“We Never Slept” - The Story of 605 Squadron

The Bear Earns His Wings

Although the Auxiliary Air Force and Air Force Reserve Act was drafted in 1922 it was not until 1924 that it became law. Lord Trenchard envisaged the Auxiliaries as a *corps d’élite* composed of the kind of young men who earlier would have been interested in horses, but now wished to serve their country in machines. He conceived that the new mechanical yeomanry with the aeroplanes would be based on the great centres of industry. The original provision was for six Auxiliary squadrons and seven Special Reserve squadrons. Trenchard stressed that this new Auxiliary Air Force was not a "reserve" for the Royal Air Force but a separate air force altogether, whose role was to be that of Day Bombers.

In chronological terms 602 (City of Glasgow) had the distinction of being the first squadron to be formed (12th September 1925), followed by 600 (City of London), 601 (County of London) and 603 (City of Edinburgh) on 14th October 1925 and 605 (County of Warwick) on 5th October 1926. 604 (County of Middlesex) was not in fact formed until 17th March 1930. The Squadron’s full title was “No. 605 (County of Warwick) Bombing Squadron.” Group Captain Gerry Edge recalls that as 606 was a "medication" it was subsequently omitted from the auxiliary numbering sequence! In 1936 the number of Auxiliary squadrons was doubled, and the number of Special Reserve squadrons was increased to five.

The main difference between an Auxiliary squadron and a Special Reserve squadron was that the former was run as a regular unit and the latter as a reserve of pilots. The letter "A" was worn on the lapels of the Auxiliary officers uniforms and the Auxiliary airmen wore theirs on the sleeve. The letters "VR" (Volunteer Reserve) were worn by the men who staffed the "500" Special Reserve squadrons. Squadron Leader John Allan Cecil Wright, a local man, was appointed as the Squadron’s first Commanding Officer. The obvious choice for the new squadron’s base was the home of the Midland Aero Club, at the aerodrome at Castle Bromwich, some six miles from Birmingham city centre.

The new CO’s first task was to appoint an Adjutant and a Flying Instructor. For these two roles he recruited one man Flight Lieutenant F.O. Soden DFC. Soden, a veteran of the Royal Flying Corps had been responsible for pioneering a new innovation in flying, for which he received the Distinguished Flying Cross. During the First World War the pilots and observer/air gunners of the RFC had no means by which to leave a stricken aircraft if it had been damaged and could no longer be kept in the air, and many men were lost as a result. Some method of allowing the crew to abandon their machine had to be devised if these losses were to be stopped. Parachutes had been widely used to drop small objects from the air, and if made strong enough could be carried by the crews who could then jump from their aircraft and descend back to terra-firma. Soden carried out a great deal of testing of the new parachutes often making many adjustments until the right balance of material and strings could be found. Soon parachutes were being mass-produced and delivered to every unit.

The recruitment of men for 605 began in earnest with large brightly coloured posters advertising the Auxiliary Air Force going up all over Birmingham. The poster was an eye catching design of a De Havilland 9A bearing down on some natives, guns blazing, with the caption ‘Join The Auxiliary Air Force Today ’! A list of trades and vacancies followed underneath. What was Castle Bromwich Aerodrome is today, after over three quarters of a century of aerial activity, a large modern housing estate known as Castle Vale. Six houses, part of the original RAF married quarters, still can be seen on the Chester Road which runs down the western side of the estate. In 1911, the land was known as the "playing fields" and the first event in aviation history ever to be seen in the Birmingham area, was a visit in that year by B. C. Hucks in a Bleriot monoplane, powered by a 50 hp Gnome rotary
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engine. Hucks, who later became a Captain in the Royal Flying Corps, gave demonstrations of flying, including looping the loop and also passenger flights.

With the outbreak of the 1914-18 war, the site was requisitioned by the War Department for use by the Royal Flying Corps and hangars and workshops were erected for a Flying Training School, which turned out hundreds of pilots for the war, including many USA airmen when the latter joined the Allies. Later further permanent buildings were constructed on the South side, along the then Midland Railway line and Castle Bromwich became an Aircraft Acceptance Centre. SE 5 and Handley Page 0/400 aircraft, produced in local factories, were flight tested here before delivery to squadrons. The first complete squadron to be formed here was No 19 Squadron, which started with Maurice Farman's "Box Kite" and then with Avros in 1915.

Between the wars, the airfield reverted to "playing fields" and very nearly became a site for housing, but the Air Ministry responded to pressure by the Birmingham Corporation and others to retain it, and it was licensed as a civil aerodrome but minus the aforementioned buildings along the Midland Railway and the land south of the road (now known as "Tangmere Drive"). The buildings were leased to the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce and housed the Heavy Engineering Section of the annual British Industries Fair until it was discontinued several years later. The airfield was used by various members of the Royal Family, Prime Ministers and Cabinet Ministers who were entertained in 605 Squadron Officers’ Mess.

1926

The Midland Aero Club began flying at Castle Bromwich in 1925 as one of the approved Light Aeroplane Clubs, and in October 1926 when the Squadron joined them the airfield again became an RAF Service Station. "Bombing" in the Squadron’s name was later changed to "Bomber". Each Auxiliary Squadron was allotted approximately thirty NCOs and men chosen for their respective skills from the RAF, with three Officers, two of whom were experts in flying training and were responsible for all flying and technical training programmes. Training time consisted on average of two evenings per week and most weekends in Spring and Summer, reduced a little in Winter. Auxiliary airmen received an annual bounty of £8 and RAF rates of pay for six "weekend camps" each year and for a fortnight’s annual training away from Castle Bromwich, all remaining time spent was voluntarily. Before being promoted to the rank of Sergeant, an auxiliary airman was required to do a fortnights course at a major RAF station. Bell tents were erected in the "orchard" at Castle Bromwich (the remains of a jam factory) for the accommodation of the troops during weekend and Whitsun camps. Later, permanent barracks and a fine Drill Hall were built together with an Officers' Mess.

Squadron Leader (later Air Commodore) J. A. Cecil Wright AFC TD DL and the Adjutant, Flight Lieutenant (later Wing Commander) Soden DFC were responsible for training and running the station. They "set the pace" by their training, leadership and demand for serious hard work for a long line of RAF Officers who came to the Squadron as junior officers, and thanks to their efforts it was a huge success winning the Lord Esher Trophy for all round efficiency in 1927, 1930, 1931, 1933, 1934 and 1935.

The first aircraft to be issued to the Squadron in 1926 were two Avro 504Ns, powered by an Armstrong Siddeley Lynx engine, fitted out for dual control and two Handley Page DH 9A bombers, powered by a Liberty water cooled engine, which arrived on the 25th of October from RAF Henlow. Recruiting got under way and it was first decided to enlist about thirty airmen, train them and then start up a further batch and so on. However, the inherent skill of "Brummie" tradesmen soon showed that they only required adaption, rather than full training, as compared with other Auxiliary squadrons. This, combined with a change of Adjutant altered the policy, and recruiting to full strength went ahead within weeks. In fact there was very quickly a waiting list of would be
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members. Many late hours and long weekends were spent in adapting and teaching these airmen the skills of engine maintenance, aircraft rigging, wireless telegraphy (short wave radio was not yet in use), armament, workshops etc. One of the first auxiliary officers to join was Flt. Lt. J. M. Leach as "A" Flight Commander who had many and varied experiences in World War I as a pilot, and was stolen from the RAF by the Army in World War II because he was a top Civil Engineer, and General Montgomery needed docks to be built in Egypt for the build-up of the 8th Army. (Lt. Col. J. M. Leach became Vice President of the 605 Association, he died in 1969.)

Flt. Lt. C. L. Knox VC joined the squadron as 'B' Flight Commander on 23rd November. He was awarded the Victoria Cross on the 22nd of March 1918 whilst serving with No 150 Field Regiment at Tugny in France. "Uncle Knox" had two not so happy squadron "firsts". He was the first to volunteer for a live parachute drop from a Vicker's Vimy, (a type of aircraft well known from Alcock and Brown's historic Trans-Atlantic flight.) but unfortunately, the weather turned sour and he ended up with a fractured pelvis and all further drops were abandoned. He also had the unenviable distinction of being the first to register the Squadron's first "prang" with an Avro 504N, catching the telephone wires along the Kingsbury Road after overshooting the landing area and ending up across the canal; fortunately, he got away with it, although the aircraft was written off. It must have been a lucky omen, because in thirteen years of extensive flying from 1926-1939, only three fatalities were incurred, two of which were in one crash. Other officers came along in due course and had to learn service flying in Avro trainers and then dual instruction in specially dual fitted DH 9As and finally pass out on the DH 9A bombers.

1927

In May another decorated man, F/Lt W.R. Cox, MC AFC joined the Squadron, arriving from 503 (County of Lincoln) Squadron on the 12th. When the Squadron left for the first annual training fortnight at Manston in August 1927, it could not yet be classed as fully operational and many airmen under training were attached to the three RAF units there, namely No 9 Bomber Squadron (equipped with Vickers Virginia night bombers powered by two Napier Lion engines), No 2 Army Co op (Bristol fighters) and No 1 School of Technical Training (men). Here special lectures and demonstrations were arranged and much sought after night flights in the Virginia aircraft were arranged.

Mention must be made of 605 Squadron's first Sgt Major (they were SMIs and SMIIs in those days, but later became Warrant Officers a year or two later). SMI "Gus" Newby, responsible for drill and discipline and physical training did a splendid job in moulding a motley crowd of "rookies" into a smart and airmenlike unit. Thus, at Manston, it being a large station a full morning colour hoisting parade, complete with band and the usual march past was held daily, and there was nothing lacking in the Squadron's standard of drill despite it being a " first ever". Also the barrack rooms outshone the rest and this this tradition stayed with the Squadron for good. 605 were fortunate to have this outstanding NCO and "Father Confessor" for 5-6 years, instead of the usual three years which was the normal posting period for regular airmen.

Mention must also be made of the 5 senior NCO instructors who started at the beginning of the Squadron's life and who set a standard not only of efficient instruction but also of an excellent relationship between Regulars and Auxiliaries. These were F/Sgt Beard ("A" Flt), Sgt "Dusty" Miller ("B" Flt), F/Sgt V. Terry (Recruiting and Workshops), Sgt W. G. Paris (Armament) and F/Sgt F. E. Groom (W/T). It should be remembered that there was no short wave radio at this time. Both with DH 9A and then later with the Westland Wapiti a three hundred foot aerial had to be wound out and Morse Code was the order of the day. However, Direction Finding stations existed in certain parts of England and D/F was part of a W/T operators training.

And so, the first "Annual Camp" came to an end without any blackmarks, write offs or other mishaps and no doubt the instructional staff were greatly relieved. As the special train pulled out of Margate...
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Station on Sunday morning, the officers came to see the troops off, and showed this relief by showering them with water out of a Southern Railway mobile water carrier found on the platform! The regular staff now had a fortnights well earned leave and the payment of the annual bounty in October marked the official end of the year’s training. Not that this meant any cessation of work, as evening instruction went on throughout the Winter and alternative weekend flying carried on.

The good news that the instructional staff heard on return from leave was that 605 Squadron had been awarded the Esher Trophy. The City of Birmingham was so delighted with this success that the Town Hall was made available for the presentation by Sir Samuel Hoare (Air Minister) with a dinner to follow. An auxiliary guard of honour was provided, commanded by F/Lt G. V. Perry (who much later became the Squadron’s Commanding Officer but was sadly lost over Dunkirk in 1940.)

1928

By early 1928 more pilots were being passed out on to DH 9As, or "Nine Acks" and the more serious operations of a regular Bomber Squadron could be started. The most obvious item was of course accurate bombing and the formation of bombing crews who could work well together to achieve the desired result, especially as this carried a lot of marks in the inter-squadron Esher Trophy each year.

Before being "let-loose" with 8½lb practice bombs, a crew had to pass out on "Camera Obscura", which also counted in the Esher Trophy. This method consisted of a hut with a lens in the roof, projecting an image onto a table beneath, so that an aircraft’s course, speed and moment of bomb release could be plotted with the aid of a metronome. The moment of release was sent by Morse Code and later on by a "photoflash" bulb on the bomb rack. With the known altitude of the aircraft and a few other details, it was quite easy to plot the exact point of impact. Many hours were spent on this exercise, which meant that each aircraft had to find the wind speed and direction by flying on a three legged triangle course, then make eight bombing runs, two from each point of the compass.

This procedure was standard throughout the RAF both with Camera Obscura and the 8 ½lb bombs, and it was laid down by High Command that Auxiliary Air Crews should carry out the same air firing and bombing tests as those of regular RAF crews. Therefore, at all future Annual Camps, three days out of the fortnight would be spent by those concerned at the nearest RAF Bombing and Gunnery range and its station. In two instances in the future, the whole fortnight was spent at a "practice camp", Aldergrove in Northern Ireland and Warmwell in Dorset.

1928 saw the the first Birmingham Air Pageant. Some of the crack squadrons of the RAF performed at Castle Bromwich, latest types of aircraft were on show and Handley Page airliners of Imperial Airways Ltd were on hand for passenger flights. This show attracted thousands of spectators, both in and around the aerodrome and 605 squadron made its first public appearance both in the air and on the ground and as far as the crowds were concerned, nearly stole the show.

On the far side of the airfield, somewhere near to where the Castle Vale school now stands, an "Arab" fort was constructed and was named on the programme as "El Castra Brometta". About thirty airmen were dressed up as Arab rebels in highly coloured gear and carried rifles, blank cartridges and Very lights and ordered to make as much noise as possible and a flight of 605 aircraft would come in and "bomb" them. The "bombs" were arranged by an Officer and a Corporal from the RAF Armament School who detonated packets of blasting "Abelite" planted in the ground in and around the Fort as the aircraft passed over. Together with the rifle fire, Very lights and big bangs, the collapse of the Fort in flames was very realistic and thrilled the crowds, but the "Arabs" had to be mighty careful where they trod!

The next item on the show was one of the star turns from the Hendon Air Display, Crazy Flying by Squadron Leader Noakes. Meanwhile, the Corporal from the Armament School, apparently a stickler for discipline decided that the "Arabs" must "get fell in" and march back to HQ in the approved manner. Halfway across the aerodrome an Avro 504N appeared alongside the Arabs dragging one wing tip on the ground, as he often did, with the pilot shouting "Get off the ****** drome". So much for the appreciation of a very good act and a disciplinary Corporal!
Once the show was over, serious training was resumed and by August when the Squadron moved off to Manston for the second year's annual training, a complete squadron could be put in the air. Aircrews were now proficient enough to be allowed to drop the practice bombs and three days were spent at Eastchurch Armament school, for bombing at Leysdown and air to ground gunnery at targets in the sea.

In addition, the Squadron took part in the "1928 Air Defence of Great Britain" manoeuvres along with regular RAF units, a distinct honour for so young a squadron. Being a bomber unit, 605 squadron had to act as one of the "enemy" attacking targets in and around London. These included the Air Ministry and RAF stations at Kenley, Hornchurch etc. Bombing was simulated by the “Camera Obscura" method previously described, and which were placed on the various targets.

There was no NATO base in those days on which to land and launch attacks, so in order to obtain an element of surprise, the formation would take off from Manston in a southerly direction and circle round and round over the English Channel for what seemed an eternity and then raid London at the appointed time. Sometimes it was 4 am in the morning, other times at dusk, when the sunset shining through the haze on to the River Thames would give the navigator easy check points.

It was then a case of making a bombing run, signalling the point of release by photoflash, firing a Very light in order that the umpires would recognise who it was and then getting up onto the camera guns for a right royal "dog fight" over London. The resultant films were assessed later by the umpires, one of whom travelled with the raiders. In every instance, the Squadron reached the objective before the fighters came in and no doubt their efforts gave the powers that be a lot of hard thinking to do.

The fighters used at the time were Armstrong Siddley Siskins; these manoeuvres would be held every two years, and the Squadron was destined to take part again, with success, and it could be said that they were instrumental in the founding the air defences of Great Britain for 1940 onwards, with the Fighter Control Units and Observer Corps.

By attacking London, 605 squadron played an important part in defending the capital, a task which they were to do for real twelve years later from Croydon in the Battle of Britain. In addition to this exercise, 605 continued with the Esher Trophy tests which required three aircrews to compete in Camera Obscura, carry out forced landing tests, camera gun trials, target finding for W/T people, pin point photography on map references and navigational exercises etc.

All the fortnights work ran up massive flying times which became a feature of the Squadron in the years to come. This found much work for the maintenance flight both regular and auxiliary and they cheerfully accepted the long hours and hard work and never let the side down.

1929

One of many features of the 1929 season was the arrival as Adjutant of F/Lt S. D. MacDonald DFC and F/O G. W. Tuttle as his assistant, both of whom achieved very high rank in the RAF in the years to come, - Air Vice-Marshall and Air Chief Marshall plus a Knighthood respectively.

An innovation as far as training was concerned, was the opening of an AML. Bombing Teacher, this might be described as a cinema standing on its end, with the projector in the roof. The pilot and bomb aimer sat halfway down, with the picture moving to the pilot's controls and the compass on the bomb sight acting in accordance (as the Earth's magnetic field was neutralised). Many hours in the Winter evenings or during bad weather were spent here, and not only did it help pilot and bomb aimer obtain maximum understanding, but also they could change places in order to see each other's point of view and it was also a great asset to the newly appointed pilots.

Annual training in 1929 was again held at Manston in Kent, with the usual three days bombing and gunnery at Leysdown and all the Esher Trophy tests as last year.

1929 also saw the creation of the now famous 605 “Rumble Book” which was used to record all the misdemeanours, line shoots and all manner of crimes for which the guilty were duly fined. F/O Rowland was the unfortunate first victim being fined 1/- for a "Rumble".
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Examples are:
Rumble - "To use engine to make approach"
Mumble - "To make an excuse for a bad landing"
Boozle - "Under the influence"
Gamble - "Dicing with death"
Cobhamble - "Undesirable publicity - getting ones name in the press"
Tangle - "Getting mixed up with another aircraft"
Humble - "Landing as far as possible from the hangars so that it can only be assumed to have been bad.
Hangle - "Damaging an aircraft whilst moving out of hangar"

1930

1930 saw the opening of the new permanent living quarters, NAAFI and Drill Hall, where the first annual squadron dinner was held and which soon became a regular feature and send off for the seasons training each Spring.

