

# Significant people - Ken Brown

The last surviving Dambuster pilot  
and my relative!



**By Megan Licari  
October 2009**

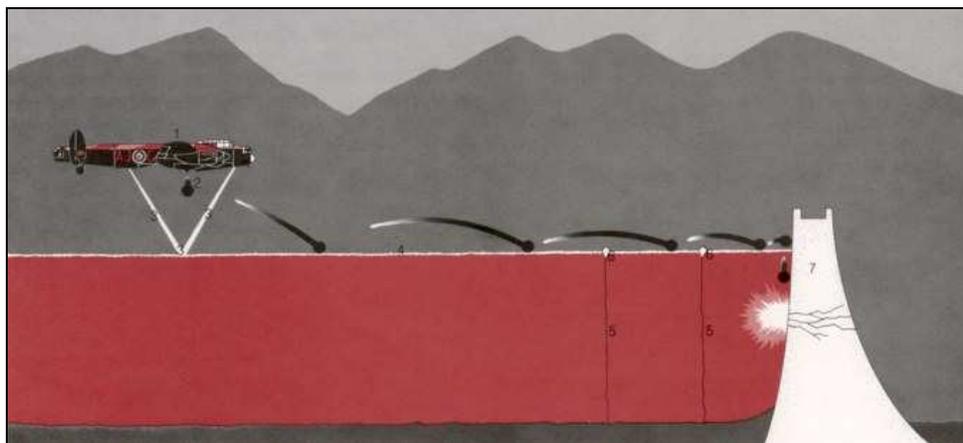
# Ken Brown

## - the last surviving Dambuster pilot

World War 2 began on 1<sup>st</sup> September 1939 with Germany invading Poland. Britain then said they were going to fight the Germans in the war on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1939 followed by Canada and then USA a week later.



A man called **Barnes Wallace** had a fantastic idea to help fight the Germans. He was an inventor and invented a bouncing bomb which could damage the famous **dams** of Germany. A dam holds water so it doesn't flood areas but if bombed towns would be flooded and Britain could stop the Germans making weapons to fight other countries.





To drop the bombs they needed the best pilots in the world. They learnt to fly very low. These pilots were in the Royal Air Force 617 **squadron**. They later were called the 'Dambusters'.



*"When we got used to it, we went down to 150 feet. This was really low. But then they asked us to start flying at 60 feet, at night-this was a whole new experience. It was frightening. You had trees; you had high tension wires; many different obstacles. At that altitude, you can't be sloppy. If you dropped a wing at 60 feet, it'd scrape on the ground." - F/Sgt. Ken Brown*

The pilots trained for two and a half months dropping pretend bombs over English dams in Derbyshire, north England. The bouncing bomb was a top secret invention so nobody was allowed to talk about it and nobody really knew if it would work.



My 'uncle', Ken Brown, was in the Canadian Royal Air Force and a talented pilot. I call him my uncle but really he is my nana's cousin and therefore my 3<sup>rd</sup> cousin. At the age of 23 he was flying the famous Lancaster bomber plane loaded with the bouncing bomb. I chose him because he is part of my family and he was the last surviving Dambuster pilot left in the world.



On the night of May 17<sup>th</sup> 1943 at twelve minutes past midnight, Ken Brown set off to bomb the **Moehne** and **Eder dams** of Germany. They flew at night time so it was more difficult to be spotted by the Germans, however the enemy still had spot lights to help them shoot the planes.



Ken Brown bombed the dams and his plane was shot at by the Germans but he managed to fly back safely. He then had to fly back to bomb the **Sorpe** dam which was more difficult as he had to try and fly at the low height in swirling mist. He had 8 tries flying at just 18 metres unsuccessfully but his last go at 3.20am was good. This was a success and he said "goner" as the bomb hit down.



His Lancaster plane was shot at and there was a lot of damage. The bad news was that one of the crew was injured with **shrapnel** (pieces of metal from the damaged plane from the shooting). They made it back safely and felt happy because they were alive.



***"We couldn't believe that there were so many missing. When we got out of the aircraft the ground crews of all the aircraft were standing around long faced, tears running down their cheeks. We were the only ones that were sort of elated in saying, 'Well, we made it back.'" - F/Sgt. Ken Brown***

There were 19 planes in total that took off but only 11 managed to attack successfully and 8 planes never came back at all. Sadly only half Canadians who took off did not return and Ken Brown lost most of his friends.



