

THE FINE WW2 'BILDA'S BOMBERS' 1943 D.F.C. TO A WELLINGTON BOMBER NAVIGATOR WHO AFTER FLYING NUMEROUS SORTIES AGAINST TARGETS IN GERMANY WITH 142 SQUADRON, HIS CREW FORMED PART OF A SCRATCH UNIT HASTILY FORMED TO TAKE PART IN THE NORTH AFRICAN CAMPAIGN, 1942-3



DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS, G.V.I.R., THE REVERSE OFFICIALLY DATED 1943, IN CASE OF ISSUE, 1939-1945 STAR, AFRICA STAR, CLASP NORTH AFRICA 1942-43, AIR CREW EUROPE STAR, DEFENCE AND WAR MEDALS

D.F.C. *London Gazette* 30 March 1943. The original recommendation, dated 31 January 1943:

"This Officer has consistently displayed fine navigational skill and eagerness to take part in operations against the enemy. These qualities have contributed to the success of his crew in obtaining photographs of the target area. At all times on the ground and in the air his fine example, skill and devotion to duty have been an inspiration to all other navigators of the squadron."

Additionally, the Commanding Officer of 142 Squadron added:

"P/O May has operated with No.142 Squadron for the past five months, during which he has carried out 24 successful sorties. His fine offensive spirit and outstanding navigational skills have largely contributed to giving his crew the highest record in the squadron for photographs of the target area. At all times on the ground and in the air his fine example, skill and devotion to duty have been an inspiration to the other navigators in the squadron. Very Strongly recommended for the Award of the Distinguished Flying Cross."

FLIGHT LIEUTENANT JOHN MAY (134655) ROYAL AIR FORCE VOLUNTEER RESERVE

John May, from Penwortham, Preston was born circa 1912 and pre war worked for Leyland and Birmingham Rubber Co. He had been married in 1936 and enlisted into Royal Air Force within months of the outbreak of the war. Initially a Sergeant Observer (No 1101598) as part of W/O Bray's crew, they joined 142 Squadron on 17 August 1942. At this time, the Squadron was based at RAF Grimsby, equipped with Vickers Wellington III and IV's

Serving as Navigator, May's first operational sortie as part of W/O Bray's crew, was against Saarbrücken on 1 September 1942 and he would take part in a further 7 sorties that month, including many to highly defended targets in Germany including Karlsruhe, Bremen (twice), Düsseldorf and Essen. Over the next couple of months, he would take part in a further 9 sorties to Krefeld, Aachen, Osnabrück, Köln, Milan, Stuttgart, as well as several 'Gardening' ops

Having been commissioned Pilot Officer on 23 October 1942, on 9 December 1942, Bray (now Commissioned and DFC) and crew were one of a detachment of 13 Wellington's from 142 Squadron to fly to the Middle East, to take part in the North African campaign. These aircraft from 142 Squadron, along with a similar number taken from 150 Squadron, amounting not more than 350 air and groundcrew (less than a squadron strength), formed a scratch night bomber unit, put together at extremely short notice. This due to the rapid movements of the campaign in Tunisia at that time. Here they would be based at Bida airfield and would prove their worth over the coming months. Note the title of the 1943 book in this group 'Bida's Bombers' which details their service.



WELLINGTON'S AT BILDA

Their first operational sortie was on Bizerte Docks on 1 January 1943, this being a target (along with Bizerte town) they would return to no less than 9 times over the following 7 weeks. Bizerte, a port city in Tunisia, was a key location within the Tunisian campaign where Allied forces began their push against Axis forces, ultimately leading to the capture of the city and the surrender of Axis troops in

May 1943. Other Targets May took part in sorties to during January and February 1943, included, Sidi Ahmed Aerodrome, Medenine Aerodrome, Almas Aerodrome in Sardinia, Villaeido Landing Ground and Trapani.

