

Sergeant Observer William Edward David 'Tiny' Wardrop.

No. 7A Naval Squadron R.N.A.S. , No.14 Naval Squadron R.N.A.S.

and No. 214 Squadron R.A.F.

Distinguished Flying Medal. Mentioned in Dispatches



W.E.D. Wardrop R.N.A.S. Used with the Permission of the Royal Flying Corps Collection of Boscombe Down Aviation Collection.

William Edward Wardrop had joined the Royal Naval Air Service as a volunteer on 5th August 1915. He did his basic training at Sheerness. He was then posted to the seaplane base at Felixstowe where he spent a year. He had his first flight on a Curtiss sea plane at Felixstowe. In August 1916, he was posted to R.N.A.S. Eastchurch where he became a gunnery and bomb dropping instructor, teaching recruits the vagaries of the Lewis Gun. He did a 6 week long naval gunnery course at Whale Island in Portsmouth. On 4th August 1917 he was posted to France, to No.7 Naval, Squadron No. 5 Wing at Coudekerque aerodrome near Dunkerque. He was an Air Mechanic 2 Gunlayer on Flight Commander Brackley's aircraft, Handley Page O/100, 3130. His first mission was a raid on Ostende on 15th August 1917. He was quickly promoted to be Brackley's Observer from the 9th October 1917.

Sergeant Observer Wardrop completed 56 missions with No.7A Naval, No.14 Naval and No. 214 Squadron. He would be Mentioned in Despatches and would be awarded the Distinguished Flying Medal on 1st January 1919. He would be demobbed on the 16th January 1919. This account will describe some of the key missions that Wardrop took part in flying Handley Page bombers during the Great War.

Wardrop's First mission with the Squadron. 15th August 1917. Target Ostende.

Flight Commander Brackley was one of the pilots to attack Ostende that night. He was with his observer Gunlayer Day and W.E.D. Wardrop, who was flying his first mission as a rear Gunlayer with the squadron. They were not flying their usual aircraft, H.P. 3130, but 3134 instead. They carried a bomb load of 14 x 112lb bombs . Brackley's log book simply describes it as '*a raid on Ostende Railway Sidings*'. Gunlayer Wardrop provided more detail in his log. '*Last machine away. Plenty of chain fire on the port side and shell burst just off the starboard side of tail. Searchlights not troublesome. 12 bombs dropped. 2 hung ups – kicked off. Cloudy. Report Successful Raid. Activity over the lines.*' The flight took 2 hours and 35 minutes. According to the 5th Group. Dunkirk. Daily Report. One fire was started as a result of the bombing at Ostende.

The chain fire that Wardrop describes was probably 'Green Balls' also known as 'Flaming Onions' a type of anti-aircraft weapon.

29th September 1917. A Long Range Mission to bomb the Railway Bridge at Namur. Wardrop is Mentioned in Despatches for his part on the raid. '*A most enjoyable trip.*'..... '*Great explosions*'. Flight Commander Brackley.

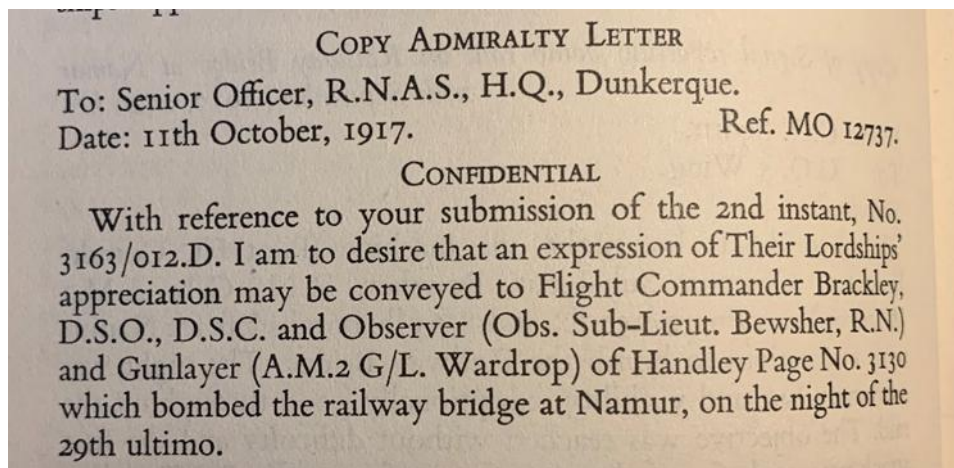
Flight Commander H.G. Brackley flew HP 3130 to Namur. The railway bridge over the Meuse at Namur was strategically important, particularly as the Battle of Paschendaele was raging. His observer was Lieutenant Paul Bewsher and the Gun Layer was W.E.D. Wardrop. Bewsher, in his 1919 book *Green Balls The Adventures of a Night Bomber* devotes *Chapter 8, The Long Trail*, to an account of this mission.