In April the old DH 9As were replaced by Westland Wapitis, powered by a Bristol Jupiter engine and the old "wood and doped linen" days were giving way to metal. With their royal blue top canopy and bright aluminium sides, RAF colours plus the Squadrons badge, they were a magnificent sight in formation on a sunny day and the fitters and riggers competed with each other for the best looking aircraft.

In May, "C" Flight No 32 Squadron Kenley with Gloster Gamecocks, under F/Lt R. L. R. Atcherley was attached to Castle Bromwich for air combat and camera gun exercises. On the 4th of May F/Lt Jerome had a lucky escape when he crashed in his DH 9A. He was on approach to Castle Bromwich at mid-day when one of his wings caught a tree, such was the impact that the tree was uprooted and the aircraft hit the ground with some force. Some eye witnesses who had been watching the flying from the Chester Road were convinced that the pilot had been seriously injured, but despite all the odds he walked unscathed from the wreckage. F/Lt Jerome was duly fined 2/- for a "Crumble", 1/- for a "Scramble", 5/- for a "Write Off", 1/- for a "Cobhamble" and 2/- for a "Gamble" for an altogether expensive accident!

By now, formation flying had become a Squadron forte, so much so, that it was invited to take part in the 1930 Hendon Air Display along with other crack squadrons of the RAF which was indeed an achievement. 605 were the only auxiliary squadron to be invited to take part in the display and gave a perfect demonstration of formation flying and landing.

Once again, annual training took place at Manston which was now designated as the Squadron’s permanent war station. The usual three days were spent at Eastchurch for bombing and gunnery on the Leysdown ranges, the results of which were very good, mainly due to the long hours of training urged on by Squadron Leader J. A. C. Wright and F/Lt S. D. Macdonald.

The next Air Defence of Great Britain (ADGB) manoeuvres also took place during this fortnight. This time England was divided into two states Redland versus Blueland and the squadron had to make raids from Manston or Eastchurch up north to targets in the sea representing a Naval Base at Skipsea, near Hull and raiding other northerly aerodromes such as Bircham Newton. Real bombs were dropped onto the sea targets, but the Camera Obscura method was used on aerodromes. Once again, as in 1928, the fighter defences did not intercept the raiders, in fact at Bircham Newton, the fighters were caught on the ground, the C/O bringing the Squadron in on a low level attack; so low in fact that no one dared to fire the Very light recognition signal until well away for the fear of setting them on fire!

In July Castle Bromwich again became the focus of activity when a new passenger service was started. Imperial Airways opened a route from the aerodrome to Croydon using a 14 seater Handley Page airliner. During the early days of the new service as many as five hundred onlookers would descend on the airfield to witness the evening arrival of the aircraft. The summer weekend brought
many visitors to the airfield when up to a dozen aircraft would take to the skies to entertain the onlookers. Membership of the Midland Aero Club now numbered over five hundred as Birmingham became more and more air minded.

As before, the usual Esher Trophy contests were held all of which added up to a record 294 flying hours per month, more than any other squadron in the whole of Britain. The outcome of all this resulted in Squadron Leader J. A. C. Wright being awarded the Air Force Cross, mainly for the work in the aforementioned manoeuvres which as in 1928 must have resulted in more thought being given to the air defence of the country. In December the squadron appointed its first Honorary Air Commodore, The Right Honourable Viscount Bearstead MC.

1931

1931 started with a surfeit of drill and discipline (“which did nobody any harm” -Les Tye) as the Prince of Wales was to present the Esher Trophy in the new Drill Hall and a suitable Guard of Honour was required.

On the 7th of February P/O Lambert made a forced landing in his Westland Wapiti on some mud flats beside the River Severn at New Passage near Bristol. Despite his machine somersaulting on landing and finishing on its back Lambert was fortunately unhurt although his pocket did receive some considerable damage with a Rumble Book total fine of 17/-.

His Royal Highness came again in May, also the Duke of York, so F/Lt S. D. Macdonald had the unusual honour of flying two successive Kings in the same month. Soon afterwards, the Prince obtained his own light aeroplane and became quite familiar with the Officers’ Mess at Castle Bromwich. There was a scare one evening when he was reported overdue with darkness setting in. As it happened during an instruction evening, the armourers were able to gain the experience of firing several Signal Mortar bombs.

In June five Armstrong Siddeley Siskins of 56 Squadron were attached to Castle Bromwich for camera gun and air combat training. Annual training fortnight was again held at Manston, with the usual three days at Eastchurch for yearly bombing and firing tables laid down for all air crews in the RAF.

The Esher Trophy bombing competition was held after Manston, at Waddington, Lincolnshire and the ground crews were collected by Handley Page Hyderabads belonging to 501 squadron and for the second successive year and for the third time in five years the trophy was won by 605. “Winning the trophy has only been made possible by the fact that our Commanding Officer Squadron Leader Wright and his Adjutant F/Lt MacDonald have had the co-operation, not only of keen officers but also of efficient NCOs and all other ranks, every man being determined to give his best for the honour of the Squadron.” It was not now surprising that there was no difficulty in obtaining recruits to the Squadron, indeed the ranks could have been filled several times over.

One of the members of the Squadron during the 1930s was Billy Dennison and he had been Flight Commander of ‘C’ Flight, at a time when the unit consisted of three flights. He was very popular with the whole Squadron and there was much competition amongst the airman to become his bomb aimer or airgunner as he used to present his crews with a watch which was made by the firm Waltham Dennison Watch Co., of which he was a director.

At the outbreak of war Billy was sent on an Air Ministry course at the end of which each person had to address the others on any subject concerned with the course. Billy chose to suggest that there would be many advantages in flying in pairs instead of threes, a subject to which he had given a great deal of thought, the advantage being manouevrability. Before he left Fighter Command, Air Vice-Marshall Keith Park agreed with Billy’s theory and insisted that where possible squadrons should combat in pairs. Billy left 605 to become the personal pilot to the Inspector General, Air Chief Marshall Sir Edgar Ludlow Hewitt, and later became his PA and flew with him all over the world, often piloting the aircraft himself.
Billy survived the war but unfortunately died a few years ago, a great loss to the whole Association, he was without any doubt a superb pilot and a charming personality.

1932

The training season started in 1932 with the attachment of a flight of Bristol Bulldogs to Castle Bromwich for air combat manoeuvres etc. ADGB bi-annual manoeuvres were held in the Spring, therefore the Squadron were unable to take part, as they had done on previous years during annual training. However, the Auxiliaries did gain experience in setting out and maintaining emergency landing flares in the evenings.

On February 25th His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, after inspecting the Midland Section of the British Industries Fair at Castle Bromwich, honoured 605 by presenting the Esher Trophy for 1931 to S/Ldr Ldr Wright. The Prince was received by Air Marshal Sir Geoffrey Salmond, KCB KCMG DSO, Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief the Air Defences of Great Britain, Air Commodore W.F. Mackeece-Foster CBE DSO DFC, Colonel Sir Henry Fairfax-Lucy (Chairman of the Warwickshire Territorial Association), Viscount Bearstead, Alderman J.B. Burman (Lord Mayor of Birmingham) and Colonel F.G. Danielson. On his arrival His Royal Highness inspected the Guard of Honour composed of the men of the Squadron under the command of F/Lt George Perry.

The Aeroplane magazine wrote of the event "The men of the Squadron gave an excellent impression of smartness and keenness. The precision of their movements on parade would have been a credit to any branch of any Service, and as individuals they are a remarkably intelligent lot, and are obviously of the right class for their jobs."

In presenting the Trophy the Prince said "I am very pleased to present the trophy which the late Lord Esher gave in 1925 with the view to encouraging the training and development of Auxiliary Squadrons. It is, as you know, awarded on a strict system of marking a large number of subjects, which include attendances at annual camps. Only these squadrons can win it who have reached a high standard of efficiency. It is therefore a matter of particular pride to S/Ldr Wright and the officers of No 605 squadron to have achieved this distinction. They have won the trophy for the second year in succession and for the third time since its inauguration.

To come to the general standard and development of Auxiliary Squadrons throughout the country, there are two instances well worthy of mention. At the Hendon Air Display last year the Auxiliary Squadrons for the first time took part in wing formation. They put up a most finished exhibition, and brought home to the RAF and the general public the state of efficiency which is being reached.

Again, in the Air Exercises the Auxiliary Air Force has reached a high standard which renders all the more creditable the performance of No 605 squadron in winning the trophy. And in presenting it to their Squadron Leader I congratulate you all most sincerely."

In April considerable excitement, if that is the right term, was caused in the Stirchley district of Birmingham one evening by the landing of a 605 machine next to the Pershore Road. F/O Jim Abell and his Wireless Operator F.A. Jenkins were returning from a short flight in the direction of Worcester when visibility became so bad as they approached Birmingham that the first likely landing-place was sought. After a very skilful landing in which Jim avoided the houses and shops in the built up area along the road he then attempted to taxi his aircraft to the centre of the field in readiness for a return in the morning to Castle Bromwich.

The ground was much softer than Jim had imagined and the wheels became embedded and finally stuck, the result being the aircraft turned onto its nose, but despite this sticky situation no major damage was caused.

On a lighter note a letter was received from an unnamed 605 source:-

Ref :- Co-operation, Spirit of. 12th June 1932
My adjutant requests me to advise you of the following incident :-

Scene : RAF Hucknall Time : 1930 hours today.
Pilot Officer Barnaby was about to start a Wapiti aircraft, K1135 and told an airman to fetch some chocks.

The airman replied, "Sorry sir, but the canteen is closed but I will see what I can do!".

Once again, RAF Manston hosted annual training and all exercises followed the same routine.

1933

As the area around Castle Bromwich became more built up, it was not possible to drop 8 ½lb smoke bombs. Camera Obscura was satisfactory for initial training, but there was a real need for the actual bombs in order that corrections could be made after the first one or two efforts. Therefore, a new arrangement was started in 1933 and continued thereafter, under this the air crews and sufficient ground staff were attached to RAF Upper Heyford on three of four different weekends and four days over the Whitsun Holiday.

Upper Heyford was often used for the Esher Trophy bombing, with 601 (County of London) Squadron also competing at the same time. The ground crews travelled by road tender, with the air gunners returning by road in order that the former could enjoy a flight.

Weather permitting, the first aircraft was over the target at 6 am, with the last one often landing at dusk, so that the road party usually arrived back at Castle Bromwich at midnight and then had to get home to be at their civilian jobs in the morning. To compensate there was always a bottle of beer and a snack awaiting their return, with the compliments of "Old Mac" (Flt. Lt. S. D. Macdonald DFC).

The Squadron arrived at RAF Manston, Kent the first week in August for annual camp. Manston was home of No 2 Army Co-operation Squadron, equipped with AW Atlas's. and No 24 Communication Squadron who flew DH 84 Dragons. Kents very own 500 Squadron were also based here and were equipped with Vickers Virginia.

The first few days saw the Squadron split into two groups, one group of four aircraft left for RAF Hawkinge for live front Vickers gun firing on the sea dunes at Lydd off Dungeness. Another four aircraft went to RAF Eastchurch for live firing of the rear Lewis guns operated by the air gunners. One morning Dick Bloxham an armourer had been tasked with arming one of the Squadron’s Wapitis. The Lewis gun magazine was loaded with 50 rounds and another Lewis was mounted on the Scarff Mounting. Dick was told to ensure that all were in full working order which he did. The aircraft was then crewed by F/Lt Wood and ACI Jack Bohemia who then departed the airfield for live firing on the ranges at Leysdown.

Later that morning there was a great deal of activity at Manston when several RAF policemen arrived from Eastchurch. They awaited the return of a particular aircraft and finally when F/Lt Wood and Jack Bohemia landed they were placed under close arrest. It was some time before the startled onlookers discovered what had happened. Two sisters had been swimming in the vicinity of the sea targets when a beach ball they had been playing with was carried into the main target area. One of the girls swam over to recover the ball which by now was next to a target, when the Wapiti flew in at two hundred feet with the air gunner firing in bursts at the target. Sadly one of the bullets hit the girl killing her instantly. Understandably Wood and Bohemia were very shocked to hear of this terrible tragedy and were held until an enquiry could be held.

The Court of Enquiry was held at Manston and heard that the ground signals and red warning flags were all in the correct positions. The warning flags were for the public to see that the sea ranges were in use and the ground signals were used to indicate to the aircraft that they were clear to proceed. F/Lt Wood was clear to enter the area and select this particular target. The RAF personnel responsible for operating the ground signals were found to be absent when the tragedy happened. The crew failed to see the small boat the girls were using against the glare of the sun on the water, and were subsequently cleared of all blame.

Although obviously relieved at the findings of the court there were still deeply disturbed by what had happened. At the end of the camp the Squadron were inspected by the Secretary of State For Air Sir Philip Sassoon whilst the aircraft carried out a formation flypast.
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Gerry Edge recalls how his great friend W/Cdr Cdr Graham Austin came to join the Squadron "He joined the Squadron in 1933, or at least he attempted to, but was told there were no vacancies, but on hearing he had been in the Officer Training Corps at school, he was accepted and on passing a medical, became an Air Gunner. This allowed him to become aircrew and to fly which was another ambition realised.

There followed attendance two nights per week, most weekends and the annual fourteen day camps. During the winter months air gunners were expected to make way for other trades to have a chance to fly such as fitters, riggers and armourers. During the Annual Camp at RAF Rochford in 1937, he was air gunner to F/O Mark Avent, and during one particular landing there was a loud bang and to their horror and the amusement of the rest of the Squadron they landed with the airfield windsock draped over the starboard wing. With the formation of the Volunteer Reserve, he sought permission from the CO to transfer and be taught to fly. He gained his "A" licence and a commission and rejoined the Squadron in June 1938. It shows the spirit of the Squadron in that there were no problems in old friends saluting me or me returning the compliment."

1934

A new Assistant Adjutant, F/O G. L. "Minnie" Manton was posted to the Squadron in 1934 and the ADGB manoeuvres were again held in the Spring, so 605 were not available. Annual training was at Manston with the firing and bombing exercises being held at RAF Hawkinge in Kent, using targets amongst the sand dunes at Lydd.

Very welcome news was received in July when the squadron heard that S/Ldr J.A. Cecil Wright had been granted a further extension of his period of command and would now be with the Squadron until the next year's summer camp. Under his guidance, since the Squadron formed in 1926, the Esher Trophy had been won four times out of seven.

Keeping Cecil Wright was great news indeed but alas the squadron adjutant F/Lt MacDonald was to relinquish his post, being appointed to the RAF Staff College. The powers that be felt that to lose both senior officers was inadvisable so S/Ldr Wright should remain to enable F/Lt MacDonald's replacement to become familiar with the intricate work and administration of an Auxiliary unit. It was no coincidence that S/Ldr Wright was one of the Unionist candidates for the new Bromford Ward in the forthcoming elections, especially as Castle Bromwich aerodrome was situated in the ward.

During the summer camp at Manston the Squadron were visited by Major C.C. Turner of the Daily Telegraph who wrote of his visit :-

"How to get two days' work and recreation into one day may be a problem of a future high-pressure existence. Here it is done by two Auxiliary Air Force squadrons in their summer camp. And No 605 (County of Warwick) and No 608 (North Riding), whom I visited towards the end of my tour, revealed the secret.

Up in the morning at 5.30, and hard at it for seven hours, makes lunch-time (for a guest) "supper" for healthily weary pilots, who rightly and wisely "turn in" for a couple of hours. By that time flying for the day is over, but there is much to do besides. The second "day" begins with "five o'clock tea" and after another strenuous few hours comes bed-time again.

There are no early closing days in this purposeful existence, which, nevertheless, is so much liked that the last day in the fortnight comes all too soon. The Warwickshire and North Riding men are not only particularly efficient - has not the Birmingham squadron won the Esher Trophy three times? - they are an interesting contrast to the London squadrons which I visited the other day. They represent the great staple industries, iron and steel, wool, chemical, and manufacturing: and air squadron activities, which go on throughout the year, bringing together types of men who would otherwise remain in their respective grooves.

But not all of them are in the major industries. I met a solicitor and a printer. The Warwickshire squadron includes a Pilot Officer (R.G. Grant-Ferris), who is one of Birmingham's city councillors -
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needless to say, the youngest of them, and undoubtedly in the opinion of all air-minded folk the best of them, for certainly flying broadens the mind and polishes the wits. Both squadrons have been inspected by the Air Officer Commanding No 1 Air Defence Group (Air Cdre. J.E.A. Baldwin). At the inspection of an Auxiliary squadron, by the way, the Regular officers and aircraftmen attached are not paraded.

The machines are drawn up in line, each with its officers and crew, and the inspecting officer usually asks questions of the pilots and others. I may say, he was impressed on the occasion by the all-round efficiency displayed, and even by a certain initiative shown in air drill. These two squadrons No 605 commanded by S/Ldr J.A.C. Cecil Wright and No 608 commanded by S/Ldr I.W.H. Thomson are still on Wapiti day bombers. Training has proceeded on normal lines, but this year for the first time pilots have had a lot of practice with forward fixed machine-guns.

This, I supposed, might portend a coming change from day bombing to fighter status, as in the case of the three metropolitan squadrons. I am informed this is not the case, but simply in order to complete training for duties which would undoubtedly on occasion involve fighting attackers in the air. The outlying squadrons of the auxiliaries are in fact, to continue as day bombers but Nos 605 and 608 are before the year is out to receive Hawker Hart day bombers liberated when the London squadrons which now use them are equipped with Demon two-seater fighters.

As will be seen from much of the foregoing passages, the flying hours of the unit were exceptionally high and the lads in the Maintenance Hangar often had many major inspections to perform, involving many long hours and late nights. One particular night however, they did manage to get away and the Senior Engineering NCO, a regular by the name of Flt. Sgt. "Stan" Reeves who, incidentally was a Birmingham man, took some of his men on a spree round Margate. Returning home a little merry in the early hours, having missed the last bus they came across a Daily Mirror poster which read "Sleep is just a waste of time". They removed this from its wire frame and hung it up in their hangar as a form of good natured sarcasm. It was later framed and hung in the Officers' Mess at Castle Bromwich.

Les Tye has heard many variants of the above episode, but vouches that this is the correct one. The above incident was described by Air Historic Branch of the Air Ministry as the "interesting origin" of the squadron's motto NUNQUAM DORMIO or "I never sleep". This motto was later adopted and incorporated in the official squadron badge. The squadron motto eventually proved singularly apt, for many times during the future war, work had to go on day and night and later still during 1942/5 605 became a night intruder squadron.

