

## **SANDY'S DOLL**

The Bomber Command Museum of Canada is honoured to display the good luck charm that was carried by F/Lt Albert Richard "Sandy" Sanderson during his forty-two operations with 107 Squadron Bomber Command.

The following page tells the story of "Sandy's Doll" and this is followed by "Sandy's War," the story of F/Lt Sanderson's wartime career. It was edited by David Poissant and first published in the August 2016 issue of "Dispersals."



## SANDY'S DOLL

*"When I joined 107 Squadron in 1943, I was given this doll. The pilot who gave it to me might have been Canadian or a member of the RAF. I do not remember his name. The pilot had completed his tour. I kindly thanked him for the doll. He indicated he had carried her all the way through his ops -about 24 or 25 of them. She may have belonged to another pilot prior to him. I always wondered why I was selected to have her."*

Albert Richard "Sandy" Sanderson had been working on a farm in Saskatchewan prior to joining the RCAF in January 1941. He learned to fly on Tiger Moths at 5 EFTS in High River and then flew Cessna Cranes at 12 SFTS at Brandon, Manitoba where he received his wings in April 1942. After flying Hampdens and Blenheims at Operational Training Units, Sandy was posted to 107 Squadron that was flying the Douglas A-20 Havoc, known as the "Boston" while in RAF service. That's when he was given the doll. Sandy flew 16 combat operations on the Boston before the squadron was re-equipped with Mosquitos.



Sandy and his doll in 2016



Sandy Sanderson in front of a Boston in 1943



F/Lt Sanderson with his Mosquito bomber

*"She had rectangular, 'mother of pearl' buttons when I first had her. She looked neat and tidy. She was in fine condition while I had her. On each operation I was on, I stuffed her into my battle dress, facing my chest. I made 42 trips with her.*

*"I would put her under my pillow between ops in my tent. Nobody ever commented or teased me about having her, as I always returned. She was tangible. She was a positive object -I could touch her."*

As a Boston and Mosquito pilot, Sandy and his doll flew a wide variety of operations including low-level attacks on V-I Flying Bomb sites and railway facilities, attacking enemy troops and vehicles on D-Day, and bombing and harassing Nazi fighter bases stations that were being used against Bomber Command's main force bombers.

*"I don't remember why I did not pass it along to another pilot when I was finished my tour. I grew attached to it. It was a good luck charm -a talisman. I felt like she was a Guardian Angel."*

Sandy's doll completed a total of at least 66 operations at a time when most Bomber Command aircrew were not surviving their tour of 30 operations.

# SANDY'S WAR

Flight Lieutenant A.R. 'Sandy' Sanderson • Pilot • 107

Sandy was sworn in as a member of the RCAF on 20 June 1941 in Regina, Saskatchewan. Assigned regimental number R107792, he was the last airman of the day, and was on the train to No. 2 Manning Depot in Brandon, Manitoba the following morning.

He had been threshing grain on Frank Peter's farm when war was declared on 03 September 1939 and Sandy told his workmates, who had no interest in getting involved, that he intended to join the RCAF and train to be a pilot. That Fall he made his way to Regina to enlist, but University types were all that were being accepted. He went back in January of '41, at which time the RCAF had revised their requirements. He was told to report on 20 June.

Sandy continues:

To me, Manning Depot, with its endless days of drill, route marches and parade square, was not a lot of fun, nor was communal living with fifty to a hundred men in barracks on steel cots. But the people were friendly enough, and it wasn't long before I was off to Calgary.

On August 8<sup>th</sup> I was posted to Nos. 2 and 11 Equipment Depot on guard duty: two hours on and two hours off, guarding equipment on the outskirts of Calgary in an area called the Stockyards. The reason for the name was readily apparent! We carried a rifle, even though we had no ammunition; we did have a bayonet, with which I almost stuck a

guy one night. I couldn't identify him in the dark and told him to advance; he kept coming until he said "you'd better halt me before I end up in the end of that bayonet."

My first airplane flight occurred while stationed at Calgary; we prospective airmen would go out to No. 3 Service Flight Training School (SFTS) and the flying instructors would allow us to fly as passengers. We were issued parachutes and were taken up on a 'Night Flying Test' that consisted of one circuit of the airdrome with an instructor, a trainee pilot and several prospective aircrew.

I quite enjoyed flying for the first time, although the Avro Anson was not too impressive.

Then I was posted to No. 4 Initial Training School (ITS) in Edmonton. I enjoyed Edmonton; the best part was at long last we were beginning to make progress in our flying 'careers.' Along the line they did 'wash guys out;' some went to non-flying positions and those considered still suitable for air crew transferred to Observer, Wireless Operator/Air Gunners or Air Gunner schools. They



*P/O Sandy Sanderson in July 1943*      *courtesy A.R. Sanderson*

were selected or rejected based on what was needed at the time as well as academic achievement on exams. I managed to stay in the top 1/3 of the class and avoided rewrites.

We arrived at No. 5 Elementary Flight Training School (EFTS) High River, Alberta on 27 October. There was ground school, endless classes on aircraft recognition, navigation, meteorology and we learned to fly the Tiger Moth. The wind blew like crazy at High River; I once saw a pilot flying over the aerodrome throttle back until he seemed motionless in the air, the wind being that strong. There were times when we were landing that a truck would race alongside as you landed and a couple of guys would jump out and grab your wingtips so you wouldn't flip over and, at times, guide you back to the hangar.



