

**THE EXCEPTIONAL AND RARE WW2 RAF DSO, DFC, DFM. WING COMMANDERS GROUP, HIS DSO IN RECOGNITION OF HIS SUPERB RECORD AS A NAVIGATOR AND BOMB-AIMER, HE HELD TEMPORARY COMMAND OF 10 SQUADRON IN 1943-44, HE HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN AWARDED AN OUTSTANDING IMMEDIATE 1941 DFC FOR 'OPERATION SUNRISE' THE PERILOUS DAYLIGHT ATTACK ON THE GERMAN BATTLE CRUISER 'SCHARNHORST' AT LA PALlice, CONDUCTED BY JUST 14 HALIFAX'S WITHOUT FIGHTER SUPPORT. ARRIVING OVER THE TARGET TO BE GREETED BY 31 GERMAN FIGHTERS AND A WALL OF FLAK, SCHARNHORST WAS SUCCESSFULLY PUT OUT OF ACTION BUT AT THE HORRENDOUS LOSS OF 5 HALIFAX'S SHOT DOWN AND EVERY OTHER DAMAGED, MOST SEVERELY AND WITH MULTIPLE CASUALTIES. GROUNDED BY LATE 1944, POST WAR HE WAS SENIOR WEAPONS OFFICER IN THE RAF. JUST 18 COMBINATIONS OF THESE DECORATIONS DURING WW2**



DISTINGUISHED SERVICE ORDER, G.V.I.R., THE REVERSE OF THE SUSPENSION BAR OFFICIALLY DATED '1944'; DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS, G.V.I.R., THE REVERSE OFFICIALLY DATED '1941'; DISTINGUISHED FLYING MEDAL, G.V.I.R. '515083 SGT. G. M. BRISBANE, R.A.F.'; 1939-45 STAR; AIR CREW EUROPE STAR, CLASP, FRANCE AND GERMANY; WAR MEDAL 1939-45, MOUNTED AS WORN, TOGETHER WITH 2 ROYAL TOURNAMENT PRIZE MEDALS SILVER, THE REVERSE ENGRAVED, '1934 BAYONET TEAM COMBATS, ROYAL AIR FORCE, FIRST PRIZE, R.A.F. CRANWELL, A.C. 2 G. BRISBANE', ANOTHER SIMILAR, BRONZE, THE REVERSE ENGRAVED, 'R.A.F. COASTAL AREA, BAYT. TEAM COMBATS, CRANWELL, A.C. 2 BRISBANE, G., 1934'

D.S.O. *London Gazette* 22 September 1944. The original recommendation for an immediate award states:

*'Acting Squadron Leader Brisbane was posted to No. 10 Squadron in October 1943, having already completed one operational tour of 31 sorties, comprising 228 operational hours.*

*During his second tour he has taken part in a large number of sorties against a wide range of strongly defended targets. These have included: Hanover, Frankfurt, Essen, Bremen, Dusseldorf, Kiel,*

Duisberg and Munster:

*This officer has commanded a flight since his arrival and has displayed a marked capacity for leadership. His energy and drive, coupled with his tactical ability, have helped raise the morale of the Squadron to a high level, and have made a notable contribution to the unit's operational efficiency. When called upon to deputise for the Squadron Commander he has proved to be an able administrator.*

*Acting Squadron Leader Brisbane's record is one of outstanding merit. I strongly recommend that his admirable work and unflinching devotion to duty be recognised by the immediate award of the Distinguished Service Order.'*

D.F.C. London Gazette 2 September 1941:

*'The KING has been graciously pleased to approve the following awards in recognition of gallantry displayed in flying operations against the enemy:*

*In July 1941, large-scale attacks were made on German warships at Brest and La Pallice (including the "Gneisenau", "Scharnhorst" and "Prinz Eugen"). A smaller attack was made on Cherbourg. The operations were carried out in daylight and extremely heavy and accurate anti-aircraft fire and fighter opposition were encountered by all aircraft when approaching the targets, which at Brest was protected by a balloon barrage. The air crews engaged succeeded, nevertheless, in securing direct hits on their objectives and in inflicting very severe damage in the target area. During the combats with enemy fighters 21 hostile aircraft were destroyed and others were severely damaged. The precise timing of attack by the various formations of aircraft and their correct approach to and accurate bombing of the objectives in the face of such powerful opposition; demanded great skill and high courage. The great success of these operations was largely due to the bravery, determination and resource displayed by the following officers and airmen, who participated in various capacities as leaders and members of the aircraft crews ... '*