On November 11th another forced landing was made when P/O Cooper brought down his machine at Dunton Crossing, Wishaw. The aircraft ended upside down after first landing safely, but getting bogged down in the soft ground. P/O Cooper walked clear and after righting the aircraft it was considered not to be seriously damaged. His head over heels landing did cost him the princely sum of £ 1.0.6 which was a bit harsh considering 5/- of the Rumble fine was for a write-off. Perhaps those deciding on the Rumble Book fines tended to err on the cautious side.

1934 was the year that saw the Squadron win the Esher Trophy again and the Right Honourable Viscount Bearstead MC was adopted as Honorary Air Commodore.

1935

1935 heralded the arrival of Flt. Lt. Richard E. Bain DFC, later Group Captain, as the new Adjutant. In April, Hawker Hart's powered by a Rolls Royce Kestrel engine, arrived and gradually replaced the old faithful Wapitis. Early in May, Castle Bromwich hosted No 1 Squadron from Tangmere when a flight of fighters arrived for air combat exercises.

This year, Empire Day was introduced at RAF stations all over Great Britain with all proceeds going to RAF charities. This was a show similar to the Birmingham Air Pageant, which it replaced. Ten thousand people were attracted to Castle Bromwich with all kinds of RAF innovations on view. Short wave radio had now been perfected and the crowds were thrilled to hear fighters talking to the
ground through loud speakers. It also meant that the new Hawker Harts no longer had to wind out three hundred feet of aerial!

A very heavy flying programme was required in this year, as the Squadron was to take part in a "spectacular" at the annual Hendon Air Display, held on June 29th, in conjunction with the Royal Field Artillery (AA). The Squadron was to take off in formation and attack Hendon while the artillery blazed away with blank charges, while the aircrew threw out "archie lights" to simulate bursting shells. Two aircraft had to be shot down enveloped in smoke, which was previously fitted to the bomb racks and disappear behind Mill Hill and land at RAF North Weald. A full dress rehearsal was always held on Friday for all the London school children.

One of the crash experts was Flt. Lt. David Lloyd and his effort was so realistic that many thought it was for real and he was told not to be quite so rash on "The Day". However, he did it just the same and the airgunner who operated the smoke gear never forgot "the expression on some of the cricketer's faces when we flattened out about one hundred feet above their match!"

The formation landing on rehearsal day was perfect, no regular squadron could have bettered it. After the main show, the whole Squadron had to land at North Weald, ready to move on to Mildenhall for the Royal Air Force Review in honour of the King George V Jubilee celebrations.

In July, time was found to run a couple of weekend trips for the new bombing routines at Upper Heyford, before departing yet again to Manston on August 6th for annual training until the 14th. For the second time the air firing and bombing tables were at Hawkinge for targets at Lydd. (Little did they know then that they would return here in one of the squadron's darkest hours, the Dunkirk evacuation.)

In August, an "AMO." (Air Ministry Order) announced that Squadron Leader J. A. C. Wright AFC and Sgt. L. C. Tye had each been awarded the King George V Jubilee Medal.

F/O Grant-Ferris received his very own page in the Rumble Book, having received much publicity as a result of his political activities. In particular one article stating "Cheltenham's Independent Conservative MP answered the call nobly when introduced to the House of Commons. A newspaper report on a verbal challenger to Grant went : "Mr Lipson set up a record. When he took the Oath his voice was even louder than that of Mr. Grant-Ferris, Sir Ian Fraser's successor on North St. Pancras, whose tones were like a box on the ears". And again "Last summer, Mr Grant-Ferris, who in point of years, is virtually the "baby" of the Birmingham City Council, but quite a veteran as a Continental traveller, made his first aerial trip over the English Channel - that is as a pilot - proceeded through France, and subsequently dropped flowers over the large assembly attending the International Pilgrimage of Peace at Lourdes". It is fair to say that he became the Rumble Book's greatest benefactor in those days.

In November came the remarkable news that 605 had been awarded the Esher Trophy for the third successive year, and for the fifth time in six years, and the sixth time since the formation of the Squadron. This now established beyond doubt or question that the County of Warwick Squadron was the most efficient Auxiliary squadron in the Royal Air Force.

This sixth success was particularly gratifying to S/Ldr Cecil Wright who had been in charge since October 1926 and was handing command over to Lord Willoughby de Broke the next year on February 29th. The record of the Squadron reflected the greatest credit on the Commanding Officer and his Adjutant F/Lt Dickie Bain, and on every officer and man. It was less that 12 months after the commencement of recruiting and after being associated with one of the most successful air pageants on record that in August 1927 the Squadron surprised the RAF in general and the auxiliary squadrons in particular by securing the trophy, defeating units which had been in existence for several years. Not only had the trophy been won six times but also the Squadron had been runners-up on two occasions. Few people, therefore, would be disposed to contest the unit's claim to being the leading "Territorial" air squadron in the country.

The trophy was handed to S/Ldr Cecil Wright at a ceremony at Birmingham Town Hall by Air Marshal Sir John M. Steel, Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief Air Defence of Great Britain, also present
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was the Lord Mayor of Birmingham, leading citizens and members of the Warwickshire Territorial Association.

1936

February 29th, traditionally a day when a lady can ask for the hand in marriage of a given gentleman, Lord Willoughby de Broke M/C entered into a similar relationship when he assumed command of 605 Squadron. A former Cavalry Officer he served throughout the First World War, where he won the Military Cross. He was commissioned in the Auxiliary Air Force after an intensive course at the RAF Central Flying School. His posting to the Squadron was received with much interest as he had established a sound reputation as a flying man. Such was his passion for flying that he owned his own private aerodrome at his Warwickshire home, and his wedding in 1934 was a real romance of the air. His bride, Rachel Wrey, was a keen air woman, and they first met during an aerial tour over Germany by a party of British amateurs. It was during the tour that their engagement was announced.

Lord Willoughby was educated at Eton and Sandhurst. From 1919 to 1922 he was ADC to the Governor of Bombay. After his captaincy in the 17/21st Lancers he became adjutant of the Warwickshire Yeomanry from 1925 to 1929. A great horseman he had been joint master of the Warwickshire Hunt from 1929. Without doubt his greatest aviation achievement to date was his winning of the SBAC Trophy in 1935.

At the beginning of February a new machine appeared at Castle Bromwich when the first Hawker Hart arrived causing much excitement amongst the men. The first phase of instruction was carried out by Johnny Rotherham, Dickie Bain and David Lloyd.

In April the Squadron were beaten 3-2 at football by Sale United with Parmiter and Eucklow netting for 605, and Dickie Bain had an inspired game at the heart of the defence. The following month a flight of Gloster Gamecocks from No 19 Squadron were attached to Castle Bromwich for air affiliation exercises.

In June the usual trips were made to Upper Heyford for bombing, with annual training being held at Aldergrove in Northern Ireland. Aldergrove was not a normal RAF Station but a Practice Camp where all RAF squadrons visited for a fortnight of nothing but bombing and gunnery. A rigorous programme was carried out from dawn to dusk to ensure that established Auxiliary squadrons carried out the same work as regular squadrons. The ranges were situated at Lough Neagh and air to air firing was carried out at drogues towed by the local pilots, both for front, rear and combined guns.

The Annual summer camp at Aldergrove from 2nd to the 16th of August was unique in that this was the first time that an Auxiliary Air Force squadron had carried out a training programme outside the mainland. The ground crews and their baggage travelled by train to Heysham, and from there aboard the Duke of York steamer to Belfast, finally arriving at Aldergrove by train. The aircraft were delayed until the Bank Holiday Monday owing to unfavourable weather conditions. When they finally got away they had to fly in the face of a fierce gale, the flight taking nearly three hours! The camp proved to be most useful especially as it gave the men the opportunity to practise fire the Vickers machine guns with live ammunition.

Prior to departure for camp, a young pilot joined the ranks, a man who would later take command and lead the Squadron with distinction. Gerald Richmond Edge takes up the story:

"On joining 605 pilots had to gain a private pilots "A" licence before they could be accepted into the Squadron. I had qualified for this in De Havilland Tiger Moths at the Midland Flying Club also based at Castle Bromwich. The Squadron's trainers were Avro 504s and I was told to forget what I had learned and the Squadron would teach me to fly. Some little time later we were re-equipped with Avro Tutors, these were new machines which had not been in service. After being checked, I was given a conversion test and then sent off on a cross-country to Upper Heyford. There was quite a strong wind and visibility was poor. I worked out my courses there and back which the instructor checked
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and was admonished to fly carefully on my compass course and not to lose myself trying to map read.

I set the course carefully on the compass and took off flying over Castle Bromwich at 2000 feet to make sure I was on course to start. The distance was only about 50 miles and I did not anticipate any trouble. I realised I was well to the east of my track and assumed the wind was much stronger than expected. I flew west and found a point on a railway where my track coincided and, setting a new course on the compass about 10 degrees west of my previous course, set off again.

Nothing seemed to go right and I finally gave up on the compass and followed the track I had ruled on my map. I duly arrived at Upper Heyford and saw the windsock was horizontal, I lined up and went into land. My aircraft floated on and on but I was so relieved to have found the airfield that I did not notice.

The number of men attending the camp was 89 percent of the total Squadron strength, an increase of 7 percent on 1935, made possible by the helpful co-operation of employers. The annual camp was not all work and no play, and opportunities were afforded for visiting Belfast and Lord Willoughby gave the whole Squadron a day’s outing including a visit to the Giant’s Causeway and the seaside resort of Portrush.

An inspection was carried out by Air Commodore J.C. Quinnell, DFC, Air Officer Commanding No 6 Auxiliary Group, and a notable visitor was Lord Londonderry, a former Air Minister. His visit was made the occasion of a great night in the Officers’ Mess. when the Squadron’s officers acted as hosts to a number of local guests.

The same F/Sgt Stan Reeve, referred to in the "I never sleep" episode, won a goat in a raffle at Crumlin. The Irishman who ran the raffle never expected anyone to take the goat home, but F/Sgt Reeve did and it became the squadron mascot. Thanks to a certain Corporal Snead, it marched at the head of the troops from Belfast Station to the docks as if it had been doing it always.

Maynard Mitchell remembers well the camp in Ireland and the aforementioned goat (although the origins of the creature are contradicted) and recalls "Charlie Thompson, who joined the Squadron the same day as I, was always up to all sorts of pranks and bought a goat at a local fair and put it into F/Lt Powell's bed with his arms and legs secured so when he came to bed full of beer he found this strange bed fellow. Powell was a wonderful character who took it very well. He was a regular Equipment Officer, full of fun and was brilliant on the piano with a fantastic repertoire of bawdy songs." There is another rumour that the goat ended up in Lord Willoughby's bed one night back home!

Just as with the arrival of the Squadron at Aldergrove their departure was also marred by bad weather when a thick sea fog and low cloud reduced visibility to an unacceptable level. The aircraft finally made an evening landing at Castle Bromwich after being forced back over the Solway Firth. Three days after arriving back from Aldergrove a Hawker Hind was loaned to the Squadron for a few days for familiarisation flights.

In October, Flt. Lt. R. E. "Dickie" Bain DFC was promoted to Squadron Leader and left to command No 43 Squadron at Tangmere which, as it happened, was to be 605's War Station when the Squadron was converted to a fighter squadron in 1939. On December 12th, King George VI ascended the throne after the abdication of King Edward VIII after reigning for 325 days, both of whom had several connections with 605 Squadron.

It must be said that despite the great success of Birmingham’s very own squadron not everyone at the time was appreciative of their aerial antics and to quote one local inhabitant who was published:

"Sir,
I should be grateful for an inch or so of your valuable space to thank the unknown aviators who so generously provided a free display of aeronautics both this morning (Sunday) and this afternoon. No One, I am sure, will begrudge them the hour they took off for lunch. I do not know, but perhaps it is..."
their intention to provide us with a little show on Sundays as compensation for the silence of the local aero-engine manufacturers who broadcast their delightful roar all over the city for about twelve hours each of the remaining days of the week.

Very little time must elapse now before we of this city become "air-minded" to the extent of sleeping, rising, working, eating and playing to the accompaniment of several hundred horse-power in action above and below. As for those old-fashioned fanatics who believe that there is a time and a place for all things - well, the sooner they die or go deaf the better for all concerned.

Sincerely yours,
H.A.C., Coventry.

One Saturday evening the Squadron was visited by the Warwickshire Yeomanry in strength for a party in the Officers' Mess, which during the course of the evening was roughed up fairly extensively by the aforementioned mentioned guests. Lord Willoughby was certainly not going to take this act of vandalism lying down and so hatched a plan of revenge. A few Sundays later twelve of the Squadron’s Hinds took to the air armed with rolls of paper and each carrying an enamel chamber pot, a far cry from the usual ordnance. After a perfect formation take-off the aircraft levelled off at 2500 feet and headed south for the parade ground of the Warwickshire Yeomanry.

Timing was vital in this attack and the CO had certainly done his homework, because as the aircraft neared the parade ground the aircrews could see the cavalry lined up ready for inspection. Just a little distance from the "drop zone" could be seen two Army Staff Cars together with motor bike outriders approaching the parade ground. This was the signal for Lord Willoughby to indicate to his steeds to make their attack and drop their paper and pots. The combination of the low flying Hinds and the rolls of paper strewn everywhere startled some of the awaiting horses, so much so that several fled in all directions. Satisfied with the raid the CO led the aircraft back to Castle Bromwich, and despite a number of terse phone calls later that day, eventually the raid was taken in good part.

1937

In February Grant-Ferris MP was fined £1, but not as one might think by the Squadron’s Rumble Committee, but by Stratford-on-Avon Police Court for exceeding the speed limit, although a charge of driving carelessly was dismissed. Perhaps it is in his favour that they didn’t police the skies. Grant was said to be touching speeds of 60 mph when the police car following him attempted to overtake. As the cars drew level there was an impact, fortunately the only damage being to both cars' bumpers.

Mr Roderick Baker, a director of the old established firm of solicitors, Philip Baker & Sons, suggested that the police had made an error of judgement and as an official car was involved, they had to justify themselves in some way! Roddy was formerly a very popular officer with the Squadron and a pilot of great promise. Unfortunately in July 1930 he was taking a flight in a DH Moth belonging to the Midland Aero Club, and piloted by a friend who was a director of a local leading brewery company, when the aircraft crashed killing the pilot. Roddy was pulled clear, barely alive and was not expected to survive due to the nature of his injuries. However, life saving surgery was performed by the local hospital and miraculously he came through, although his flying days were over. He later became the Mayor of Stratford-on-Avon, a town which was destined to play a key role when it came to officially recognising the achievements of the men and women who served the Squadron.

Sir Lindsay Everard DL MP, a leading light aircraft sponsor, became Honorary Air Commodore in 1937 and occasional visits to his private airstrip were made.

This year marked the Coronation of King George VI who, as the Duke of York in 1931 had flown in 605 aircraft. A party of 605 Squadron airmen were sent to London for the Coronation procession, with the rest of the Squadron taking part in a Military Parade and March Past round the centre of Birmingham with the aircraft forming a fly past at the same time. Empire Air Day took place at Castle
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Bromwich with the usual air displays and conducted tours round the Squadron workshops etc. This time the attendance was the largest number ever recorded for an airshow. Annual training was held at Rochford in Essex from 1st to the 15th of August, and although it was known as Southend Airport at this time, it was little more than a private aero club. Thus the Squadron had to make their own camp, live under canvas and work from improvised workshops, which was good training for conditions that were eventually to prevail on certain occasions in the years ahead.

During the camp at Rochford a very amusing, if somewhat embarrassing incident occurred involving Mark Avent and Graham Austin. The intrepid duo had been out for a local flight in their Hind when Mark decided on arrival at the airfield he would try and make his landing as short as possible. Making his approach Mark brought the aircraft just over the fence as Graham, his air gunner, who was watching out of the port side saw that the wind sock was very close indeed to the starboard side of the aircraft.

Graham was sure that Mark could see the wind sock, but as they crossed the fence the Hind lurched and took with it the sock and pole which were found sticking out of the starboard planes. Fortunately the only other damage was a severe dent to the pride of the pilot. The camp gave the squadron the opportunity of utilising the firing ranges at RAF Martlesham Heath, something that delighted the Adjutant John Glenn, who was very keen on gunnery practise. The social life was also worthy of mention as the officers were frequenting entertained by the famous Rank Miller family, who had a magnificent house nearby.

The ADGB manoeuvres in this year were held in August so that the Auxiliary Squadrons could take part as in 1928, 1932. Unusually long hours were worked, added to which was some very foul weather, in all, quite a rough time. As a relief, the CO and Officers arranged a boat trip for the troops from Southend Pier to Margate, in order to visit the old "happy hunting ground" of the previous years at RAF Manston.

In September a cricket match was held at the Tally Ho ground between "D" Division Birmingham Police and the RAF. The RAF team with several 605 players scored 212 for seven wickets (F/O Morris 42, F/Lt Proc Hewins not out 51 and top score went to F/O Mark Avent with a magnificent 75 not out). The Police team were bowled out for 163 with Constables Boddington and Heron top scoring with 53 and 62 respectively.

At the end of the year F/O Denis G. "Splinters" Smallwood arrived as Assistant Adjutant, a man who would distinguish himself as a superb fighter pilot and leader, and after a very successful career in the RAF retired with the rank of Air Chief Marshal and the following awards, KCB, OBE, DSO and DFC. (It gives great satisfaction that he is a member of the 605 Squadron Association.

1937 saw the phasing out of the old Avro 504Ns, being replaced with Avro Tutors as the initial training aircraft.

1938

In January Air Ministry arranged for a Gloster Gauntlet to be made available to the Squadron so that it could be used for evaluation flights. Later that month the Squadron took part in affiliation work with No 111 (Fighter) Squadron at Castle Bromwich.

Through the early Winter months, Leading Aircraftsmen Bench started to form the Squadron Brass Band, from men with little or no musical experience. They persevered so hard that a really good band came into being. In the Spring, the training of six airmen pilots was commenced on the newly arrived Avro Tutors.

In June a letter arrived addressed to the Commanding Officer from the inhabitants at Marston Hall, Marston Green asking rather nicely if the pilot of aircraft number K5536 would kindly refrain from flying low over the house especially at around 3pm at weekends. The couple who lived at the house had a young daughter who would take a nap at this time, thus the aircraft would wake her from her slumber. The aircraft must have been fairly low for them to read the serial number on the side.
A quick search of the air flying log found that the culprit was Maynard "Mitch" Mitchell. It was decided that a personal visit was in order so that an apology could be made. Scotty joined Mitch and returned several hours later stating what an excellent reception they had received and both smelling strongly of whisky! Public relations at its very best.

