

# A GLIDER PILOT AT ARNHEM

Mike Peters relates the experiences of one of the glider pilots who were thrown into the fighting in defence of the Oosterbeek perimeter in September 1944.

The men of the Glider Pilot Regiment (GPR) had an almost unique perspective on Operation Market, the airborne element of Market Garden, in that they were in the first wave of General Robert "Roy" Urquhart's division, landing just after the Pathfinder Company and ahead of the parachute drop by the Red Devils of Brigadier "Legs" Lathbury's 1st Parachute Brigade.

Once on the ground, unlike their US counterparts British glider pilots were

**MAIN PICTURE RIGHT:** By the military and aviation artist John Wynne Hopkins, this painting, entitled "Full Flaps", depicts Horsa gliders landing at Landing Zone 'Z' to the east of the village of Wolfheze. It was here that Staff Sergeant Alan Murdoch and Lieutenant Michael Donald Keen Dauncey delivered their cargo of personnel and equipment from the 1st Airlanding Regiment RA. Shortly afterwards, the paratroopers of 1st Parachute Brigade (Brigade HQ and three Para battalions), carried by the RAF and USAAF, dropped nearby at LZ 'X': an impressive site. This painting was commissioned by Brigadier Mike Dauncey DSO DL. (Courtesy of John Wynne Hopkins; [www.jwhopkins.co.uk](http://www.jwhopkins.co.uk))

**BELOW:** Personnel of 'G' Squadron, No. 1 Wing, Glider Pilot Regiment pictured at RAF Fairford in June 1944. It was in February 1944 that Lieutenant Mike Dauncey was posted as a Second Pilot to 9 Flight GPR, which was based at RAF Leicester East. He moved with 9 Flight to RAF Fairford where the Flight became part of the newly formed 'G' Squadron under the command of Major Bob Croot. (All images via Author and Luuk Buist unless stated otherwise)

**FAR RIGHT:** Lieutenant Mike Dauncey, 'G' Squadron, No. 1 Wing, Glider Pilot Regiment. Dauncey had volunteered for the Glider Pilot Regiment and was assigned to 'G' Squadron in January 1944. Although he was available for duty at the time, Dauncey was not used during the Normandy landings, much to his disappointment.

trained to be what was termed by their commander, Colonel George Chatterton, as "Total Soldiers". They were trained to fight as light infantry alongside the troops they carried and, in addition, they were expected to be able to operate any of the equipment, heavy weapons or vehicles that they carried on board their gliders. Notably, the glider pilots that reached the bridge at Arnhem were accompanying the six-pounder anti-tank guns that they had flown in with the first lift. When the accounts of these scattered groups and individual glider pilots were collated and added to those of 1 and 2 Wing GPR, they created a previously unheard narrative of the battle. A narrative that links every aspect and phase of the fighting in Nijmegen, Arnhem and the ferocious fighting that took place on the Oosterbeek perimeter.

In September 1944, when the GPR was at the peak of its strength and capability, the regiment fielded more than 1,200 pilots for the Arnhem operation. The regiment was divided into battalion-sized formations designated as 1 Wing and 2 Wing GPR respectively. The original Operation Market plan allocated 1 Wing to HQ 1st Airborne Division to act as a divisional reserve, with local defence and prisoner handling functions. The pilots of 2 Wing were in turn held as a reserve by Brigadier "Pip" Hicks for his 1st Airlanding Brigade in and around the landing zones.

It is interesting to note that elements of 'A' Squadron were tasked with flying Lieutenant General "Boy" Browning and his Corps headquarters into Nijmegen. Those pilots from 'A' Squadron that flew into Arnhem had a secondary task.



Immediately after landing and unloading their gliders they were ordered to march south to Nijmegen where, on arrival, they were to reinforce their comrades guarding Browning's headquarters.