Brackley took-off on the 300-mile round trip at 19:59 hrs, carrying four 250lb and eight 65lb bombs. Namur was so far behind the lines it has never been bombed before and there is no black out. They found the bridge easily. They turn off the engines to do a silent gliding attack and are able to do two bombing runs against the bridge with no anti-aircraft, machine guns or searchlights to oppose them.

Flight Commander Brackley described the attack in his log book. '*Course: Namur via Ghent, Brussels and Charleroi. Night raid on railway bridge at Namur. 4 x 250lb and 8 x 65lb bombs. Most enjoyable trip. Found Namur easily. Made first run from S. to N. at 4,700 feet and Bewsher dropped 6 bombs. All missed - damn! Second run same direction at 4,400 feet and 2 of the 250lbs hit bridge near Northern extremity Great explosions! think we badly damaged the bridge. Had excellent trip back*'. On the second run they score two direct hits on the northern end of the bridge, destroying half the railway tracks, the bridge was badly damaged and that three sets of rails out of six were destroyed.

Gunlayer Wardrop, the rear gunner, described the historical, 4 hour 40 minute flight in his log book. *'Special Commission to bomb Railway Bridge. Flew past Thourout, Bruges, Ghent, Antwerp and Brussels. Chain fire and A.A just missed our tail when near Bruges. Everything quiet after passing Ghent. No searchlights or A.A. Passed over Namur first time at 4,500 feet then second time dropped 4 bombs just missing the bridge. Third and last time dropped six. Two dropping south, two hitting bridge and two just north (250lbs were the weight of the two that hit the bridge). Third time we were at 4,000 ft. lights were burning brightly at Antwerp and Brussels. Aerodromes were visible at several places also Zepp. Sheds near Brussels. Huns were about but none attacked. Longest raid in H.P. at present. Rather cold trip. Visibility Glorious – Moon. (Not very active over lines until about 11:30pm).*

Less than two weeks later, on 11th October 1917, all three crew members; Brackley, Bewsher and Wardrop were mentioned in Admiralty Dispatches. *'I am to desire that an expression of Their Lordships' appreciation might be conveyed to Flight Commander Brackley, D.S.O., D.S.C. and Observer Sub. Lieutenant Bewsher R.N. and GunLayer Air Mechanic 2 G/L Wardrop'.*



Five weeks later an Intelligence Report arrives at the Squadron. *'On the night of September 29th allied aircraft successfully attacked the Luxembourg bridge at Namur, which was badly damaged. 17 German civilians were killed.'* Sometime after the raid Major Brackley amends his log book and adds the following details. *'Agent confirms our report and says that bridge was badly damaged and that three sets of rails out of six were destroyed.'*

28th October 1917. Target Cologne. *'Gardner, after a seven and a half hour flight, bombed Duren'.* – Flight Commander Brackley.

The plan was to attack Cologne, Germany's sixth largest city, on the banks of the River Rhine. A successful attack on Cologne would send a very clear message to the German people. Tiny Wardrop described the mission as a *'Reprisal Raid'*. A copy of the Raid Order for the Cologne mission was found in Tiny Wardrop's logbook at the Imperial War Museum. The eleven crews would take-off at five minute intervals starting at 5:40pm. The last aircraft was scheduled to

leave at 6:30pm. Flight Commander Brackley's plane, H.P. 3130 normally carried a bomb load of 4 x 250lb and 6 x 112lb bombs, a total of 1,672lb. On this raid to Cologne, they carried 2 x 250lb and 8 x 65lb bombs, a total of 1,020lbs. The weight of the bomb load was only about 60% of what was normally carried, probably to be able to maximise the fuel carried.