A number of pilots attended the School of Air Navigation at RAF Manston during April and May, making good use of the resident Avro Ansons and learning all the techniques involved with the tricky task of navigation.

Empire Air Day on May 28th was again held at Castle Bromwich, and this time another "Fort" was built as in the First Birmingham Air Pageant. This time there were no "Arabs"; as the airmen under training who provided them before, were now Corporals, Sergeants and skilled technicians employed in their respective jobs. However, the Fort was defended by the local 4th Anti Aircraft brigade, firing blank charges with the aircrews simulating shell bursts. The Fort finally burst into flames as the aircraft attacked and the spectators were duly entertained.

During the summer the Squadron were handed the opportunity to once again prove what an efficient unit they were when a signal was sent from Air Ministry in London to several squadrons tasking them with photographing from the air a new store complex at Hartlebury near Kidderminster. The signal had arrived on a Monday afternoon at 1600 hrs, and once it had been decoded and circulated another hour had lapsed, which meant that most units had already closed, but as 605 operated on Monday evenings they had a chance of completing the task before the others.

Corporal Frank White, an excellent auxiliary NCO, was in charge of the photographic section and he hurriedly assembled the necessary cameras and film and had them installed in one of the Squadron's Hinds in no time at all, as the race was on to beat the oncoming sunset. Gerry Edge was the first qualified pilot on the scene and was subsequently given the role of making the flight.

Without delay Gerry departed Castle Bromwich and headed for the new stores at Hartlebury. Arriving at 7000 feet an overlay of vertical photographs was taken and then a further two runs were made at descending altitudes. Corporal White then suggested that a running oblique overlay be tried at 250 feet. Fortunately the weather was calm as Gerry had decided to fly like a crab over the site to prevent the wing from being in the picture, whilst simultaneously maintaining a steady height and course. Two runs later and Cpl White was satisfied with the evenings work, which was just as well as the light was fading rapidly.

Once back on the ground at base Cpl White hurried off to the photographic section with the resultant film which he developed and printed without delay. The vertical photographs were very good and the oblique running overlay results were excellent, so much so that he had made them into strips and with so many clear photographs there was very little distortion where they joined.

The strips were rolled up and taken to the GPO in Birmingham in time to catch the midnight post to London, and by nine o’clock the next morning they were on the desk at Air Ministry, a remarkable achievement considering the order for the pictures had been sent out from this office only a few hours earlier. The weather was to play a big part in this tale, as fog enveloped the site at Hartlebury on Tuesday morning and persisted for the rest of the week.

Lord Willoughby de Broke received notice from Air Ministry that no other unit was able to obtain any photographs of the new stores therefore 605 were the only unit capable of completing the task, and the icing on the cake was the message that they were absolutely delighted with the pictures and indeed the speed in which they were received and their heartiest congratulations were to be conveyed to all concerned.

A farewell dinner was held in July on the occasion of the retirement of the Squadron’s Honorary Air Commodore Viscount Bearstead. The Viscount had served the squadron magnificently and presented them with a superb silver Bear and Ragged Staff.

Annual training was held at Warmwell in Dorset during the first two weeks of August, which was another Practise Camp as at Aldergrove, where air firing and bombing was carried out at the end of Chesil Bank. Also alternative flights were sent to Andover for bombing at Weston Zoyland. This camp
was to be the last with the Hawker Hinds, and one of the most exciting exercises on the range was to fire at the ground targets, make a quick circuit during which they had to change the lock of the machine gun and fire again. As they needed both hands for this the aircraft used to wobble alarmingly and there was always a chance of getting ones fingers mixed up in the lock. As at the camp at Rochford the previous year, the squadron were under canvas and one hot night Maynard Mitchell was woken by Charlie Thompson who had been fishing and had placed a very cold eel on his chest which gave him quite a start.

A feature of this camp was a large amount of photo reconnaissance work, along with 504 Squadron flying Hawker Demons, which could be described as a "two seater Hart". Peter Freeman-Pannett recalls being one of the crew who won the award for the best aircraft at the camp, which was even more commendable as it was Peter's first summer camp. He also remembers "An Avro 504 had engine failure and landed outside the airfield and we had to man handle it back to base on the country roads. In fact in July a decision was made to convert all the Auxiliary Air Force Bomber squadrons to Fighter squadrons.

A new recruit and perhaps it's youngest arrived at the squadron in September when a son was born to Lord and Lady Willoughby de Broke. Rachel broke the news to the squadron with a telegram to John Glen that went:

"MILLIONS OF THANKS TO YOU ALL FOR BEAUTIFUL FLOWERS. AM RELIEVED THAT NEW HONORARY MEMBER WAS BORN WITH JOYSTICK.

= RACHEL WILLOUGHBY DE BROKE = "

At his christening the new Willoughby's godfather was none other than King Leopold of the Belgians. In November Mark Avent was fined £3 and his driving license endorsed for speeding. The Deputy Stipendiary Mr Max Holdsworth said that he had been fined 30s previously for a similar offence, and apparently that wasn't enough. At the end of the year the squadron's self styled "Mr Publicity" Grant-Ferris was once again in the news, this time entering the famous Monte Carlo Rally with co-drivers Lord Walera and the well known racing motorist (one of them had to be) Bill Everitt. They entered one of the new Humber "Super Snipe" saloons.
The Bear Sharpens Its Claws

On January 1st 1939, the Squadron was converted to a fighter Squadron and transferred to No 11 Group under the command of Air Vice-Marshall L. Gossage and would be equipped with the Gloster Gladiators, which had Bristol Radial engines and two Browning guns, synchronised to fire through the propeller CC Gear (Constantinesco Gear - an hydraulic interrupter mechanism.). The Gladiator was the last of a long line of aircraft to use the CC Gear and the last bi-plane to be used in combat by the RAF.

This move was a blow to all the air gunners, navigators, wireless operators and photographers as all the years of training were wasted and also there was no prospect of the ground crew getting any joy rides on test flights. Consequently, the interest of certain personnel flagged and some did not re-engage for their four yearly service and for the first time since the Squadron was formed, there was no waiting list to join up. The first aircraft arrived on the Squadron in April, and the pilots started their conversion on to them, as well as learning the art of being a fighter pilot.

In April a meeting was held of Meriden Rural Council to address local complaints of low flying and general misbehaviour in the air. One local claimed that some pilots when "stunting" appeared to be trying to see how near they could go to the chimney pots without knocking them off. Colonel C.J.H. Wheatley suggested that a log be kept of the aircraft numbers of the culprits so that they could establish who was at fault (thus proving the innocence of 605 pilots !). He felt that if 605 were responsible that the Commanding Officer would then put a stop to the practice.

Empire Air Day on May 20th presented the Squadron with the ideal platform on which they could dazzle the Birmingham public with their new Gladiators and amaze them with their new skills as fighter pilots. As much time as possible was spent from April to July at Tangmere, which was being used as a base from where many hours were spent practising the art of fighter interception.

Every year the Squadron's honorary Air Commodore Lindsay Everard gave a luncheon to the officers of the Squadron at his private airfield at Ratcliffe. They were very lavish affairs and were very popular with all those fortunate enough to be invited. This year Lord Willoughby had flown with his wife Rachel from his own small airfield to Castle Bromwich in his privately owned Fairchild aircraft. Lord Willoughby was to lead the officers in their Gladiators and the regular Adjutant F/Lt Bertram was to follow with Rachel in the Fairchild. After another great party everyone took off back to base, all that was except F/Lt Bertram and Lady Willoughby de Broke who failed to turn up at Castle Bromwich.

The aircraft should have covered the 40 mile journey in about twenty-five minutes, but an hour had lapsed and still no sign of them. Understandably Lord Willoughby was becoming rather anxious, wondering just what had become of them. A while later a telephone call came through from an airfield not far from the coast of Norfolk where they had landed searching for fuel, which was not surprising considering the distance they had travelled. Bertram had left Ratcliffe and flown on a reciprocal course and rather unbelievably had not realised his mistake until they were flying over the sea!

After refuelling they set course for home and arrived back safely just as it was getting dark. Bertram must have dreaded his treatment on arrival and quite naturally the CO was rather vexed, but at the same time relieved to see his beloved Rachel safe and sound. F/Lt Bertram was to pay for his error for quite some time with the ribbing he received from his fellow officers.

1939 was a landmark year for aviation in Birmingham with the completion of the much awaited airport at nearby Elmdon. 605 had been selected to provide a guard of honour at the official opening by Princess Marina, the wife of the Duke of Kent on July 8th. All went well and the men and officers arrived with an hour to spare before the royal visitor arrived. Some claimed the movement of the men between the two airfields was probably the shortest ferry flight in history as the distance was only a matter of seven or eight miles. The aircraft were lined up and each rigger and fitter was stood with the pilots in front on their machines ready for the inspection when suddenly the heavens opened and a terrific downpour enveloped the airport.
We Never Slept - The Story of 605 Squadron

After a delay the opening party arrived and by now the men had been standing in the rain for an hour and were obviously soaked to the skin. The ground had become very sodden and it was decided that the Princess's car could get stuck in the mud, which simply would not do, so the inspection did not take place and the men and machines were told to return to Castle Bromwich. Altogether a very disappointing and uncomfortable afternoon.

The possibility of war was now imminent and as Castle Bromwich happened to be a mobilisation centre for all those Class E Reservists living in the Midlands, evening attendance was spent in assembling anti gas respirators and other necessities for kiting out the thousands expected.

For the first time ever, annual training was held from August 6th to the 20th, at RAF Tangmere in Sussex, which had now become the Squadron's War Station in lieu of Manston. All the troops were under canvas, as the normal living quarters belonged to Nos 1 and 43 Squadrons. Group Captain R. E. "Dickie" Bain was now station C/O after commanding No 43 Squadron on his departure from Castle Bromwich in 1936. Daily routine work had to be carried out in anti gas cloaks and morning parade was held wearing respirators as well, which was truly a weird sight when seen for the first time! Strange to relate, but these were never worn again, even throughout the war, except perhaps for the odd practise.

On departure for home, the Squadron marched past the station C/O who called out "You'll be back". Not many took this remark seriously, but sure enough the Squadron was mobilised and became a unit of the RAF within thirteen days.

Prior to the annual training fortnight, it had been announced by 11 Group that the Squadron was to get Hawker Hurricanes as they became available, plus two dual control Fairey Battles for adapting pilots to monoplane flying. It was quite a challenge for part time pilots, changing from years of bombers to fighters and then to monoplanes in less than no time. A Fairey Battle had been in residence at Castle Bromwich for ten days in July, during which time most of the pilots had managed to get an hour in the cockpit, before being let loose on the Hurricanes.

Alex McGowen, a regular airman in the Squadron recalls returning to Castle Bromwich with the rear party. "As we entered camp a colleague on guard duty at the main gate said "Sorry, everyone is confined to camp". This concerned me somewhat because the procedure was that regulars were not allowed leave each year until after the summer camp but one had to accept the circumstances as they were and there could be no exceptions. When news of the confinement got out I'd never seen so many wives and girlfriends looking in. This was about the 31st of August or the 1st of September, and we all remember what happened on Sunday morning, the 3rd of September". Unfortunately when the lads moved back south Alex remained at Castle Bromwich. Years later he proudly served the Squadron Association as Welfare Officer before eventually moving to Sussex himself and becoming a local councillor.

On August 24th, the Squadron was mobilised at Castle Bromwich along with hundreds of men from the Class E Reserve. The station was so full of men that many had to sleep on the old "A" Flight Hangar floor. A new hangar which had been completed a short while before was capable of housing the whole Squadron and its offices. Meanwhile the stores personnel were kept busy kiting out all the new arrivals.

Cpl Dick McCoy recalls "I was called up on 24th August and I can never forget as it was the only time that I was late for duty. I got home at 10pm and found my Embodiment papers on the front door mat, with the instructions to report that day at 10am. I slept that night in the Officers’ Mess potato bin as all the beds were full. The Squadron gradually began to look as though it was going to become settled at Castle Bromwich but the day dawned for them to go to the battle station. Off they went and I was left behind with the rear party which finally got away but I was still left there. Those left were very upset although it was only a bus ride home we would sooner have been with the Squadron."

Soon afterwards five thousand reservists descended on the airfield together with all their spare uniforms which arrived in boxes and were subsequently issued to those concerned. Guard duty at the airfield was undertaken by the LDV who were all "old sweats" from the Great War and were
known to be more than a little trigger happy. They got on well with the remaining 605 airmen who affectionately referred to them as "Look, Duck and Vanish"! It wasn't until the new year that the lads at Castle Bromwich finally received word that they were to rejoin their colleagues at Tangmere.

There was a significant shortage of tools and spares, indeed the Squadron had only two cleaning rods to service over 100 aircraft guns, and the problem was made worse by the fact that they were equipped with a mixed bag of Gladiators, Hurricanes and two Fairey Battles, all of which made the journey south to Tangmere. Faced with such a problem Flt Sgt Les Tye rang up the firm he had just deserted, Fisher and Ludlow, and cajoled two dozen 'silver steel' rods from them and they duly arrived by train the next day. Les then set about the task of making his own rods which would allow all the guns under his command to be cleaned with the minimal amount of fuss and delay for which he was well known.

Les had a second snag - with the reflector gun sights. The Squadron had been issued with a sight made by a well known Austrian lens firm, and the pilots found them superior to the English pattern. They fitted the Gladiators fine, but wouldn't fit the Hurricane, being just 3/16 inch out both vertically and horizontally. Les worked through the night following this discovery and made a pair of small extension pieces, one with a toggle set on it, and posted them to his family firm, who were well known to have a mass of stock press tools, capable of knocking out thousands in the time it takes to make one.

The extension pieces were made of brass so that they did not interfere with the aircraft's compass, and the firm soon had the new parts back with the Squadron who duly fitted them and the Austrian lenses to the Hurricanes, which no doubt delighted the pilots.

Another 605 innovation was the making of a sign with the bold red words "Warning Guns Loaded" printed on it which had to be removed in order to open the cockpit hood. The good reason for such a sign was to prevent the accidental firing of the guns on an aircraft that was ready for action and was kept in the hangar whilst work was carried out on it. Airman Soloman took the credit for the smart signs, having worked for a printing firm and given a precious 48 hour pass with the proviso that he returned with the aforementioned signs, a task which he carried out perfectly.

The need for the notices had become apparent when during a particular cold spell at Tangmere freezing rain had iced up the aircraft which then took a long time to remove before they were fit to fly; permission was therefore given for the aircraft to be placed in the hangars. One Hurricane had been parked with it's nose facing the hangar door and was in the process of having it's service. The armourer carrying out the task had just removed the cleaning rod and placed it on the floor when suddenly all eight guns burst into life, blasting a large hole in the door and almost frightening the life out of the poor airman. It turned out that the airman in charge of the aircraft had entered the cockpit, and had forgotten to make sure the guns were unloaded before testing the pneumatic firing system. A very worried Duty Officer soon arrived, having jumped from his bath on hearing the guns go off, and stopped only to throw on his grey coat and flying boots.

Many years later during the BBC programme "Down Your Way", which was being filmed in nearby Chichester, the incident was recalled (in a rather brusque manner), but credit where credit is due, to hit the weathercock on top of the cathedral from over three miles is commendable!

Brand new Hurricanes soon came rolling in, minus their eight guns and gunsights and with the underside painted a bright sky blue. Soon after receiving the new aircraft they were taken in the air to practise dog fighting, often attaining fairly high speeds during which the leading edge of the gun bay panels pulled out of their fastening and bent upwards. This proved to be somewhat dangerous especially when landing as the panels then acted as spoilers which made the aircraft rather unstable. Hawkers were made aware of the problem and after some work on the troublesome panels they believed they had it solved. Two pilots were selected to test the new panels, and so Flying Officers Edge and Danielson took off to give them a good test.

The two Hurricanes soon returned, and yes the two gun panels on both aircraft were sticking up. The men from Hawkers examined the wings and panels and then asked the two aviators "At what speed did they fail ?" to which they replied "We don't really know as the airspeed indicators came
against the stop at 440 mph." They were horrified by this statement and said that the maximum speed allowable was 380 mph. Later the wings were changed to an all metal design and no further trouble was encountered with the gun panels.

The work load was very heavy as it was a case of two squadrons in one. Pilots had to train to fly Hurricanes as quickly as possible whilst the Gladiators had to be available for operations if called for. All the Gladiators’ CC synchronised guns had to be tested by firing on the range and all the Hurricanes had to be fitted with guns and sights which then had to be harmonised at flying level. Also rapid re-arming and re-fuelling practises were carried out and coming from Birmingham, a few exclusive ideas were invented, which the Group Armament Officer duly noted and circulated round Fighter Command, crediting the Squadron with the same.

Armourers from the other squadrons saw the men from 605 using a special tool for cocking the guns on the Hurricane, which was normally done by reaching into the wing and pulling the cocking lever by hand. Flt Sgt Les Tye had designed this tool and had them made in the Squadron’s workshops. Not only did it help protect the armourers hands but its greatest asset was that it could be used without having to take off the whole gun panel. Indeed as the rear section of the gun panel was hinged the tool (or wanking iron as it was affectionately known by the men!) enabled the aircraft to be rearmed far quicker than the conventional method. As a result of the ingenuity of Les Tye the tool was made in large numbers and adopted for general use.

Gerry Edge recalls some of the events leading up to the declaration of war:

"During the summer of 1939 we were equipped with Gloster Gladiators which were armed with four guns, but shortly before our annual camp, we started to be re-equipped with Hawker Hurricanes which had eight guns. Although both were single seater fighters we had had no practice of firing the guns in either aircraft. The Hurricanes carried 3,400 rounds of ammunition which, at the high rate of fire, could be expended in fifteen seconds and we were most anxious to know how the recoil would effect the aircraft. It seemed ridiculous to us to expect us to engage enemy raids without any practice and not even having fired the guns, and so after moving to Tangmere and being embodied, we urgently requested Group to give us permission. At last on 2nd September we were told we could fire 100 rounds from one aircraft. So, on the morning of the 3rd I was sent off and told to fire at a suitable target out to sea.

