Air Force Association (SA)

Aviator Profile

Flying Officer Ross Milton Stanford DFC OAM

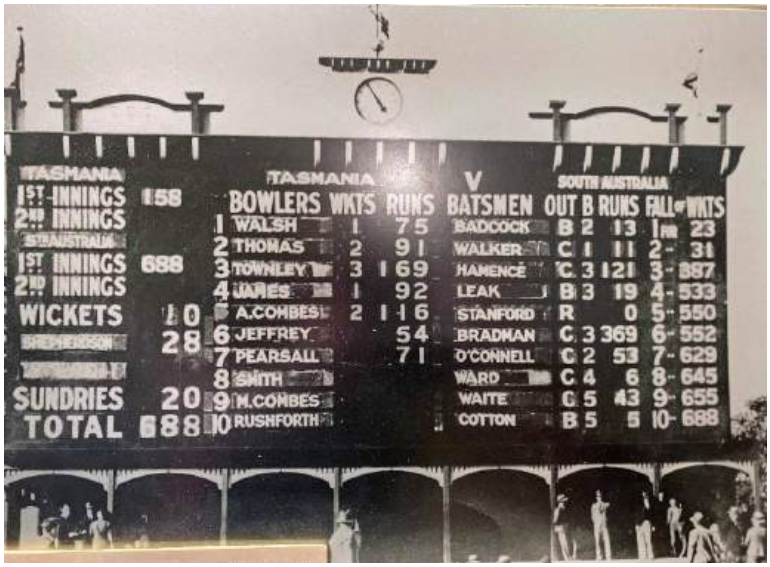
World War 2 Bomber Command Pilot (467SQN, 617SQN); First Class Cricketeer

South Australian Cricketer who completed 47 missions as a pilot in Bomber Command before playing in the Victory Tests

Ross Milton Stanford was born in Fulham, a suburb of Adelaide, on 25 September 1917. He was the eldest of three children to Frank Stanford and Edith Excell. His father, a market gardener, was from several generations of market gardeners in the western suburbs of Adelaide. Ross's great grandfather, Thomas Stanford, arrived in Adelaide in 1838 on the *Rajasthan* only two years after Adelaide was founded. He initially went to Meadows in the Adelaide Hills but moved down to the Adelaide Plains between the city and the coast to work market gardens in 1858. He then leased and eventually purchased a 26 acre market garden on the eastern side of Tapleys Hill Road north of the River Torrens in the mid 1870. For almost 100 years, members of the Stanford family operated market gardens in areas around the modern day suburbs of Brooklyn Park, Lockleys, Fulham Gardens and Kidman Park. They grew various fruits and vegetables.

Growing up on his family's 19 acre market garden on Tapley's Hill Road, Fulham Gardens, Ross attended Lockleys Primary School but he was destined not to initially follow his family into market gardening as he showed particular talent for cricket. Playing for Lockley's Primary School he scored what was a schoolboy world record of 416 not out aged only 14 in December 1931. At the time, school matches were played over two Friday afternoons. By then end of the first afternoon, Stanford had scored 200 not out and Lockleys intended to continue batting on the second afternoon to see how far Stanford could go. After several further hours of play, the match was called off with Stanford still at the crease on 416 not out with the team score nearing 600 runs. The 416 runs remained a schoolboy record till the 2010/2011 season. He completed the school cricket season amassing 1,131 at an average of 161 including four centuries and was seen as a schoolboy cricket prodigy.

These early achievements led to his receiving a scholarship to Prince Alfred College where he continued to excel in the school cricket team. In his final year of school, his batting average was over 76 – the highest of not just Prince Alfred College but also across the Adelaide Turf Association. His form continued in his first season out of school playing for West Torrens Cricket Club in the 1935/36 season. With several scores including a 195 in B Grade before Christmas, he was promoted to A Grade and scored a century.



The Adelaide Oval Scoreboard showing Ross Stanford's score of 0 alongside the great Donal Bradman's score of 369. (Greg Stanford)

Attracting the attention of South Australia's State cricket selectors, he was selected in February 1936 at the tender age of only 18 to play in a first class match against Tasmania which at the time was not playing in the Sheffield Shield. Captained by Don Bradman, the South Australian team largely comprised young and

upcoming players giving them exposure to first class cricket. South Australia batted first and Ross Stanford came in at fifth drop with the score already an impressive 5 for 550 with Bradman having scored another century not out. Bradman pushed the ball around for several runs to ease Stanford into the game. Sadly, however, nerves got the better of Ross Stanford when he himself pushed the ball into the covers and took off for an impossible run and duly got run out for a duck. Bradman went on to score 369 – a record first class score at the time. Staford did not play any further games for South Australia pre-war but continued to excel at grade level and won the Talbot Smith Award for best fielder in A Grade cricket in 1937-38.

Meanwhile, Stanford joined the State Bank of South Australia and in 1938 was transferred to Waikerie and then Tailem Bend where he continued his cricket and played football for Waikerie. While in Tailem Bend, a recruitment train came through the town and Ross Stanford enrolled for service with the RAAF in January 1941 hoping to fly. However, a RAAF doctor assessed him as unsuitable for flying as Ross disclosed that he had once been hit on the back of the head by a cricket ball.

