

Sunday May 16th 1943:

OPERATION CHASTISE

(Avro Woodford perspective)

On the evening of Sunday May 16th 1943, 19 Avro Lancasters from the newly formed 617 squadron at RAF Scampton, took off in 3 waves in what was code named, "Operation Chastise". The name given for the attack on the Ruhr dams.

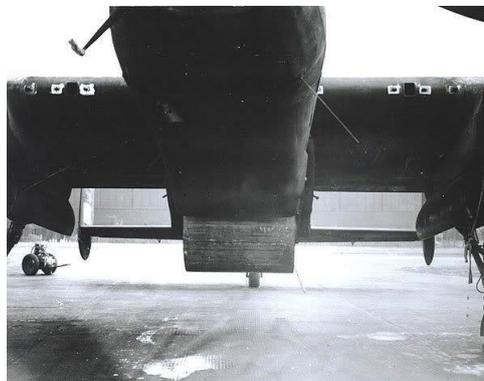


Much has been written elsewhere relating the details of each specific task, together with its mission, success or otherwise but it is not the purpose to repeat those details here.

This feature relates to Avro's involvement in the operation!

Barnes Wallis's so called, "bouncing bomb" was correctly a mine, code named, "Upkeep" and it necessitated a list of modifications to the Avro Lancaster. These modifications were not just confined to the bomb bay. The aeroplanes were mark 3's taken from the Woodford assembly line and officially referred to at Type 464 (provisioning) Lancasters. It had been the plan to carry out most of the necessary mods by Avro engineers working at the Vickers base at Weybridge (464 was a Vickers type number). However, the extent of work needed, forced a change of plan and the work was transferred to Woodford.

The main changes to the standard MK3 airframe required a deeper bomb aimers nose blister, the removal of the mid-upper gun turret to reduce weight and drag and replacement of conventional bomb doors by front and rear fairings. Vickers built support brackets to hold the mine in place. A hydraulic motor powering a belt drive was installed to spin "Upkeep" at its required 500 rpm on release.



In the lead up to the raid itself, Guy Gibson and his selected crews, carried out intensive training using standard unmodified Lancasters to achieve maximum experience and proficiency, particularly in very low level flying that was going to be vital to the success of the coming raids.



As indicated earlier in this piece, it is not intended to relate to anything about, Operation Chastise itself. Many books and articles are available for readers who wish to know more. As for the Lancaster itself however, it performed its role precisely as expected with no shortcomings.

Sadly, of those 19 aircraft that took off from RAF Scampton on May 16th 1943, 8 did not return and very sadly, 53 crew members lost their lives. 3 others were captured.

With the benefit of hindsight, authors and historians have already written and will continue to publish their own views about the raids. Perhaps from an Avro perspective, we can let the following extract taken from a letter written personally by Dr Barnes Wallis to Roy Chadwick, the Avro Lancasters chief designer say it for us...

"May I offer you my very deep thanks for the existence of your wonderful Lancaster, for it was the only aircraft in the world capable of doing the job" Dr Barnes Wallis.