*Back Row: Oancia, Sutherland, O'Brien, **Brown**, Weeks, Thrasher, Deering, Radcliffe, MacLean,, McCarthy, MacDonald; Front Row: Pigeon, Taerum, Walker, Gowrie, Rodger*

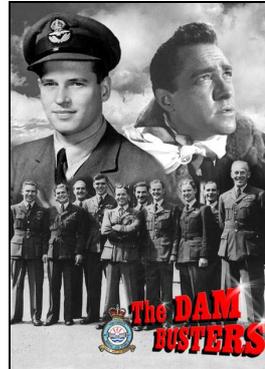
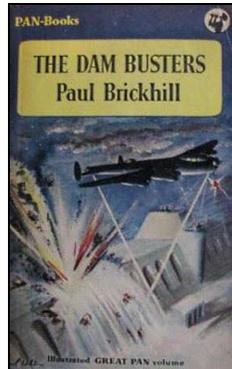
Eventually the war ended on 08 May 1945 and thanks to my uncle and all the brave people we are lucky to live in a peaceful country where all different types of people can live together happily.

Because he was so brave Ken Brown was awarded the **Conspicuous Gallantry** Medal. This is the second most important medal you can get after the Victoria Cross. He met King George VI, the Queen mother and has since met the queen we have now - Queen Elizabeth.

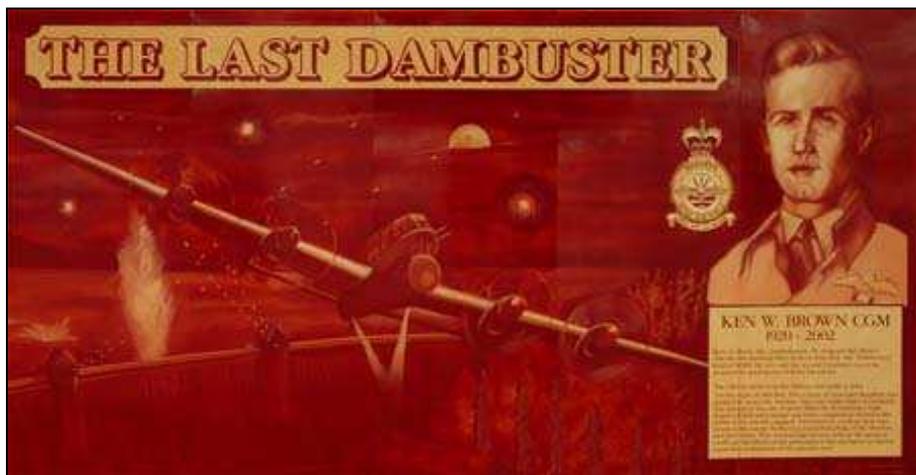


*F/Sgt. Ken Brown (left); King George VI (right).*

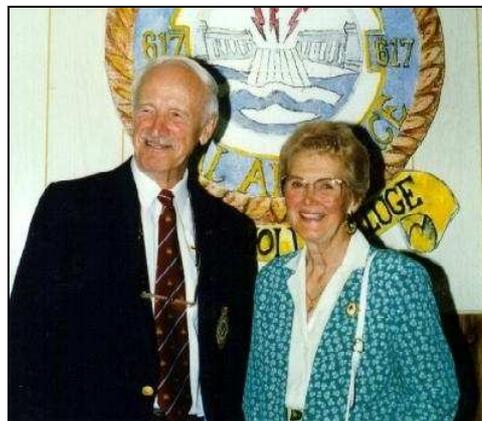
He is so famous for his bravery that he has been on TV many times, his name is in the **Dambuster** book and also mentioned in the film called 'The Dambusters with the famous music.



They have even painted a mural for people to remember him in his own town of **Moosejaw** in Canada to remember how brave he was.



After the war they moved back to Canada with his English wife, Beryl, who was my nana's closest cousin. They lived happily ever after, had 5 children and my mum visited them often.



Ken used to show my mum all his medals and **log book** from the world war which was like a diary of where he flew and bombed. He also told stories of all the brave friends who died in the war helping to keep our country free. Sadly, he died when he was 82 on Christmas Eve 2001 but because he was so brave he will never be forgotten.



We should thank everyone for fighting to make our world a better place. That's why we wear poppies to remember all the very brave people who made a difference to our lives.