Several months later, Ross re-registered for the RAAF in Adelaide at No 5 Recruitment Centre and this time, did not disclose the blow on his head by a cricket ball. His enlistment application was successful and on 21 July 1941, he enlisted in the RAAF as trainee aircrew and was posted to No. 4 Initial Training School, Victor Harbour, to complete basic training and aircrew screening from July to November 1941. He then completed No. 19 Flying Course from November 1941 to February 1942 obtaining 75 flying hours on the DH 82 Tiger Moth and flying solo after only 11 hours at No 1 Elementary Flying Training School at RAAF Parafield in Adelaide's north. He was then posted to No. 6 Service Flying Training School at RAAF Mallala further north of Adelaide from February to May 1942. Completing 125 flying hours on Oxford and Avro Anson aircraft, he graduated as a pilot and received his Flying Badge and was promoted to Sergeant pilot on 30 April 1942.

RAAF DH82 Tiger Moth trainer aircraft at RAAF Parafield. (SAAM)

As with many of the Australian training airmen at this time, he was selected for service overseas and posted to England. He left Australia in late August 19423 and arrived in England in late November. In February 1943, he completed a basic flying refresher at No. 22 Elementary Flying Training School at Cambridge flying Tiger Moths, obtaining a further 48 flying hours on the aircraft. He then proceed to RAF Ramsbury in eastern Wiltshire in mid-March to attend No. 15 Advanced Flying Unit (AFU). The AFUs were designed to familiarize non-British aircrew with European flying conditions such as weather, geography, navigation, and airspace aspects as many non-British aircrew found the flying conditions in Europe very different to those they had trained for in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Rhodesia. Over four weeks, Stanford completed 97 flying hours on the Airspeed Oxford dual engine trainer. He then completed blind and beam approach and landing training at No. 1 Beam Approach School at RAF Watchfield in southwestern Oxfordshire from mid-April to late April 1943 to consolidate his training in difficult, challenging or dangerous conditions.

An RAF Airspeed Oxford Trainer of No 20 Advanced Flying Unit. (IWM)

Stanford was then posted to No. 27 Operational Training Unit from mid-May to mid-July 1943. Located at RAF Litchfield in southeastern Staffordshire, 27OTU was formed in April 1941 to train aircrew for strategic bombing. The unit primarily trained Australian and other Commonwealth aircrew who were then posted to operational squadrons mostly in Lincolnshire. A key aspect of the OTUs was the initial forming of a crew (eg pilot, navgiator, wireless operator, air gunners)

who would learn to operate together on a heavy bomber and then proceed as a team to their operational squadrons. Accordingly, at 27OTU, Stanford formed his initial crew comprising himself as pilot, Tom Butler (Navigator), Alan Jordan (Wireless Operator), George Clarke (Bomb Aimer) and Gordon Venables (rear gunner). The crew converted on to the Vickers Wellington twin-engined heavy bomber, obtaining 76 hours on the aircraft.

Stanford was then posted to No 1660 Heavy Conversion Unit at RAF Swinderby in Lincolnshire where the crew converted onto the famous four-engine Avro Lancaster, the preferred strategic bomber of RAF Bomber Command, from mid-July to late August 1943. The crew were augmented with additional airmen Edward Judson (a RAF Flight Engineer) and Les Griffiths (mid-upper air gunner). It was at this stage that the rear gunner, Gordon Venables was grounded due to eye troubles and replaced by Arthur Rushton. At 27OTU, Stanford completed 38 hours flying time on the Lancaster. He was commissioned as a Pilot Officer in early August 1943.

Finally, after enlisting in the RAAF more than 30 months previously, Ross Stanford was finally posted to his first operational unit, No. 467 Squadron, a RAAF Bomber Command unit based at RAF Bottesford, Nottinghamshire, in late August 1943. Formed in November 1942 at RAF Scampton, Lincolnshire, 467 SQN as an Article XV squadron under the Empire Air Training Scheme (EATS), equipped with Avro Lancaster heavy bombers. Although a RAAF Squadron, it comprised many Commonwealth aircrew throughout the war and when first formed, comprised over 90% RAF aircrew. On 24 November, the new squadron relocated to RAF Bottesford, Leicestershire, before again relocating a year later to its permanent base at RAF Waddington in Lincolnshire.

467SQN Lancaster Apple at RAF Station Waddington in August 1943. This was the first Lancaster on the units strength and an aircraft that Ross Stanford flew on several occasions.

It was one of three dedicated RAAF Lancaster squadrons in World War 2 alongside 460SQ and 463SQN. The squadron served with distinction throughout the war participating in Bomber Command's offensive against Germany. It saw action in the Battle of the Ruhr, the Battle of Berlin, the Normandy landings, and strikes against V1 and V2 targets. Flying its last bombing mission in April 1945, 467 SQN was then used for the transportation of liberated Allied POWs to the UK. It was earmarked to form part of the new Tiger Force to operate against Japan and the squadron actually commenced conversion

training onto B-24 Liberators for that purpose until the war in the Pacific ended and the Squadron was disbanded on 30 September 1945.