Major Brackley's *'Rough History of 214 Squadron – completed in the field'* written in January 1919 provides a brief summary of the operation. *'The whole squadron attempted to raid Cologne, but ran into rain storms before reaching German Frontier, compelling all machines to return. Alternative targets were attacked on return journey.'*

This description does not do justice to the Herculean efforts that all the crews made that night, struggling through really challenging conditions before they had to abandon the raid near the German border. The aircraft diverted to their alternative targets around Antwerp, which they bombed. All the aircraft returned safely to Coudekerque, after spending up to seven and a half hours in the air.

Flight Commander Brackley's log book described what happened on their 4 hour 30 minute flight. *'Started with the intention of bombing Cologne. After getting half way, ran into thick weather and rain. Had to return and drop bombs on the alternative objective - Antwerp. Some bombs exploded in town but few burst on railway station. Hit by AA over Antwerp and again on return from Knocke. Course Zeebrugge-Selzaete-Lokeren-Aerschot-Diest- and back to Antwerp'*. Major Brackley. Log Book No. 2. NMRN 2017/83/2 Yeovilton.

Gunlayer Wardrop, acting as Brackley's rear gunner on H.P. 3130, had a lucky escape that night. *'Fourth machine away. Followed coast until we saw the Scheldt (Holland). Turned S.E. passing north of Antwerp. Turned then due east. When over north of Louvain flew into a storm. Tried to get through but impossible. Had to return. Dropped our bombs 2 x 250lbs and 8 x 65lbs on Antwerp. Bombs fell on town, railway junctions and docks. Flew N.W until over the Knocke. Searchlights soon picked us up. No A.A. for quite? Three minutes. Two shells one on either side burst about 10 ft. above us. When we landed we found 10 holes in our machine (planes) two windows blown out at the back and one in the front. Shrapnel went in one window and out the other, just missed my back. The ammunition dump at Roulers blew up at 9:25pm. Followed coast home. Warm trip. (Very active over lines) Visibility very good although cloudy.'*

Wardrop then puts in an additional note about Antwerp after completing the raid account. *'Extra. A very large fire was burning in the town when we arrived. One of bombs caused a small fire in the N.E. corner of town'*.

One crew from 7 N Squadron, flying HP 0/100 3125, was in the air for seven and a half hours. A massive feat of endurance for the pilot Flight Lieutenant Gardner, his observer Second Lieutenant Terrell and rear gunner G/L Beaver. Brackley put a note in his log book, *'No one reached Cologne. Gardner after seven and a half hour flight bombed Duren and landed at Droglandt.'* Duren was a town approximately 20 miles south west of Cologne.

Wardrop's first mission as an Observer. 9th October 1917. Target Thourout Railway Junctions.

After a two month long apprenticeship as rear Gunlayer, Wardrop was made the Observer for Flight Commander Brackley on HP 3130. He flew his first mission in this new role on the 9th October 1917. They took off to raid Thourout at 23:10 and ran into thick clouds soon after. They struggled as far as Nieuport, where the Lines and German occupied territory started, before returning back to base 30 minutes after taking -off with their bombs intact. Observer Wardrop, *'Tested visibility, alright at 3,000 but after climbing to 4,000 ft. Was very poor. Had to give "Wash-out" signal so returned.'*

An hour and a half later, the weather conditions had improved sufficiently, for the crew of H.P 3130 to take off again at 01:06 heading back to Thourout Railway Junction as Flight Commander Brackley described in his log book. Once again though, things did not go completely smoothly for the crew of H.P. 3130 *'Conditions much better this time. 4 x 250lb and 6 x 112lb bombs. Objective showed up fairly clear. G/L did good shooting first run. 3 bombs hung up and could not be released for over half an hour. Eventually got rid of them in the sea.'* Major Brackley. Log Book No. 2. NMRN 2017/83/2 Yeovilton.

