

THE OUTSTANDING WW2 D.F.C. AND M.I.D. GROUP TO A BEAUFIGHTER AND MOSQUITO NIGHT FIGHTER PILOT OF WHO CLAIMED 4 CONFIRMED VICTORIES AND 1 DAMAGED 1943-44, LATER FLYING SORTIES OVER THE BATTLE AREA DURING OPERATION MARKET GARDEN AND ANTI V-1 FLYING BOMBS OPS IN DEFENCE OF THE UK, HE WAS AWARDED THE QUEEN'S COMMENDATION FOR VALUABLE SERVICES IN THE AIR IN 1957, DURING THE INDONESIAN-MALAYSIAN CONFRONTATION OF 1963-1966 (BORNEO OPERATIONS), HE WAS ONE OF THE PILOTS INVOLVED IN COVERT FLIGHTS INTO HOSTILE JUNGLE TERRITORY, FLYING THE SINGLE-ENGINE VERSION OF THE SCOTTISH AVIATION PIONEER AIRCRAFT IN SUPPORT OF BRITISH SPECIAL FORCES ACTIONS



DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS, G.V.I.R., THE REVERSE OFFICIALLY DATED '1944'; 1939-45 STAR; AIR CREW EUROPE STAR, CLASP, FRANCE AND GERMANY; AFRICA STAR, CLASP, NORTH AFRICA 1942-43; ITALY STAR; WAR MEDAL 1939-45, M.I.D. OAK LEAF; GENERAL SERVICE 1962, CLASP, BORNEO 'FLT. LT. K T. A. O'SULLIVAN. R.A.F.'

D.F.C. *London Gazette* 15 August 1944. The original recommendation for an immediate award states:

'Flying Officer O'Sullivan has been a Night Operational Pilot for 23 months and during that period he has destroyed four enemy aircraft by night, and damaged one by day. This officer's keenness to seek out and destroy the enemy, and his constant efforts to improve his already high operational ability have been an outstanding example to the rest of the unit. Whilst serving with No. 255 Squadron in North Africa, this officer damaged a He. 111 on 13 April 1943, destroyed a He. 111 on 11 May 1943 and destroyed two Ju. 88s on 27 May 1943. Since returning to this country, he has destroyed a Ju. 88 over the south coast whilst serving in this unit [No. 125 Squadron].'

Mention in despatches *London Gazette* 1 January 1946.

Queen's Commendation for Valuable Services in the Air *London Gazette* 1 January 1957

Flight Lieutenant Kevin Thomas Anthony 'Incendiary' O'Sullivan, was born in Tooting, London on 29 December 1920 and after leaving school became a Shipping Clerk, before enlisting into the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve in January 1940. Selected for pilot training, he attended elementary and advanced flying schools and in December 1941 was posted to 255 Squadron, a Beaufighter Night

Fighter unit operating out of Coltishall. Initially equipped Beaufighter MkII s, in March 1942 they were reequipped with the more powerful MK VIF's, the squadron being ordered to the Middle East in November 1942. Continuing their role as night fighters, 255 also started Intruder Operations and it was over North Africa that O'Sullivan and radio-navigator Flight Sergeant W. G. Hood, flew with considerable success., O'Sullivan earning the nickname 'Incendiary' due to his habit of setting fire to enemy aircraft!

BEAUFIGHTER NIGHT FIGHTERS IN NORTH AFRICA

Into action pretty much immediately, on 24 November, O'Sullivan was involved in a friendly fire incident in which his Beaufighter was "hit by gunfire from HM Ships, resulting in a Perspex splinter temporarily blinding the pilot in one eye. O'Sullivan managed to crash-land in a thunderstorm after being shepherded home wingtip-to-wingtip by Squadron Leader Player".