As it transpired, the order for the 'A' Squadron march to Nijmegen was overtaken by events; every available airborne soldier was needed at Arnhem. As the tempo of the fighting increased and the rate of attrition escalated the idea of retaining an uncommitted reserve of glider pilots was soon forgotten. Those glider pilots who found themselves isolated from their squadrons were quickly integrated into the ad-hoc formations forming around them. Importantly they were all either Senior NCOs or Officers, and as casualty rates continued to mount, more and more glider pilots were used to replace those officers and SNCOs killed or wounded in the





fierce fighting around the main highway bridge in Arnhem or in the fighting around the landing zones and the now deadly streets of Oosterbeek.

One of the young GPR officers who came to the fore during the battle was Lieutenant Michael Donald Keen Dauncey who, from 'G' Squadron, No.1 Wing, flew as second pilot in a Horsa to Staff Sergeant Alan Murdoch. The two men were part of the First Lift on Sunday, 17 September 1944. Mike's Horsa was carrying a load comprised of personnel from 1st Airlanding Regiment RA.

The tow from Britain was uneventful, and Mike and Staff Sergeant Murdoch carried out a good landing close to the Mental Hospital in Wolfheze. Along with the bulk of 'G' Squadron the two pilots were then deployed in defensive

positions, providing close protection to the Light Gun Batteries.

Initially the Oosterbeek area was relatively quiet, though German resistance increased steadily as the enemy realised the extent and the strength of the British landings. Mike Dauncey and the men around the gun line were beginning to feel the heat.

**"The bullet grazed my scalp, sending a flood of blood down into my face."**

"There was a certain noisy activity during last night with shots flying about and bags of shouting, but it didn't materialise," he later recalled. "Got some little bits of mortar in the shoulder and on the forehead, not bad. The usual form of sniping, mortar and self-propelled gunfire.

"Several amusing things occurred today. The game was 'spot the sniper'. To get a better angle I went down the road to the school with a very reliable private of the South Staffords. We took



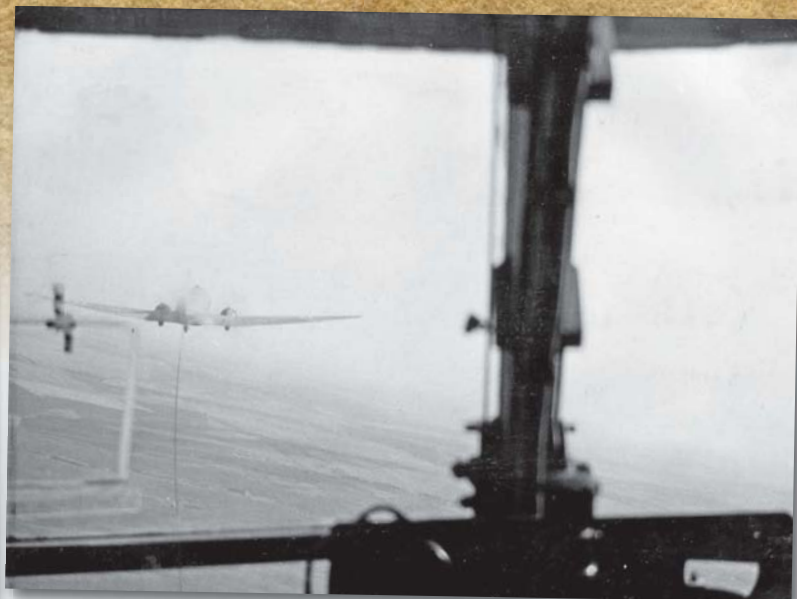


**ABOVE LEFT:** A rare colour image of a Horsa glider taking off. (Courtesy of the Assault Glider Trust)

**ABOVE RIGHT:** The view that Lieutenant Mike Dauncey would have seen during his flight to Arnhem: a photograph taken through the cockpit screen of a Horsa glider. Lieutenant Dauncey recalled being heartened by the presence of an MM and an MC among his passengers. (Courtesy of the Assault Glider Trust)

**RIGHT:** Established in 1942, the Glider Pilot Regiment came under a newly formed administrative corps, the Army Air Corps, the badge of which is seen here on the type of maroon beret the regiment was permitted to wear. The Glider Pilot Regiment was disbanded in 1957.