*A No. 5 EFTS Tiger Moth airborne during training flight in High River area circa 1942  
Bomber Command Museum of Canada photo*

My first solo flight was 08 November 41 at High River; I had completed 9 hours and

15 minutes of Dual Instruction and had just finished a circuit with my instructor when he got out and told me "Okay it's yours. Do one takeoff and one landing. Good luck." I did well except for throttling back too far on my downwind leg, but caught it in time; from then on I *always* checked my air speed indicator when throttling back.

After missing 3 days due to a sinus infection, I had a lot of flying hours to make up so I cruised around with an instructor by the name of Walz who like to chase coyotes across the fields of Turner Valley. I made up the hours, but it was Walz who did most of the flying.

We completed EFTS on 21 Dec 41 and were posted to No. 12 Service Flying Training School in Bandon, Manitoba and began flying the Cessna Crane just after New Year's Day 1942. I had a bit of trouble landing the Crane and would 'pump it down' meaning juggling the stick or wheel back and



*Cessna Crane with Avro Anson behind. Canadian Warplane Heritage*

forth to get down without breaking anything. It frustrated my instructor, Alexander, who turned me over to another to help solve my problem. This instructor got me to do tail down landings which broke the ice for me; although I went on to three-point the Crane, I found tail down landings very good for rough field or crosswind landings.

There was one fatal crash while we were in Brandon; we were told to stay away from it, but of course we couldn't. There wasn't much left of the plane as there isn't much material in a Crane. *[19 Jan 42; Killed was LAC Ross Francis Kitto, RNZAF; 23 years. Interred in Brandon Cemetery Manitoba]*

It was already snowing when several pilots and I left on solo cross-country flights to Dauphin, Manitoba and return. A blizzard developed and my gyro became fouled; the others had turned back a half-hour before I did. I did a reciprocal course but could not find the aerodrome; I dropped to about 200 feet and found a road that looked familiar; following it, I was getting low on fuel when I arrived at Virden, an Elementary Flying School. I circled until they gave a green light and made a good landing. They phoned Brandon and later in the afternoon, a couple of instructors flew down. I didn't know it at the time but when making a forced landing, you are not allowed to fly it out. I expected a tongue-lashing, but everyone was happy I had found an aerodrome.



*No. 12 Service Flying Training School, Brandon Manitoba Flight Ontario photo*

We completed the Brandon course 08 April 1942 and two days later were in the ninth Wings Parade out of Brandon. I was recommended for a commission, but it seemed most fellows going overseas never received commissions in time. I remained a Sergeant, not even receiving a Crown *[Flight Sergeant]*; my commission came later, through the RAF. I went home on leave, was posted to No. 2 Y Depot in Moncton for a couple days, then to No. 1 Y Depot in Halifax on 27 April 42.

We arrived in England seven days later.

Our transport to Britain was a ship called the Batory, a reportedly former flagship of the Polish Navy. It was very fast, but had to travel at the slower speed of the convoy of which we were a part. We saw no ships sunk nor any other commotion. We did have rough weather and although I never got seasick, I did miss a meal or two because the food was awful! Sour peas and carrots with an atrocious beer that we drank out of billy cans. We were given a chocolate bar per day on which we existed along with the cereal or porridge they gave us for breakfast.

We landed at Glasgow and travelled by train to No. 3 Personnel Reception Centre in Bournemouth on the south coast of England, where we got our first taste of the war. We were billeted in hotels in a resort area along the south coast, just across the English Channel from the Germans. A few of us had gone to an afternoon matinee when we suddenly heard some loud thumps; a bomb had gone off close by. People began to panic; we stood on our seats and yelled for calm and to file out quietly; hell, if we had been closer to the door we'd probably have been the first ones out! There was one person killed in the backyard next door, having tea when the bomb hit. We learned that three or four German raiders had come screaming in low with bombs under their bellies, strafing and doing as much damage as possible; they dropped their bombs and got the hell out, back across the channel.



*Messerschmitt Bf-109 'Tip and Run' raider. These aircraft made lightning attacks on English south coast resorts. Photo: panzer.7bb.ru*

One of those raiders dropped a bomb on the Anglo Swiss Hotel that was full of Canadians and hit the almost empty sleeping quarters, most having gone down for tea. Six men were killed; volunteers were called to help and we got to work. We found one officer flattened beneath a concrete pillar; I'll never forget seeing him with his watch stopped at four o'clock, probably the moment of his death. My first close contact with casualties.

Along with a New Zealand Air Force Pilot Officer, I was sent to the Royal Regiment of the Buffs for a week on maneuvers. Their artillery was scary; they set the guns for specific elevations, but the damn things always seem to fall short. The saving grace of the exercise was that we were both rewarded with a 48-hour pass!

That ended my Army experience and, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June 1942, I was posted to No. 15 Advanced Flying Unit (AFU) at Leconfield, Yorkshire, where we flew Airspeed Oxfords, which I liked better than the Cessna. I tried to get an Oxford above 10,000 feet using thinning, enriching, diving for speed...everything to no avail; probably a good thing, because we didn't have oxygen. We did a

lot of cross country flights, many of them 'under the hood' for proficiency on controls. During my time at Leconfield I went to No. 1516 Beam Approach Training Flight at Middleton St. George (14 to 17 July), where we flew on instruments all the time. The time spent there and on the Link Trainer stood me in good stead later on operations doing nearly all night flying.

