

# Book Reviews

## The Dam Busters

By Jonathan Falconer

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 Black & white and colour photographs  
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Reviewed by G R Pitchfork

Few RAF operations during the Second World War have attracted such interest, or epitomised so graphically the courage of RAF aircrew, as the raid mounted by 617 Squadron on the night of 16-17 May 1943 against the Ruhr dams. To commemorate the 60th Anniversary of this epic action, the highly regarded author of other books on Bomber Command, Jonathan Falconer, has produced a superbly researched and lavishly illustrated book that offers a wider perspective on the operation. The raid has previously attracted the attention of various authors and a film maker, so some may question the need for another account. Once they have seen this book, I am sure that any such doubts will immediately disappear.

This book could perhaps best be described as the encyclopaedia of the Dams Raid. Having set the backdrop to the bomber offensive, the author relates the development of the idea and value of attacking the Ruhr dams, Barnes Wallis's concept for the Upkeep 'bouncing bomb', and the trials that took place to prove his brilliant technological concept. The author then concentrates on the formation of 617 Squadron under its charismatic leader, Guy Gibson, before describing the raid in great detail. With the aid of many photographs and excellent colour maps, the reader is able to follow the progress of the raid very clearly. The author's coverage of the aftermath from the German perspective is particularly interesting, and is illustrated with many rare photographs.

The author pays due tribute to the aircrew who flew on this operation, and he has devoted sections that describe their actions, their later operations, and the decorations that they earned. He concludes the book with a fascinating insight into the making of the classic film starring Richard Todd, who has written the Foreword to the book.

The casual observer may, on first glance, think that this is an illustrated narrative of the raid, such is the extensive use of photographs, including some unique German material, and the quality of the technical drawings and maps, both of which are clear and very informative. The use of rare colour photographs of many of the aircrew adds a very evocative aspect to the book, as does the inclusion of two excellent paintings by the well-known aviation artist, Nicolas Trudgian. However, there is much more to this book than a wide selection of excellent illustrations. Jonathan Falconer has, as usual, carried out his research in a meticulous fashion, and the great merit of this book is that it encapsulates all aspects of the epic Dams raid in one superbly produced volume.

At a time when it seems to be the fashion for modern journalists and historians to sit in their comfortable chairs to find fault with operations that helped produce the peace that they enjoy, it is appropriate that Jonathan Falconer reminds us of the gallantry and sacrifice of so many young men of the Dam Busters. Although my private library contains all the other books describing this operation, I suspect that this volume will be the one I refer to most frequently. It is strongly recommended.

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