**BELOW:** The view from the astrodome of a Short Stirling glider-tug as Airspeed Horsas are hooked up to their tow ropes on the east-west runway at RAF Fairford, Gloucestershire, on 17 September 1944. The Horsas parked on the left will be used for the second lift to Arnhem the following day. (Imperial War Museum; CL1155)



round a huge fire in the school hall on which was a huge tin bath full of chickens! They were cooking for the battery."

By Wednesday, 20 September Mike was deployed in a mixed force of Glider Pilots, South Staffs and Parachute Regiment survivors in a defensive screen in front of the gun line in Oosterbeek. "Somehow we were kept awake all night and in the morning started a bit of a link-up. Our post covered the crossroads and we also got some chaps out to cover around the top of the battery. Company Sergeant Major Smith, of 'B' Company, 11 Parachute Battalion and I were in the top two houses on either side of the road, so we formed a link-up.

"Then occurred my first piece of luck. I never wore my helmet, relying instead on my beret as a morale booster for the others. I was standing outside near a slit trench when a sniper put a bullet through the front of my beret and out the

back. The bullet grazed my scalp, sending a flood of blood down into my face. I fell to the ground and lay perfectly still for several seconds, then I warned Sergeant Major Smith that I was going to scramble into his trench. I rolled into the trench just as the sniper's second shot hit the ground where I had been."

The tempo of the fighting in the once peaceful streets of Oosterbeek increased dramatically from 21 September onwards. The collapse of the 2nd Parachute Battalion's perimeter at Arnhem Bridge allowed the Germans to concentrate their armour and artillery on Oosterbeek and its environs. The Germans quickly realised that a thrust from Arnhem, along the riverbank into Oosterbeek, would cut the British Airborne force off from relief by XXX Corps. Such a thrust would also threaten the only artillery available to General Urquhart, the light guns of 1st Airlanding Regiment RA.

What followed over the next few days was an increasingly desperate struggle between the 9th SS



up our position upstairs, but after about half an hour smoke started filling the room and eventually became so dense that we couldn't see. I went downstairs to investigate and found some gunners





**ABOVE LEFT:** A Horsa glider under tow. During Lieutenant Mike Dauncey's second solo flight on the Hotspur the flap lever came off in his hand and he was forced to make a "heavy landing".

**ABOVE:** A vertical photographic-reconnaissance image showing Airspeed Horsa and GAL Hamilcar gliders on a Landing Zone, believed to be LZ 'Z' near Wolfheze woods, at Arnhem on 17 September 1944. (HMP)

Panzer Division and the men defending the gun line struggling to maintain contact with the riverbank at the south-east corner of the Oosterbeek perimeter. This composite force was named after its commander, Major Dickie Lonsdale, a battle-hardened Parachute Regiment officer. Mike Dauncey and the pilots of 'G' Squadron GPR were in the thick of this fighting.

Over the next few days Mike Dauncey led his own small composite force with great bravery against self-propelled guns, tanks and infantry. On 23 September Mike led a small group of paratroopers on a raid against a German occupied building:

**“Eventually a tank came into sight and I ran forward and threw the bomb.”**

“We dug out some chaps who were resting at the church and the music hall and went over the road to Captain Mike Corrie, as Lieutenant Max Downing was killed and Lieutenant Frank Derbyshire was missing from patrol. We still had no PIAT. German infantry was however still rather wary of rushing about wildly. We had our positions in upper floors of houses so as to get a more commanding view which was OK except

for the mortars, and a self-propelled gun which had things much its own way except that it was too cautious to come really near. If the anti-tank chap had only been there or even a PIAT would have done.