The original recommendation for an immediate awards states:

*'Flying Officer Brisbane was Navigator and Bomb Aimer in the leading aircraft of a formation of Halifaxes which made a daylight attack on the "Scharnhorst" at La Pallice on 24 July 1941.*

*This officer had spent most of the previous night and the morning in perfecting navigation arrangements, and brought the section to the target within one minute of the estimated time.*

*During the run-up to the target the aircraft was repeatedly hit by flak, but despite this, he directed the section with unhurried calm and meticulous care, and carried on the run until photographs of the results were complete.*

*The success of the sortie was to a great extent due to his coolness and precision and his unhurried directions were a fine inspiration and example to his crew.*

*I strongly recommend that his fine effort be recognised by the immediate award of the D.F.C.'*

D.F.M. London Gazette 22 October 1940. The original recommendation states:

*'This N.C.O. Observer has contributed in a very large measure to many very excellent shows. He has always been a very good example to his juniors and has been of great assistance in passing on his operational knowledge to others.'*

Covering remarks of the A.O.C., No. 4 Group:

*'A keen and capable Observer who has now completed 29 operational flights over enemy territory. His determination and courage have been an example to others of his squadron. Strongly recommended for the award of the D.F.M.'*

#### **WING COMMANDER GUY MAXWELL BRISBANE**

Guy Maxwell Brisbane was born in Southgate, London, in 1911 and was educated at Southgate Grammar School. His father, a member of a city cotton-broking firm, found young Guy a job selling leather goods, but after a few years, he left to enlist in the Royal Air Force. Qualifying as an Air Observer in June 1939, at the outbreak of hostilities and having been advanced to Sergeant, he was serving in 104 Squadron, a Blenheim unit based at R.A.F. Bicester. A few weeks later, however, he transferred to 51 Squadron, a Whitley unit.



#### **NO. 51 SQUADRON - D.F.M.**

Having then qualified in Astro Navigation at St. Athan in March 1940, he flew his first sortie with 51 on 11 April, an anti-shipping mission to Norway. Later in the same month he and his crew attacked Stavanger and on 3 May, with Squadron Leader Marvin at the helm, they attacked an enemy airfield near Oslo, Norway. However, on the return home, owing to fuel shortage, the skipper and crew were forced to abandon their Whitley by parachute over Easingwold, Yorkshire. Brisbane and 3 of the crew survived uninjured, however one member of the crew died of injuries and the pilot was seriously injured.

After the war, Brisbane submitted a secret report on R.A.F. training, in which he quotes this incident in respect of parachute usage:

*'On one occasion in early 1940, I had to abandon a Whitley aircraft by parachute, due to petrol shortage and bad weather over England. Nobody in the crew had jumped before. We had all heard the correct method of abandoning an aircraft was to dive out headfirst. Apart from the extreme physical reluctance one felt towards leaving the aircraft headfirst, it was found - when the order came to jump - that it was practically a physical impossibility to leave the Whitley escape hatch in this fashion. I,*

being the first to jump, wasted a good deal of time trying to find the best way of getting out. I eventually found the only practicable way was to go through the hatch feet first, facing aft. The rest of the crew followed this example, and we all left the aircraft safely. Unfortunately, one member of the crew landed so heavily that he died of his injuries ... When this experience is considered, it really is astounding that R.A.F. crews, who relied on parachutes, knew so little about the correct method of using them.'

Details of the crash can be found here:

<https://www.yorkshire-aircraft.co.uk/aircraft/yorkshire/york40/n1406.html>

Less than a fortnight later, Brisbane was back on operations, taking part in several bombing attacks on the Ruhr, in addition to a precision strike on a bridge on the Meuse. His flying log books notes shrapnel damage in a sortie to Essen in this period.