Night flying isn't safe when it's pitch black with someone shooting at you; you better know where you're going!

My next stop was No. 14 Operational Training Unit (OTU), Cottesmore, Rutland. There, after local familiarization flights on Oxfords, we changed to Handley Page Hampdens. Twice during my stay at #14 OTU, I swung a Hampden 180°; just taxied back and started again. The Hampden had small twin tails; some called it the flying coffin, but the most popular, and accurate, nickname was 'flying suitcase.' It had a long boom of a body and, until you got the tail up in the slipstream, it was as stable as a kangaroo on ice. I eventually got it going and completed 110 hours of First Pilot time on it.

It was here I crewed up with 'Hoot' Henderson, RCAF as navigator; a Wireless Operator Air Gunner (WAG) by the name of O'Conner RCAF; Rose, RAF as Bombardier and Air Gunner Coates, RCAF. We were scheduled for one of the



*Handley Page Hampdens*

*Photo: wallyswar.wordpress.com*

thousand bomber raids, but our Squadron Leader wisely recommended that we, an inexperienced crew, not be used. Many guys I trained with in Brandon were lost on those publicity stunt raids.

One memorable experience on Hampdens was when, about to take a plane just refueled from a night trip, Hoot threw his chest pack on top of the tail plane which promptly sagged with one side almost hitting the ground. The ground crew checked to find only one of four bolts still holding; the previous pilot must have made a heavy landing, smashing the bolts. If we had taken it up, the first turn would have been disaster. After that Hoot always shook the tail plane before mounting up.

We survived Hampdens and were posted to 424 Squadron, 6 (Canadian) Group at Topcliffe, Yorkshire on 29 October 1942, flying Vickers Wellingtons. The Wellington was awkward and I had two problems with them. My aircraft had a faulty auto pilot that never did get repaired; each time I went through procedures and cut in the auto pilot, the plane went into a screaming dive to port.

My other problem was my short legs. I was flying with F/L Klassen on 22 Dec when he cut one of my engines; it's a test to see if you can keep the aircraft straight. I'm doing my best with a six inch cushion behind me, but I can't get enough rudder, so I throttled back the opposite engine. Klassen said you have to keep full power on; I explained I couldn't get enough rudder; he said to get the pedals adjusted; I said they're up as far as they go, they don't make them any longer. The next morning S/L Comar gave me three choices: stay here and instruct; go home and instruct; or we'll give you any other posting you want. I almost fell out of my chair; they don't do things like that in the military. I needed time to think. My friends told me it's no disgrace if your legs are too short; go home; people are being killed over here.

I asked for fighter bombers.



*Bristol Blenheim Mk IVs*

*Imperial War Museum photo*

12 March 1943: I was at No. 13 OTU at Bicester in Oxfordshire, on Bristol Blenheim Is and IVs. Blenheim's were a cinch to fly, compared to other aircraft I had flown to date, even the nose heavy Mk IVs; the visibility was good, and I was now flying formation. Another pilot, Louis Longueville (from San Francisco), and I were approached by a couple of navigators saying they wanted to crew up. Both had been trained in South Africa and, after checking them out, I found Ed Free to be the best navigator in our squadron; he didn't have much rank and was a bit overly religious, but he was good. So I ended up in a four-man crew with

Navigator Ed Free, WAG 'Ginger' Doran and rear Gunner Jim Lovett from New Zealand.

We completed No. 13 OTU and were posted to 107 Squadron at Hartford Bridge on 8 June 43; the same time I was advised of my commission. Off I went to London with a handful of clothing coupons for a tailor-made uniform from Hathaway's. The first time I appeared at an officer's mess in uniform was at 107 Squadron; a new experience for me. Luckily, my friend F/O McCullough was there and he knew his way around the mess. I didn't even know what serviette rings were for, nor many of the other things used in the mess. But I survived and a few days later was down as Orderly Officer; one of the duties was to check on the food in the Airmen's mess. Shortly after entering the Airmen's mess I heard a loud "Hey, Sandy!" It was one of my ground crew from 424

Squadron. He asked what aircraft I was going to have and said he was going to come and work on it. I ended up with a great ground crew; many of the Polish ground crew were not treated well by their officers, so they often wandered over and worked with my crew. One of them gave me a cigarette lighter made from two brass buttons; I still have it and it still works. Other than cigarettes, I can't recall how I repaid them; likely with coupons, socks and shirts.

The 'fun' started almost immediately. 107 Squadron had an all-black A-20 Havoc Mk II night fighter with flame dampening exhaust and a hard nose housing 12 forward firing .303 machine guns. I was sent up in it on 28 June for some solo single engine flying. I feathered an engine at a reasonable height and flew for about 30 minutes before unfeathering. It wouldn't start; climbing to 10,000 feet, I put it into a dive...no luck...wouldn't start. After trying everything in the manual, I headed back to the 'drome and circled at 800 feet until the tower realized I was in trouble and gave me a green light to land. The ground crew found the battery was dead; there was no way I could have started the engine.