A 255 SQUADRON BEAUFIGHTER

O'Sullivan's first successful encounter with the enemy took place on 13 April 1943, when he damaged a He. 111 in a combat over Sardinia:

Early evening of 13 April 1943, O'Sullivan piloting Blue 3: 'Ordered to patrol a 40 mile North/South line, 60 miles west of Southern Sardinia at nought feet. Red section patrolled until relieved by Green section - nothing to report. Green section arrived at patrol line at 17.40 hours and commenced patrol. Blue 1 and Blue 2 had just commenced patrol at 18.00 hours, when Blue 2 saw a tight formation of 12 plus enemy aircraft flying at 50 feet coming from the east about 40 miles from Sardinia_ Consisted of Ju.88s and He.111s. Blue 1 and Blue 2 attacked from astern keeping out of range of enemy machine gun fire. Blue 3 arrived and went in to attack damaging one He.111, thick black smoke pouring from its starboard engine. Blue leader thought it foolish to attack the enemy in the face of concentrated fire. It was decided to break up the formation. Blue section then made a starboard attack in echelon. The enemy aircraft panicked, broke formation, and started to climb, dropping 15 to 20 torpedoes. Blue 1 attacked 2 Ju.88s in turn. The enemy aircraft were camouflaged black on top, dark and light green

with red splashes underneath. Blue section played an important part in the engagement by attacking the enemy in the face of heavy fire and breaking up the formation. During the initial stages of the attack, Blue 2 was seen by the crew of Blue 3 to be attacking a He. 111, numerous strikes being seen on the enemy aircraft although it was not seen to crash. A little later, Blue 2 was heard to call over the R/T "That is two of them gone". One He. 111 is accordingly claimed as damaged by Blue 2. No further claim can be made owing to lack of evidence.'

Greater success was to follow, for in the following month he gained three confirmed victories, namely a He. 111 on the 11th and a brace of Ju. 88s on the 27th. The combat reports for these latter encounters state:

Night of 11-12 May 1943: 'Patrolled under Brownie and Donald East of Bizerte at 10,000 ft. until 2345 hours. Under Donald, put onto a bogey travelling west taking evasive action. Fleeting contact well out to starboard at maximum range, lost immediately. Hard turn to starboard given by control onto 260 degrees. Contact obtained again well to starboard. At 170 m.p.h. I.A.S. contact closed in rapidly closing to 3,000 ft. Closing to 120 yards, the enemy aircraft was identified as a He. 111 by silhouette and position of exhausts. At approximately 0010 hours when near Bizerte, fire was opened at 100-120 yards range with a one second burst with cannon only, strikes being seen on the fuselage. For three seconds, there was inaccurate return fire from a mid-upper position. This ceased when a second deflection burst from the Beaufighter hit the port engine which exploded, debris flying past the Beaufighter. A third one second burst at same range caused an explosion in the fuselage. The enemy aircraft went to starboard giving off flames and a great amount of smoke, finally hitting the ground and exploding. No one was seen to bale out. The Beaufighter orbited for a time and then returned to base. Claim: One He. 111 destroyed.'

Two further aerial victories came later that month, just prior to him leaving the squadron:

Night of 27-28 May 1943: 'Patrolled at 10,000 ft. near Bizerte. Over to Spongebag who reported 10 bogeys to N.E. coming towards Bizerte. No height given. Spongebag brought the Beaufighter in behind, losing height to 8,000 ft. Contact obtained at 8,000 range to port and a little above. Closed very rapidly to 3,000 and identified a Ju. 88 by silhouette against light sky in west. Closed to 80-100 yards. Now 15-20 miles N.E. of Bizerte at approximately 2110 hours, an attempt was made to open fire, but it was not until the firing button had been manipulated in various positions for 15-20 seconds that a one second burst was given with all guns. The starboard engine of the enemy aircraft immediately burst into flames. As the Ju. 88 broke away to port, the rear gunner opened fire without damaging the Beaufighter. Visual was lost but contact held. The enemy aircraft was taking violent evasive action, but the Beaufighter was brought in to 1500 and visual regained. A little flame and a large amount of grey smoke could be seen coming from the starboard engine. The enemy aircraft was doing tight turns and had lost height to 6,000 ft. A full deflection one second burst was given at 60 yards range. The port engine exploded and strikes were seen along the fuselage. The aircraft went down vertically into the sea and disappeared. No member of crew was seen to bale out. Navigator Radio found he had another contact at 4,000 range above and well to starboard. Closed to 2,000 and identified a Ju. 88 by silhouette against the light western sky. At range of 100 yards dead astern and slightly below, a two second burst was given with all guns. The starboard engine exploded and strikes were seen along the fuselage. The enemy aircraft dived vertically into the sea. Two more explosions were seen in the engines as the aircraft went down. Spongebag had nothing more so the Beaufighter patrolled N.W.-S.E. just off Cap Bizerte. Claim: two J.U. 88s destroyed.'

The following outstanding website gives considerable information of 255 Squadron's wartime service, aerial victory lists etc, as well as detailed biographies of crew including O'Sullivan:

<http://www.255.org.uk/sitemap.html>

125 (NEWFOUNDLAND) SQUADRON, MOSQUITO XVII'S, D-DAY, OPERATION MARKET GARDEN AND V1'S

Rested at No. 9 Group as a flying instructor, June 1943 to March 1944, in April 1944, O'Sullivan returned to the operational scene with an appointment in 125 Squadron, a Mosquito unit operating out of Hurn. In May, he flew a number of G.C.I.'s (Ground Controlled Interception) patrols operated from RAF Sopley; a radar station (codenamed 'Starlight') and on the night of 22-23 May 1944 he added another confirmed victory to his tally, namely a Ju. 88 over St. Catherine's Point on the south coast:

Night of 22-23 May 1944: *'My navigator picked up a contact dead ahead 5 miles range well below our height of 19000 ft. Range closed very rapidly as I.A.S. 180 m.p.h. we tight turned through 360 degrees losing height to 14500 ft. Contact was regained at 3 miles still slightly below. Target was heading due North and weaving violently. We experienced moderate window, throttling back to 250 2.A.S. but later increasing to 280 2.A.S. We closed in dead astern and a little below obtaining visual at 1000 ft and identifying enemy aircraft at 700 ft as a JU 188 by silhouette and position of exhausts which were whitish yellow. I opened fire at 120 yards from slightly below allowing * ring deflection and gbing a 4 sec. burst. Strikes were seen on port engine and fuselage, and pieces and sparks flew off while there was a small explosion in port engine. Inaccurate shots burst from enemy aircraft followed just as I finished firing and then enemy aircraft fell away to port out of control with port engine burning. We watched it go down and hit the sea where it exploded. We gave Sopley a fix!'*



O'SULLIVAN

O'Sullivan was subsequently awarded the D.F.C. and his radio-navigator, Flight Sergeant W. G. Hood, who had followed him to No. 125 Squadron, received the D.F.M.

In June, piloting Mosquito XVII's, O'Sullivan flew night patrols over the D-Day beaches and over the French coast, in protection of the supply convoys supporting the invasion, the squadron having a good deal of success off Le Harve towards the end of the month.

The next threat came from the V-1 Flying Bombs, 125 Squadron moving to Middle Wallop to take part in the campaign against the flying bomb but in September, flying from a forward base at Bradwel Bay, they also flew a large number of offensive sweeps during Operation Market Garden (Holland), O'Sullivan noted as taking part in 8 operations 'over the battle area' between 19th a 28 September.

Next came a move to Coltishall, where the squadron carried out patrols against the remaining German intruders, flying-bomb carriers (German bombers used to air-launch V-1s) and to find and attack the remaining German coastal shipping. Upgrading to Mosquito XXX night fighters in January 1945, O'Sullivan would continue with the squadron until at least May 1945, though his last patrol, an anti-intruder, was on 11 April.