AN ARMSTRONG WHITWORTH WHITLEY

June 1940 witnessed Brisbane undertake no less than 13 operational sorties, around half of them against enemy troop concentrations and communications in France as the net closed round the B.E.F. His secret report on R.A.F. training quotes an incident that occurred over France in this period:

*'I can remember being sent one night to attack troop concentrations during the German advance through France in 1940. The road junction we had been ordered to search for had been located by the aid of flares and enemy troops and transport columns were seen moving along the road. The pilot of my aircraft - in an excess of enthusiasm - made a low-level approach at about 1,000 feet and I in my excitement left the distributor switch on 'single and salvo' instead of 'distributor'. The result being that, when I released the bombs, the full load fell in a salvo instead of a stick. The bombs were instantaneously fused and when they burst 1,000 feet below us the resultant explosion was catastrophic. By good fortune no great damage was done to the aircraft and we were able to return to base.'*

The remainder of his sorties were largely of the German kind, among them trips to Essen and Homberg in June and to Kiel and Wismar in July; his flying log book again notes flak damage over Kiel on the 8th - *'Very heavy A.A. fire. Shrapnel through fuselage tank and main planes.'*

August's operational agenda included a strike on the Fiat works at Turin, whilst in September Brisbane attended another navigation course. He was awarded the D.F.M. and appointed the Squadron's Navigating Officer and Bombing Leader, and remained similarly employed until posted to No. 76 Squadron, a Halifax unit operating out of Middleton St. George, in June 1941.

## 76 SQUADRON - IMMEDIATE D.F.C. FOR OPERATION SUNRISE

Brisbane flew his first sortie - against Kiel - on the night of 24-25 June 1941 and thereafter flew as Navigator to Wing Commander G. T. Jarman, D.F.C. In the following month they attacked Bremen on the night of the 3rd-4th but, as cited above, it was for his part in the attack on the Scharnhorst at La Pallice on the 24th that Brisbane won his immediate D.F.C.:

*'During the run-up to the target the aircraft was repeatedly hit by flak, but despite this, he directed the section with unhurried calm and meticulous care, and carried on the run until photographs of the results were complete. The success of the sortie was to a great extent due to his coolness and precision, and his unhurried directions were a fine inspiration and example to his crew.'*



## OPERATION SUNRISE

In late March 1941, the German battle cruisers Scharnhorst and Gneisenau sailed into Brest harbour after two months devastating merchant shipping in the Atlantic. This offered the RAF a target not to be missed.

Planning for a large scarce raid of 150 bombers on Brest harbour in late July, on 23 July, intelligence was received that Scharnhorst had slipped out of harbour and was heading for La Rochelle, 260 miles south of Brest. This movement caused considerable alarm, Scharnhorst posing a significant threat to allied shipping.

As such plans were changed. Codenamed 'Operation Sunrise', on 24 July 1941, 100 R.A.F. bombers were to attack the Gneisenau at Brest, these supported by 3 squadrons of fighters, with 2 more squadrons and 18 Hampdens tasked with drawing off fighters. A second smaller force would be tasked with attacking Scharnhorst at La Pallice. With the Halifax deemed the only aircraft up to such an operation, just 2 squadrons were equipped with this new aircraft; 35 and 76 squadrons.

As such, the plan was for just 15 aircraft to make this attack, 9 from 35 Squadron and 6 from 76 squadron. However not only would this raid have to be made in daylight, the bombers would have no

fighter cover during the entire raid due to the distance of La Rochelle's from England; La Pallice, being out of range of fighters.

Taking off from Stanton Harcourt at 10.30am on 24 July, almost immediately one of the 76 Squadron Halifax's had to turn back with engine trouble, leaving just 14 aircraft to attack. Flying at below 1,000 feet in an effort to avoid enemy radar, at approximately 100 miles from their target, a German destroyer was spotted as they flew low past the Ile d'Yeu. The destroyer opened fire on the bomber formation and all element of surprise lost to the bombers. Despite this they pressed on.

With German command now aware of a coming attack, as they approached La Pallice, 31 fighters were spotted circling the area and the bombers were subjected to intense flak from both shore defences, Scharnhorst's 51 guns and the guns of its destroyer escort; one Halifax being brought down and several more damaged as they approached the target. 'The sky turned black with all the smoke from bursting shells, and the acrid smell of cordite filled the interiors of the aircraft. The enemy fighters, paying little heed to their own flak, made repeated attacks and more bombers were shot from the sky, though the gunners in the Halifax's fought back fiercely as the fighters came in.'