*l-r: F/O D. Brown; F/S J. Shaw (both KIA 22 Oct 43); F/O E. McCullough (POW 22 Oct 43) Ed McCullough photo via Russ Legross.*

By then I had 4 hours on A-20s and knew I could fly one on a single engine and land it if necessary.

We flew a lot of low level cross country and formation flying in pairs or boxes of six. During one practice low level flight we roared over a fox hunt. Why anyone would conduct a fox hunt in the middle of a war I do not know. The horses started bucking, I don't know where the dogs went, and we didn't see the fox. My WAG gave a running account from his rear position of a rider being dragged, another horse bucking across a field and third running straight through a hedge. I hope no one was hurt; we didn't hear any complaints; we were doing what we were supposed to and they were only out bothering some poor fox.

04 September 1943 our crew flew its first operation. It was against the Marshalling Yards at Amiens and was a circus. That was 12 aircraft, in daylight, in formation, bombing from about 10,000 feet. My logbook reads: flak nil, no snappers (fighters). [Boston IIA OM-J serial BZ275]

*[107 Squadron Operations Record Book for 04 Sep 43 reads:*

*"24 aircraft led by W/Comdr England, were detailed to attack Marshalling Yards at Amien. All a/c attacked the primary from 11,500 to 12,100 feet at 0915 hours dropping 96 x 500 lb. M.C. T.D. .025.*

*Bursts were observed on railway tracks and wagon repair shops, on buildings to the South of Eastern yards and a few overshoots to the South and South East of target.*

*Weather was good. Visibility 10-20 miles, no low cloud and hazy.*

*No enemy aircraft or flak encountered.*

*A fire was seen in a wood North of Crecy-on-Ponthiem.*

*N.B. This operation was carried out in conjunction with 88 Squadron.]*

By the 9<sup>th</sup> of the month I had done five ops, so we were going fairly steady. Two of the ops were on the same day, 08 Sep 43, laying smoke between mine sweepers and the enemy coast:

Take off at 0915 in Boston IIIA OM-D serial BZ223

Take off at 1512 in Boston IIIA OM-H serial BZ280

The object of smoke-laying ops was to block the German artillery's view of the minesweeping operations; the risk was that artillery barrages into the channel created huge plumes of water and if your low-flying aircraft hit one, you were in the drink! Fortunately during my smoke-laying operations the Germans weren't firing.

A 09 Sep 43 operation against Monchy/Breton Airfield was carried out in concert with 342 (Free French) Squadron. Twelve Bostons from 107 Squadron and 11 from 342; because 342 were an aircraft short, our crew was assigned to fly with them.

I had seen 342 Squadron in action and they did not instill confidence. They received the best aircraft, were treated royally and did little according to intelligence standards. As soon as we crossed the coast, they began nattering like crazy, breaking radio silence. The formation got very raggedy and Ed told me we were way off target; I don't know where we dropped the bombs. When we got back I explained to our Wing Commander what happened and that if he ever wanted me to fly with those guys again, he could court martial me. I never again flew with them and, as far as I know, nor did anyone else from 107.



*107 Squadron Douglas A-20 'Bostons' John Shephard photo via Russ Legross*

One of the most memorable ops of the 16 I did while on Bostons, was a 03 Oct 43 attack on a transformer and switching station at Changy, near Orleans. Twelve Bostons attacked; 6 at high level and 6 at low level; our crew, in Boston IIIA OM-S serial BZ394, was in the low attack. Ted Hoeg had part of his tail shot off, but there were no fighters.

From 107 Squadron ORB:

*All aircraft attacked primary at 1412/1413 hours.*

*6 aircraft from 50 feet dropping 23x500 M.C. 11 secs. 6 aircraft from 1,500 feet dropping 23x500 M.C. .025. (2 bombs hung up)*

*A huge orange flame seen to rise up from transformers and circuit broken in North part of station. Direct hits on Administrative Building and whole target enveloped in smoke rising to 3,000 feet seen from 30 miles after leaving target.*

*Aircraft machine gunned target and two goods trains. One, just west of target, was raked all along wagons and engine.*

*Light inaccurate flak over target.*

*Light and heavy flak inaccurate on coast on return, in both cases not intense*

*3/10 Cu. 3,000 feet. Visibility excellent over target.*

*3 aircraft took photos: Aircraft 'Q' (vertical). 'M' & 'L' (oblique).*

We had a few sad incidents. The first guy I knew to go missing was a South African billeted just down the hall from me. I had traded him a large can of Revelation Pipe Tobacco for a package of photographic paper he had. Shortly after that, he was shot down, missing. He eventually made it back, but not before his can of tobacco had been stolen.

Another event included McCullough, Hoeg and I: We were all trying to make ten ops, as the commonly-held belief was most didn't get past seven. An op was being put together and two more crews were required; each of us wanted it so W/C England told us to flip for it. I lost the toss so McCullough and Hoeg went. It was a low level op and the formation made a faulty return crossing of the French Coast at Veere where intense accurate light flak was waiting. McCullough and Hoeg were shot down along with two other crews. McCullough was the sole survivor and was interned as a POW for the duration.