Wardrop provides more detail in his log book, *'First machine away. Tested visibility once again. This time A.1. Flew over lines just past Furnes then went S.E. until we saw Thourout. Dropped 3 bombs (2 x 112lbs and 1 x 250lbs) near loop line. These exploded on the west side of the line. Turned south following main line. Dropped 4 (3 x 112lb and 1 x 250lb) on station. Three bombs failed to release owing to releasing gear suddenly collapsing. No searchlights or A.A. Visibility fair – very dark. Active over lines.'* Flight Commander Brackley was pleased with Wardrop's first outing as his observer, *'G/L did good shooting first run.'*

1st June 1918. The Brackley and Wardrop team is captured in a famous photograph.

On the 1st June 1918, No. 214 Squadron was visited by an Official Photographer, a Lieutenant Thomas Keith Aitken. He took a series of remarkably clear and sharp images of the squadron's aircraft undergoing maintenance, fuelling and bombing-up. He also went up in a Handley Page and took a number of air to air images from the rear gunner's platform. These aerial images showed a group of squadron's aircraft flying over the coast. Twenty nine images taken that day by Lieutenant Aitken are in the archive at the Imperial War Museum in London, *IWM (Q 12181)*. Although no longer taking part on raids, the Commanding Officer is photographed with his former observer, Corporal W.E.D. Wardrop.



Image taken on 01/06/18 at Coudekerque. L-R. Corporal 'Tiny' Wardrop, Unknown. Possibly Captain Theodore Quentin Studd, Major Brackley Commanding Officer 214 Squadron. IWM (Q 12181).

6th June 1918. Target St. Denis Westrem Aerodrome. Crash Landing Number 1.

At least one 214 Squadron plane attacked the St. Denis Westrem Gotha base that night. This was H.P. 3488, the aircraft with Lieutenant Lewtas as pilot and Corporal Wardrop as Observer. They arrived at the German aerodrome to find the airfield landing lights lit saw a German plane with its own landing lights on and attacked it. The lights on the ground went out but the German aircraft then shot identification flares and the ground landing lights were put back on again. The HP crew then proceeded to take advantage of this and bomb the German aerodrome as Corporal Wardrop described in his log book.

'Third away. Circled between Dunkirk, Furnes and Burgues and climbed to 7,000 ft. Crossed the lines near Dixmunde and flew due east until we came to the Bruges-Ghent canal then steered south. Saw a machine landing at St Denis and landing lights on. We were just nearing to attack when all the lights went out. We hovered in the vicinity and presently a red light was fired from the air and two white from the ground then all lights came on again. We took a run E. to W. over the southern part of the 'drome. A parachute flare was dropped from the air enabling us to see the ground like daylight. Started a small fire which was either works or mess quarters. Saw a light at Oostcamp Aerodrome so dropped a Cooper bomb. This fell to the west of light. Dropped the other Cooper on three aerodrome lights 1 red and 2 green. This fell just east of the red light. Not very active on Nieupoort front but the Ypres front was very active.'

'Flying along the sands between Gravelines and Dunkirk we suddenly crashed. It was a total wreck.'

Wardrop's plane crash landed on the beach. It dropped 200 feet coming into land and the plane fell out of the sky and crashed for no apparent reason. Wardrop was thrown out of the wreckage and was buried with his head and shoulders in the sand. He escaped unharmed apart from a black eye. He then pulled the pilot out of the sand. Wardrop pulled off the pilot's thigh length flying boot and he thought he had pulled off the pilot's leg! The Gun Layer flying in the rear cockpit, called Thomas was seriously injured. Thomas was flown back to England but died from his injuries. Wardrop flew again the next day. *"The black eye sustained in the crash was the only injury I suffered during my entire war service (he flew 66 missions), so the Gods must have favoured me with their blessings."* Corporal W.E.D. Wardrop. Imperial War Museum Sound Archive. Wardrop also has the 6th/7th June as a "Stand By" night. He was due to go on a second raid to Bruges Docks but he had an *'accident to left hand'*. This might be referring to their second raid of the night or an error over the date.

15th June 1918. Target Bruges Docks. H.P. D5401 shot down. *'Our starboard engine was hit three times, aileron controls shot away, elevators and planes punctured.'.....'Warm night' – Corporal Wardrop. Crash Landing Number 2.*

Probably the most significant event for the squadron that night was the loss of H.P. 0/400 D5401. It was caught in the searchlights over Bruges and hit repeatedly by heavy and accurate Anti-Aircraft fire. Lt Freer managed to nurse the stricken plane as far as the lines where it crash landed. The crew of Freer, Wardrop and Binckes were all safe, but the Germans destroyed the aircraft with artillery fire early the next day.