Several 467 SQN Lancaster aircraft survived the war with the most notable, S for Sugar, flying 137 missions, the second highest of any Commonwealth bomber, and now preserved and proudly on display at the Royal Air Force Museum, RAF Hendon. 467 Squadron flew a total of 3,833 sorties during the war but suffered heavily losing 118 aircraft and a total of 760 aircrew of whom 284 were Australian. Arriving at 467SQN on 29th of August 1943, Stanford and his crew conducted unit consolidation training before conducting their first operational mission on the evening of 5th September, a large mass formation of 605 aircraft striking the twin southern towns of Mannheim and Ludwigshafen. The mass formation included twelve 467SQN Lancasters including Stanford flying 'H for Harry' loaded with a 4,000lb 'cookie' bomb and a mix of 4lb and 30lb incendiary bombs. The mission proved successful, causing massive fires across the cities but with 34 aircraft failing to return.

467SQN Ground staff stand by 467SQN Lancaster 'H for Harry' while it is running up its engines before taking off on a test flight at RAF Waddington in August 1943. 'Harry' was the Lancaster that Stanford and his crew flew on their first operational mission in on 5 September 1943. Note the distinctive nose art on the aircraft - the Australian coat of arms featuring a kangaroo and emu.

For the next several weeks, Stanford and his crew conducted further unit training missions but flew back-to-back operational missions on the 27th and 28th September targeting Hanover and Bochum in the Ruhr Valley. Two further back-to-back operational missions were conducted on 1st and 2nd October striking Hagen and Munich in the Ruhr. This was followed with a brief break with three missions in four days between 18th and 22nd October again targeting Hannover, Leipzig in the east and Kassel. The strike on Kassel was particularly devastating, causing a firestorm that destroyed 4,300 apartment buildings and leaving up to 120,000 people homeless, 153 industrial buildings destroyed and over six thousand civilian deaths.

During November he completed six operational missions including four targeting Berlin between 18th and 26th November. On the 3rd November, Standford was flying one of 18 467SQN Lancasters in an overall force of 589 Lancaster and Halifax bombers targeting Dusseldorf. The raid encountered significant night fighter activity with 467SQN's SQNLDR Rollo Kingsford-Smith fighting off four-night fighter attacks. While making their run into the target, Stanford suddenly saw another Lancaster just in front of him appear in the dark. He quickly pulled on his stick climb the heavy Lancaster laden with its full bomb load to quickly climb above, narrowly avoiding a devastating mid-air collision at altitude.

The significant focus on Berlin continued during December with Stanford conducting another two of his three operational missions for the month over the risky and dangerous German capital. But December also highlighted to Stanford how the routine unit training missions could still pose risk. On the 27th December, he took off on a routine training sortie when suddenly the aircraft suffered a large bird strike with birds penetrating the cockpit and striking Stanford in the head. Stanford recovered the aircraft back to the airfield immediately.

FSGT Ross Stanford and his crew standing in front of a 467SQN Lancaster after a mission. From left: FSGT Ross Stanford (RAAF), FSGT A. J. Jordan (RAAF), SGT E. Judson (RAF), FSGT G. Clarke (RAAF), SGT L. Griffiths (RAF)

In January, he completed another four operational missions including two more over Berlin.

A Bomber Command Lancaster drops its bomb load of a 4,000lb 'cookie' and smaller incendiary bombs at high altitude over a target. This bomb load was the standard load employed by Bomber Command Lancasters through the war with the large 'cookie' designed to achieve significant blast damage and the smaller incendiary bombs designed to create fires. (AWM)

By February, the airmanship of Stanford and his crew was firmly appreciated by senior officers. He was promoted to Flying Officer on 9th February 1944 and on 15 February, the crew was posted to No 617 Squadron (RAF), the Dambuster Squadron, after being selected for the squadron. On 23rd May 1944, it was Gazetted that FLGOFF Ross Stanford was to receive the Distinguished Flying Cross for his service at 467SQN. The Citation read "*Flying Officer Stanford has completed many successful operations, against the enemy in which he displayed skill, fortitude and devotion to duty*."

Overall, during his time with 467SQN, Stanford flew 23 operational missions including nine over Berlin, amassing 273 flying hours mostly over Germany. While the crew remained together for the entire tour at 467SQN, they flew their missions on a number of aircraft including 'Apple', 'Beer', 'Freddie', and 'Harry' but flew the most in 'Julie'.

Stanford arrived at 617SQN at RAF Woodhall Spa on 15th February 1944. After the unit's success in the famous and audacious Dambusters Raid on 16th/17th May 1943, 617 SQN became a specialist precision bombing squadron. It experimented with new bomb sights, target marking techniques and colossal new 'earthquake' bombs developed by Barnes Wallis, the inventor of the 'bouncing bomb' used in the Dambusters Raid. An unsuccessful attempt to bomb the Dortmund-Ems Canal from low level in September 1943 resulted in the loss of five aircraft and the death of the Squadron's new commanding officer. As a result, the unit entered a period of reduced operational activity.

