

R/64816 Warrant Officer (Class I) Thomas Breech Miller RCAF, GM

George Medal Citation

MILLER, Flight Sergeant (now WO1) Thomas Breech RCAF (R/64816) George Medal, No.78 Squadron. Award effective 6th January 1942 as per London Gazette of that date and AFRO 1870/42 dated the 20th November 1942.

"One night in September 1941, Sergeant Miller was the Air Observer of an aircraft which, following return to the UK after a successful attack on a target in North West Germany had been intercepted and attacked by an Enemy Intruder Aircraft. The controls of the Whitley were damaged, and the starboard engine was put out of action, and the pilot had to affect a forced landing. The aircraft landed heavily with undercarriage retracted, came to rest half over a hedge, and caught fire.

The Rear Gunner and Second Wireless Operator were only slightly injured and escaped from the rear of the aircraft. Sergeant Miller was also uninjured and escaped through the top hatch. He then noticed that the Pilot and first Wireless Operator were still in the aircraft, which was now blazing furiously. Undeterred, Sergeant Miller re-entered the aircraft through the top hatch and found the Pilot lying in a dazed condition, as he had been wounded about the face and head. Sergeant Miller pulled the captain through the hatch and carried him away from the aircraft. He returned for the first Wireless Operator, who was lying in the rear of the cabin, very badly hurt and with his clothing on fire.

Sergeant Miller succeeded in lifting him through the hatch and carried him to a place of safety, where he beat out the flames from the injured man's clothing with his hands, after rolling him on the ground in an attempt to smother them. The flares, oxygen bottles, ammunition and petrol tanks began to explode immediately after Sergeant Miller got clear of the aircraft. He received severe burns to his hands while rescuing his comrades, whose lives were undoubtedly saved by his prompt and extremely brave action"

Born in Waubaushene, Ontario, 1921, his home was in Saint John, New Brunswick; He enlisted in the RCAF in Moncton on the 18th July 1940. He subsequently joined 78 Squadron on 30th August 1941. His first operation was on 2nd September 1941 (Frankfurt) His second operation was on 6th September 1941 and this brought him the decoration of the George Medal. Following medical treatment he then rejoined 78 Sqn, was promoted to F/S and flew four more operations. The first on 11th February 1942 (Le Havre) This was his last Op on Whitley's as 78 Sqn began conversion onto the Halifax) His second was on 29th April 1942 (Ostend) the next was on 30th May 1942 (Cologne) and finally on 1st June 1942 (Hamburg) He was shot down and taken prisoner on this last sortie. He was commissioned on 1st June 1943 (J/96500) and was released and returned to the UK on 12th May 1945. Following the war he studied history at the University of Toronto and diplomatic history at the London School of Economics (Ph.D., 1954). He accepted a teaching position with Lakehead Technical Institute (later Lakehead University) and was active in the Canadian Institute of International Affairs and numerous local organizations. He retired in 1988 and died in Thunder Bay on 10th August 1996. His obituary notice stated that following his second crash he spent four days in a dinghy off the Dutch coast, paralyzed with a back injury, until rescued by Germans.

This award remains the highest decoration awarded to 78 Sqn to date