A MOSQUITO MK XXX NIGHT FIGHTER

It is not clear when O'Sullivan left 125 Squadron, however by 8 May 1945, he had taken part in approximately 69 sorties with the squadron and a huge number of Night Fighter Training flights (NFT's) not counted in this total. O'Sullivan's D.F.C. recommendation states he had taken part in 50 sorties by 4 June 1944, 15 of these were with 125 Squadron, suggesting he took part in the region of 104 operational sorties during the war.

POST WAR, METEORS AND BORNEO OPERATIONS

Having been demobilised in 1946, O'Sullivan rejoined the Royal Air Force on a short service commission in 1951, initially being posted to No. 1 F.T.S. at Moreton-on-Marsh, prior to attending a refresher course on Mosquitos at Swinderby. Soon after he joined 39 Squadron followed and was posted to RAF El Hamra in the Canal Zone of Egypt and also to RAF Kabrit, during a time of high tension in the Middle East. In October 1952 he took a permanent commission and returning to the UK in the spring of 1954, he undertook a fast jets conversion course at 228 OCU RAF Leeming, piloting Gloster Meteors. Awarded the Queen's Commendation for Valuable Services in the Air in 1956 (London Gazette 1 January 1957), in 1959 he is recorded as flying Meteors as a Staff Pilot in No. 1 Squadron out of Thorney Island and attended the R.A.F. College of Warfare at Manby in 1962.

The same year, he was posted to 209 Squadron, based at Seletar, Singapore and among other duties, flew supply runs in support of British Special Forces actions in the Indonesian-Malaysian confrontation of 1963–1966 (Borneo operations). During this service, O'Sullivan was one of the pilots involved in covert flights into hostile jungle territory, flying the single-engine version of the Scottish Aviation Pioneer aircraft. The Single Pioneer's exceptional STOL performance allowed it to land on short, muddy, and primitive forest clearings and high-altitude ridges where other aircraft could not go. As such, during the conflict it was able to handle critical troop communications, supply drops, general transport, and wounded evacuations from isolated positions



A SCOTTISH AVIATION SINGLE PIONEER

Returning from the Far East in July 1965, O'Sullivan ceased flying duties on his 45th birthday, transferring to Ground Branch and training as an Air Traffic Controller. Stationed over the next two and a half years at RAF Shawbury, RAF Leconfield and RAF Little Rissington. On 21 February 1968, shortly after a car crash that had left him in great pain and a confused state of mind, O'Sullivan tragically took his own life. He was 47 years old. At an Inquest held on 26 February 1968 at Stow-on-the-Wold, the Cotswold Coroner recorded on Flight Lieutenant O'Sullivan the verdict of "*suicide whilst the balance of his mind was disturbed.*". He is buried in the Commonwealth War Graves plot at St. Peter's Church, Little Rissington,

AN ACE?

Various sources, including Shores and Williams' definitive work *Aces High: Fighter Aces of the British & Commonwealth Air Forces in World War II*. List O'Sullivan as 4 confirmed victories with one damaged which was possibly upgraded. Additionally, the logbook belonging to O'Sullivan's navigator, Flight Sergeant W. G. Hood, lists 5 aircraft destroyed, one of which is the HE111 damaged on 13 April 1943. However no evidence for an upgrade for the damaged aircraft has been located and the combat reports are clear (copies of each with research). As such although it's certainly possible an upgrade was made, 4 confirmed and 1 damaged appears to be the final tally.



Condition GVF, Ex DNW/Noonans June 2006. Note QCVSA emblem subsequently added to the GSM ribbon. Sold with a comprehensive file of research including DFC recommendation, combat reports, LG, birth/death certificate etc. Also digital copies of 125 Squadron's Operational logs 1944-45

An outstanding and very scarce night fighter pilots group with at least 4 confirmed aerial victories