“The Germans who had been darting about all day were finally pretty well pinpointed by the evening. We thought we'd have our own back on them in return for their self-propelled guns. Two paratroops and I went out on a patrol,

and supported by a little Bren-gun fire we caught them with their trousers down. After chucking a No.36 [Grenade] in through a hole in the wall and shouting that

“This was too much to ask and the mortars came down on us. Major Croot was waiting for us. He was delighted and no-one took any

notice of the mortar, except the Germans who were terrified, until one landed five yards away and wounded three of them and two of us. We were standing under a large leafy tree and we were all buried in the branches, which had been severed by the mortar.”

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The next day, 24 September, Mike's luck began to run out when he attempted to flush



# SPECIAL ARMY ORDER

THE WAR OFFICE,  
31st August, 1942

20, GENERAL/6006

A.O. 128 1942

## Formation of Glider Pilot Regiment and Parachute Regiment

The following regiments have been formed as Units of the Army Air Corps, the formation of which was notified in Army Order 21 of 1942 --  
Glider Pilot Regiment with effect from 21st February, 1942 --  
Parachute Regiment with effect from 1st August, 1942.

By Command of the Army Council.

*Le Dauncey*

out a troublesome German sniper. "The game was still spotting the sniper that afternoon," he continued. "To get a better view of where I thought he was, I went up to the top of the house to get a view from a dormer window. Unfortunately he spotted me first and the bullet hit a stovepipe just by my head, a piece of pipe or the bullet striking me in the left eye blinding me at once. One paratrooper tried to get the metal out of my eye with a couple of matches, but this was not possible so it had to be left. It was later this day that a paratrooper paid the glider pilots a real compliment when he said how glad he was to be fighting with us. It was so simple yet so sincere.

"Things were fairly sticky that evening. The Germans were making a real effort. Still no anti-tank equipment for us. We had to send away for it each time and it did not seem to appear. Two Self Propelled Guns were level with us in the same street belting away at everything. We let them do it and waited for the infantry. I must say the chaps with me were excellent. It was a question of taking tanks and self-propelled guns, mortars and shells and I am glad to say no flame-throwers, and then giving their infantry stick if and when they came.

"One chap got a German officer with a No.36. He was creeping into our cellar while we were upstairs, so we did not notice him. His binoculars were quite good. Captain Mike Corrie who threw a couple of 36 grenades at them eventually frightened off the tanks. He was in excellent form that night. I expect they thought they were mines. Oh for a PIAT or an anti tank gun!

"Later that night when things had quietened down a paratrooper helped me down to our Regimental Aid Post

but the Doc could not be found and the Corporal hadn't any means of getting the metal out so we returned to our houses

where they tried the match trick again. As I was not feeling up to form I did not stay awake but had a good sleep to try to get myself fit for the following."

In spite of his injury, Mike like many around him, continued to fight on. On Monday, 25 September he was involved in repelling a German armoured attack along Weverstraat:

"As the morning wore on the ominous squeak of enemy tanks began to get louder and louder. One of the parachutists gave me a gammon bomb and armed with this I went up the road accompanied by another airborne soldier to await the

**BELOW:** A map drawn by Brigadier Mike Dauncey DSO DL detailing the location of some of his actions, and his movements, during the fighting at Arnhem.



### LEGEND:

1. Landing Zone (LZ) 'Z'; Sunday, 17 September.
2. Guarded riverbank during the night; Monday, 18 September.
3. Small house in Benedendorpsweg; Tuesday, 19 September.
4. No. 159 Weverstraat, Oosterbeek; Wednesday, 20 September.
5. No. 159 Weverstraat, Oosterbeek; Thursday, 21 September.
6. No. 159 Weverstraat, Oosterbeek; Friday, 22 September.
7. Weverstraat, east side of large house; Saturday, 23 September.
8. Weverstraat, east side of large house; Sunday, 24 September.
9. Weverstraat, in baking and coal business buildings during morning; Monday, 25 September.
10. To Regimental Aid Post near Church in the afternoon; Tuesday, 26 September.



tanks' arrival.