The noted senior RAF bomber pilot WGCDR Leonard Cheshire was posted in to restore some strong leadership to the famous squadron, now facing some difficulty. He implemented a new pathfinder technique that was trialed on a raid only a week before Stanford arrived. On the night of 8th/9th February 1944, 617SQN Lancasters approached Limoges at 16,000 feet. Below, a Lancaster at 5,000 feet dropped shielded flares over the target. Cheshire flew in at 2,000 feet and could see as light as day. He identified the rooftop of the Gnome-Rhone factory and dropped a marker flare on the roof top.

Approaching at 16,000 feet, the remaining 617 SQN Lancasters ingressed to the target, dropping their bombs on the marker. The factory was devastated. It was Cheshire's first big success with 617SQN and set the basis for the units' future operations that Stanford was going to conduct during 1944.

During the remainder of February and early March, Stanford and his crew conducted workup training with their new unit. They conducted their first operational 617 SQN mission on 10th March. The mission was a low-level strike designed and planned by Cheshire, targeting a needle roller bearing factory at Saint-Etienne in eastern central France at only 2,000 feet. It was Stanford's first operational mission at low level but due to low cloud cover, the 617SQN strike was overall not very successful. In late March, he flew three missions targeting critical industry around Lyon in eastern France.

On 5 April, he flew in a 145-strong Lancaster raid targeting German aircraft factories on the outskirts of Toulouse in southern France. The mission involved WGCDR Cheshire marking the target at low level using a Mosquito becoming a precedent for future pathfinder missions. The mission was a success resulting in significant destruction. However, the long-range flight was challenging and risky for a fully loaded Lancaster, an aspect that was realised by Stanford as he was crossing the English Channel on his return to England with his fuel tanks almost empty. He put in a mayday call and was directed to a small secondary airfield on Thorney Island in the English Channel in West Sussex where the runway lighting suddenly appeared right in front of him. In his later years, he noted it was one of his closest calls.

Five days later he participated in a strike on the St Cyr military signals equipment depot in western France. The deadly raid was particularly successful, destroying all the buildings of the depot. Once again, WGCDR Cheshire marked the target buildings flying a Mosquito at low level. On 18th and 20th April, Stanford participated in strikes on rail marshaling yards at Juvisy south of Paris and La Chapelle in northeast France. Both strikes were completely successful, resulting in the destruction of the rail junctions. These missions were the part of the RAF Bomber Command's preparations for the forthcoming D-Day landings by attempting to significantly degrade key lines of communications.

RAF post strike imagery showing the destroyed military signals depot at St Cyr, France, after the 617SQN strike.

The mission on the 20th April was the crew's 30th overall mission in Bomber Command, effectively meaning they had completed their Bomber Command operational tour. However, having just been posted to 617SQN, they had effectively agreed to stay on for a second operational tour highlighted by the conduct of two further missions on 22nd April and 24th April targeting Brunswick and Munich.

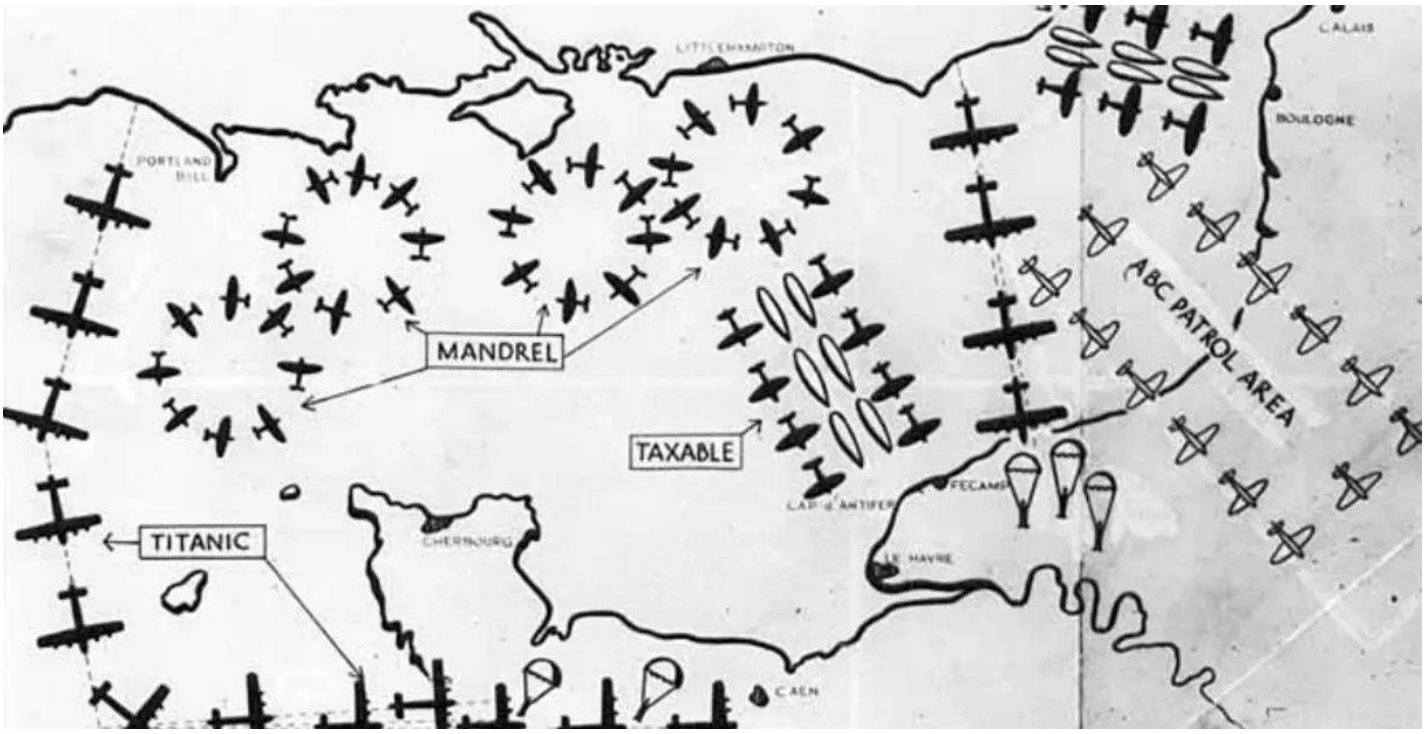
During May, 617SQN flew only four operational missions with Stanford flying none, providing the unit with some degree of respite while conducting some workup training for the forthcoming high operational tempo they were going to experience in June in support of the D-Day landings. In the early hours of 6th June, D-Day, Stanford flew one of 16 617SQN Lancasters on a mission in support of the amphibious force approaching Normandy. It was a sensitive and unique mission called OP TAXABLE, designed to confuse the Germans into believing the allied landings were occurring in areas other than the actual Normandy area.