The January 1919, *Rough History of 214 Squadron*, described the incident and the fate of the aircraft, HP 5401. *'June 15th 1918. Bruges Docks. Whilst attacking Bruges Docks the intense barrage of A.A. fire resulted in the machine being hit in many places. Starboard engine was hit and put completely out of action. Pilot managed to cross the lines at 100 feet and made safe landing in full view of the enemy. Very shortly after, the machine received a direct hit which blew it to pieces.'*

The observer, Corporal Wardrop, wrote a detailed account of the night's events in his log book. In addition, he gave an account to author Ron James that appears in his history of 214 Squadron, *'Avenging in the Shadows'*. Corporal Wardrop's own recollections of that flight on the 15th-16th June 1918 are vividly recorded in the Imperial War Museum Sound Archive, *Wardrop W.E.D. an Oral History, Catalogue Number 29*. It was recorded in March 1973.

The basic facts for the crew of D5401 on that 15th-16th June night are listed in Sturtivant and Page Pg 389. *'Badly damaged by AA (Anti Aircraft fire) during raid on Bruges Docks; FL (Forced Landed) on beach Oostdunkerque Bains, destroyed by enemy shipping, set on fire'*

At 22:55, Freer, Wardrop and Binckes took off from the sands for Bruges. It was observer Wardrop's thirty eighth mission, but the rear gunner, Lieutenant Reginald Binckes's, second mission. Corporal Wardrop's log book provides full details of the flight. *'Second away. Climbed between Furnes and just east of Gravelines eventually crossed the lines at 7,500. Two searchlights came up at Ghisthelles but managed to fly around them. Saw Ostende-Bruges canal and took a line W to E over centre portion of docks releasing eight bombs. These were observed to fall on the western side of the dock between northern and southern Darses. An AA (anti-aircraft) shell then exploded by our starboard engine just above us. We then flew NW to SE over docks releasing the remainder. Bursts from these were seen by Lt. Binckes on the eastern side just in a line with those that had exploded on the western side. Turned east then south. Discovered the engine had been hit and would soon stop. The water pipe from radiator on top had been severed. Managed to keep going alright after starboard engine had stopped. We were just SW of Bruges then. Crossed the Hun lines at 500 feet by Dixmunde. Turned north and made for coast. A west wind which was blowing began to make us drift perilously near the lines again. Managed to reach the coast so fired a few Very lights to enable us to see the sands more clearly. Eventually landed about two miles our side of the lines. As soon as daybreak the Huns began to shell the machine. They soon made a wreck of it. It also caught fire. As soon as the fire died down we went to examine the engines etc. also to see if we could save anything. We had not been there for five minutes when they started firing at us. So we left.'* Their flight had lasted two hours 15 minutes.

Corporal Wardrop's log book summarised the damage that the anti aircraft fire had done to HP D5401. The crew were lucky to survive the trip. *'Warm trip. Visibility was fair. Our star engine was hit three times aerilon control(s?) shot away elevators and planes punctured. This was done by AA over Bruges.'*

'Tiny' Wardrop also recounted his experiences onto audio tape in the early 1970s. This is now in the IWM Sound Archive and provides some interesting additional details and information. *"On the night of the 16th June we were back over Bruges again when we were caught in an intense AA (anti-aircraft) barrage. The propeller and radiator were hit on the starboard engine and we had to throttle back on the other one. Then we headed for home on what I can only describe as a powered glide. With the prevailing wind against us we came down lower and lower. Meanwhile the searchlights held us in their beams whilst Archie gave us a real roasting. Luckily all of us escaped injury when our aircraft eventually crashed in No Mans land near Nieuport. Struggling from the wrecked machine we quickly took cover in a large shell hole but we were soon approached by soldiers we took to be German, In one of those Accidents of War opening fire with a Webley (revolver handgun), I shot one of them. They turned out to be Belgians, sent out from their front line to bring us in. Our luck held again as we were taken prisoner rather than being shot. In the dug out we tried to explain that we were British flyers but could not make them understand. Although we were well treated and provided with beer and sandwiches, they kept us there for several hours. Eventually one of the captors said, 'It's alright now you will shortly be picked up by your unit'. Whereupon I exclaimed 'You said you*

could not speak English'. 'A few hours ago I couldn't but now you are cleared I can'. He replied. In a later conversation the Belgian soldier told me he that before the war he had worked at a restaurant in the Strand"