Flight Lieutenant May's last operational sortie with 142 Squadron was on 15 February 1943, a bombing sortie to Birzerte. During this sortie an enemy fighter was damaged by the rear gunner. The Bray crew, including May, left for Algeria, enroute to England on 23 March 1943. By this time, he had completed 31 Operational sorties, 17 over Northwest Europe and 14 over North Africa



Campaign Stars, Claps and Medals
instituted in recognition of service
in the war of 1939-45

THE AWARDS LISTED ARE MARKED X ON THE ACCOMPANYING SLIP

Order of Merit	Description of Ribbon	Class or Emblem (if awarded)
1 1939-45 Star	Dark blue, red and light blue in three equal vertical stripes. This ribbon is worn with the dark blue stripe furthest from the left shoulder.	Battle of Britain
2 Atlantic Star	Blue, white and red green striped and watered. This ribbon is worn with the blue stripe furthest from the left shoulder.	Air Crew Europe or France and Germany
3 Air Crew Europe Star	Light blue with three stripes and in addition a narrow yellow stripe on either side.	Air Crew Europe or France and Germany
4 Africa Star	Pale buff, with a central vertical red stripe and two diagonal stripes, one dark blue, the other dark blue stripe furthest from the left shoulder.	8th Army or 1st Army or North Africa 1942-43
5 Pacific Star	Dark green, with red and white, a central yellow stripe and two diagonal stripes, one dark blue, the other dark blue stripe furthest from the left shoulder.	Burma
6 India Star	Dark blue with a central red stripe and in addition two orange stripes.	Pacific
7 Italy Star	Five vertical stripes of equal width, one in red, one in white and one in green in the center, the two intermediate stripes being in white.	Italy
8 France and Germany Star	Five vertical stripes of equal width, one in blue, one in white and one in green in the center, the two intermediate stripes being in white.	Atlantic
9 Defence Medal	Flame coloured with green edges, upper each of which is a narrow black stripe.	Silver Laurel leaves (King's Commendation for Brave Conduct - Civil)
10 War Medal 1939-45	A narrow central red stripe with a narrow blue stripe on either side. A broad red stripe in the center.	Oak leaf

Form 467 B.

NAME MAY, J.

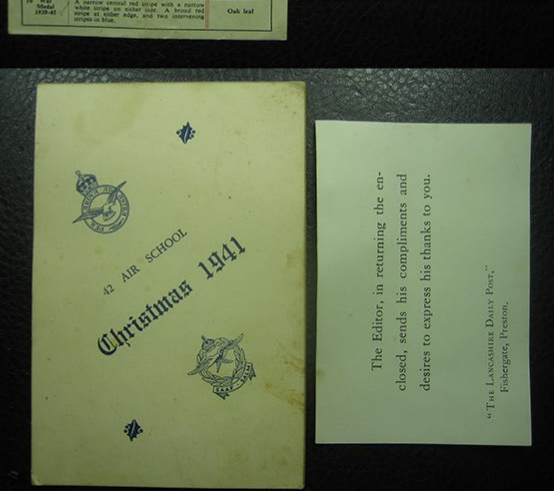
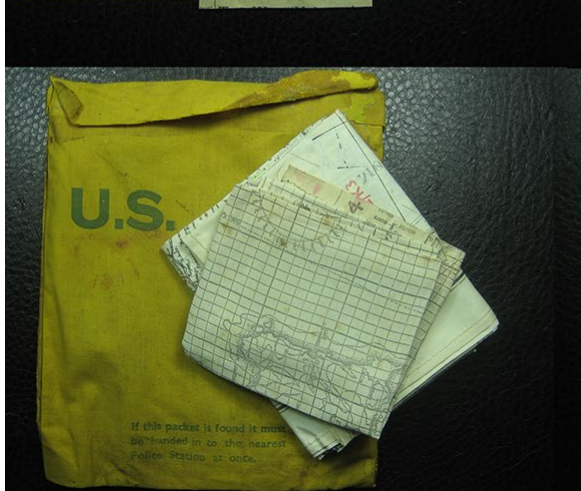
RANK & No. P.O. 134655