I took off at 1045 hours and flew south over the sea and found a box floating about a mile out and making a shallow dive I fired at it. The box disintegrated and there were splashes all around it but the burst only lasted about a second which did not give much time to check the effect of firing the guns on the aircraft. On landing the CO told me the balloon had gone up. We were at war."

The upheaval caused by the "bomber to fighter" change over left some sections either under manned or with "fresh faces". The latter now had to be sent away to training establishments. Fortunately, as Castle Bromwich was a Mobilisation Centre, some vacancies were immediately filled by very able men and being "locals", acquired the 605 esprit de corps very soon.

A sad casualty occurred on transfer from Castle Bromwich to Tangmere when LAC Leonard Francis Abbott lost his life in a road accident. It was the 27th of August and LAC Abbott had been detailed to drive a Chance Light down to Tangmere, which was being towed by a Fordson Tractor unit. Some thirty miles from Castle Bromwich in Kenilworth the whole unit fell down an embankment and Abbott was sadly killed. Opinion afterwards thought that whilst negotiating a turn the big tractor tires caught under the tow-bar thus causing the fatal accident. LAC Abbott was only twenty-two years of age and was buried with full military honours with F/Sgt Tommy Cornish taking charge of the firing party at his funeral.

After war was declared on 3rd September, a further loss occurred on the 19th when F/O Warren was killed in a collision between two Gladiators, the other pilot F/O Norman Forbes baled out unhurt over Chichester.

Many changes in personnel took place around this time with a number of notable departures. One of the most popular to leave the squadron was F/Lt J.P. "Proc" Huins the Squadron doctor. Proc had joined 605 way back in its early days with a fine aviation pedigree. He saw action in France with 45
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Fighter Squadron flying Sopwith Camels later receiving the Croix de Guerre. After the war he completed his medical studies and entered general practise in Northfield, Birmingham. Proc and his brother John played rugby for the famous Moseley RFC for five years. After leaving 605 Proc was posted to the Bomber Command Research team where he undertook the pioneering work into testing oxygen equipment for the bomber crews. Indeed such was his desire to experience at first hand what the crews had to endure that he completed thirty bomber raids over Germany. His dedication was justly rewarded when he later received the Air Force Cross and Bar and an OBE for his work as well as being Mentioned in Dispatches.

This period "the phoney war” did allow valuable time for the pilots of the Squadron to become fully operational on the newly delivered Hurricanes. There was much excitement on October 20th when the Squadron were scrambled for the very first time but no enemy aircraft were sighted. The Squadron's surplus Gladiators were sent to the recently formed No. 615 (County of Surrey) Auxiliary Squadron. The only sign of activity was when flights of Armstrong Whitworth bombers landed at Tangmere after leaflet dropping over Germany. Squadron ground crews assisted these flights by re-fuelling them in readiness for another run. A new face appeared towards the end of September when Sgt Basil Whall joined the ranks, although his stay was short lived and in the middle of October together with Sgt H. Kitchener and Sgt W. Parker joined 263 Squadron at RAF Filton. Sadly Basil was killed during the Battle of Britain with another Auxiliary unit, 602 Squadron, whilst Kitchener survived the war and the fate of Parker is unknown.

In December 605 parted company with only their second Commanding Officer since it formed in 1926. S/Ldr Lord Willoughby de Broke was promoted to Wing Commander and posted to No. 11 Group Headquarters as Senior Air Controller. Despite ending his career with a front-line fighter squadron, Lord Willoughby was destined to play a major role in the forthcoming air battles over England. His replacement was S/Ldr George Vivian Perry who had been with the Squadron for some time. No. 1 Squadron were posted from Tangmere to what would soon become the front line in France and 605 were joined by a fellow auxiliary unit No. 601 (County of London) Squadron equipped with Bristol Blenheims. As a farewell the Squadron put up an immaculate formation on the 22nd as a tribute to a man who had led the proud airmen of Birmingham with distinction.

Maynard Mitchell recalls of the first war-time Christmas

"Christmas 1939 at Tangmere was a really lovely time in spite of the fact that not one of us understood the phoney war that existed then. Life in the Mess was very gay and the Station Commander Grp Cpt Bertram was marvellous in his care and hospitality. I had arranged for a kiln of Mitchells and Butlers Old Ale (65 degrees gravity) to be sent down and this went down very rapidly. Nevertheless vigilance was maintained. We had manoeuvres with the French Air Force who came over to bomb Tangmere, but their aircraft were very old and unimpressive. Christmas 1939 was quite severe and there was a lot of snow on the Downs behind us and some of us went skiing."

The Squadron were fortunate to have such a talented musician as Cpl "Brummie" Naven who was a most excellent bugler, and whose services were called upon on Christmas Eve starting off at the airman’s party. The men plied him with drink after drink until, upon hearing his repertoire, the Sergeant’s Mess called on him to perform for them, rewarding him in the same way. Brummie continued to play, but was beginning to weaken from the ravages of the alcohol inside him. Not to be outdone, the officers were being entertained in the CO’s cottage and he was helped over to their party, during which his legs gave way and he fell full onto his back on the floor. Being the professional he clearly was, he continued to play and gave an excellent rendering of the aptly titled "Sussex by the Sea" whilst still lying flat on his back.

1940

February 11th, and the Squadron were once again on the move, from Tangmere to RAF Leuchars in Fife. Their new home, was some ten miles south of Dundee and on the doorstep of the famous Royal and Ancient Golf Club at St. Andrews. The stay at Leuchars was short lived but proved quite a time
for the opportunists. Cargoes from ships sunk by the Germans were being washed up on the shore and often contained rare luxuries. Five and six course lunches were the norm after a foray to the beech.

On arrival Cpl Dick McCoy and Aircraftsman Wood were detailed to report to the Corporal in charge of fire duties at the airfield who promptly put them on duty on the fire crash wagon. Dick remembers “Woody was told in about five minutes how to turn on what seemed like about a hundred taps which mixed the foam which sprayed out of the hoses and supposedly put out the fire. I was instructed to be the brave one who dressed up in an asbestos suit and if there was an accident then I was to hack my way into the crashed aircraft and save as many as I could. Our total instruction lasted only about ten minutes and we were told to report for duty at 9am the next day.

At 9.05am an Imperial Airways four engined passenger plane was about to take-off when one of the outer engines caught fire. Our new driver, like us just started, set off to render assistance with Woody trying hard to remember which taps to turn on and me struggling to get the top half of the asbestos suit on whilst the driver tried to take the shortest route to the fire over anything that happened to be in the way. Half a mile from the aircraft there was a sudden spurt over the front of the crash wagon and we then had foam for ever more; when we arrived at the plane I looked up at the engine which was about twelve feet above me and asked how the hell I could get up to it. The pilot waved us away and took off and the fire went out before he was airborne. We had left a lovely white line right across the airfield and I don’t think the CO was a happy person.” It says something for the prowess of the average 605 fire fighter that a pilot of an aircraft with a burning engine is prepared to take his chances in the air rather than with them!

The golfers in the Squadron barely had time to unwrap their golf clubs before a further move north to Wick, Caithness followed, on the 27th. Almost within a fortnight the Squadron had moved from one of the most southerly airfields to one of the most northerly a journey of nearly seven hundred miles. There were many familiar faces at Wick as 43 Squadron had recently arrived from Tangmere. The two squadrons were tasked with the job of protecting the Royal Navy at Scapa Flow in the Orkneys. The Luftwaffe were concentrating their efforts on destroying as many naval vessels as possible in an attempt to reduce the effectiveness of the Royal Navy. These attacks made Wick one of the busiest sectors of Fighter Command and it would not be long before 605 would encounter the enemy face to face.

To say Wick was a bleak place would be an understatement, it’s characteristics were exacerbated by the very cold weather and the stone wall boundary which gave the place an almost medieval feel. Some of the men decided that these stones could be utilized elsewhere and ‘A’ Flight duly built a square shelter in the dispersal area which they roofed with some galvanized sheeting, also scrounged. The shelter was made more homely with the smell of freshly laid eggs and bacon which had been kindly donated from some of the local farms and cooked on a primus stoves together with tea and coffee, which were greatly appreciated by the frozen airmen. Much gratitude is owed to the farmers of Wick for their hospitality, many of whom did not charge the Squadron for their produce, which all went to help make the stay in one of Scotland’s outpost as comfortable as possible in such inclement conditions. The men hatched a scheme that allowed them to charge a very minimal fee for the goods from their home made cafe, the profits of which would be handed out to deserving cases to enable them to travel home, as travel warrants were very limited and most had used up their quota on the journey from Tangmere. Just before the Squadron left Hawkinge, some time later, Gerry Edge was presented with a letter from HQ asking for audited accounts and the name of the officer who had sanctioned the rest room as the whole thing was against RAF regulations. Gerry replied that the officer who might know all about it, no name supplied, was unfortunately missing believed killed. No more was heard.

The savage cold winter had taken its toll on the airfield at Wick with most areas a complete quagmire. The grass runways were often impossible to negotiate and this brought new hazards to the Hurricanes of 605 and 43. Large snow falls had to be cleared by hand and once removed would reveal the broken ground underneath. Obviously something had to be done. Flt Lt Robert Grant-
Ferris decided some action must be taken and quickly, so he journeyed to London by train to advise the First Lord of the Admiralty that the operational capabilities of the squadrons were threatened. This was rather a bold move but he felt the First Lord should be told that his Navy could not be offered full air protection. Grant-Ferris had one great advantage, he knew the First Lord personally, as he too was a Member of Parliament, he was of course Winston Churchill!

Sometime in February a damaged Heinkel 111 bomber made a forced landing on the aerodrome, and apparently the crew believed they had touched down on the sea as the crew door opened and out came a dingy followed by the confused crew. They soon realized where they were and that for them the war was over. Straight after the landing a number of vehicles raced to the scene only to be greeted by the pilot who said in perfect English "Two dead - take them out". The bomber had been shadowed in, flanked by two Hurricanes who on seeing the enemy aircraft belly land, raced in wanting to be the first to claim it. They were so anxious that they both braked too hard and ended up on their noses either side of the Heinkel. One wonders what the Luftwaffe crew must have thought of this sight, perhaps wondering if the British pilots knew how to land their aeroplanes.

An almost complete enemy bomber on the Squadron's own airfield was too much of a temptation and it quickly became the focus of the inquisitive and the souvenir hunters amongst the men. A number of the Squadron's armourers and fitters, Soapy Hudson, Des Timmins and Hedley Bonnes, to name but a few decided that the Hun's machine guns required a full evaluation and proceeded with their test firing. The first thing that puzzled them was that there were several gun barrels lined up inside the fuselage next to each gun position but only one mount from which to fire them. One of the guns was removed and the men went to the top of the local cliffs to put it through it's paces. Hedley volunteered to try first and set about firing at some innocent seagulls. After a few bursts and no hits he cried out and dropped the gun at his feet. The gun had overheated and the surrounding material which was similar to bakelite had begun to melt. The penny dropped - obviously the Germans had a problem with the overheating of their machine guns and so when one began to get too hot it was unhinged and thrown out of the gun hatch and another from the stockpile took its place.

Word soon got out that the Heinkel was systematically being stripped, like a group of termites attacking a carcass, and a general order went out confining all men to their billets for 24 hours and ordering all lockers and rooms were to be searched and that all items removed from the bomber were to be returned immediately. The order was carried out to the letter, well almost, until one airman found one of the aircraft's bombs placed rather strategically on top of one of the lavatory cisterns.

Soon all was well again, although one of the machine guns was retained for further evaluation, as presumably no one would know how many there were to start with, so how could they miss it? The ever resourceful ground crews made a stand for the gun and set it up on the dispersal point to guard against a low level attack, "why not shoot the buggers down with their own guns"! One high ranking visitor to Wick, Air Marshal Sir Edgar Ludlow-Hewitt, on seeing the Squadron's new ground defences remarked "I think you are on a very good wicket there!" and simply carried on with his inspection, making no further comment about what he had seen.

(Later in September, when the Squadron moved from Drem to Croydon the gun, still intact and as yet untested was mounted on to an old Bentley chassis and LAC Gregory was tasked with driving south to London. During the journey south, which took him through his home town of Birmingham he decided to pop in and visit the folks. The reaction of the locals on seeing a Bentley armed with a German machine gun coming down the road can be envisaged! The story of this gun did not stop there, and as the barrel was of a slender cylindrical design the men had the idea that it could be fitted into the tail of a Hurricane and be utilized as a form of rear defence. One gets the impression that they were now getting desperate to fire this gun, as it had been in their possession for so long. It was felt that it was not really capable of shooting down an enemy aircraft but they hoped that a great panic would set in amongst the Luftwaffe pilots, especially the 109 ones, if they knew that the RAF's Hurricanes were now fitted with rear mounted machine guns.
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Luckily there was a high percentage of German tracer ammunition loaded in the gun, so there would be no problem with them seeing it firing. Permission to try the scheme out was given, although by whom was never recorded, and after a great deal of discussion with the metal riggers a plan was formulated and LAC Hadley, a plumber by trade and therefore fully qualified to fit German guns to British aircraft, was given the job. The gun was fitted and a series of pulleys were connected to its firing device and a toggle was put in the cockpit and, almost inevitably, Bunny Currant was given the enviable task of trying it out! The gun was fired in combat, not surprisingly without success, but it was hoped that it raised some alarm amongst the Hun, and more it went to prove what a resourceful bunch the pilots had to fall back on.

Many patrols were flown during the next month without incident, until the 28th March when finally 605 saw action. The incident started with a report that several enemy bombers had been sighted over the Shetland Islands about noon. Two or possibly three were reported seen and they were thought to be part of an enemy squadron of convoy raiders. The fighters of both 43 and 605 squadrons were scrambled and air-raid warnings sounded but no bombs were dropped. The warning lasted for twenty-two minutes and all the local school children were kept safe in shelters, passing the time by singing.

A Heinkel 111 was flying at about 10000 feet, above the cloud layer, when the pilot spotted three Hurricanes of 43 Squadron. He dived steeply through the clouds as the fighters closed in firing short bursts of gun fire. As the bomber came through the clouds at 7000 feet he was intercepted by F/O Pat Leeson and P/O Ken Schadtler-Law of 605 who both attacked the stricken machine. After two short bursts the aircraft was well ablaze and began to lose height rapidly. At about 1000 feet the Hurricanes of 43 Squadron again attacked resulting in the raider crashing into the sea off the coast of Caithness. One eye-witness recalled "I was watching through a window of my house when I saw a white streak coming through the sky. It burst into flames, and black smoke arose, and then it disappeared from view". The Heinkel was in fact the 48th victim for the Royal Air Force, but more importantly it was the first albeit a half for the fighters of 605. The victory was shared by 43 and 605 and the score board could at last be started. Later in the day a telegram arrived from Lord Willoughby de Broke which said "Thousand congratulations STOP. Up 605 STOP. Hope this is the first of many STOP". It was obvious from this that Lord Willoughby was deeply proud and highly delighted with the squadron's first success. Although Lord Willoughby was no longer a member of the Squadron, he kept in constant touch with events and always visited them when he could, and indeed his visits were viewed with great anticipation and delight. Another telegram to F/O Leeson asked "CONGRATULATIONS DID IT DIE OF FRIGHT" and another from Cyril "HEARTIEST CONGRATULATIONS FAST WORK! 1 UP ON GRANT AND HIS ROME EXPRESS".

A few days later two new pilots joined the Squadron having been recently commissioned from 151 Squadron at North Weald. They were Pilot Officers Christopher "Bunny" Currant and Ian "Jock" Muirhead, and had made the long journey to Wick by road in Ian's German Opel, stopping off at his Cumbrian home on the way. Ian had joined the RAF in 1929 and soon showed his natural talent at pistol shooting representing the RAF at Bisley and winning several trophies at swimming. Ian first met Bunny when he joined 151 in 1937 and they became the very best of friends. Early April brought news that Hitler's march through Europe was progressing rapidly with the invasion of Denmark. On the 10th of the month the Squadron encountered more Luftwaffe aircraft with Jock Muirhead damaging an unidentified reconnaissance aircraft and Pat Leeson made 605 history on the same day by destroying a Heinkel 111. Two parachutes were seen leaving the stricken bomber but no trace of the German airmen was found.

The next four weeks saw the Squadron being scrambled on many occasions but with little or no contact with the enemy. The first week of May had been like the last three but events were about to change dramatically. A raid of Dornier 17 bombers on the 9th gave a few other 605 pilots the opportunity of facing the enemy. One Dornier was shared between Ralph Hope, Gerry Edge and Graham Austin off Dunnet Head.
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Gerry Edge recalls: “We had a deal of experience in Convoy patrols which could be tiring in bad weather and in night flying but I only had one contact at night just south of Scapa Flow, getting in a 5 second burst, but he dived away very steeply into cloud and I lost contact. A Heinkel 111 landed on Wick aerodrome with bad damage from the starboard quarter, which was the direction from which I had attacked.

On 9th of May we were ordered to search for a bandit said to be approaching Scapa Flow from the south-east. I took off with F/O Austin and F/O Hope as my numbers two and three respectively and patrolled on a line about five miles east of Wick to five miles east of Catcall Isle. There was a deal of cloud about above 3000 ft over the coast. After approximately 1.20 hours, F/O Hope called on the radio and said he was low in fuel and I gave him a course to Wick. After a further twenty minutes going north, F/O Austin was also detached. I flew on but when crossing Portland Firth, I saw a speck in the distance to the south-west. I turned towards it, but soon saw it was flying due east towards some cloud over Wick. I turned South and intercepted it over our dispersal point on Wick aerodrome. The rear gunner was firing at me and the tracer seemed to be coming straight at me but swerved away as it came close. I held fire until I was very close, too close as my screen was immediately covered with oil from his starboard engine. As I broke away, F/O Austin came in on my starboard wing and fired at it as it vanished into cloud. I knew the cloud ended about ten miles east of Wick so I set off East to the far side of the cloud. About a minute after arriving, a Dornier 17 came out of the bottom of the cloud half a mile west of me and almost immediately a parachute opened behind it. The starboard engine and wing of the Dornier was on fire and it crashed into the sea. The parachute followed and landed a few hundred yards to the west of it. I guessed a course for Wick which I held carefully so that I could find the wreck again and fortunately arrived over Wick harbour.