"During the time we had spent in the dug out our Handley Page had been raged by the German guns and literally blown to smithereens. A sequel to this story is that when we arrived back at the Squadron, I was sent for by the Armaments Officer. He was angry and enquired about the five Lewis guns we had on board, reminding me it was a Court Martial offence to lose one's gun. I replied 'How was I expected to bring back five Lewis guns from no-man's land? Stick them up my jumper?' Commander Brackley decided that after the two crashes (Wardrop had crashed on the night of the 5th/6th June when his HP suddenly fell out of control from an altitude of 200 feet at the end of a mission.) I should be given fourteen days leave."

The loss of H.P. 5401 with Freer, Wardrop and Binckes was recoded in the June 16th Daily Summary of Naval Flying Operations. *'Battle Casualties to Machines. 1 Handley Page which was shot down by anti-aircraft fire and subsequently destroyed by German artillery. Crew safe.'* National Archives. AIR1/456/15/312/46.

28/09/1918 Target Railway Junctions. Major Brackley stops Wardrop and Freer doing three raids in one night. *'...endeavoured to do third raid but C.O. deemed it otherwise.'* Observer Sergeant Wardrop.

The previous day, on the 27th September, Headquarters 82nd Wing RAF issued *Secret Operation Order No. 113*. This allocated the targets for the squadron to attack *'as many times as possible'*, from dusk on the evening of the following day, 28th September, to dawn on the 29th. The first attacks to start *'as soon as darkness sets in'*. The squadron was tasked with attacking major railway junctions at Cortemarck, Lichtervelde and Thourout.

The first aircraft to take off from St. Inglevert, at the relatively early time of 19:10, was H.P. 4591 crewed by Freer, Wardrop and Holley. H.P. 4591 was carrying 1 x 1650lb bomb and 2 x 16lb bombs. Sergeant Observer Wardrop recorded the night's mission in his log book. *'First machine away. Went out to sea over Sangatte and followed the coast as far as Nieuport. Here thick black clouds enveloped us. We endeavoured to get above them without success, so turned until we eventually saw Bray Dunes. We then went inland and crossed the lines. Saw the very large square wood near Thourout, then the junction. Owing to the visibility it was hard to see the town clearly. Circled over it about four times then decided to drop. Took a line S.W. to N.E. releasing on the town. The burst was observed N.E. of town. The explosion was terrific. Dropped three flares and two sixteen pound bombs. These bombs were not seen to burst. Returned to St. Inglevert for second raid on machine 3489. Time of attack 20:45. Visibility Poor. Active on lines.'*

On landing at 22:05, Freer, Wardrop and Holley changed aircraft and swapped 4591 for a new machine that was already bombed up. 40 minutes later they took off for the second time that night. They were off to bomb Thourout town. H.P. 3494 was the second aircraft. This time they were carrying a load of 14 x 112lb and 4 x 25lb bombs.

'Only machine to land at St. Inglevert for second raid. Same route as before. Owing to mist and clouds we had to circle about and found ourselves south of Thourout. Eventually saw railway. Took first line S.W. to N.E. releasing four. Bursts were not observed. Turned and went over again releasing five. These bursted in the town by the railway. Last line E. to W releasing remainder. These were not observed. Landed at Coudekerque and endeavoured to do third raid but C.O. deemed it otherwise. Visibility very poor. Time of attack 00:15. Active on lines.'

It seems that Major Brackley had vetoed Freer, Wardrop and Holley going on a third raid. They had landed back at Coudekerque after their second mission at 01:00. 35 minutes later they were flying back to St Inglevert. In addition to the three crew, the aircraft was carrying the squadron Bombing Officer, Lieutenant Willis, Lieutenant Fraser and Air Mechanic Snell. *'Left Coudekerque for St Inglevert. Crossed coast west of Dunkirk and followed coast as far as Sangatte then to aerodrome. First machine to finish the two raids.'*

Another lucky escape for Wardrop. 14/10/1918 Target Melle.

