



Enemy Coast Ahead – The Dambusters

by

Philip E. West

PRINT SIGNATURES

Philip West is recognised as one of the world's finest aviation artists. Collectors of his original oil paintings span the globe, many waiting patiently for his next breathtaking canvas to appear. Self taught, Philip has won many accolades for his paintings, not the least of which was the prestigious Duane Whitney Award for Excellence at the 1997 American Society of Aviation Artists Exhibition.

Flying Officer Raymond E Grayston (Flight Engineer, 617 Sqn.) joined the RAF in June 1939, as an engine fitter. In 1942 he volunteered for aircrew, as a flight engineer. He was subsequently posted to 50 Sqn at Skellingthorpe in Lincolnshire. The crew had completed 30 ops. by January 1943. Les Knight was then requested to continue flying with his crew on Special Operations. This involved moving to Scampton, to form 617 Sqn. On the night of 16-17 May, Les Knight and his crew took part in the raid on the dams and were responsible for breaching the Eder Dam.

The crew continued on operations until September 1943, when trying to carry out a raid on the Dortmund Ems canal in fog, the plane was damaged and crashed. After ensuring his crew successfully baled out, Les Knight remained on the aircraft and was never seen again. Ray spent the remainder of the war as a prisoner in Stalag Luft 3.

Squadron Leader George 'Johnny' Johnson DFM (Bomb Aimer, 617 Sqn.)

went initially to the USA for pilot training. Frustrated at not qualifying and a burning desire to get airborne Johnny applied for the shortest possible training course; air gunner. having completed this course successfully Johnny was posted to 97 Squadron as 'spare' gunner – mid or upper, whichever was needed. At this time Bomb Aimers were being sought for the Lancasters and as this position warranted extra pay, Johnny applied and passed the training course. He was then chosen by Joe McCarthy to join his crew before they were all transferred to 617 Squadron.

Flying in AJ-T, with American pilot Joe McCarthy and crew they attacked the Sorpe Dam from 30 feet, for which Johnny was awarded the DFM. Johnny went on to fly 40 missions with Joe McCarthy at the controls.