ROYAL AIR FORCE

FLYING CLOTHING CARD

Date of Issue and Unit Stamp

Signature of Equipment Officer





Though there is no logbook with the group, all off May's 31 operational sorties have been extracted from these to form a 5 page list, each entry detailing aircraft number, crew list and aircraft report in brief. Examples below:

13/9/42 – Breman

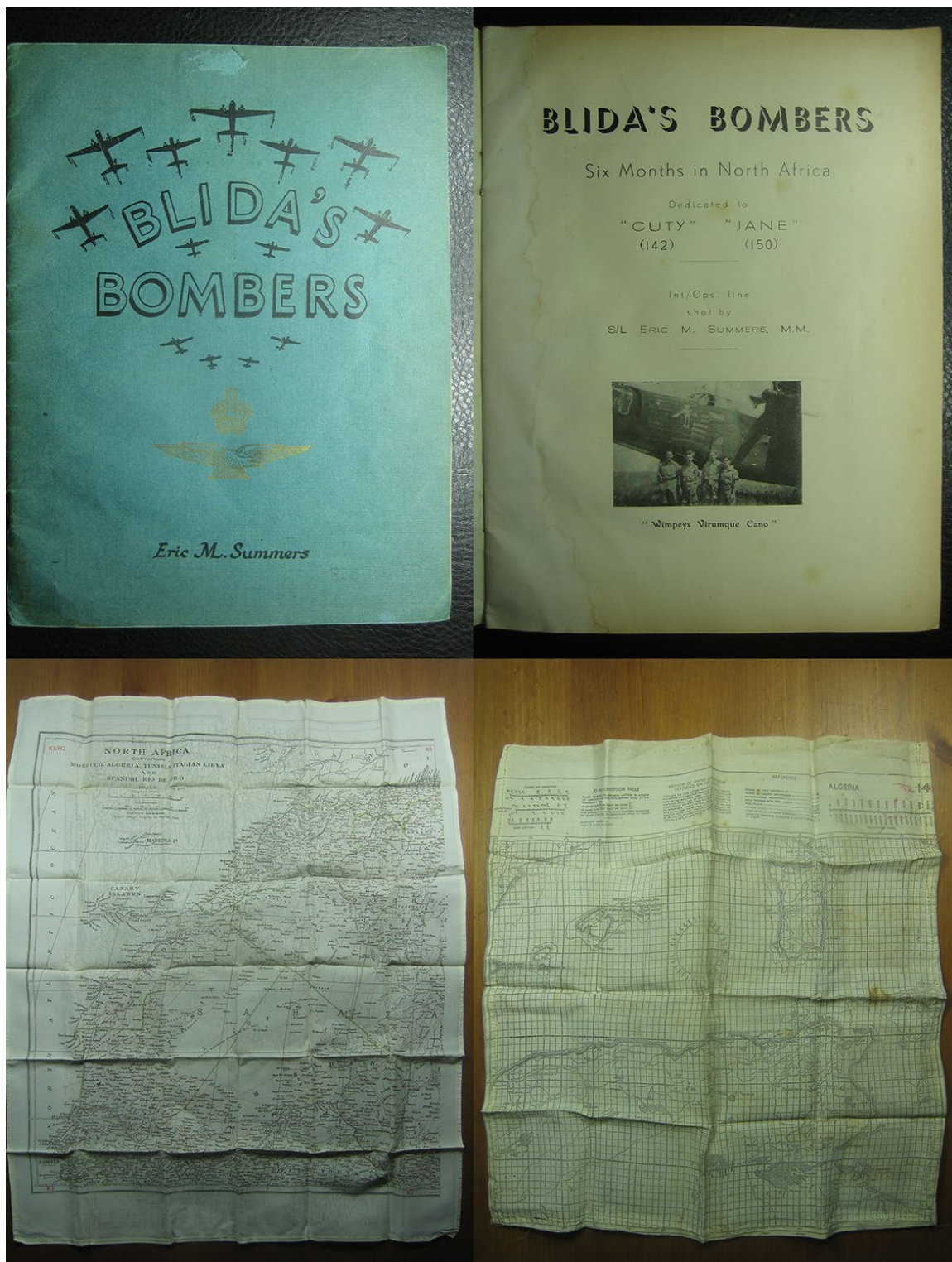
Z.1478.(U)	P/O.G.N. Pickering, Sgt. J.L. MacDonald, W/O.A.C. Bray,	-do-	0021	0542	Bombing of Breman - one pin-point made bombing. O.K. No ground detail seen but bombed between fires. Several incendiary sticks seen to explode. Many fires burning well with much smoke - in particular two areas of fires. Bombed from 12000 feet - much ground haze and smoke. Glow of fires seen 30 minutes before arrival - believed river seen but no positive ground detail seen - Bombed on fires burning. Very good show, fires appeared to be widespread and still burning well.
	Sgt. J. May, Sgt. R.A. Dolanoch, Sgt. E.W. Banks, Sgt. J.G. Southey.				(CONTINUED.)