The squadron attacked Melle Railway Junctions and Sidings for the seventh time since the 28th/29th September. Seven of the last nine missions were to Melle. Once again, H.P. 4591 carrying a 1660lb bomb, was first away, at the relatively early time of 6:30pm. Observer Sergeant Wardrop and Lieutenant Freer took their usual route along the Bruges-Ghent canal to the target, as Wardrop's log book records. *'First machine away went to sea by Wissant and followed coast as far as Nieuport. Followed Ostende-Bruges canal to Ghent. Circled over sidings for some time. Went over N.E. to S.W. first time, only another machine (Flight Lieutenant Hetherington and Sgt. Whittaker were just above us coming in the opposite direction so we turned and waited until they finished. They started two fires'*

'Dropped large bomb just north on sidings of eastern fire. (A lack of punctuation from Sergeant Wardrop here does not make it completely clear what happened) (The above fires were confirmed by several machines). Our bomb set alight practically the whole of the sidings. Trains and lines could be easily observed. Returned overland via Bruges. Bruges did not even put a searchlight up although we went over the southern part of the town. Visibility Fair. "Active over lines. Fifteen fires including Thourout, Lichtervelde, Cortemarck, Roulers and believe Menin."

The Imperial War Museum Sound Archive contains an interview with Sergeant Observer 'Tiny', William Edward David Wardrop. The interview provides a fascinating account of Wardrop's time in the RNAS and the Royal Air Force. In it he refers to a mission to bomb Melle when the crew were temporarily knocked unconscious by the concussion of the 1,660lb bomb exploding. The crew woke up to find themselves over Holland! He does not give the date.

“Made a huge fire at a railway siding at a place called Melle, a railway siding full of ammunition. We hit the sidings alright and they saw the fire from 40 miles away. A terrific explosion. That was when we woke up over Holland. You were not supposed to come down below 4000 feet for this bomb, not supposed to drop under 4000 feet. Again we got so determined that we were going to do something with the wretched thing that we came down lower than we should, we came down to 2000 feet and we nearly got concussed, we woke up over Holland. The poor chap at the back, I don’t know where he woke up but he was sick as a toad (?????) of course. We found ourselves over Holland and the machine was just flying itself. We were quite safe, we just went out to sea and came home and that was it. We all saw the fire, many people saw the fire and that was us.”

IWM Sound Archive. Interview with William Edward David Wardrop.

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80000029>

It was at least 16 miles from Melle to the Dutch border. The maximum speed for a Handley Page 0/400 was 97 mph. If the plane was flying at 90mph it would take the plane 12 minutes to cross into Dutch territory. When the crew woke up over Holland the plane had probably been flying itself for at least 15 minutes.

Wardrop’s last mission of the Great War. 9th November 1918. Target Charleroi Railway Junction. *‘...shot directly at us with tracer shells. The first passed within a foot of my head.’* Sergeant Wardrop

214 Squadron attacked Charleroi Railway Junction. Six aircraft bombed the target first of all. Then four of the six came back on a double raid, to maintain the pressure on the retreating enemy. For Corporal Wardrop it was his last raid of the war, attacking Charleroi Railway Junction and Station.

