



John Bernard Johnson



Flight Sergeant

Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve

1488398

Served 296 Sqdn.

Died 12/07/1944

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Civvy Street

John Bernard Johnson was born to John and Sarah Johnson, of Wigan, Lancashire in 1924. John Bernard Johnson and John Bryan Longworth were 1st cousins. In 1942 John B Johnson was aged 18 and volunteered for service with the RAF Volunteer Reserve after attending university.

Service Record



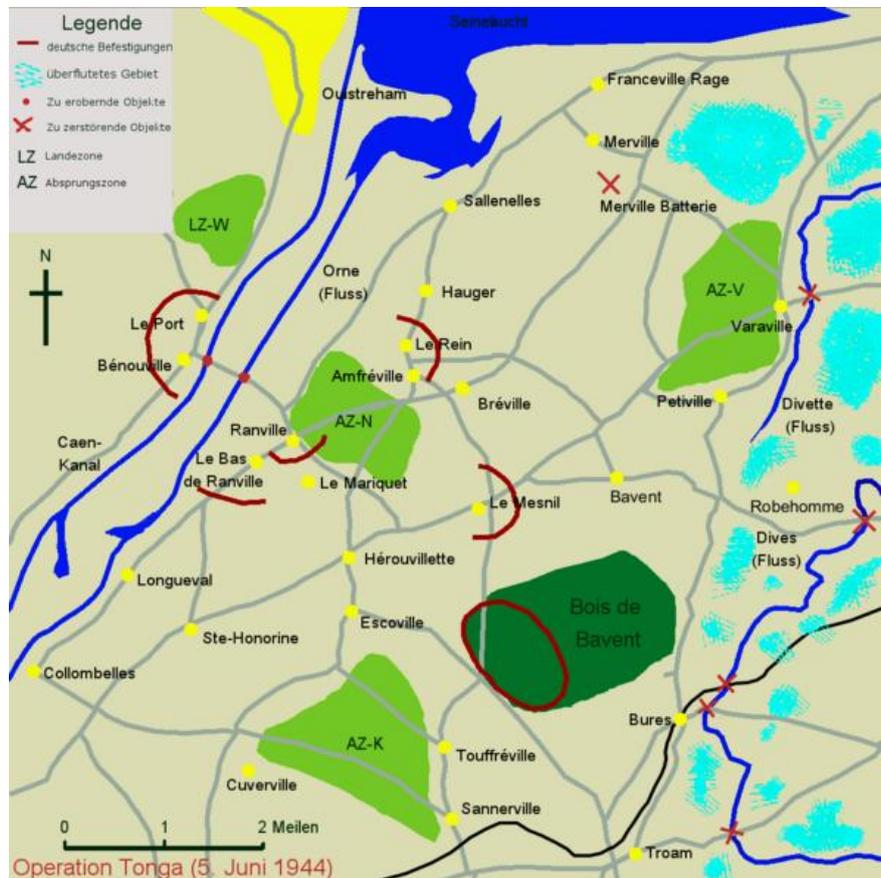
Armstrong Albemarle

Bernie joined 296 squadron in early 1944, the squadron having returned to England following operations in Sicily, and a number of duties over Italy. The Squadron consisted of 3 Flights -A,B,and C. There were 10 aircraft in each flight with 3 in the reserve pool. Bernie is thought to have served in B Flight.

Training exercises with the Airborne Forces were the order of the day from then on, including some SOE supply drops to the French Resistance in February and March 1944, and the Squadron was moved to Brize Norton during March.

During March they were engaged in dropping personnel, arms, ammunition, radio sets, food and other supplies to the resistance movements in Europe. They also began training and preparing for the next major airborne assault, that of Operation Overlord, the Normandy landings. For these it provided three pathfinder aircraft and eight towing Horsa gliders, with a further 19 gliders being towed in during D-Day itself. Bernie piloted Albemarle V1774 on D-Day.

Operation 'OVERLORD', the Invasion of Europe.



Operation "TONGA"

The eve of 'D-Day' for No.296 Squadron was the beginning of Operation 'TONGA'. No.296 Squadron began with 3 aircraft.

