



O'DWYER Warrant Officer James Patrick (Jim) O'Dwyer, 27 April 1925 – 28 January 2026.

James Patrick O'Dwyer volunteered for the Royal Air Force on his 18th birthday in 1943, travelling from his home in Cahir, County Tipperary, to Dublin to enlist. After initial selection, he was sent to air gunnery training on the Isle of Man, qualifying as an air gunner in December 1943. He completed advanced training at No. 1 Lancaster Finishing School at RAF Hemswell in June 1944 before being posted to No. 101 (Special Duties) Squadron at RAF Ludford Magna in Lincolnshire.

No. 101 Squadron operated Avro Lancasters equipped with "Airborne Cigar" (ABC) electronic countermeasures. These aircraft carried a German-speaking specialist who intercepted and jammed Luftwaffe night-fighter communications, transmitting on enemy frequencies to disrupt control systems. The role required aircraft to remain longer in the bomber stream and often operate at some separation, making them conspicuous targets. The squadron sustained the highest loss rates in Bomber Command.

O'Dwyer served as a rear gunner—the "tail-end Charlie"—isolated in the Perspex turret at the extreme rear of the aircraft. Although part of a three-turret defensive system, the rear gunner bore the brunt of combat, as German night fighters most often attacked from astern. Positioned between the tail fins, he had little protection from armour, worked in extreme cold, and was separated from his parachute, which was stored forward in the fuselage.

He began operational flying on 18 July 1944 in support of Operation Goodwood, attacking German forces in Normandy during the Allied attempt to capture Caen. Two days later he took part in a raid by 302 Lancasters against the railway junction at Courtrai in Belgium, an operation intended to disrupt German supply lines, during which multiple aircraft were lost.

Over the following weeks he flew a sustained series of operations against industrial, logistical and military targets across occupied Europe and Germany. These included a major night raid

on the port of Stettin involving more than 400 Lancasters, attacks on V-weapon launch sites at St Riquier on the Somme, and continued operations in the Netherlands in support of Operation Market Garden. Targets also included German industrial cities such as Karlsruhe, Stuttgart, Essen and Cologne as Bomber Command intensified its offensive against the Reich.

The tempo of operations was intense. Aircraft could be turned around rapidly, and in some cases there were as little as eleven hours between sorties. O'Dwyer's tour of operations, completed in approximately three months, has been described as one of the most condensed experienced by Bomber Command aircrew.

He completed a full tour of 30 operations and then flew an additional sortie. His final mission took place on 29 October 1944 against German coastal batteries at Domburg in the Netherlands. During the war, No. 101 Squadron lost 1,176 personnel, reflecting the extreme risk associated with its specialised role.

Following the completion of his operational tour, O'Dwyer was transferred from front-line flying to air traffic control duties for the remainder of the war before being demobilised. He rejoined the Royal Air Force in 1950 and returned to service in heavy bomber units, flying aircraft including the Avro Lincoln, the post-war development of the Lancaster. He continued in RAF service until 1957.

In later life he became a member of the RAF Association.