

# A Pathfinder's War: An Extraordinary Tale of Surviving Over 100 Bomber Operations Against All Odds

Sean Feast, Flt Lt Ted Stocker DSO DFC

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Ted Stocker lived a charmed life. Trained at RAF Halton as one of Trenchard's 'Brats', a posting to Boscombe Down saw him fly in both the prototype Stirling and Halifax just as war engulfed Europe for the second time. Qualifying as one of the RAF's first flight engineers, he flew operations in 1941/42 with 35 and 102 Squadrons, a contemporary of Leonard Cheshire, helping with the often hair-raising task of converting pilots from two to four engines. On his return to 35, he became a pathfinder and flight engineer leader, taking part in virtually every major air battle of the war. Awarded the DFC in 1943, he was posted to 7 and then 582 Squadrons, going on to complete more than 100 bombing operations, often as a master bomber, and flying with some of the pathfinder 'greats', including Don Bennett himself. Although his aircraft was frequently hit, and he survived a crash landing on only his second trip, Ted was never wounded. His achievements were recognized with the Distinguished Service Order, the only known DSO issued to a flight engineer during the war or since. After the war, he flew with Bomber Harris on a tour of Brazil and later qualified as a pilot, introducing the Lockheed Neptune anti-submarine aircraft to the RAF for the first time as a flight commander with Coastal Command.



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