*That 22 October 43 Operation was against Courcelles – Aircraft Aero Engine Repair Works near Charleroi with Bostons from 88 and 342 Squadrons. 107 Squadron losses were:*

*Boston IIIA 'OM-A' serial BZ230:*

*W/C England, R.G. Pilot RAFVR KIA*

*F/O Anderson, N.P. Nav/B RAFVR KIA*

*P/O Kindell, A.E. WO/AG RAFVR KIA*

*Boston IIIA 'OM-D' serial BZ223:*

*F/O Brice, J.R. Pilot RAFVR KIA*

*F/S Muddell, V.G. Nav/B RAFVR KIA*

*F/S Gibson, R. WO/AG RAFVR KIA*

*Boston IIIA 'OM-K' serial BZ234:*

*F/O McCullough, E.E. Pilot RCAF POW (Stalag Luft I)*

*F/O Brown, D.R.R. Nav/B RAFVR KIA*

*Sgt Shaw, J. WO/AG RAFVR KIA*

*Boston IIIA 'OM-G' serial BZ203:*

<i>F/S Hoeg, T.</i>	<i>Pilot</i>	<i>RAFVR</i>	<i>KIA</i>
<i>Sgt Gardner, H.</i>	<i>Nav/B</i>	<i>RAFVR</i>	<i>KIA</i>
<i>Sgt Rodham, C.</i>	<i>WO/AG</i>	<i>RAFVR</i>	<i>KIA</i>

*Two aircraft were forced to land at other RAF fields: 'OM-O' at Kenley and 'OM-R' at Manston.*

*107 Squadron Operations Records Book reads, in part:*

*...4 aircraft were seen to be shot down at Veere at 1507 hours. One aircraft, believed to be 'A' seen with the starboard engine on fire but under control flying southwards. One aircraft believed to be 'D' seen on fire. This aircraft exploded and fell in the channel between Walcheren and Noord, Beveland. Two aircraft seen on fire and seen to collide and break up in the air. These last 2 aircraft believed to be 'G' and 'K'. Large flocks of birds of many kinds were encountered over the enemy coast and estuaries and considerable minor damage caused to aircraft 'V' and 'F' as a result of hitting them.*

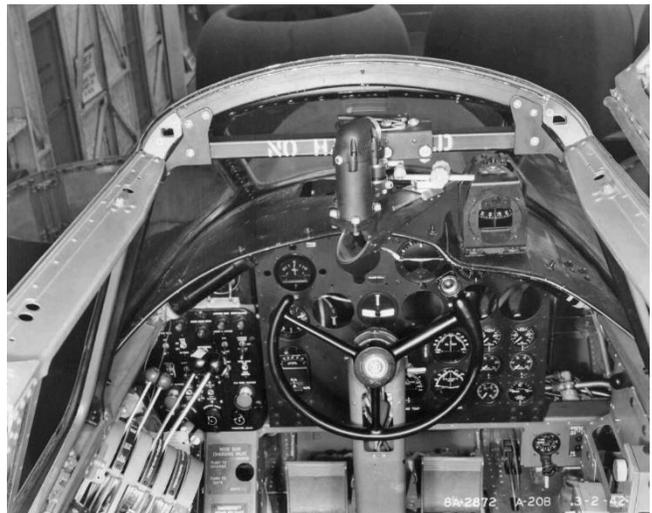
We completed 16 operations, during daylight, on Bostons. Many were raids on so-called 'No-ball' sites where V-1 'Doodlebug' rockets were launched. No-balls were hardened concrete structures and heavily defended with fighters and FLAK (a contraction of the German name 'Flugzeugabwehrkanone' meaning air defense cannon).

FLAK were cannon shells set to explode at a predetermined height, scattering metal shards over a large area; they exploded in a puff of black smoke with the unmistakable smell of cordite. If you heard or saw the puff and didn't hear the jingle-jangle of metal hitting or piercing your plane, you were okay. Very often, however, we *did* hear the darn flak pieces hitting us. I still have one piece, the size of a marble, I dug out of our aircraft after an operation.

More than a few times, planes returned from low level ops trailing wire from power lines; many weird things went on.

The A-20 was one of the nicest aircraft I ever flew. The cockpit was spacious enough that you could at least move your arms and elbows; the seats were comfortable, although we always sat on a parachute. Vision was beautiful; it was much easier to fly in formation than the Mosquitos I flew soon after. It could easily be landed on one engine and could take a lot of punishment. It could have used heavier machine guns or cannon.

On 3 February 1944 we moved to Lasham, leaving behind our beloved Bostons to switch over to de Havilland Mosquitos.



*A-20 Boston cockpit*

*Mark Allen M photo*

On February 3, 1944 we moved to Lasham. We were leaving our beloved Bostons behind to switch over to de Havilland Mosquito fighter bombers. We flew Oxfords at first to keep busy, but on February 20 I flew the Mark VI Mosquito for the first time.

I flew solo after my familiarization flight; I had no problems with the aircraft swinging, thanks to my experience on Hampdens. I flew my first operation in a Mosquito [Mk VI 'OM-A' serial LR312] on 16 Mar 44, a raid on a Noball (V-1) site at Preuseville in France.