Window being dispensed from an RAF Lancaster

The mission involved high precision flying where the aircraft staged at 2-mile (3.2 km) intervals parallel to the French coast and then spend two and a half minutes flying toward the coast, dropping window or chaff at fifteen-second intervals. The aircraft then turned and headed away from the coast for two minutes and ten seconds and turn to commence another approach thereby flying repeated rectangular profiles over several hours. At the same time, small boats were conducting similar

approaches across the English Channel towing radar reflecting ballons. The intent was to create a wide cloud of chaff edging towards the coast and appearing like an actual amphibious force. The aircraft were modified by cutting a hole in the nose to allow the large quantities of chaff to be dropped and they were crewed with additional airmen to assist in its dropping.

Conducted on the approach to the French coastline off Cap d'Antifer about 80 km northeast from the actual D-Day landings at Normandy, Operation Taxable was intended to deceive the German forces believing the invasion would land east of Le Havre. Meanwhile, a similar operation involving No 218 Squadron (RAF) was conducted further northeast intended to simulate an allied landing near Calais.



World War 2 Graphic showing the various air operations for the Normandy Landings including 617SQN's OP TAXABLE.

FLGOFF Ross Stanford and the expanded crew for the 6 June deception mission for OP TAXABLE in support of the D-Day Landings. (Stanford Family)

With allied forces successfully lodging on the continent on 6th June, 617 SQN was quickly tasked into critical and precision interdiction missions to prevent or delay German reinforcements from reaching the Normandy area. On 8th June, Stanford flew in one of 25 Lancasters in the first 617SQN mission to use the new and large 2,000lb *Tallboy* earthquake bomb targeting the Saumur railway tunnel.

The mission was the first of many for 617SQN and Stanford involving the Tallboy bomb. Developed by the British aeronautical engineer Barnes Wallis, the 5-ton Tallboy was designed not to be dropped directly on a target but nearby, penetrate the ground and cause shock waves in the ground that would impact the foundations of the target. It was specifically designed for difficult, underground or hardened targets that conventional bombing techniques could not destroy. To penetrate the earth or hardened targets without breaking apart, the casing of the Tallboy had to be significantly stronger than traditional bombs which were designed to be light to maximise blast and be light enough to increase bomb loads. Likewise, the Tallboy was specifically designed by Wallis to be aerodynamically clean to allow it to reach a higher velocity to increase penetration. Its huge size required a modified Avro Lancaster bomber to carry it.