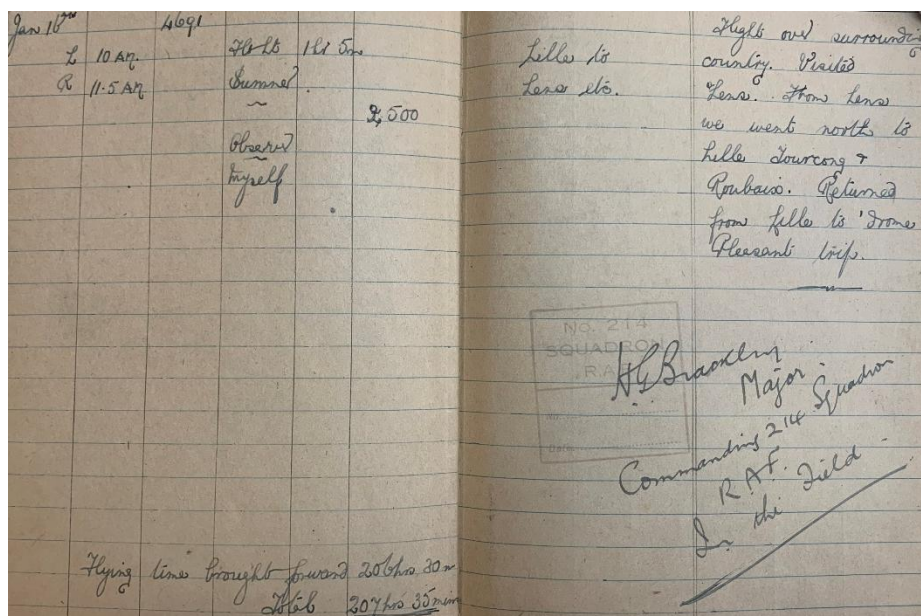
Wardrop was flying again with Ellison and Mansell in H.P. 9643. They left at 6:45 pm carrying a load of 16 x 112lb bombs to Charleroi. The mission would take 2 hours 45minutes to complete. *‘Sixth machine away. Flew S.E. to Valenciennes then south of Mons and La Louvie to Chaleroi. Circled town for twenty minutes. Only one searchlight appeared which was rather troublesome. First attacked sidings and junction just N.E. of town. Went over twice each time releasing three bombs. One of these observed to fall on line to Jumet?. Circled round then observed a train coming towards the station from the east. Turned quickly and released two bombs immediately the train stopped but I do not think I hit it. Turned once more and released the remainder on train missed but secured a direct hit on the station.*

Turned west to come home. Everything was quiet when suddenly a pom-pom gun shot directly at us with tracer shells. The first passed within a foot of my head. Two large fires observed at Mauberge and one just south of Mons. Visibility Fair. “No activity on lines”.

16th January 1919. 'Tiny' Wardrop's last ever flight with 214 Squadron.

At 10:00 am, Lieutenant Sumner took-off in H.P. 4691. He was flying a cross-country route to Lille and Lens with Sergeant Wardrop as his observer. It will be Wardrop's last ever flight with No. 214 Squadron. *'Flight over surrounding country. Visited Lens. From Lens we went north to Lille, Tourcong and Roubaix. Returned from Lille to 'drome. Pleasant trip.'*

Tiny Wardrop had done his bit and was going home. A grateful nation had awarded him the Distinguished Flying Medal for his outstanding service. Sergeant Wardrop kept a detailed record of all his flights with No. 214 Squadron. He calculated that he had successfully completed 56 raids. He had completed 119 flights on Active Service, a total of 207 hours in the air. His aircraft had dropped a total of 41 tons of bombs on the 56 raids and he had flown a distance of 20,000 miles in the Royal Naval Air Service and RAF. Sergeant Wardrop's last act was to get the squadron stamp put in his log book and signed by his Commanding Officer. The C.O. signed it, *'H.G. Brackley, Major, Commanding 214 squadron RAF. In the Field.'*



Sergeant Observer Wardrop's Flying Career on Handley Pages in numbers.

Based on information contained in a letter sent by W.E. Wardrop to Mr Norman Gilham, 26th June 1982, held in the Royal Flying Corps Collection at the Boscombe Down Aviation Collection.

- Number of raids successfully carried out. 56
- Number of raids attempted and forced to return because of weather. 10
- Flights on Active Service . 119

- Hours in Air on Active Service. 207
- Hours in Air on Home Service. 50
- Hours in Air as trainee pilot. 20
- Approximate miles flown 20,000
- Approximate tonnage of bombs dropped. 41 tons.
- Types of bomb dropped; 16lb, 20lb, 25lb, 40lb Phosphorous, 60lb, 112lb, 250lb, 550lb, 1650 lb.
- Featured in Despatches from Lords of Admiralty
- Awarded the Distinguished Flying Medal 1st January 1919
- Discharged Sergeant Observer January 1919.



Sergeant Observer W.E.D. Wardrop. France 1918.

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