*107 Squadron ORB reads, in part: Six Mosquito aircraft of 107 Squadron led by W/Cdr Pollard...five of the aircraft carried out an attack on the primary target at 1710/14 from a height of 300 feet approximately. 20 x 500lb MC MkIV T.D. 11 secs being dropped. Cannon were also used. Columns of smoke were seen in the target area and it is believed that the aiming point was hit.*

*A considerable amount of flak greeted the aircraft at the coast and at the target a fair amount was seen. Not one of our aircraft sustained damage from this cause.*

*Aircraft 'C' piloted by Lt. Longueville abandoned the operation on the outward journey after damaging the airscrews by hitting the sea. A successful landing was made at Tangmere.*



*V-1 launch site after a 107 Squadron raid; the launch ramp is uppermost right.*  
IWM (C4719)

The next day I lost my best friend in a cruel twist of fate: F/L David Campbell was from Ireland and had been trained in the States. We were at the bombing range, practicing dive-bombing and I was learning by observing his technique, which usually involved the near stalling of the aircraft as he put it into a steep dive for better accuracy. Partway down the dive the top section of his starboard wing came off; his plane flipped over and went straight in; Campbell and his navigator, Kevin Dodrill DFC, were both killed. It was St. Patrick's Day.

*[David Mark Campbell is interred in the Clondevaddock (Christ the Redeemer) Church of Ireland Churchyard. He was 31. Kevin Sean Dodrill is interred in the Woodston Cemetery, Old Fletton.]*

Our fourth op, 22 April 44, was a ten-plane raid (5 pairs of Mosquitoes at five-minute intervals) on the Engine Repair and Locomotive sheds at Mantes, France; we and S/L Brittain were the first pair. We were supposed to be following him, but after we crossed the French coast he was all over the sky; Ed Free, my navigator, told me that if we continued to follow him we would miss the target completely. We broke off and continued to the target on our own. As we approached, the enemy opened up with everything they had. Tracers and shells were bursting everywhere as we

nosed into our bombing dive; I opened up with machine guns and cannon while waving the nose around and they stopped firing; we must have really scared them...or killed them.

We pulled out of the dive and found we still had one bomb under each wing, thanks to a hydraulic failure. We had no choice but to return with them. Ed managed to pump down the flaps and landing gear and I put it down as gently as I could and let it roll to a stop. We got out and left the bombs for the ground crew to look after. Later, we learned from another crew that when they got to the target there were already two holes blown through the main building roof...not bad: direct hits from the only two bombs we were able to drop!

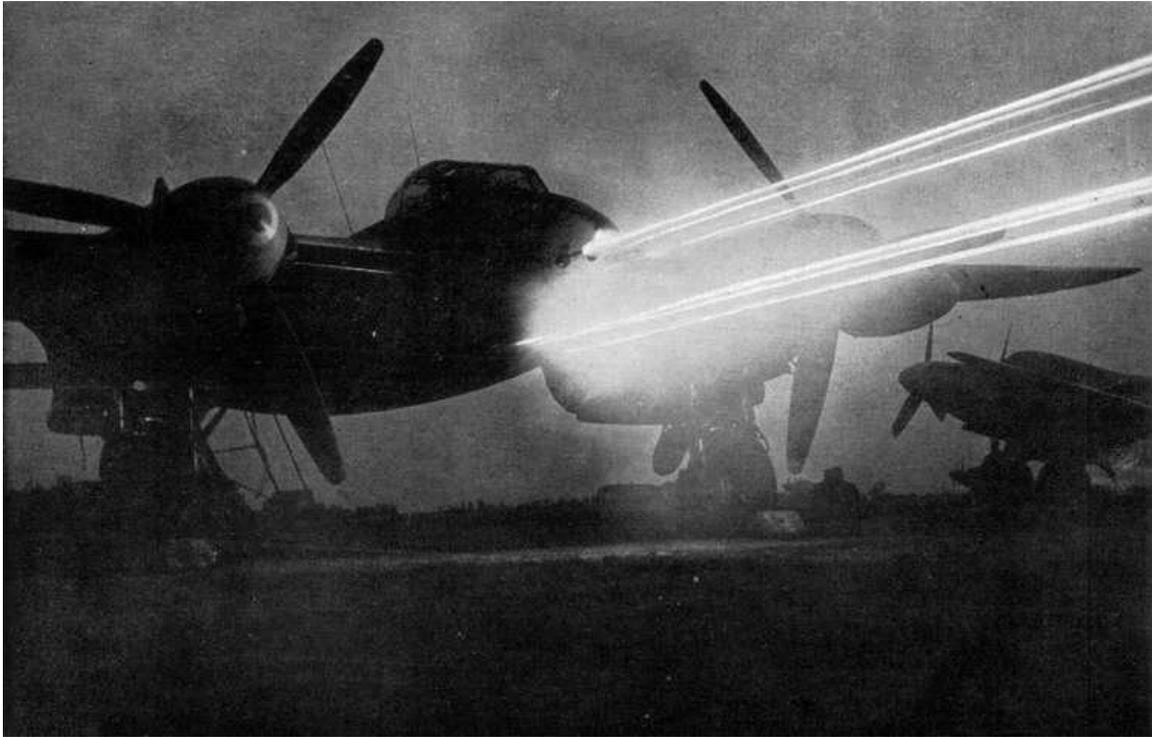
S/L Brittain did attack the target; and on the way back received a flak hit to one spinner; he feathered the prop and made it back to base on one engine. Aircraft 'G' piloted by F/S Smith was hit in the starboard wheel; the undercarriage collapsed on landing; the crew were unhurt.