Image showing the immense size of the 12,000lb Tallboy bomb being prepared by RAF ground crews. (IWM)

The mission was intended to stop a German Panzer Division that was expected to use the tunnel and bridge to cross the Loire River and reinforce German forces in the Normandy area. Along with the other Lancasters, Stanford dropped his Tallboy bomb from 18,000ft with great accuracy striking the approaches to the bridge, penetrating and blocking the railway

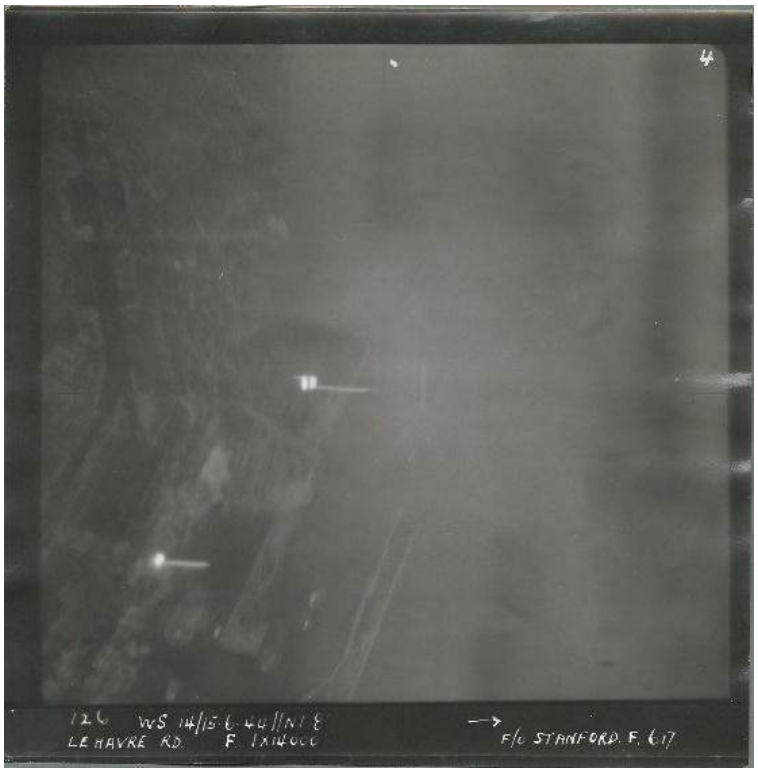
Post strike imagery of the 617SQN attack on the Saumur Railway Tunnel and Bridge clearly showing the large craters caused by the 617SQN Tallboy bombs along the rail cratering the rail line and just after the entrance to the tunnel. (IWM)

tunnel, critically preventing the German reinforcements, especially 2nd SS Panzer Division *Das Reich*, from moving towards Normandy in a timely manner.

On 14th June, Stanford and his crew were again in the air with 21 other 617SQN Lancasters targeting the E-Boat pens and harbour at Le Havre. The daylight raid was designed to stop the German E-Boats, fast heavily armed motorboats, that were departing at night and attacking allied shipping supporting the Normandy landings. Despite encountering strong flak, the 617SQN Lancasters scored a direct hit on the hardened E-Boat pens penetrating the roof and doing serious damage inside. All but one of the E-boats were damaged beyond use. Further, the strikes on the harbour caused massive explosions that were so strong that ten vessels were blown out of the water and onto the wharfs. The raid was a success, with only one bomber lost and Le Havre virtually eliminated as an E-boat base for the remainder of the war.

Damage to the E-Boat Pens at Le Havre after the strike by 617SQN using Tallboys on 14 June 1944. (IWM)

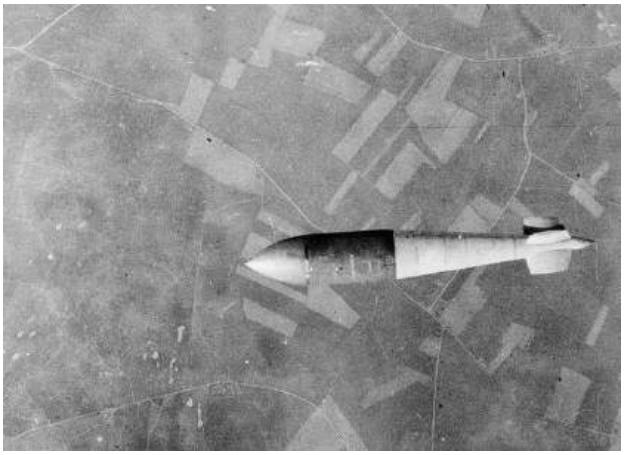
On 15 June, Stanford and his crew joined twenty-one other 617 SQN Lancasters in a similar attack on the E-Boat pens at Boulogne further along the northern French coastline near Belgium. The massive strike again cause massive damage and while not completely destroying the E-Boats, the strike critically damage much infrastructure and forced the relocation of the E-Boats to Ijmuiden on the Dutch coastline much further away from the Normandy landing area.



Strike imagery of Stanford's attack in the 617SQN strike on the E-Boat pens at Le Havre on 14 June 1944 with Tallboy bombs. The two bright white marks are the incendiary pathfinder markers placed by WGCDR Cheshire (CO 617SQN) and SQNLDR Shannon (fellow South Australian pilot) in their Mosquito aircraft. (International Bomber Command Centre image)

617SQN was then tasked to support Operation CROSSBOW, the allied operation aimed at countering German rocket capabilities including V-1 flying bomb ("buzz bomb" or "doodlebug") and V-2 rocket weapons. The 617SQN Tallboys were specifically tasked to destroy rocket sites. CROSSBOW quickly took on paramount importance following Germany's first launch of V-1s against London on 13th June 1944 only a week after, and prompted by, the Normandy landings. Indeed, the

sudden assault prompted General Eisenhower to direct Crossbow targets were first priority over everything except the urgent requirements of the Normandy landings. Stanford flew four CROSSBOW missions on the between 20 and 25 June targeting V-2 bunkers at Watten and Wizernes and a V-1 bunker at Siracourt along the northern French coast near the Belgium border. The missions were largely successfully resulting in the Germans being unable to use the bunkers.