After dropping their bombs, those bombers that had survived the murderous fire over the target, were pursued for some distance by enemy fighters before finally reaching relative safety. Of the 14 aircraft that attacked Scharnhorst, no less than 5 were shot down, a horrendous 36% loss rate. Of these, 3 aircraft were from 76 Squadron, just Brisbane's Halifax L9446 and L9531 returning, both having been seriously damaged; Brisbane's losing one engine but claiming an enemy fighter.



HALIFAX'S DURING THE RAID ON 24 JULY 1941

In the surviving bombers, 2 crew were killed, 4 seriously wounded and others lightly. In their operational reports, one Halifax crew noted it had subjected to 20 separate attacks by enemy fighters, others noted 9 or 10 attacks. Pretty much every Halifax had suffered multiple hits, most were severely damaged; engines shot up, turrets out of action, fuselages raked by bullets etc.

Despite the losses sustained by the La Pallice bombers, the raid was considered a resounding success;

Scharnhorst was hit by five bombs, all on the starboard side. Two bombs penetrating the upper deck and exploding on the main armoured deck, the other three penetrating all decks and exiting without exploding. The result was serious flooding of the hull, and the ship developed a severe list. This damage meant Scharnhorst was sent back to Brest and into drydock for repairs which would not be completed until the end of the year. The significance of putting Scharnhorst out of action for such a long period during the battle of the Atlantic, cannot be underestimated.

During the operation, Flying Officer Brisbane was part of the crew of Halifax L9446, the lead aircraft during the attack and was responsible for leading the formation to the target. For his remarkable skills in getting the formation to target within a minute of the estimated time, despite his aircraft being repeatedly hit by flak, he would be awarded an Immediate Distinguished Flying Cross.

A narrative of events from the side of the crew of a 35 Squadron aircraft can be found here:

<http://www.archieraf.co.uk/archie/19512tlustory1941.html>

Six hits were claimed on the Gneisenau by the much larger force attacking Brest harbour, for the loss of 10 aircraft, this putting the far heavier losses suffered by the La Pallice force into context.

After this operation, Brisbane was grounded for a 'rest' and posted to H.Q., Bomber Command.



### **7 SQUADRON AND 10 SQUADRON'S - IMMEDIATE D.S.O.**

In December 1942, he returned to operations with an appointment in 7 Squadron, a Stirling unit operating out of Oakington, and flew his first sortie - a strike on Turin - on the night of the 11th-12th.

He flew further strikes against Munster and Le Creusot in June, the same month in which he transferred to No. 10 Squadron, a Lancaster unit.

### **10 SQUADRON**

By now a Flight Commander with overall responsibility for 10's navigational skills, and sometimes deputising as Squadron C.O., Brisbane commenced a final flurry of operational activity.

One of his first targets was Hamburg, at the commencement of the famous 'firestorm' raids in late July 1943. Dusseldorf and Frankfurt were among the chosen targets in November, whilst in the new year he was detailed to attack Essen, prior to moving on to a number of French targets at the time of the Normandy landings.

As related in his obituary notice in the Daily Telegraph, on one occasion his pilot's oxygen supply failed over the Alps: Brisbane gave the pilot his own oxygen and blacked out - but not before providing a course home. He was awarded an immediate D.S.O.:

*'This officer has commanded a flight since his arrival and has displayed a marked capacity for leadership. His energy and drive, coupled with his tactical ability, have helped raise the morale of the Squadron to a high level, and have made a notable contribution to the unit's operational efficiency.'*



HALIFAX'S IN FORMATION

## LATER SERVICE

Brisbane ended the war as a staff officer with 222 Group in Ceylon and afterwards served as a weapons specialist. Between 1950 to 1953, he was attached to the U.S.A.F. as a senior weapons officer at Wright Field, Dayton, Ohio. Having then held staff appointments back in the U.K., he was placed on the Retired List as a Wing Commander in 1958 and settled in Norfolk.

The Imperial War Museum collection holds 2 files of documents relating to Brisbane's wartime and post war service, along with his logbook:

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1030000925>





Condition, GVF, a little chipping to enamel on one obverse arm of the D.S.O or better. Sold with a large amount of research (digital), including original decorations recommendations and sorties flown list, Operational logs for each squadron, LG's etc.

An exceptional and very rare R.A.F. Gallantry group, being 1 of just 18 recipients of this combination of medals for WW2