*107 Squadron Mosquito Fighter Bomber; the airmen are unidentified. D. Poissant collection*

On the night of 5/6 June 1944, seventeen 107 Squadron Mosquitos were given the duty of carrying out offensive patrols of roads and railways in Northwestern France in support of Operation Overlord (D-Day). Ed and I were the first to take off, leaving Lasham at 2333, in Mosquito VI 'MO-P' for our assigned patrol over Cherbourg, covering airborne landings. There was light flak and we bombed roads and attacked individual vehicles with machine guns and cannon. On the way back we came across the invasion fleet that seemed to fill the Channel; we had our IFF on (Identification, Friend or Foe), so the ships would know not to shoot at us.

The next night, 6/7 June 1944 we were off to a place called Gruville, in Normandy, part of wide-ranging series of road patrols from 0015 to 0345 by sixteen 107 Squadron Mosquitos. The weather was clear and the moon bright; roads were easily followed, but little movement was seen.



*Mosquito FB VI night test firing. D. Poissant collection*

The night of 7/8 June, we attacked the Marshalling Yards at Mezoudin; 107 Squadron ORB recorded:

*Twelve aircraft of 107 Squadron were detailed to attack the marshalling yards at Mezoudin. Eleven aircraft carried out the attack between 0345 and 0425. There was considerable haze over the target and reports as to the extent of the damage done are somewhat conflicting.*

*Aircraft "B" piloted by F/O Long is missing from this operation. At 0320 he was heard using VHF distress procedure and it appears likely he and his navigator abandoned aircraft over the Channel.*

*All other aircraft returned safely to base.*

*[Pilot F/O Denis Arthur Long was killed in action. He has no known grave and is remembered on panel 20 of the Runnymede Memorial. Navigator F/S Bernard Charles Gee Robinson was killed in action. He is interred in Marston (St Mary) Churchyard.]*

We were going strong with road patrols, marshalling yards and general nuisance making. The purpose being to keep the Germans' heads down and prevent them from getting any sleep. With all the bombing and strafing of aerodromes hopefully doing some good. Most of us did very few day trips; it was mostly night flying on instruments.

We attacked a German Army de-training point at Le Mesnil Manger the night of 12/13 June. First a/c airborne at 0105, last a/c landed at 0450:

*107 Squadron despatched 12 aircraft in pairs at intervals of 20 minutes to carry out attacks on an enemy detraining point.*

*One member of each pair dropped flares to light up the target for the other member, who attacked with bombs and cannon. The procedure was then reversed.*

*Little opposition was met in the target area. Very little activity was seen at the detraining point. All our aircraft returned safely to England, though a/c 'G' piloted by Capt. Brown had to make an emergency landing at Manston due to a lack of brake pressure.*

Ed and I were 'coned' by searchlights one night, which was a terrible experience. We could see the searchlight beams ahead of us and did everything possible to avoid them; evasive course changes and the like. Despite our best efforts, the cockpit was suddenly flooded with intense bright light. You could have read a newspaper if you had the time! I used a few words of profanity while using every maneuver I could, short of upside down, which would've done no good, and we reached speeds of 300 miles an hour trying to escape this bloody bright light from I don't know how many searchlights. Finally, after what seemed an eternity, the light was gone; we must have reached the limit of their range.

Whenever I used profanity, Ed would remark "must you swear?" which usually calmed me down; I only used it in situations such as I just described or when 'navigating' was difficult.

Many interesting things happened on night ops; one night, around the time of D-Day, I remember flying out of a cloud with the light of the moon shining on the fuselage silhouetting the aircraft against the clouds. It was the most beautiful thing, and for a moment I forgot there



*Moonlit Mosquito D. Poissant collection*

was a war on. I soon remembered where I was and ducked back into the cloud. An enemy fighter would have had us 'cold turkey' if we had tarried. Still, it was a pleasant experience while it lasted.

German night fighters staged around specific beacons before being directed onto targets; we regularly attacked and destroyed them, but one beacon was left alive in France. Its call letter never changed and why the Germans never turned it off, I don't know, but on cloudless nights it could be seen for miles and often helped us get to targets or back home.

I recall one night it was so dark we had to fly for better than three hours on instruments alone. I regularly asked Ed "how are we doing?" He'd look over the panel and verify we were good, much

to my relief. On long instrument flights I'd get odd sensations of diving, turning, or something else; doubting your instruments, is suicide. Somewhere along this time I should have been screened, but we kept losing new aircrews.

Just before going on leave in late April '44, we had two pilots join our squadron: Keith Hadley (RCAF) and Frank McJennett (RNAF). I had put in six weeks so was entitled to six days leave; I was off to London. Upon my return, both guys and their navigators were dead.

P/O McJennett, 23 years of age, and Navigator F/O Owen Newcater (RAFVR), 36, were not on the battle order the night of 22/23 April 44, so were part of a night flying program when they crashed 4½ miles west of the aerodrome. Both were killed instantly and are buried at Brookwood Military Cemetery.