A 12,000lb Tallboy falls from a 617SQN Lancaster over the Watten V-1 underground storage facility on 30 June 1944. (IWM)

The CROSSBOW attacks continued in July. On 6th July, Stanford and his crew flew in a 17 617SQN commitment to strike a large underground V-3 Cannon facility under construction near Mimoyecques in Northern France near Belgium. The complex comprised a network of tunnels dug under a hill linked to five inclined shafts in which 25 V-3 guns were to be installed. Aimed at London, the long-range guns would have been able to fire ten large shells a minute, or 600 rounds an hour, onto the city. Representing a new and devastating terror weapon. The Allies knew nothing about the V-3 but identified the site as a possible launching base for V-2 ballistic missiles, based on reconnaissance photographs and fragmentary intelligence from French sources.

The 617SQN strike on 6th July seriously damaged the underground complex with one Tallboy direct hit and four near misses, causing tunnels and shafts to collapse, entombing hundreds of workers underground and damaging to the gun barrels. For Stanford, the mission was the closest experience he had to being shot down. The aircraft, ED-763/B, was struck by flak several times and lost a port and starboard engine and its hydraulics. Stanford nursed the aircraft back to RAF Bradwell Bay in eastern Essex in Southeast England for an emergency landing.

Post strike imagery of the devastated German secret weapon (V3) site at Mimoyecques, near Marquise, France, after the daylight attack by 617SQN Lancasters on 6 July 1944 in which Ross Stanford participated. The many small craters are from previous attacks by Allied aircraft that did not serious damage the target. The large bomb craters were caused by Tallboy deep-penetration bombs dropped by No. 617 SQN. There are two large craters at the end of the curved rail spur as it enters a tunnel to the underground storage area. There are also several direct Tallboys hits on a hardened concrete roof slightly above the tunnel entrance. (IWM)

Stamford flew five more Tallboy missions targeting CROSSBOW targets in July returning to Wizernes, Watten and Siracourt. On 1st August, they struck a V-1 storage site in a railway tunnel at Rilly-la-Montage in central eastern France. The Tallboy bombs caved in both ends of the tunnel, making the strike a major success. As a result of these and other similar raids, the Germans were forced to abandon the massive V-1 bases they had constructed and use smaller more mobile launching sites. It was Chesire's final mission with 617SQN as he was posted out of the squadron having completed four operational

tours in Bomber Command. Destined for greater things, he would go onto create Bomber Command's Pathfinder Force. Stanford established a close relationship with Cheshire particularly after the war.

The strike on 1st August was Stanford's and his crew's final mission with 617 SQN. Having completed 24 dangerous missions with the precision strike squadron on top of their 23 dangerous missions with 467SQN over just eleven months, the crew asked to be rested. They were not actually posted out of 617SQN until early March 1945. After several months' rest, Stanford was attached to the Air Ministry from October 1944 to March 1945 where he spoke to employees who were making aircraft and aircraft components on the war and the operational experience. The morale boosting program was aimed at sustaining defence industry production as it was believed that although victory was looking likely in Europe, the war in the Pacific would continue and RAF Bomber Command was preparing a strategic bomber force called Tiger Force for the Pacific theatre once Germany was defeated.

While in England, Stanford turned to his love of cricket and tried to play whenever he could to find some relief from the rigors of war and flying in Bomber Command. This included playing in Unit and Base cricket teams as well as higher representative opportunities whenever they were available. He played a match for an RAAF team against an English side at the County Ground, Hove, in July 1943. Further matches followed throughout 1943–45. He first played at Lord's on 27 May 1944 in an Australia vs The Rest match where he scored 50. He scored 51 in an England vs RAAF match at Lords on the 29 May 1944. Incredibly, these two matches were played during the workup training for the intense June D-Day landing operations that he was going to fly only several weeks later.

FLTLT Ross Stanford in cricket gear taken in June 1945 while playing for a RAAF side. (AWM)

In 1945, following the conclusion of hostilities, Stanford was selected to play for the Australian Services XI in a five Test Series called the Victory Tests, played in England. Played between May and August 1945 just after the German surrender, the Victory Tests were designed to be a morale booster for the British and help the Commonwealth get back to normal life after the war. The concept and matches attracted strong government support with the Australian Prime Minister John Curtin pushing for the immediate resumption of international cricket after the war was over.

