LDR MUNRO.	WOP/AG. WIT CONTROLLER		
JUNE 12.		W-LM482 LANCASTER	S/LDR MUNRO.	WOP/AG.		
JUNE 13.		W-LM482	S/LDR MUNRO.	WOP/AG.		
JUNE 14.		W-LM482 LANCASTER	S/LDR MUNRO.	WOP/AG. SIGNALS CONTROLLER.		
JUNE 16		W-LM482 LANCASTER	S/LDR MUNRO.	WOP/AG. SIGNALS CONTROLLER.		
JUNE 24		W-LM482 LANCASTER	S/LDR MUNRO	WOP/AG. WIT CONTROLLER.		
JUNE 25		W-LM482	S/LDR MUNRO.	WOP/AG. WIT CONTROLLER		
NAV. TRAINING.					1:45	
— "D DAY" —						
50 "OPS" THE CREATION OF A TACTICAL SURPRISE TO SUPPORT LANDING OF TROOPS ON THE OPENING OF THE SECOND FRONT. BELIEVED SUCCESSFUL.						4:30.
51 "OPS" RAILWAY TUNNEL AT SAMMUR. FRANCE - 1 X TALLBOY - 10,000 FT. SUCCESSFUL.						6:20
N. F. T.					:58	
H. L. B. 6 BOMBS. 13,000. FT.						2:15.
52 OPS - U BOAT PENS AT LA HAYRE. 1 X 12000 LB TALLBOY - 18000 FT. SQDN FLEW IN FORMATION.					3:40	
53 OPS - E BORT PENS BOUND ONE. 1 X 12000 LB TALLBOY - 8000 FT. ARMY OPPOSITION DAMAGED BY FLAK.					2:40.	
54 OPS - WIZERNE. 1 X 12000 LB TALLBOY. 17000 FT. FORMATION.					2:55.	
55 OPS - NO BALL TARGET. 1 X 12000 LB. TALLBOY 17600. HIT BY FLAK.					3:25.	
TOTAL TIME...					439:35	436:20

The next mission of the 8th brought the first use of the 12,000 lbs. *Tallboy* bombs on a railway tunnel near Saumur, 125 miles south of the battle area. The raid was prepared in great haste because a German Panzer unit was expected to move by train through the tunnel. The target area was illuminated with flares by 4 Lancasters of 83 Squadron and marked at low level by 3 Mosquitoes. 25 Lancasters of 617 Squadron then dropped their *Tallboys* with great accuracy, one actually pierced the roof of the tunnel and brought down a huge quantity of rock and soil. This badly delayed the Panzer unit. The tunnel was still not cleared when the area was liberated in August 1944.



Saumur tunnel damage



Tallboy bomb

On June 14th Munro was tasked with leading 617, and as signals controller (as well as for its next three raids) for a total force of 221 Lancasters on a raid of E-Boat pens at Le Havre. Once again, the *Tallboys* were put to good use. The crew reported "Our own bomb fell right on the aiming point. The squadron too bombing on our own aiming point was very good, and at least two direct hits were scored. Only one bomb was seen to do down on the northern aiming point and it also was extremely accurate." One bomb penetrated the roof, and the E-Boat threat to the invasion beaches from this port was almost completely eliminated.

The 15th, E-Boat pens at Boulogne were the target. S/L Dave Shannon another of 617 Squadron's Flight Commanders also came along as a passenger. Percy's logbook records, "1 x 12000 lb Tallboy – 8000 F/T. Heavy opposition, damaged by flak." It is not recorded to what actual damage was done to the aircraft. Interestingly enough the other 617 Flight Commander Joe McCarthy also had his aircraft damaged, causing it to lose its *Tallboy*. The damage to the E-Boat pens however was significant. Because of the two raids the remnants of the French based E-Boat flotillas were forced to pull back to the Dutch port of Ijmuiden.

617's focus now shifted to V-weapons. Percy's next and final two missions were against the Nazi rocket sites. On the 24th the Squadron, with Munro leading, attacked Wizerne. They scored several hits with their *Tallboy* bomb. 1 Lancaster was shot down by Flak, the first loss by the squadron in exactly 2 months.

Although not knowing it at the time Percy and his crew flew their final mission (Percy's 55th) on the 25th. 617 Squadron sent 17 Lancasters, 2 Mosquitoes and 1 Mustang to bomb the Sircourt flying-bomb store. The Mustang was flown by Wing Commander Cheshire and used as a low-level marker aircraft. The Mustang only arrived at Woodhall Spa that afternoon, by courtesy of the Eighth Air Force, and this was Cheshire's first flight in it. The Lancasters scored 3 direct hits on the concrete store with *Tallboy* bombs and no aircraft were lost. Percy's logbook entry reads "Ops – Noball target. 1x12000 lb. *Tallboy* 17600. Hit by flak."



On 10 July W/C Cheshire was summoned to 5 Group Headquarters where Air Vice Marshal Cochrane told him, "I've been looking at the records and I see you've done 100 now. That's enough. It's time you had a rest. I've told Tait (G/C James "Willie" Tait) to take over. It's no use arguing. Sorry but there it is. 100 is a good number to stop at. Shannon, Munro, and McCarthy will come off too. They've been going continuously for about two years and it's time they had a rest as well." And with that, Percy's operational war was over. Statistically the average Bomber Command crew only lasted about 12 missions, so these men up to that point had really defied the odds.



S/Ldr. Dave Shannon



S/Ldr. Joe McCarthy

Percy was then posted to No. 86 Operational Training Unit operating war worn Wellington bombers. He did 13 trips in them, with the first on 18 July and the last 28 September. He also recorded "crashed" on 6 September. Percy was then sent home. His war was over.

Some time during mi-April 1944 Percy was recommended for the Distinguished Flying Cross.

“Pilot Officer Pigeon has completed 42 continuous operational sorties as a Wireless Operator. E has taken part in attacks on such heavy defended targets as Berlin, Essen, Hamburg, Cologne, and many other objectives in Germany. He began operation in January 1943 and in March of that year volunteered to join a Special Duties Squadron, thereby considerably extending his tour of operations. He has now completed twenty sorties against these objectives in Occupied Europe. His calmness when his aircraft has been in danger and his great determination even when confronted by heavy odds have played a great part in the success of many of these attacks. He is therefore strongly recommended for the award of the Distinguished Flying Cross.”

The award was effective 19 June 1944 as per London Gazette dated 30 June 1944 and AFRO 1861/44 dated 25 August 1944. No citation other than “completed...many successful operations against the enemy in which he has displayed high skill, fortitude, and devotion to duty.” The medal was presented on 20 October 1948.



Percy stayed in the RCAF and rose to the rank of Flight Lieutenant. He was posted to Vancouver, and later served as Adj. And Flying Control officer at Fort St. John. Later postings were to the Search and Rescue Squadrons at Winnipeg and Sea Island (Vancouver), and as Exchange Officer to 101 Squadron RAF at Swanton Morley, England.

His last postings were to Summerside, P.E.I. and 405 Squadron in Greenwood, Nova Scotia where he flew with Maritime Air Command. His last logbook entry is for May 19, 1962, for 2 hours and 45 minutes in an Argus.

F/L Pigeon retired from the RCAF in June 1962 and moved back to Williams Lake to retire. Percy Pigeon passed away on 23 March 1967.