I landed at base, refuelled and I was airborne again at 1355 hrs. I obtained permission to return to the wreckage and lead the Rescue Launch to the airman who had baled out. I found the wreckage and circled round over the parachute, unfortunately the boat crew saw the wreckage first and stopped and collected pieces and I tried for about twenty minutes to lead them to the man in the water who was still alive. I asked base on the radio to ask the Navy to tell the skipper to go the 250 yards to where I was circling, but the Navy refused, saying the message had to go in code. I was becoming vexed and pretending to be even more so I said to tell the Navy they would have to be quick or I would sink their ***** boat. The message was then sent in clear and the boat moved across to the airman. He was alive when pulled aboard, but died as they reached the harbour. On returning to base, I pressed for this procedure to be overhauled as it was hard enough losing this life unnecessarily but as we spent most of our time flying over the sea it was not very reassuring to consider being in that icy water while the Navy sent their messages in code.

A few days later we were delighted to receive a consignment of a new type of propeller, namely a wooden three bladed constant speed one made by Rotol. This enabled the pilot to control the revs per minute of the airscrew as he wished, from the cockpit, and which would be unaffected by the speed, height or throttle position. This gave a great improvement in performance and range and our aircraft were all fitted when we moved down to Hawkinge.”

The following day the grave news that Hitler had invaded Holland and Belgium and Luxembourg had been overrun was broadcast and the opinion was that France would soon be his army's next conquest. Britain had sent the British Expeditionary Force to France and Belgium to halt Hitler's Army and together with the French and Belgian Armies protect the last remaining free countries of Europe. The Luftwaffe bombed the headquarters of Lord Gort at Arras on the 10th and this action seemed to act as a signal for the German front to flame into action. Churchill had promised the French he would send a number of Royal Air Force Squadrons to bolster the meagre French Air Force against the forthcoming onslaught from Goering's Luftwaffe. Although 605 were not one of the squadrons sent to France they were to lose a number of pilots as replacements. Flying Officer Brian Hillcoat, Pilot Officers Carter and Hawken and Sgt Lewis left the Squadron on the 10th May. It was a particular blow to lose Brian Hillcoat as he had been with 605 since the days at Castle Bromwich but he would now no doubt prove to be a valuable asset to No 1 Squadron.
By this time France had become the focus of Hitler’s forces with his army threatening to overrun the country. The RAF squadrons in France were recording a considerable amount of success against the Luftwaffe despite appalling conditions and overwhelming numbers of enemy aircraft. The situation in France considerably worsened, and the French and British Governments agreed that the British Expeditionary Force would be absorbed into the French defence scheme. This decision was perhaps to prove a little hasty as signs of indecision between the French High Command and their Government soon became apparent as the German armies thundered onward towards the Allied lines on the Belgian/French border.

The Belgian Army soon became overrun and the French 7th Army which lay in front of the BEF was being dismembered. The French 1st and 9th Armies to the right of the BEF had disintegrated and so on the 16th of May the order to withdraw came. Several gaps appeared in the withdrawing lines and the Germans drove an axe of several Panzer divisions through to Amiens and then Abbeville. The allied armies were fully split in two when the Germans reached the sea with the majority of the BEF to the left of this line. It was then decided that the only course of action left for the BEF was a full withdrawal from the theatre of war to the port of Dunkirk. Dunkirk had excellent facilities as a major sea port and thus would hopefully provide the BEF with an evacuation route back to England.

The Germans began to tighten their grip and the BEF became even more cut off and by the 21st of May they had reached the outskirts of Boulogne and were only 9 miles from the port of Calais. The British force were under constant bombardment from enemy ground fire as well as an increasing number of raids by enemy aircraft. Air Ministry saw that there was an insufficient number of fighter squadrons in the South of England to counter these attacks and therefore more units were required. The order to move south to Hawkinge in Kent reached 605 on the 21st of May. Within a few hours fifteen Hurricanes departed Wick, with the ground crews following a short while later by train. The Hurricanes arrived at Hawkinge at 9 o'clock that evening. Although some of the Squadron’s pilots had encountered action with the Luftwaffe, nothing could have prepared them for the forthcoming battles. Several new factors had now to be considered such as anti-aircraft fire and more importantly the Luftwaffe’s premier fighter the Messerschmidt Me 109. The Germans had been raiding the North of England devoid of fighter cover due to the distance to be flown from Norway and therefore the Squadron had seen nothing of the Me 109. That first night at Hawkinge the pilots were told that they should be at readiness at 4.30 the next morning and should get as much sleep as they possibly could.

Shortly after 4.30 the call came for the Squadron to scramble and patrol the Calais and Boulogne areas. No enemy aircraft were sighted on this patrol, but later that day another scramble a group of Heinkel 111s were sighted. Jock Muirhead destroyed one and Mike Cooper-Slipper shared another. Whilst patrolling the Arras area of France the Squadron were jumped by a group of Me 109s. This was not to prove a very successful first encounter with Germany’s front line fighter, with Bunny Currant having to make a forced landing in France and suffering a broken nose. Graham Austin’s Hurricane was also hit and set on fire with one enemy bullet hitting him in the left leg, but in spite of this wound he was able to bail out near Vermelles. Both Bunny and Graham were fortunate in that they both came down near to the Allied lines and Graham was evacuated from Dunkirk to Newhaven aboard a hospital ship. After a short spell at a civil hospital at Barnet he was transferred to Torquay. Bunny also returned by ship and made it back to Hawkinge that same day.

Mike Cooper-Slipper recalls the events of the 22nd and 23rd of May: “May 22. We were called at about 0400 hours and took off at first light. We were very keen to have a go at the Germans, having spent a rather uncomfortable winter chasing them around the North of Scotland, in terrible weather from a somewhat primitive airfield, with very little success. The Squadron carried out a patrol in to France behind Calais and Boulogne without seeing any other aircraft, it was the last time that we had that pleasure during our stay at Hawkinge! We took off again at about 1100 hours and the two flights got separated over France. ‘A’ Flight was jumped by 109s and lost a couple of pilots. ‘B’ Flight got itself split into two sections in cloud. My Section, in which I was number three, came across two He 111s at about 5000 feet, about 500 feet below us. The section leader saw them but did not attack, No 2 and myself took one each and set them on fire. I was excited and went alongside,
whereupon the front gunner gave me a burst, including two through the canopy. I then dropped back and shot a couple of crew members getting out of the top of the canopy. The 111 went down in a spin and crashed in a field. On getting back to Hawkinge, I got an enormous strip torn off for leaving the Section Leader. I was not ever credited with destroying that 111.

May 23. A very early morning patrol, this time escorting a Blenheim squadron on a bombing mission. They were to bomb a group of German tanks which had spent the night in a small wooded area, probably waiting for fuel. There was intense light flak, and the bomber boys, at about 2500 feet, lost some of the Blenheims and the ones that got home were all hit by something. We were at about 3500 feet and as soon as the remaining Blenheims were clear, we continued our patrol to the Arras area, where we had a brush with some Me 110s. After landing at Hawkinge, we went to see Basil Embry’s Blenheim and someone took a photograph of two people standing in a hole in his starboard wing where it had been hit by flak. Patrolled towards Ostend, tangled with some 109s, I think we lost one pilot. We were very short of fuel and just made it back to base. I remember that the sands of Dogger Bank looked like land to begin with, then realised there was quite a way to go - my thumb was sore from pressing the fuel gauge. Patrolled the Dunkirk area, I was jumped by 109s and badly shot up, my armour plate, installed the night before, saved my life. My compass and several other instruments were shot up, I was down at sea level, in fairly bad visibility so I had quite a job deciding which way was home. I was quite wrong at first and wandered in over Calais where lots of black flak bursts soon set me on the right course. The German flak was black and ours was white. When I landed there were 55 bullet holes in my aircraft, including the centre of an armour piercing bullet in my map case.

Many sorties and scrambles were flown during the next couple of days and on the 25th the squadron came face to face for the first time with the Luftwaffe’s screaming dive bomber, the Junkers 87. Gerry Edge was the first to spot the Ju 87s who were indiscriminately attacking lines of evacuating civilians. Gerry recalls that this was one of the few occasions during the war that simply made his blood boil and he gave thought to the men in the enemy machine rather than the aircraft itself. The Squadron broke formation and attacked the enemy aircraft with Gerry destroying one and Mike Cooper-Sliper another. Jock Muirhead went one better and dispatched two as well as claiming one of two Hs 126 spotter planes he had sighted at 10000 feet.

The next day the Squadron engaged several Ju 88s just after lunch, claiming three destroyed including Mike Cooper-Sliper who fired at one aircraft and then proceeded to chase it down into the sea. Jock Muirhead reported attacking a Me 110, silencing the rear gunner and then fired at it again as it dived towards Ostend and was later credited to him after it was seen to crash by some troops, but was cut short when he noticed fumes in his own cockpit, probably caused by a combination of a glycol leak and steam. Despite efforts to find a suitable airfield to land his damaged aircraft he had little choice but to bale out, the situation made worse by the fact that he couldn’t see his instrument panel and therefore had no idea at what height he was flying. He later estimated his height to be about 1000 feet when he parted company with it, and then came under fire from a group of Belgian troops. Picked up by an RAMC officer he was sent to Ostend by car and sent to the harbour as a ship would be sailing to England that evening.

Jock wrote the following two letters on his return, the first to his mother and the other to the Irvine Parachute Company:

"It's been quite an exciting week. Apparently the AM notified you I was missing on Monday which was the day I was shot down on. Well, I've been bombed and torpedoeed since then on my way back and missing again. The start of the whole business was when I got a bullet in my radiator over France and all the cooling stuff came into the cockpit so that I was forced to leave by parachute. I got out at about 1000 ft and was immediately fixed on by all the Belgians in the neighbourhood. I eventually fell in a tree with everyone in the neighbourhood still shooting for all their worth. Eventually I got in a ditch and stayed there until I was in a position to argue. Anyway, some of our own troops came along after a while and I scrounged a lift to Ostend where I fell in with the Belgium Air Force who told me a ship was leaving that night. Well I tootled along to the ship and found it wasn't going until
the next night and so we had to wait. I ran into one or two of my pals who had been shot down and we spent the next two days dodging bombs which were showered on us incessantly wherever we went. We got quite used to them. Well we eventually sailed sometime in the evening expecting further bombing attacks, but instead of that a German aeroplane followed us about 20 or 30 miles and gave our position to either a submarine or coast motorboat which promptly torpedoed us after firing 4 torpedoes at us. I was standing on the wheelhouse dead over the strike and got blown into the air somewhere, anyhow, I came down eventually and swam around for a while until I found a big chunk of wood which I boarded with three other blokes and stayed put for the next four hours or so.

We were eventually picked up by some destroyers (incidentally, the chap who picked us up was sunk the next day) who took us home where we were put on a hospital train and eventually sent here. I've been pretty thoroughly bruised between the legs, my legs were completely out of action, but they are recovering a little strength now and I've got a burst eardrum but apart from a lot of skin missing where I contacted the ship, I think I'm OK. Jimmy from Dumfries rang up last night. I don't know how he knew. Tell him I'll be seeing him soon. Give all my love to Dell, tell her I can't write anymore as I'm terribly tired. 3 days without sleep and eats. I was the only Air Force Officer to survive I believe so I expect I have a spot of cross-examination to go through. I expect Dad will laugh like blazes to think that I should get away with being shot down then be torpoded!

Love Ian

PS All I possess, one pair of flannels and a pullover the Navy gave me."

and the second:

“Royal Air Force,
Officer Hospital,
Torquay
8.7.40
Dear Sir

I am writing this short account which may interest you of the extremely efficient operation of one of your seat type parachutes. I was patrolling Dunkirk on the 26th May in a Hurricane when I encountered a ME 110, which I subsequently engaged and disposed of. Shortly after this operation which took place at 5000ft out to sea, I found a bullet had lodged in the cockpit and cut a glycol pipe. As fumes and boiling glycol were entering the cockpit rapidly, I made for the shore and endeavoured to land at ....... then in Belgium hands. Unfortunately the cockpit had become untenable and I was unable to see the instruments. I then decided to jump and with that end in view, disconnected my oxygen and microphone leads. I left the aircraft at 1000 ft over.......... by rolling it onto its back at an airspeed of about 150 and pushing the stick forward as I became inverted. I was immediately thrown out of the machine and when 300 ft clear pulled the rip cord. The parachute opened so rapidly that I can only assume I had unconsciously eased the ring before pulling it as I never even got it clear of the pocket. I was then fired on violently by Belgian troops and civilians and was able to escape by partially collapsing the chute by climbing up one set of the rigging lines. I let go at about 200 ft and landed in a tree which I was unable to avoid as there was quite a strong wind. I subsequently was obliged to abandon the parachute as I had great difficulty in preventing the Belgians from shooting me in mistake for a German. I eventually got back to this country two days later after being torpoded. I am still in hospital but I am very grateful to you for the extremely efficient manner in which your parachute behaved at low altitude. Yours sincerely J Muirhead P/O DFC”.

On the 27th 605 again joined forces with 32 Squadron to act as escort to a group of Blenheims, during which a small group of Dornier 17s were sighted but no engagement was possible. Norman Forbes was lost during this mission, last seen near Poperinghe, and later reported to have been captured and made a POW by the Germans. Another patrol was flown during the afternoon, this time with 17 Squadron, and were overrun by an overwhelming force of some 50 Me 109s and 110s after first engaging six Dornier 17s. 605 suffered two fatal casualties during this attack losing Pete
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Danielson and the CO, George Perry, both men being later remembered on the Runnymede Memorial.

Peter Freeman-Pannett sums up the feelings of the ground crews - "Our feelings at this time, we were shattered, we worked from dawn to dusk, repairing those that came back. Meals on wheels at dispersal, sleeping on straw mattresses in the gym, fully clothed because of air raids. Finally losing our CO, I guess we now knew that the war was not going well for us and our pride was dented, we were no longer a fighting force. To me the 27th of May was the worst day with 605 Squadron; (with respect to all the lads that finished up in the Far East, it does not compare, I know) we were finished and being shipped out. Transported with baggage to Folkestone station to await a special train, we had to stand on the platform whilst train after train of troops evacuated from Dunkirk hurled insult after insult at us. Cans and bottles were thrown at the “bloody RAF blokes” who were supposed to back them up. Where were we when things got tough? You name it they threw it or said it. To say our morale was low was an understatement. We must have looked a sorry lot when we arrived at Drem two days later".

Mike Cooper-Slipper remembers the last day at Hawkinge - "28 May. The Squadron were withdrawn. We had lost half our pilots either dead or missing, our aircraft were all shot up and in bad shape. I had about 75 bullet holes through my Hurricane! There was quite a collection of shot up aircraft that had made it back to Hawkinge. Apart from all the aircraft that operated from there that had various adventures, several others dropped in with sundry complaints. I remember a Lysander with the whole rear fuselage a mass of congealed blood, and when they lifted the occupant out of the rear cockpit, his whole lowerpart was smashed to pieces by a flak shell that had hit him. A Hurricane came in with all the fabric on the fuselage streaming back over the tail of the aircraft. My rigger always took my forage cap when he helped me to strap myself into my aircraft, he was always the first one there when we returned to hand me my cap back. He said it was for good luck, his pilot could never be killed so long as he had his cap. The batmen were full of news when they woke us in the morning with a cup of tea and a biscuit or two. One prize bit of news was that the Germans had landed during the night, and were fighting down in Folkestone at that moment!"

Gerry Edge’s memories of this period are also vividly recorded: “On the 21st of May, our CO Squadron Leader George Perry told me about 1000hrs that he had been informed that we should not be moving in the foreseeable future and we could unpack our aircraft stores. Soon after midday he sent for me and said we had been ordered to move to Hawkinge near Folkestone without delay and I was to lead the Squadron there. On the nights of the 19th and 20th we had been using the deep twilight of the Northern Lights to train all our pilots to become fully night operational so when we started I had not been to bed for two nights.

We took off at 1500 hrs on the 21st to refuel at Acklington where we landed at 1645 hrs, after refuelling we took off again for Hawkinge at 1900 hrs and landed at 2105 hrs. The squadron we were replacing had had heavy losses and had only been there a very short time and all their ground crews had not even arrived and so some crews of the previous squadron refuelled and serviced our aircraft. They were all very willing and helpful but we had the wrong crystals fitted to our radio and so until these could be obtained, we could have no contact with base. Our ground crews were due to arrive during the night so I busied myself trying to obtain maps with the enemy positions marked on. No one seemed to have any knowledge of these details and various differing guesses were made. In fact the position was so fluid, altering by the hour, that it would not have been much help to us. Control said we should not be wanted before noon but when their next shift arrived, we were called to readiness at 0430 hrs and so when our crews did arrive, they took over on the airfield. It was fortunate that the weather was good as most of the aircraft crews did not use the billets during our stay at Hawkinge but slept by the aircraft under tarpaulins. And so when called to readiness at 0430 hrs, most of the Squadron had never even fired their guns except for the few who had had contact with the enemy.

1st Patrol - May 22 Take-off 0630 hrs, landed 0815 hrs. The CO not being on the station, I was ordered to lead our first sortie over France, so at 0630 hrs we took off on our first patrol; we were to
go via Calais-Boulogne-Bethune to the Arras area looking for enemy aircraft at a suggested height of 15000 ft. There was a small tanker burning off Boulogne and a ship sinking a few miles further south-west also smoking. It was a lovely morning but there were a number of fires dotted about and apart from some ack-ack both black and white, we saw no sign of activity and no enemy aircraft. We landed back at base at 0815 hrs. We went to the Mess for breakfast but it was in a very uninviting state and I settled for some toast and coffee on the field. The ground crews were also eating on the field and I asked for some tea etc to be sent to them.

2nd Patrol - May 22 Take off 1130 hrs, landed 1325 hrs. We were ordered to carry out a second sortie to patrol five miles south-east to five miles south-west of Arras at medium height and I was told to lead. The weather was cloudy and I kept losing sight of B Flight but out of a cloud from which I thought they should be emerging, I saw six aircraft in a similar formation. After a second look, I realized it was six Messerschmitt 109s closing up fast from the port quarter. I turned hard towards them and gave a long burst at the leader, we closed very rapidly and he opened fire but was way off target and he stopped firing and dived away in a spiral smoking and I changed to his No 3 who took no evasive action nor did he open fire at me. He went down and crashed near his leader. Looking for the others, I saw a Heinkel 111 which appeared to be damaged. I closed up and fired at it but after a few rounds my guns ran out of ammunition. P/O Graham Austin and Sgt Moffat did not return from the patrol. The former was badly wounded in the leg but sadly the latter was killed. The rest landed at 1325 hrs. Two 109s destroyed, no damage to my aircraft. I realized I had been very wasteful with my ammunition firing a lot of bullets which were not necessary. We had been flying without armour plating but now it arrived and the airmen said they were going to have it fitted before we flew again operationally; they worked all night to try and install it in all the aircraft; it would certainly have saved F/O Austin and probably Sgt Moffat.

