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# D.S.O. (1945)immediate, D.F.C. (1943) & Bar (1945), a superb pathfinders Master Bomber's group of some 75 ops



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## Medal Description

D.S.O., (GVI), silver-gilt and enamel, reverse dated '1945'; D.F.C., (GV1) reverse dated 1943., with Second Award Bar, reverse o dated '1943' and the reverse of the Bar '1945', 1939/45 Star, Air Crew Europe Star, clasp, France and Germany, Africa Star, Defence Medal, War Medals , M.I.D. , Air Efficiency Award, (GV1), 1st issue (Act. Wg. Cdr. D. A. Cracknell, R.A.F.V.R.).

D.S.O. L.G. 6/2/1945. Recommendation for an immediate award states.

'Wing Commander Cracknell was Captain of an aircraft detailed to attack Dusseldorf on the night of 2

November 1944. His task was a vital one involving the dropping of target indicators. Long before the target, his aircraft was engaged by most accurate anti-aircraft fire and hit several times, but displaying great coolness and complete disregard of personal safety, this officer made a long and steady bombing run and thus enabled his bomb aimer to achieve the most precise results. The target was well hit as proved by the photograph he obtained.

Even after the bombs had gone and the photograph taken Wing Commander Cracknell's aircraft was still selected as the primary target for the defences and only his great coolness and fine airmanship can have prevented the aircraft from being lost; as it was he returned his damaged aircraft safely to base without further incident.

Wing Commander Cracknell is now carrying out his third tour of operations and has completed a total of 60 bombing attacks regardless of defences and by his fine record of many attacks successfully carried out, together with the thoroughness of his preparation for these attacks, he sets a fine example to the Squadron. In recognition of this officer's fine record of service, I strongly recommend him for the award of the Distinguished Service Order.'

D.F.C. L.G. 4/5/1943. Recommendation states:

'Since completing his first tour of operational duties, this officer has participated in a further 14 sorties. While in the Middle East, he completed a number of attacks on Greek and Italian objectives. All his allotted tasks have been performed in a most skilful and exemplary manner. Squadron Leader Cracknell has displayed a marked determination to finish successfully any duty he may undertake. On more than one occasion, engine trouble has failed to prevent him from completing his mission and once when attacking Turin one engine failed before he had crossed the Alps. In spite of this, he continued, bombed the target, and flew the aircraft safely to base. Undeterred by fighter attacks and ground defences this officer has displayed the highest courage and devotion to duty.'

Bar to D.F.C. L.G. 23/10/1945. The recommendation states:

'Wing Commander Cracknell has now completed 75 sorties and has commanded a very successful Pathfinder Squadron since the early days of January 1945. He has carried out in an exemplary manner, on 18 occasions, the duties of Master Bomber. His overriding confidence, calmness, determination and coolness of judgment have not only made him an outstanding Captain of aircraft, but also a Squadron Commander second to none.

The results of his squadron can be attributed in no small measure to his excellence as a pilot and Captain in the air and to his discipline and organisation on the ground. I very strongly recommend that this officer's contribution to the final defeat of Germany should be recognised by the non-immediate award of a first Bar to the Distinguished Flying Cross.'

Douglas Aubrey Cracknell B.1909, commenced commercial flying in 1936, for the Railway Air Services, in addition to running private charters; he was also a flying instructor with Airports Ltd.

A pre-war member of the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve, Cracknell was called-up on commencement of hostilities, Pilot Officer in March 1940.

Served as a pilot in No. 148 Squadron in the Middle East, the unit having been reformed in Malta in December 1940. Equipped with Wellingtons, it carried out strikes against a variety of targets, against Greek and Italian objectives on at least 24 occasions.

At the end of his tour he returned to the U.K. in 1942 and, in October of the same year, resumed his operational career with a posting to No. 49 Squadron, a Lancaster unit operating out of R.A.F. Scampton - and afterwards R.A.F. Fiskerton. He flew another 26 sorties, mostly against heavily defended German cities at the height of bomber command losses. He attacked Berlin on three occasions, Hamburg lthree times, also Bremen, Cologne, Dusseldorf, Essen and Munich.

Cracknell participated in five further sorties after the recommendation for his D.F.C., and was awarded the Air Efficiency Award to his accolades in August 1943

Third Operational Tour - No. 35 (P.F.F.) Squadron - immediate D.S.O.

In the summer of 1944 - and having been appointed to the acting rank of Wing Commander - Cracknell returned for his third tour in No. 35 (P.F.F.) Squadron. (Lancasters), out of R.A.F. Graveley as part of No. 8 (P.F.F.) Group.

In addition to his immediate D.S.O., he was mentioned in despatches (L.G. 29/12/1944.).

In January 1945, Cracknell was given command of No. 7 (P.F.F.) Squadron at Oakington in January 1945. and up to April 1945 he flew as Master Bomber on a further 18 occasions.

Post war, Cracknell served as Chief Pilot of British South American Airways (B.S.A.A.) and, from 1949 as Operations Superintendent to the South American Division of B.O.A.C. B

In January 1946, he navigated an Avro Lancastrian to South America, thereby opening-up the first civil airline route from Heathrow. Sharing the cockpit was Air Vice-Marshal D. C. T. 'Don' Bennett, the founding force behind the Pathfinders.

Died in London in 1979.

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[D.S.C. group with N.G.S. Palestine. D.S.C. 1944 \(D Day aboard Infantry Landing Craft Sword Beach\), M.I.D. H.M.S. Keith when sunk at Dunkirk, also served H.M.S. Cossack 1941 when sunk with heavy loss](#) [10]

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