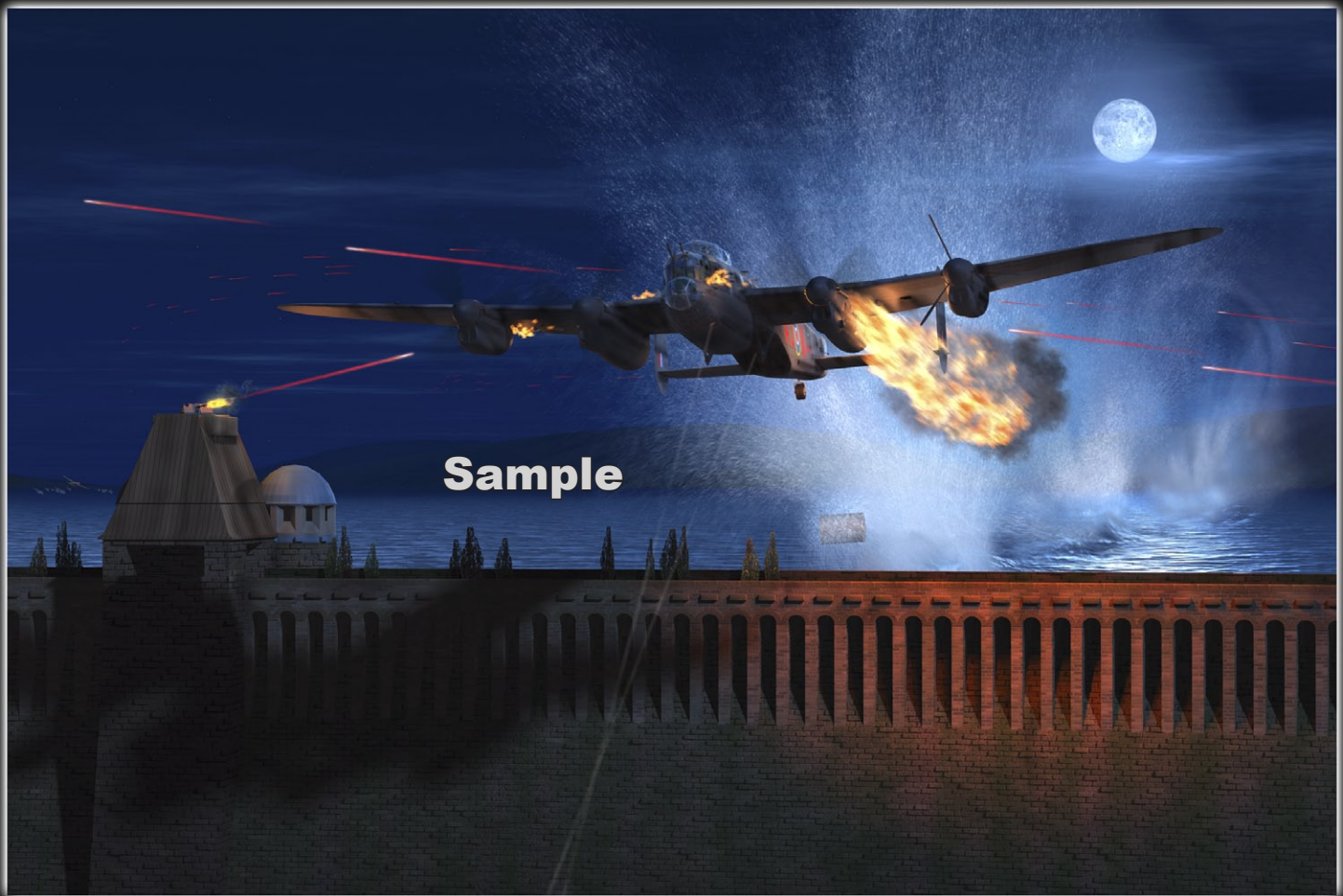


“COURAGE BEYOND FEAR” - BY LEN KRENZLER

Tribute to the Dambusters - Lancaster Flown by John Hopgood attacks the Mohne Dam - May 17, 1943

Signed on plate by Sgt George “Johnny” Johnson DFM, F/Sgt Grant MacDonald, and Sgt Frederick Sutherland



The Dambuster mission, or operation Chastise as it was called, is perhaps the most legendary bombing raid in history. The skill, planning, precision and engineering involved was, and still is, amazing.

This image portrays Lancaster AJ-M, the second Lancaster to attack the Mohne Dam. AJ-M flown by John Hopgood was the only Lancaster to be shot down over the dam during these missions. Wing Commander Guy Gibson in AJ-G was the first to attack the dam and thus had the element of surprise. John Hopgood and the crew of AJ-M were not so lucky. Gibson's bomb was released too early. It sank and exploded too far from the dam to damage it. This required a second attack by the next Lancaster in line, AJ-M.

As AJ-M approached the dam, the German gunners were fully prepared. The result was that the guns from both towers on the dam crossed up on the Lancaster and she was “raked from nose to tail” with 20mm gunfire. The result was a raging fuel fire and the loss of a second engine, the first being lost on the perilous journey from England to the dam site. The bomb was released a fraction too late and bounced over the dam hitting and destroying the power station.

With the loss of two engines, AJ-M was unable to gain altitude in order for all the crew to escape safely. The pilot John Hopgood held onto the controls to the very end giving two crew members, bomb aimer John Fraser, and tail gunner Tony Burcher, a chance to escape. At a mere two hundred feet above the ground, they were two of the lowest successful bailouts recorded during the war. Both survived. Tony Burcher was injured but John Fraser was not and bravely evaded capture for 10 days. Both survived the war as POW's.

It took three more attempts before the dam was finally breached. The Ruhr valley was flooded and significant damage was done to the Nazi war effort as a result. John Hopgood and his crew were true WWII heroes.

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