3rd Patrol - May 23 Take off 0450 hrs, landed 0645 hrs. Ordered to lead 2 Squadrons of Spitfires, with 605 Squadron Hurricanes to rendezvous over the coast. I had not been to bed for five nights and had difficulty keeping my eyes open. The trouble seemed to be that the evening shift of controllers kept telling us we would not be called before midday and the next shift brought us to readiness at dawn. However, I thought I could manage one more patrol but I did not know if there had been any other wings patrolling and thought this might be the first and I was sorry not to be in better condition.

We joined the Spitfires at 6000 ft over the coast and climbed to 20000 ft crossing into France just south of Boulogne and set course for Bethune. My eyes closed and I was asleep, waking with a start I looked to starboard and saw what for a moment I took to be a formation of enemy aircraft and thought I had let my wing be jumped. I then realized that my port wing was pointing at the ground and that the aircraft I had just seen were those I was meant to be leading. I climbed back and took over the lead again and we carried out the sweep without seeing any enemy aircraft. On landing, I turned off the petrol and then switched off the magneto before my plane stopped rolling and as the propeller stopped I was asleep again. My crew thought I had been wounded and had brought a stretcher for me and were trying to lift me out of the cockpit when I woke.

The ground crews who were nearly as tired as we were, were still living out on the airfield and one of the young men was climbing through the fence round the airfield and visiting the nearby village to buy bread and some victuals for the others. After their long journey from the north, they had insisted that now the armour plate had arrived they would not let the pilots fly in any aircraft in which it had not been fitted. This was a very big job entailing working day and night. They deserved great praise.

4th Patrol - May 24 Take off 0455 hrs, landed 0625 hrs. The morning of the 24th, we were brought to readiness at 0430 and told to take-off on a patrol via Boulogne-St Omer-Arras-Dunkirk. The CO Squadron Leader George Perry said he would lead B Flight and A Flight would fly to starboard. At 0455 we took off and climbed up to 20000+ ft and turned south-east of Boulogne. We went well South of St Omer and turned east. George was not experienced on Hurricanes and we were not in contact on radio, we were flying in a loose and wide formation and going rather too fast for the
formating aircraft. The weather was perfect but there was a smoke haze over the ground which made map reading difficult. We saw no enemy aircraft and there was no ack-ack. After an hour and a half, most of the formation had turned back to base being low in fuel but we pushed on to the north-east. When the East Scheldt became visible almost beneath us, I decided I must turn for base. I slowed down and set the controls for max range. I was delighted to see Hawkinge and I glided down and landed straight ahead. I asked my fitter to see what fuel I had left. He said there was none in the main tanks and started to inspect the gravity tank. I said "Not to bother I ran out of the gravity first". (In conditions for maximum duration, a Hurricane could stay aloft for about five hours but at full throttle the fuel (90 gals) only lasted 45-50 minutes).

5th Patrol - May 24 Take off 1150 hrs, landed 1320 hrs. Ordered to escort 2 squadrons of Blenheims to bomb in the Arras area. We rendezvoused over the coast and crossed into France just north of Boulogne, then to south-east of Arras about 70 miles to target. There were some great columns of smoke especially one to the right of us and another about 7 miles east of us, in the middle was a vast cumulo-nimbus cloud with vivid flashes of lightning from about 1000 ft to 12000ft, it looked like a massive picture of an inferno; the Blenheims headed into the middle of it. and as the weather thickened, we closed right up. The cloud thinned a little and I saw the leading Blenheim about 50 yards on my port side, could not see any Hurricanes so I closed right up to the Blenheim. There were flashes of lightning all around us and as the snow started to be really thick. I selected hot air but shortly afterwards the engine began to run very roughly. I was flying right inside the Blenheim's starboard wing overlapping by at least three feet and could only just see its fuselage. I tried all positions of the mixture control but lost all power and sight of the Blenheim. I put the prop control into coarse pitch to keep it turning but at 11000 ft, the engine stopped but continued to windmill. There was a thick icy cover of snow on the windscreen and the side panels were iced over and the air was very rough. I used the Kigass Primer several times and by the time I was down to 1200 ft, it fired weakly. I managed to keep it going but the engine was nearly cold. At 1000 ft it was running more smoothly and I was dropping out of the cloud. I held the speed at about 100 mph and the dials were all looking hopeful and I opened up to about 130 mph to have all temperatures back to normal. I suddenly realized that I was still following our original course.

As soon as the engine was at operating temperature, I opened up to zero boost and tested the magnetos which were OK. Having passed the storm, I climbed to 1500 ft and turned south. After a short time, I saw a Blenheim at about 100 ft heading north-west. As I turned to join him, I saw Me 109s about half a mile behind the Blenheim in a wide Vic and just right for an attack by me from above on the starboard quarter. I closed up and dived towards the No 2. They made no alteration of course. I held fire until I was close behind and closed on No 2. I gave a four second burst into the cockpit and he swerved to port and dived down. I was overshooting so I changed my target to the leader who was still holding his course. As I opened fire, his port wing dropped and he turned away gently. I looked for No 3 but we could not see him for a few moments when I saw an aircraft in the distance heading east. I saw a fire break out below but whether from either of the two I had shot at I do not know. I decided I had killed the leader with my first burst as otherwise he would have made more violent evasion. I set off north-west and in a few minutes I had closed with the Blenheim. I saw he had a huge hole in his port wing and escorted him back to Hawkinge. He landed very fast and just finished right in the south-west course of the field. I took my car across to him and we stood together in the hole in the wing. He was vexed and said "I'll make the bastards pay for this, let's go and have lunch". It was Basil Embry. We landed at 1320 hrs.

6th Patrol - May 25 Take off 0550 hrs, landed 0740 hrs. Ordered to escort 10 Blenheims in the Menin-Courtrai-Roubaix area. We engaged twelve Messerschmitt 109s near Ypres heading for the Blenheims. I sent one down in flames and changed to another target, when I saw an Me. 109 coming at me head on. I had spent quite a lot of ammunition on the first two but as we were closing very quickly, I opened fire at long range. I was hitting him round the engine and he was firing his cannon through the spinner but the shells were passing round my aircraft. When I could plainly see the hole in the spinner, I saw a flash and at the same time, there was a sizable explosion in my cockpit which
filled with smoke. As he passed within feet of me, I ran out of ammunition. Perhaps I went through
his slipstream but I thought we had collided. The smoke cleared from the cockpit and the controls all
worked so I turned for base. To my surprise my crew could find no damage, perhaps they thought I
was suffering from lack of sleep but see report on the next patrol.

7th Patrol - May 25 Take off 1110 hrs, landed 1205 hrs. Patrol - Calais-Dunkirk area. South of
Gravelines, we engaged a formation of 20 + Junkers 87s heading for the coast. I closed with one
which went on fire after a short burst and looking for another, I saw my No 2 (P/O Mike Cooper-
Slipper) firing at another which went on fire. I closed right up with a third which went on fire with a
short burst. The sky seemed to have cleared and for a short time, I could see no other aircraft. I had
climbed to about 8000 ft when I saw a large formation about 30-40 Ju 87s in the south-east some
2/3000 ft above. I did not climb away from them in case I should lose sight of them so I opened up to
full boost and climbed towards them. As they came closer, the range between us diminished very
rapidly and I realized that their leader was almost overhead so I pulled up into a vertical climb. My
speed dropped very quickly and I thought I would crash into the middle of them. I realized a Ju 87
was about to pass over me. I fired and my plane came to a stop, but I was hitting the Stuka from
about 20 ft. Pieces of it fell past me as my aircraft was reversing away. I had never done a tail slide
before but I had been told that if I ever found myself in that position to hold the controls against a
stop as if they were loose the reversed airflow might smash them across and break them. I pushed
my right foot hard forward and pulled the stick hard back and to the right and saw the flames below
me on the starboard side. My plane fell into a dive very smoothly but the engine kept running and I
lost a great deal of height and was down to a little over 1,000 ft. I turned for home and saw about
half a mile north of me, a Ju 87 flying east at about 3-4000 ft just south of the coast road, which was
packed with refugees. The rear gunner was standing up and well out of the gun rear cockpit firing at
the refugees. I had a good look round whilst diving towards him. Overtaking too fast, I throttled right
back but to keep out of his slipstream as I knew I could only have very little ammunition I kept a
small distance above him. The gunner suddenly started to swing his gun towards me. Easing the nose
down on to target about 50 yards away I fired and after about 1 sec ran out of ammunition, but it
was enough. The Stuka rolled over to port and dived into the field and burst into flames some 100-
150 yards south of the coast road. Feeling naked without any ammunition, I returned to base but
being low, I ran into very heavy ack-ack which damaged my starboard wing spar. (The aircraft had to
go back to MU for repair). I asked my fitter to put my parachute, which I always left in the cockpit of
my plane, into another aircraft P3580. When he moved my chute, it revealed that the back of my
aluminum seat was all dented from the rear, the shell hit on my previous patrol had burst on the
armour plate behind my seat but did not penetrate, the shrapnel ricocheting into the back of the
seat. Further search revealed that the shell had hit the plywood cowlings just forward of the throttle
controls. The plywood had sprung shut leaving only a black line about 1.5 inches long which was not
easy to see, and then made a small rip in my leather glove from where it passed through the ripcord
handle making a hole in my Irving jacket and a tear in my uniform. It also grazed the ripcord handle
on the other side, it went on to make a 1/4 inch groove in the side of the seat before bursting on the
armour plate. As my crew apologized to me amidst laughter, I said "So you did think I was going
nutty". They answered "Oh no Sir, we are sorry we did not find the damage". I was very sorry to lose
No 2557 which I had been using for quite a while and which had so far carried me safely through
several tight spots over France.

8th Patrol - May 26 Take off 0705 hrs, landed 0825 hrs. Ordered to patrol Boulogne to St Omer and
to rendezvous what at first was said to be 6 but then changed to 12 Blenheims. I had decided to get
as close to the enemy as possible, because at close range our guns seemed much more effective and
a short burst would suffice. However we engaged four Ju 88s and I closed right up and gave one a
long burst from its port quarter and its port wing folded. I chased after a Ju 88 near St Omer but ran
into very heavy ack-ack which seemed to be very close. My plane was shaken badly, however I
thought I had not been hit but on landing my crew said it was unserviceable as it had a hole in the
starboard main spar and had to be returned to MU.
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9th Patrol - May 26
Take off 1315 hrs, landed 1440 hrs. Ordered to patrol Calais-Dunkirk area. I was ordered to rendezvous near the coast with some other squadrons. We did not join up but flew in fairly close proximity. I thought they were following us so I led them just south of Calais and Gravelines-Dunkirk. There was a great deal of smoke from numerous fires in this area and visibility was poor. We saw about 6 Ju 88s going into thick smoke or cloud heading west. We engaged them as they emerged and my No 2 quickly sent one down. I fired a long burst into another silencing the rear gunner, but receiving a lot of attention from the rear guns of two of the other aircraft. His cockpit started to break up and smoke was coming from the port engine and it went down steeply with flames on the port side. (My No 2 was P/O Mike Cooper-Slipper). I had lost sight of all Hurricanes but suddenly I saw tracer passing me and I was being dived on by four Me 109s. I turned underneath but one was almost on my tail and I was able to turn inside him and get him in my sights. Two of the others were firing at me from a very long range but I gave the one in my sights a very short burst but any hits were doubtful, the range was too great and they turned east and left me. I suddenly realized I was being stalked by a Me 110. He fired at me and hit my starboard wing but he was coming up too fast and overshot and I gave him the rest of my ammunition as he passed very close overhead. He went down in a steep left handed spiral with his port undercarriage dropping down. On landing, my crew found my starboard wing was again badly damaged and main tank had been hit. There was a bullet hole in the cowling but no hole was found in the gravity tank inside. I used to slip my plane to port when the enemy was behind me which was perhaps why my starboard wing seemed to collect the damage. My aircraft was again u/s but the ground crew had fitted a new starboard wing on the airfield to P3580 so I had my chute moved back into it for the next patrol.

10th Patrol - May 27
Take off 0830 hrs, landed 1005 hrs. Ordered to escort a squadron of Blenheims bombing in St Omer area, they flew on a zig-zag course which I found very difficult to follow and then broke up into sections and then the section we were trying to escort broke up into singles. I did not see them drop any bombs. We broke away and proceeded to Armentiers and Courtrai and then north towards Dunkirk. Trying to escort the various Blenheims, we had split up ourselves and except for Red 2, the sky seemed empty until several miles south of Dunkirk at about 11000 ft. I saw six Dornier 17s below to starboard. We dived on them, and as we were overtaking quickly, I opened fire at about 200 yards from above on port quarter, oil was streaming over the port wing and I moved my aim to the starboard side very close overhead and I overshot diving across its bows. I went well ahead and on turning back towards them, I saw the starboard engine was on fire and the Dornier was diving down. Three others were still in formation but turning away to the south. I had turned to port after my first attack and so made ahead-on attack from their starboard bow, on their No 2, the cockpit was smashed and the Dornier 17 went down. But I was careless over flying the other two and was caught in fairly accurate fire from both rear gunners. Fuel and ammunition being low, I returned to base. My aircraft was again unserviceable needing a new starboard wing. Also a few holes in the fuselage but they only needed a few patches. We were delighted to see our old CO and great friend, Wing Commander Lord Willoughby de Broke when we returned to Hawkinge, who had come to have lunch with us. He stopped to have tea after we returned from our next patrol. It was to be a bad one with heavy losses.

11th Patrol - May 27
Take off 1435 hrs, landed 1545 hrs. We took off at 1435 hrs with instructions to join up with one flight of 17 Squadron making a rendezvous over the coast near Dover. I led 605 Squadron fairly wide to port and slightly behind. (We were given no instructions regarding the leadership of this composite formation and 17 Squadron made no move to lead). Crossing the coast near Calais, we headed south-east towards St Omer then turned east then north towards Dunkirk. The ack-ack, both black and white bursts, was heavy. Passing through this area we saw six Dornier 17s below us heading to the coast, west of Dunkirk. They were to starboard and I turned and made a shallow dive from their port bow and fired at the leaders, No 3 firing from above 200 yards to very close into its cockpit which was smashed and it went into a steep dive. I could not see any aircraft around so I turned towards the coast on a weaving course. Shortly, I saw a squadron of Me 109s coming out of cloud above and behind me. They saw me but had to dive very steeply to put me in
their sights. There were too many of them trying to shoot at me at the same time and they were getting in each other’s way, their speed was, I hoped, too high to be able to aim properly. Some tracer went over me followed by a 109. I fired as it went over me and it collected a good burst and started to burn. The others all vanished and I returned to base. Landed 1545 hrs. From this patrol seven pilots did not return.

May 28th. After coming to readiness at dawn, a signal was soon received that we were to move to Drem on the south coast of the Firth of Forth to reform. Take off 1300 hrs. Air test on P3588 which had been repaired at Hawkinge after combat damage and a new starboard wing fitted. Landed 1315 hrs, aircraft serviceable. At 1510 hrs we took off for Chubbier en route for Drem, F/Lt Grant-Ferris leading. Landing 1645 hrs. We were unable to proceed as there was no 100 octane fuel available until 30-5-40. I borrowed an Oxford to fly across to Cosford near my home. May 30th. Took off from Cosford for RAF Shawbury in the Airspeed Oxford. At 0915-0930 landed Chubbier. Aircraft all refuelled and we took off for Drem at 1020 hrs. F/Lt Grant-Ferris again leading, I broke away en route with "A" Flight and landed at Drem at 1200 hrs. I was asked if I would go across to Grangemouth to air test Hurricane L2012. So at 1510 hrs, I took off in the Tiger Moth LG630 with P/O Mike Cooper-Slipper ("Slips") as passenger. Landed 1545 hrs. Hurricane L2012 was flight tested and was serviceable but needed some paintwork so "Slips" and I flew back to Drem in the Moth. The Squadron was now entering a period of major rebuilding after this horrific six days at Hawkinge where having started as a complete unit it was now decimated.”

Two new pilots arrived straight away, P/O Jim Humphreys and Sgt Leslie Ralls. Jim, a native of New Zealand requested of his mechanic, LAC George Scrivener, that a Maori Tikki be painted on his Hurricane’s engine cowling with the following inscription “TE MATENGO I TE ROTO I TE RA” in white paint. Another ground crew member, Fred Harrison, recalled being told by George that the translation was "I am death from the sky".

The remainder of the pilots left Hawkinge, night stopping at Shawbury for fuel and food. Mike Cooper-Slipper took the opportunity to make a low pass over his family home in Staffordshire, but unfortunately misjudged the height of some nearby trees and collected some branches as a souvenir in his radiator. Shawbury was a Flying Training School and the students were very impressed by the number of bullet holes the Squadron Hurricanes wore like battle scars. Much ale was consumed that night and Mike had to be carried to bed "Shot down at last, by Allsopps Best Bitter." Mike's reflections on the week at Hawkinge are a poignant reminder of the effects of war on such young men "My own thoughts of the week I had been fighting were too mixed up to make much sense. I had grown up certainly, I had flown every patrol that the Squadron had carried out. I had killed and seen a lot of dead people and I was cold and untouched by it. I could put down a gallon of good old English beer at one sitting. I was nineteen and was a fighter pilot. Looking back, it was all rather unreal. In that little area of the south coast, a small piece of France and Belgium a desperate battle was going on, thousands were being killed, ships sunk, aircraft shot down, yet all the rest of the United Kingdom was much as it had been for a long, long time, in that beautiful summer of 1940".