"Eventually a tank came into sight and I ran forward and threw the bomb. Nothing happened for a long time and I began to wonder if it was ever going to explode.

**ABOVE:** A section of Weverstraat in Oosterbeek, where Lieutenant Mike Dauncey fought between Wednesday, 20 September and Tuesday, 26 September, at which point injuries forced him to seek shelter at the Regimental Aid Post in the Ter Horst house.

**BELOW LEFT:** A 75mm howitzer of 'D' Troop, 2nd Battery, 1st Airlanding Regiment RA in action in the Oosterbeek perimeter, 20 September 1944. Mike Dauncey's Horsa transported personnel and equipment from this regiment to Arnhem.

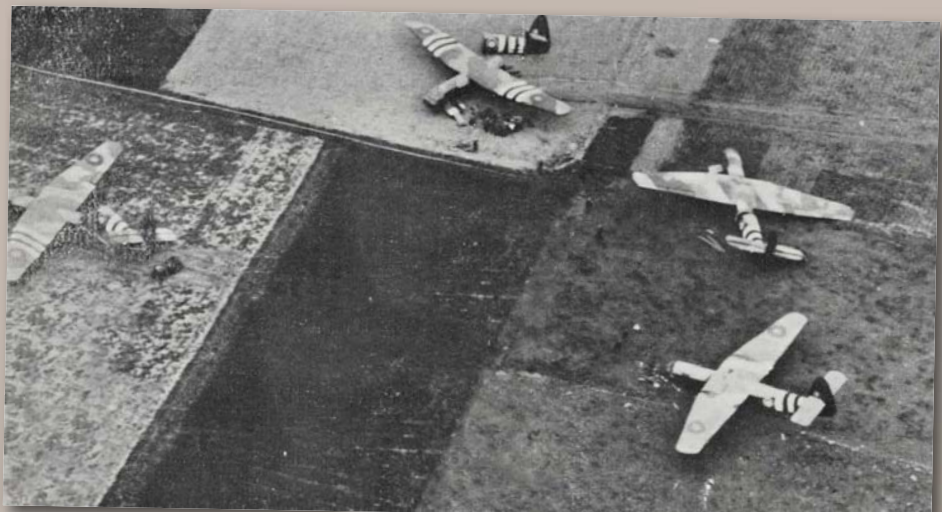
**BELOW RIGHT:** An oblique photograph showing Horsa gliders being unloaded on one of the drop zones. (HMP)

Then suddenly there was an enormous blast. Dust was everywhere. The tank didn't move. I just hoped and prayed it had done enough damage. Certainly it stayed stationary. When I looked around, though, my comrade had gone. As I didn't feel I could do very much more with only a German Luger pistol in my hand, I made my way back to a group of soldiers a little behind me and we formed a place to stop the enemy infantry.

"More tanks soon began to roll into the vicinity. We threw a few grenades in their direction and they threw one or two at us. Slowly but surely the enemy crept towards us and I was hit in the thigh by a bullet that fortunately just went straight in and out. It certainly made me fall but it didn't

break my leg. The time had now come to seek refuge in a slit trench. Wandering around the battlefield had become a very bad idea. On taking shelter, I suddenly heard a noise to my left and looked down to see a German stick grenade beside me. It went off and broke my jaw in two places. Amazingly I could still think all right, but I couldn't very easily speak and my face was a mess.