While the English side was virtually a full-strength test side, the Australian Services XI featured various RAAF members who had played in a RAAF XI while on duty in England during the war, and a group of mostly soldiers from Australia. The side included six South Australians: FLTLT Ross Stanford, CAPT Richard Whitington, FLGOFF Eddie Williams, FSGT James Workman, WOFF Graham Williams, and FLGOFF Reg Ellis. Only one player, the future Test captain Lindsay Hassett, had any previous Test match experience, with the remainder having either Sheffield Shield or first-class experience. For some, such as the future Australian cricketeer Keith Miller, a RAAF pilot, the Victory Tests were a 'breakout' series highlighting their cricket potential at the national level. For Stanford, it was an opportunity to play cricket, his great passion, against some noted players as well as remind South Australian selectors of his capacity. He later recalled "*If it hadn't have been for the war, I would never have been in England*, *I would never have played on these famous English cricket grounds, and I never would have played against these famous English cricketers*, *such as Wally Hammond who was captain, Len Hutton, Cyril Washbrook, Les Ames, and of course, quite a few others*."

Remarkably, the Victory Tests resulted in a tied series with each team recording two victories and a draw. In the First Test, held from 19th – 22nd May, only eleven days after Victory in Europe, Stanford scored 49 batting at 4th drop in a 75-run partnership with Keith Miller who scored a 100 in the first innings. The Test was convincingly won by the Australians by six wickets. He did not play in the 2nd Test played June 23rd – 26thwhich was won by England, nor the 3rd Test played from 14th - 17th July and won by Australia. He scored 2 and 33 not out in the 4th Test which was a draw. In the 5th Test, played from 20th -22nd August and won by England, he scored 1 and 23.

The Victory Tests were a huge success attracting record crowds. 367,000 people attended the matches at Lord's (three matches), Old Trafford (one) and Bramall Lane (one), with the final game at Lord's attracting a then-record 93,000 people for a single three-day match. Sadly, however, the Victory Tests were never given Test match status by the participating Boards of Control, because the Australian Cricket Board feared their side was not strong enough to compete with a near Test-strength England, so the games only had first class status; a sore point for the players who never officially got to play test cricket like Stanford. He stated years later in a newspaper interview in 1990, "*Nobody remembers us now or what we did but we have our cherished memories and that's all that really matters*."

FLGOFF Ross Stanford glides a ball through slips for runs in the innings where he scored 49 in the First Victory Test in May 1945. (AWM)

The team was established as a military unit, commanded by Squadron Leader Stan Sismey, the team's wicket-keeper but there is no reflection of it in Stanford's online personal RAAF record.

After returning to Australia, the Australian Services Side also played several matches against Australian state teams during which Stanford scored his highest first-class score of 153 in a match against Tasmania in Hobart in January 1946. This was somewhat ironic given he commenced his first-class career scoring a duck against Tasmania in 1936. His renewed cricket was recognised post-war by the South Australian State side selectors and he played 23 first class matches in the 1946/47 and 1947/48 seasons scoring 932 runs at an average of 26 including 9 matches for South Australia. He continued playing in the local Adelaide competition until 1955 playing for West Torrens.

Promoted to Flight Lieutenant in August 1945 during the Victory Test Series, Stanford returned to Australia with the Australian Services Side and was demobilised on 26 March 1946 after completing five years of service including two operational tours with Bomber Command with 823 flying hours in his logbook. The last entry in his logbook is recorded

FLTLT Ross Stamford's Awards for his service in World War 2: from left Distinguished Flying Cross, 1939-45 Star, Aircrew Europe Star, Defence Medal, British War Medal 1939-45, and the Australian Service Medal 1939-45. Image Virtual War Memorial

the words "*thus ended the best five years of my life*." Along with the Distinguished Flying Cross, he was awarded the 1939-45 Star, Aircrew Europe Star, Defence Medal, British War Medal 1939-45, and the Australian Service Medal 1939-45

Briefly returning to the State Bank of South Australia on his return to Australia, he later turned to working the family market gardener business in the Fulham area. He retired in 1967 but worked for a number of charities including the Captain Sturt Memorial Museum Trust and founded the Australian Division of the Cheshire-Ryder Foundation in 1970. The Cheshire-Ryder Foundation was founded by his former 617SQN Commanding Officer and later good friend Leonard Cheshire VC, OM, DSO & Two Bars, DFC and wife Sue Ryder. Stanford was appointed a member of the Order of Australia in 1991 for his services to the community through the charity.

A member of the 617 Squadron Association in Australia, he organised the final worldwide reunion of the Dambusters Squadron in Adelaide in April 1980.

Stamford ran unsuccessfully for election as a Liberal candidate in the 1959 and 1968 South Australian elections for the seat of West Torrens. He also contested the Federal seat of Hindmarsh in 1966 as a Liberal candidate, losing to the Labor candidate, Clyde Cameron by only 916 votes after preferences.

Ross Stanford passed away in 2006. He was the last surviving South Australian member of No 617 Squadron. Proud of his service to his nation and honouring those who served, he regularly marched in the Adelaide Anzac Day March.

Images of Ross Stanford taken in 2003 in his old RAAF uniform, with his awards and Wings and a cricket bat he used during the Victory Tests in 1945. (Stanford Family)

Greg Weller
Vice President
Air Force Association (SA)
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