19 year old F/O Hadley and 27 year old Navigator F/O George Crabtree (RAFVR) were part of a 25 April 44 attack on a Noball (V-1) target at Heudiere when their Mosquito 'OM-L' failed to pull out of a dive; it crashed on the target and burst into flames. Both men were interred in the British Military Cemetery at St Riquier-des-Plains, France, exhumed and reburied in the War Cemetery at Grandcourt, France. Many years later I met Keith's brother in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan.

The 'Fog of War' showed itself during take-off in two-minute intervals for a night op. A fellow from 305 Squadron had swung during take-off and was given, I am told, permission to taxi back up the runway; which is really dumb. Neither Ed (who wouldn't lie) nor I heard the tower say anything about it. I powered up and took off down the runway; fortunately, I had applied a little extra flap for take-off and was able to scream over top of this fellow at the last second. "We could have killed that poor bastard," I blasted the tower. Why they didn't shoot off a warning flare, I'll never know.

While patrolling a German airfield one night, keeping them down and away from the heavies, we heard one of the RAF Pathfinder leaders, a master bomber, radioing the main bombers not to bomb the red or blue flares; bomb the other ones. He then said he'd been hit and was going down; no hysteria, no commotion or panic; just a matter of fact continuation of his transmission. I have no idea how they made out.

During one day trip, an American fighter misidentified and shot down one of our aircraft, killing the crew. But we lost a lot of aircraft; some flew into hills; we weren't supposed to be below 1,000 feet, especially at night. One guy from Saskatoon, F/O Wilburn Taylor (RCAF), and his navigator F/O Aston Aiken (RAFVR), of Jamaica, were killed while attacking enemy communications in



*Armourers prepare a De Havilland Mosquito FB Mark VI for night operations. Upper is feeding ammunition belt into a Browning machine gun. Lower aircraftman cleans one of the cannon barrels. Note night ops exhaust shroud on engine. IWM (CNA2088)*

Northern France in the early hours of 08 Aug 44; they hit an electric pole and burst into flames 20 miles SE of Montmirall, Marne, France. They are buried in Connantre Communal Cemetery in France. Taylor was 23, Aiken 29.

We had many interesting experiences, particularly during the daytime, while screaming around the European countryside. We never 'put it through the gate' but we did step up the speed coming out at low level, which was often the case when alone. Without a wingman and his subsequent protection, one wanted to get out of France, Belgium or Holland as soon as possible.

During one patrol we came upon a railway station at the bottom of a valley; there was no train or activity; if there had been, I would've shot it up. The station had an extremely long platform and a lone man appeared on it right in front of us; he started running and I instinctively put the nose down and lined up the sight on the poor rascal. As I was about to shoot, I thought "what the hell, what difference could this guy make...we don't even know who's side he's on." He kept on running the entire length of this hugely long and low platform, instead jumping off. I didn't shoot, but must have scared him pretty good. Instead we flew off merrily on our way.

A fairly common occurrence during daytime patrols across German airfields was to catch the enemy sunbathing on top of hangars; most often they'd jump off the hangar rather than see if they were going to be shot at.

After an official total of 42 operations in Bostons and Mosquitos, we left Lasham. We were screened 16 August 1944 and I was told I would be heading home to instruct. I was sent to 'R' (Reselection) Depot Warrington up near Manchester until 05 September, when I boarded the Mauretania for the trip to Canada.

Arriving at Rockcliffe (Ottawa), I received a month's leave then on to #7 OTU Debert, Nova Scotia to instruct. Instructing there was interesting; we flew the bomber version of the Mosquito and I had my old flight commander from Brandon as one of my pupils. While stationed there I took an instructor course at Trenton Central Flying School. I also wrote off a Ventura; we often deliberately taxied through snowbanks when using a short runway, but this one was frozen hard and it broke the undercarriage. The snowbank was cleared immediately afterward.

I was recommended for the Air Force Cross while at Debert, but it failed to come through; a bit disappointing. One month I completed more night flying than all the other pilots combined; it was



*Restored Mosquito 'F-Freddie' bomber version (note Perspex nose) owned by Bob Jens of Richmond, BC. Pictured are (left) Steve Hinton, warbird test pilot and Richard de Boer, author. Photo courtesy Richard de Boer*

much more fun to go to the bar or into Truro, so some never did do any night flying. I was discharged 07 September 1945.

On 24 November 1950 I went back in; I flew DHC Chipmunks out of Regina in a special reserve. The idea was that if things got going really strong in Korea, we would have trained personnel to run airdromes. Two years later, 30 November 1952, I left again; this time for good.

While in the RCAF I flew 18 different aircraft types; I was qualified first pilot on 15 and actually did only about 1,000 hours of flying time. My logbook shows a total of 75 hours and 25 minutes of Link trainer time; that helped a lot with night flying and made a huge difference to my confidence in instruments and ability to recover from difficult situations.

It was an interesting experience for all who survived. As far as I know, I am the only one left of all the flying types from my graduating class who went overseas. With the passing of Don Montgomery, my last surviving friend, I'm left holding the fort.

My navigator, Ed Free, passed away 10 April 2001; he was a year younger than me and lived in England.



2014 - Richard 'Sandy' Sanderson at the public unveiling of Mosquito F-Freddie at Abbotsford, BC  
(Still from the video 'Gaining Altitude' by Pan Productions)