"The two paratroopers put a shell dressing over my mouth. I could think clearly but felt very weak. The two chaps then helped me to the Regimental Aid Post [Ter Horst house], which unfortunately was so full that I couldn't get inside. I was left outside by the side of a dead man where I stayed for some time





**ABOVE:** A Sturmggeschütz III (StuG III) assault gun pictured in Weverstraat.

**BELOW RIGHT:** Brigadier Mike Dauncey DSO DL signing prints of the painting, entitled "Full Flaps", which he commissioned from the artist John Wynne Hopkins. Copies of the prints can be purchased, with proceeds going to The Glider Pilot Regiment Association Benevolent Fund and Help for Heroes. For more information on the artist, please visit: [www.jwhopkins.co.uk](http://www.jwhopkins.co.uk)

**BELOW:** The Second Pilot's wings which, introduced in 1944, would have been worn by Lieutenant Mike Dauncey.

until awakened by the rain when I managed to put the dead man's blanket partly over myself.

"I couldn't get into that house though and stayed there until someone came outside and I managed to attract his attention. The medical officer had been hit and it was impossible for the orderly and Padre to do anything, as there must have been at least three hundred chaps there. The drill was to get a blanket, find a spot to lie down and a cup of char. Unfortunately this came out again through the hole in my chin, which I have since heard from other people, was a most amazing sight.

"After the sleep I had recovered a little but could not talk properly. I learnt later that there were two fractures and the centre loose piece had been shoved out of position."

Mike was now incapable of playing any further



part in the battle and could not be evacuated back across the Rhine. He was among the thousands of British airborne soldiers taken prisoner when the surrounding German forces closed in on Oosterbeek. Initially Mike was transported to hospital in Apeldoorn, then after a few days, the German Army transported Mike and five other Airborne soldiers to the Dutch eye hospital in Utrecht. After excellent treatment from the Dutch staff he was moved to the German controlled St Antonious Prison Hospital.

Aware that he was about to be transferred to Germany, Mike escaped with Major Gordon Cuninghame of the 5th Battalion, the Black Watch. The two escaped in classic style using knotted bed sheets. Assisted by the Dutch Resistance the two men remained hidden from the Germans until 4 February 1945. The two escapers cycled from Utrecht disguised as doctors via Culembourg and Buren to the River Waal. They then crossed the river in a leaking rowing boat and reached Allied territory.

After the war Mike's eye injury prevented him from returning to flying duties. He was disappointed that he would never be able to complete the training and become a First Pilot. On hearing of this Lieutenant General Browning sent Mike a set of his own first pilot's wings – making him a First Pilot.

Shortly after returning to duty at Fargo Camp, Mike was astonished to see his name listed on the honours and awards list published in *Flight Magazine*. Unbeknown to him Mike Dauncey had been recommended for the Victoria Cross, but had instead been awarded the Distinguished Service Order for his bravery during the Arnhem Battle.

Prior to Operation *Market* the Glider Pilot Regiment was at the zenith of its wartime strength; by the end of the battle of Arnhem it had all but ceased to exist. Those pilots who had escaped in the darkness and rain across the fast flowing Rhine were to learn that, including those taken prisoner, their regiment had suffered 90% casualties. The regiment would recover, and reinforced by new GPR pilots and an influx of RAF pilots it would mount one last big mission – Operation *Varsity*, in which the Glider Pilot Regiment finally bounced the Rhine and crossed into Germany.

After the war Brigadier Shan Hackett had this to say of the Glider Pilot Regiment: "Our Glider Pilots were not only very high grade airmen – I believe that the Glider Pilot Regiment was the finest body of soldiers that the British Army produced in World War Two." The remarkable actions of Lieutenant Mike Dauncey at Arnhem certainly support such a statement. ■

• Limited edition prints of "Full Flaps" by John Wynne Hopkins, each signed by Brigadier Mike Dauncey DSO DL, are available for purchase. Proceeds from these prints will go to The Glider Pilot Regiment Association Benevolent Fund and Help for Heroes. Each print is priced at £30.00 plus £5.00 P&P (UK). Please send a cheque payable to "Mike Peters" to the following address: Full Flaps Print, Ascot House, Norwich Road, Little Stonham, Suffolk, IP14 5DL.