The very first No.296 Squadron Albemarle (**Flight Lieutenant Whitty**) took off at 23:00 hrs from Brize Norton with 9 Pathfinders of 22nd Independent Parachute Company on board, who were to locate and mark the Dropping Zones (DZs) for the main force. This flight experienced a few problems when the first man in the parachute stick fell on the jump doors and there was a delay of 10 minutes whilst he was extracted and pushed out over the drop zone. A further 7 men followed him, but a second run to drop the remaining 2 soldiers had to be made.

Flight Lieutenant Whitty was followed by **Wing Commander McMonnies** and **Squadron Leader Archer** who had to drop troops of 5th Parachute Brigade of **Brigadier J H N Poett** (Brigadier Poett was in aircraft of Wing Commander McMonnies). Squadron Leader Archer had to make a second pass over his zone to drop all of his troops. The two aircraft came close to colliding after the drop, but this was narrowly averted. Light flak was also encountered, but easily avoided.



Pathfinders synchronising their watches in front of an Armstrong Whitworth Albemarle.

The principal task of 5th Parachute Brigade was to support the Pathfinders and to reinforce Major Howard's company (Pegasus Bridge). Approximately 40 minutes behind the pathfinders were 8 more Albemarles (they were 10 but 2 went u/s and it was too late to replace them) of 296 Squadron, each carrying 9 troops of the 5th Parachute Brigade and heavy equipment like bulldozers of 6th Airborne Divisional Engineers. A considerable amount of light flak was encountered over the drop zone, resulting in damage to a number of aircraft, but the pathfinders had successfully marked their targets and all the paratroopers were deployed.

Flight Lieutenant Scott's aircraft was the only one to encounter any great difficulty, and he had to make no fewer than four passes over the drop zone. 3 men got out on the first run, however the doors then collapsed and prevented the remainder from jumping. When the pilot made a second pass the paratroopers were still not ready to jump, but on the third run 5 men got out. A fourth and final pass was made to deploy the remaining paratrooper, together with his dog, who had up until this time been hiding in the gun turret.

Sadly, **Flight Sergeant Jones**, the rear gunner of **Flying Officer Bull's** aircraft was wounded by a bullet fired from the ground. The aircraft landed at Ford for medical aid but Flight Sergeant Jones died in hospital. The tow rope on one Horsa broke away, however it is believed that it was able to land on a beach.



Armstrong Whitworth Albermarle 296 Sqn RAF, 5 June 1944

Of the 5th Parachute Brigade, the 7th Battalion was to take Bénouville to the west of the River Orne, whilst to the east of it, the 13th Battalion captured Ranville several hours after they had landed, and this became the first village to be liberated in the invasion. The 12th Parachute Battalion was positioned a little to the south of Ranville, dug in along a small ridge which screened the Division against attack from the south. Several times on D-Day, the 12th Battalion was attacked by the 125th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, and despite the significant loss of strength they had incurred on the drop, the Battalion, supported by well-sited anti-tank guns, nevertheless held their ground most successfully and dissuaded further attacks.

Operation “MALLARD”

When they returned to Brize Norton, the crews involved during operations on the first night slept throughout the morning but were awake in time for their briefing at 14:30. The aircraft were marshaled at by 17:00, and Aircraft of No.297 Squadron took off first from 18:48 hrs followed by aircraft of No.296 but the 25th glider, towed by **Flying Officer G.S. Vaughan** crashed on take-off causing delay. The remaining aircraft were all airborne at 19:47 hrs and flew at 500 feet ASL.

On DZ, gliders were released at 1000 feet ASL. Concentration was excellent and 17 of the 19 gliders towed by No.296 released between 21:13 and 21:15 hrs but near the release point was one Anti Aircraft position, which gave trouble to aircraft. Several were hit. **Flying Officer Wilson's** aircraft crashed in flames, though 4 of the 5 crew succeeded in bailing out, the rear gunner **Pilot Officer Smith** was not seen to leaving the aircraft. Several more aircraft received damage, the aircraft of **Flight Lieutenant Hilton** was badly shot up and forced to make a crash-landing at Greenham Common.