16/9/42 – Essen

Z.1416.(W)	Sgt. G. C. Thomson, S/O H. W. Ogule, Sgt. J. May, Sgt. A. G. Alton, Sgt. A. Higgins, S/O D. J. Smallwood.	-do-	2025	0146	Bomb load as above - One photograph attempted. O.K. Believed bombed target area as joining fires. Pathfinder flares seen on arrival.
------------	--	------	------	------	--

Details f crews of 12 Squadron can be found here:

https://www.aviationarchaeology.org.uk/marg/men_of_142.htm#personnel41-42



It seems Flying Officer May was an extremely fine navigator and post 142 squadron served as an instructor. On 16 August 1944 he is noted to have visited no 33 Service Flying Training School, Mantioba, Canada:

“F/O. J. May (134655) G.D. Nav., and P/O. F.V. Hill (173447) G.D. Nav., Manitoba. Navigation Instructors from United Kingdom on tour in Canada arrived by air for a two day liaison visit”

It is unlikely that Flying Officer May saw any further operational service during the war but this is certainly worthy of further research.



The awards are sold with the following original items including:

- 1) Flight Lieutenant John May D.F.C. R.A.F.V.R. notification letter to attend his D.F.C. at investiture Buckingham Palace 1 May 1945. Along with two tickets to Buckingham Palace Investiture.
- 2) Air Ministry campaign medals transmittal slip
- 3) RAF Flying Clothing Card to F/O 134655 May J
- 4) Original 1942 photograph of five crew in front of their Wellington, crew named to reserve and a second aerial photograph.
- 5) 1943 publication Blida's Bombers by Eric Summers covering 142 & 150 Sqns deployment in North Africa etc. May named within.
- 6) Four RAF buttons, two DFC ribbon bars, an epaulette rank bar and May's dog tag
- 7) 42 Air School Christmas 1941 menu
- 8) Three newspaper clippings, two detailing the award of the DFC to May and another of Lysanders
- 9) Compliment card from 'The Lancashire Daily Post'
- 10) RAF yellow canvas escape packet
- 11) mini-escape compass, glass cracked
- 12) Two double sided R.A.F. silk escape maps of North Africa, No K3/H2, with Iberian peninsula reverse and a smaller map of Algeria with Gibraltar reverse
- 13) Rubberised container, possibly part of escape equipment

Additionally included are digital copies of the Operational logs for 142 Squadron during May's entire service and May's individual sorties as noted above.

A very fine group to a Wellington Navigator who saw operational service on two fronts 1942-3