This deployment saw the end of 296 Squadron's participation in the D-Day landings, however they were involved in another airborne operation on the 7th June. Operation Cooney involved 9 aircraft from 38 Group, and 296 Squadron provided 3 Albemarles to the effort, each carrying 6 troops of the 4th French Parachute Battalion, SASB. In all 58 soldiers were dropped on no fewer than 17 undefended drop zones, between Redon and St. Malo, with the intention of disrupting enemy communications between West Brittany and the remainder of France. All of the drop zones were very small and a considerable challenge to locate, however 296 Squadron's navigators and bomb-aimers were successful in finding both of their allotted zones.

On D-Day, these Squadrons had been involved in dropping paratroops and launching Horsa gliders for the purpose of capturing bridges, six miles inland from the coast, over the River Orne and Caen Canal. On the same day, two more gliders were placed directly on a coastal battery controlling the estuary of the River Orne, which was in a position to oppose the seaborne landings. All of these operations were completed successfully.

July 1944

During the last 12 days of Bernie's life, the Squadron took part in SOE operations :

July 6th/July 7th, 1944.

one aircraft of No. 296 Squadron

July 7th/July 8th, 1944

five aircraft of No. 296 Squadron (one successful),

July 8th/July 9th, 1944.

three aircraft from No. 296 Squadron

On the night of the 11th July 1944, as part of a group of aircraft seconded to assist 138 (special duty) Squadron for SOE operations on that date, he took off from Brize Norton, but failed to return.

Flight Sergeant John Bernard Johnson died, aged 20 on the 12th July 1944, and is commemorated by name, at the Runnymede Memorial in Surrey. This memorial lists over 20,000 other airmen who were lost in the Second World War during operations from bases in the United Kingdom and North and Western Europe, and who have no known graves.

Other fatalities from 296 Sqn on the 12th July were:

Flying Officer, **Stanley Morrison Masters**, aged 27, 144588 (buried at St. Marie, Le Harve)

Warrant Officer, **Richard Alan Simpson**, aged 21, 1380149 (Runnymede)

Flight Sergeant, **Wesley Benjamin Hunniford**, aged 24, NZ427501 (Runnymede)

Sergeant (Air Gnr) **William Richard Bush** aged 19, 1876215 (buried at Bayeaux)

The Officer Briefing Report for this date records that all these men flew on the same flight, with a drop zone near Chemaze, a village about 10km SW of Chateua Gontier in Western France. The OBR states "up time 00:15 This aircraft failed to return. No news has been received of the fate of the crew."

As both the known graves are along the coast of France (some 100km apart), it is assumed that the aircraft ditched in the Channel either on route or on it's return. Another assumption would be that the aircraft had suffered damage whilst attempting to reach, or returning from, the drop zone, damage that made it's safe return impossible.

The remaining Squadron members went on to take part in the Arnhem operation in September 1944, when it towed 25 gliders in the first wave and a further 21 the following day and shortly after the squadron began converting to Halifax Vs but it was November before the final Albemarle left.

Until the Rhine crossing of March 1945, the squadron carried out supply dropping missions to resistance forces in what remained of occupied Europe. With the end of the war the squadron was involved in trooping flights to Denmark and Norway and returning POWs. The squadron also began flights to India in December 1945 but on 23 January 1946 it disbanded at Earl's Colne.

296 Squadron



Squadron Codes:
XH Aug 1942 - Nov 1943
9W Oct 1943 - Jan 1946
7C Mar 1944 - Jan 1946

Commander : Wing Commander D. I. McInnies

In July 1944 296 squadron possessed 37 serviceable Albemarle aircraft and shared 40 Horsa gliders with 297 squadron.

38 Group



“A Noble Pair of Brothers”, symbolising the close association with the Army Airborne Forces.

N° 38 Wing was established 15th January 1942.

It's first Commander was Group Captain Sir Nigel NORMAN.

The Wing's first Order of Battle consisted of 296 and 297 Squadron, both based at Netheravon.

295 Squadron was formed at Netheravon 3rd August 1942. Tragically, Air Commodore Sir Nigel Norman was killed on 19th May 1943. He was on his way to North Africa, but the aircraft crashed on take-off from Portreath.

On 6th November 1943, 38 Wing became 38 Group with nine squadrons : four Albemarle (295, 296, 297, 570), one Halifax (298) and four Stirling (299, 190, 196, 620) totaling 248 aircraft.