On the 31st of May, Walter Churchill made RAF history when he was awarded both the Distinguished Service Order and the Distinguished Flying Cross, being the first to gain such a double honour on the same day. Although the awards were for his efforts with 3 Squadron, the Squadron were rightly proud that he had been recognized. His citations read -“31/5/40 - DFC - F/Lt W. M. Churchill (90241) This officer has shot down 3 enemy aircraft since his arrival in France and has led many patrols with courage and skill. "31/5/40 - DSO - F/Lt Churchill DFC (90241) This officer assumed command of a squadron shortly after it arrived in France and led it with marked success, inspiring his pilots and maintenance crews magnificently. He undertook the tactical instruction of the new pilots, led many patrols successfully and organized his ground defences and crews in an exemplary manner. While under his command, the squadron destroyed 62 enemy aircraft and he was throughout the mainspring of their offensive spirit, their excellent tactics and their adequate maintenance results. Only four pilots of the squadron were lost. F/Lt Churchill had recently destroyed 4 enemy aircraft, bringing his total to seven”
“We Never Slept” - The Story of 605 Squadron

Peter Freeman-Pannett wrote of the arrival at Drem "When we reached here we were shattered as well you might guess, but this place certainly helped the recovery. Great big open airfield, miles from anywhere, south of Edinburgh, but near the coast at a place called Dirleton. Remember a great pub there being within walking distance going, but not always coming back. Camp was an all wooden hut construction, single storey on stilts, well spaced out. It had three hangar all girder and corrugated ironsheeted, camouflageed, and in a line about 100 yards apart going east-west, with a small apron. There were two grass runways, one going north - south at the bottom of the airfield and the other east - west forming a 'T' across the whole airfield." Peter and his ground crew colleagues found an old abandoned Morris 12 car on the airfield and applied their skills to it to make their very own taxi, which went like a bomb. Cyril "Swede" Moulstone also recalls the arrival at Drem "Arriving at Drem, no one knew anything about us arriving, and I think 602 Squadron was in residence there, hence no billets for us. So someone had a brilliant idea to put us in tents, then it rained and rained for weeks. Then someone had another brilliant idea to use the billets from the 1914-18 airship days. We moved into these, of course the glass in the windows had long departed, plus there were no toilets, so every morning a parade was held to march over to the toilets. The parade had a name, can't remember it at the moment, but it wouldn't be difficult to guess."

It was about this time that Bomber Command were experiencing problems when their returning aircraft were being followed home by enemy intruders and were subsequently being attacked when attempting to land (a tactic which would be gainfully employed with much success by 605 later in the war). In order to attempt to combat this threat the Squadron designed an airfield lighting and approach system that they put to the Station Commander, "Batchy" Atcherley, which would allow allied aircraft to land unmolested.

After many trials it was developed with a flare path which could be seen by landing aircraft but not by any flying above 500 feet and consisted of several dispersed red lights which could either flash various letters or simply remain lit. They were called action marker beacons and from the letter of the night one could fly on predetermined courses, remaining at a fairly low altitude until the next light was picked up. From the first marker beacon the height to fly was 300 feet; further ahead the pilot would come across two more lights which were shielded above and were adjustable so they could be set for different heights. Flying between these at 200 feet the pilot could see two more sets of lights on poles about 50 yards apart, each consisting of three lights coloured, amber, green and red. Each light was again shielded so that if a pilot was coming in on green at a given speed depending on the aircraft type, and the red light could be seen a little more throttle was needed, and vice versa if the amber light could be seen. More lights were placed to mark the airfield boundary which could only be seen on approach and if the pilot looked out of the port side of his aircraft he could line up two lights so that they formed a horizontal line which meant that if he brought his stick right back and his speed was correct his machine would be rolling along the runway. The scheme was documented by the Squadron and circulated by the Station Commander to Air Ministry and became known as Drem Lighting, (although 605 Lighting would have been more appropriate!) and was adopted as the standard for all RAF Airfields.

On the 1st June, Gerry Edge received official confirmation of his promotion to Flight Lieutenant, a position he had held with distinction for some time. Replacement pilots began to arrive in the Squadron throughout June. The first four P/O Sydney James Madle, P/O Alec Ingle, P/O Robert Eric Jones and Sgt Lawrence Charles Sones arrived on the 18th and three days later F/Lt Archibald Ashmore McKellar joined from another Auxiliary squadron, 602 (City of Glasgow). McKellar held the distinction of being the first allied pilot of the war to bring down an enemy aircraft onto British soil, when he destroyed a Heinkel 111 on October 28th 1939. The pilots of 602 lost no time in learning all they could from the experienced hands of 605 and it was during this time together that Archie McKellar struck up a friendship with Walter Churchill. Walter was impressed with the little Glaswegian's spirit and enthusiasm for flying, so much so that when a vacancy came up for a Flight Commander he invited McKellar to fill it, an opportunity he grasped with both hands. On the 24th Barrie Goodwin was killed when his Hurricane spun into the ground after performing some basic
fighter manoeuvres. Those who witnessed the accident thought that perhaps Barrie had passed out and subsequently lost control of his aircraft. Barrie had joined the Squadron before the war, serving with his older brother Mac who at the time of the tragedy was flying with 609 (West Riding) Squadron. The Goodwin family received another bitter blow when Mac was shot down a few weeks later during the Battle of Britain. Mac and Barrie were laid to rest as they had flown together, side by side at the family church of St Cassians, Chaddesley Corbett, Worcestershire.

During the rebuilding process much time was spent practising formation flying, Gerry Edge recalling how one particular pilot went about this exercise - "We were often asked how close we were to each other when we flew in formation. The answer was that in close formation the distance was about four or five feet, but with our young and more adventurous pilots these distances were often greatly reduced as it was found that if the leading edge of a wing was just under the aileron of the leader the up draught would push the aileron up and vice versa, which caused the leader's wing to drop severely. However, one mischievous pilot, thinking his leader needed waking up used to tap my wing tip with his and then pull away quickly, pretending he was not the culprit. He was very young, but an excellent pilot and was the only other pilot who went on all the patrols we flew at Hawkinge. He was Pilot Officer Cooper-Slipper".

Four days later and something for which the Squadron could rejoice, the award of the first decoration for a 605 pilot, a Distinguished Flying Cross for P/O Jock Muirhead. Jock heard of his award in the RAF Hospital in Torquay where he was recovering from his recent ordeal in the English Channel. He was especially cheered with a telegram of congratulations from a very proud Archibald Sinclair. Everyone in the Squadron was delighted with the award but the celebrations would be put on hold until Jock's return in a few days.

During yet another routine practice flight in early July, Gerry Edge and Alec Ingle were simply putting their aircraft through their paces when they decided to make a few fast runs together with some steep dives. Gerry made one mock attack and watched as his No 2 followed suit but attempted to make his look quite spectacular. Alec made his last run and appeared to skim down the cliffs and Gerry thought he was too low, especially as he witnessed a small splash as the Hurricane just pulled up before turning into a submarine. Back at Drem, Gerry told Alec of the splash and explained that in his opinion he had pulled out too late. "No, no" exclaimed Alex, "Plenty of room". Then at that moment his fitter arrived and explained "Mr. Ingle's aircraft is unserviceable, sir. The prop is missing about three inches off each tip!".

July was a relatively quiet month at Drem the biggest activity being on the personnel front with the arrival of new pilots as the Squadron grew to full strength. P/O George Mathwin Forrester, Sgt Eric William "Ricky" Wright, P/O Robert William Foster and Sgt Robert Douglas Ritchie were all welcomed to the Squadron ranks. The last of the new pilots P/O Edward James Watson joined in early August and finally 605 could claim a full complement of pilots. The most important task was left to those who had seen service at Dunkirk to pass on the vital lessons learnt in the heat of battle. Especially important was the new tactic of head on attacks which had been pioneered by Gerry Edge.

Nearly all the air raids the enemy made consisted of a nucleus of bombers with a close escort of fighters, positioned slightly behind and above and a much larger force of fighters above, acting as top cover for the whole formation. The bombers, which usually flew in a V shaped formation, were protected from a stern attack by their respective rear guns, which when brought to bear on a rear attack where very effective indeed. An attacking force could not dive through the top cover and close escort without being attacked, especially as their overtaking speed would be comparatively slow, which gave the rear gunners enough time to try and take them out. Therefore two possible types of attack were considered which were likely to yield better results for the attackers and hopefully result in fewer casualties.

The first was an attack that could be made head on and simultaneously from 20-30 degrees either side of the head, or secondly from above making a very steep dive at the enemy bombers. The latter looked very effective from the ground but was not practicable as the speed that built up in the dive made the controls very heavy and therefore made aiming the machine and its guns accurately
almost impossible. During this phase of experimenting with different modes of attack the AOC visited the Squadron to evaluate the men to see if they were ready to return to 11 Group in the south. Walter Churchill detailed Gerry Edge to lay on an attack for the AOC to demonstrate the Squadron’s effectiveness.

Gerry describes the attack he made at Drem that day and the head on attack method - "I detailed one section to fly over the aerodrome at 2500 feet, from east to west. Taking the other section to 7000 feet, I tried to fly in to the airfield above them. Looking around to make sure the air was clear I lost sight of our target for about 15 seconds before I saw them again just passing under my port wing. I immediately rolled over into a very steep dive, and was able to keep them in position, but as the speed built up, it became impossible to hold them in our sights and we shot by them at well over 400 m.p.h. We landed and I expected a rocket, but from the ground it had looked perfect and the AOC was delighted and declared us fit for battle on the 2nd of August". - "Head on attacks were much more leisurely as one had no opposition except the odd flash of a front gun. We found it best to approach at about 180mph., which with the enemy aircraft flying at about the same speed gave a closing speed of between 350 and 400 m.p.h., enough time for a good burst at an opening range of 400 yards. This enabled the attack leader to aim about the distance of one or two aircraft to the side of the lead machine and through the lead aircraft down across the line of the V formation. None of the fighter escort could get forward to contact us for about ten seconds from starting the attack. At a later date with 253 Squadron, I led six aircraft to attack 30+ bombers with close escort and a large top cover. The attack was very effective but I learnt a new danger that I had not thought of. From hosing down the port side of their formation I rolled over and dived away and as I pulled out in a reverse direction from my attack I saw bombs all around me, one just passing my starboard wing tip. The bombers had jettisoned their load, broken formation and were heading for home. We were credited with 15-17 aircraft destroyed between the six of us, the attack lasting only 8-10 seconds and no damage had been sustained on our part. (This from a force made up from both flights and largely unbriefed and untrained in these tactics but led with skill and determination by their new CO and his friend and Flight Commander Duke-Wooley - later G/Cpt R.M .B. Duke-Wooley, DSO, DFC (USA).). Head on attacks were not encouraged as they were considered to be too dangerous. Considering that 253 Squadron had lost three Commanding Officers and eleven pilots in a three day period in early September and that in the next three weeks, despite making many head-on attacks, they had negligible losses and many successes I did not agree with Command’s thoughts."

Another tragedy struck the Squadron on the 9th of August when, only three weeks after joining, Sgt Robert Douglas Ritchie was killed after reporting feeling dizzy from the fumes from a glycol leak. His aircraft crashed into the sea a mile from Dunbar. He was picked up by the boat Enumara but he had already died from a broken neck. Dougie was 24 and was buried in Leslie Cemetery in his home region of Fife.

Despite much aerial action over Southern England life in the north was by comparison relatively quiet. On the 15th August all this was about to change. Working on the theory that most of the RAF’s assets were defending the south of England, Goering decided to mount a long range raid on north-east England with the main targets being the airfields at Driffield and Dishforth. A unit of Heinkel 111s and another of Junkers 88s were tasked with the raid bringing with them an escort of Messerschmitt 110s. Although twin engined and somewhat slower than the Spitfire and Hurricane the Me 110 was certainly a dangerous adversary. The 110 was the only fighter with sufficient range for the mission and even then with only marginal fuel reserves they would be unable to engage in prolonged dogfighting. This was certainly not an easy mission for the Germans as they would have to make a round trip of some 1000 miles, but their intelligence sources stated there would be minimum resistance as the northern airfields were only used as havens for battle weary squadrons from the south to rest and re-equip. Unknown to them five squadrons of Hurricanes and Spitfires lay in their path.

At 10.00 seventy-two Heinkel 111s of KG/26, which was known as the Lion Geschwader, took off from Stavanger/Sola airfield in Norway en route for Dishforth and Usworth airfields. The north
eastern cities of Newcastle, Sunderland and Middlesborough were cited as secondary targets. The bombers were escorted by twenty-one Me 110's of 1 ZG/72 based at Stavanger/Forus. Such would be the surprise of this raid that one of the Squadron’s pilots, Sgt Leslie Ralls was away getting married just as the raiders struck. He rather enviously regretted missing what was a “marvellous time” for the rest of the Squadron, and one can but admire his priorities on this fateful day.

Just before 1pm on the 15th of August, the radar plotters at Anstruther in Fife spotted the advancing aircraft of a large enemy force, and Air Vice-Marshal Saul, 13 Group Commander, ordered all his available units into the air. The two squadrons based at Acklington, Nos 72 and 79 were vectored north, while 605 and 607 were sent to patrol the area south of Durham. The controllers at first thought the enemy aircraft could be doing nothing more sinister than minelaying. Twelve Spitfires from 72 Squadron led by Fl Lt Ted Graham, intercepted the Messerschmitt fighters and soon ripped through them. Minutes later and the Spitfires were joined by the Hurricanes of 79 Squadron and a twisting dogfight developed over the coast. Deprived of most of their fighter escort, the Heinkels droned south searching for their targets of the airfields at Dishforth and Usworth, but the Germans had made a serious navigational error. They had made landfall a good seventy miles too far north, and were going to pay a very heavy price for doing so. As they approached the River Tyne at Newcastle they were subjected to a ferocious attack by "B" Flight of 605:

"B" Flight 15th August 1940

Blue 1 F/Lt Archie McKellar (P3308)
Blue 2 P/O Eric Jones (L2014)
Blue 3 P/O Ken Law (P2717)
Green 1 P/O Bunny Currant (P2994)
Green 2 F/O Cyril Passy (P3827)
Green 3 P/O Jock Muirhead (L2122)

"B" Flight's Commander F/Lt Archie McKellar ordered his pilots to make individual attacks on the bombers. By now the Germans were split into two loose formations and were approaching Easington Colliery from the south-west. P/O Eric Jones and P/O Ken Law attacked the last enemy aircraft in the first formation, sending it spiralling into a dive. Ken Law continued to pursue his foe over the colliery and sent it crashing into the sea three miles east of the pit-head.

During his final attack Ken's Hurricane was hit by return fire and he quickly decided that it was damaged enough to prevent him reaching a suitable airfield. Ken chose his landing spot, Hartlepool Golf Course, and he made for an area near to the sand dunes. He lowered his landing gear and made a low approach. Invisible from the air was a wire fence which separated the golf course from a wheat field and this acted as an arrester wire catching his wheels as he passed overhead. The aircraft yawed several time and finally tipped onto it's nose. It teetered for a moment then fell over onto it's back. A local man Edwin Stephenson who had witnessed the "landing" ran towards the aircraft together with some soldiers who were on coastal defence duties nearby. Edwin helped lift the wing while Ken was released from his harness by two of the soldiers. Ken had sustained a badly gashed head and a nearby doctor called Hall diagnosed he was suffering from concussion and arranged for him to be taken to hospital in Hartlepool. This incident prompted several local ladies led by Bessie Allen to launch the Hartlepool Fighter Fund to buy a replacement aircraft for the RAF, albeit a Spitfire and after much fundraising and various events a cheque for more than £5000 was sent to the Air Ministry at the end of November, a truly remarkable effort.

The other casualty was F/O Cyril Passy who had to force land his aircraft only a mile from Usworth airfield shortly after 2 pm. Squadron claims were three for F/Lt McKellar who had sustained some slight damage from return fire, one destroyed and another shared by P/O Bunny Currant, one destroyed by P/O Eric Jones and another by P/O Jock Muirhead. Jock had been flying as Green 3 when he attacked a formation of 20-25 Heinkel IIIs flying north at a height of 12000 ft. He closed to approximately 50 yards and opened fire but observed no results. Whilst breaking off his attack he went after a bomber that had been driven from the formation by Bunny Currant. The enemy was already flying with it's starboard engine feathered, and after firing a short burst at the port engine.
the aircraft spiralled through the clouds and was seen to land on the sea. Jock circled overhead as he saw the five crew members climb out into a rubber boat. Later that day P/O Jim Humphreys and P/O George Forrester were sent to search for the rubber dingy, although the results of this search are unclear. During the melee Archie McKellar reported seeing a red lion on a white background behind the perspex nose of the leader of the second formation, confirming the identity of the raiders as KG/26, although on this day the lion was more than tamed by the bear of Warwickshire. This raid cost the Luftwaffe dear with the loss of eight Heinkels and six fighters, their only success was some damage and casualties caused when the bombers jettisoned their bombs over Easington Colliery and the village of Hawthorn.

The second wave of enemies fared little better after being intercepted by 73 Squadron who accounted for six Junkers bombers, although several others did get through to bomb the airfield at Driffield. In all some 20 enemy aircraft failed to return and when added to the 55 destroyed in the southern air-battles, represented the heaviest losses recorded by the Luftwaffe during the Battle of Britain, and the pilots of 605 could be justifiably proud of the part they played in this historic day.

At the end of the month 605 lost one of its longest serving pilots when F/Lt Douglas Scott was promoted to Squadron Leader and left to form and command 306 Squadron at Church Fenton. 306 was one of the new squadrons nearly all staffed by Polish pilots and one wonders if after years of working with the lads of Birmingham he could understand this new "foreign" dialect. Sadly Douglas was killed in November the following year whilst serving with 616 Squadron, later being awarded the Air Force Cross. Three days after Douglas left the Squadron for the Polish unit, two Poles joined 605. Both P/O Witold Jozef Glowacki and Sgt Jan Budzinski had served 145 Squadron at Westhampnett, and had the distinction of becoming the first foreign pilots to fly with the Squadron.

September brought with it news that F/Lt Gerry Edge was to be promoted to Squadron Leader and given command of 253 Squadron who were based at RAF Kenley. 253 had had a torrid time losing several pilots and commanding officers in just a few days. What was required was an experienced pilot and a natural leader who could instill new confidence into a group of men whose morale was at its lowest. Gerry was a natural choice, having fought with much distinction during the carnage at Dunkirk and being credited with the head-on attack policy of dealing with enemy bombers. 253’s gain was certainly 605’s loss. The Squadron log book summed up the feelings of the whole Squadron.

"Gerry Edge will be a very great loss to 'A' Flight which he commanded and to the Squadron, being much loved and respected by officers and men. Very rarely in the history of the Squadron could an officer be so much missed by so many."

Two days after Gerry’s departure and the Squadron were also ordered south to RAF Croydon in South London, only a few miles from were he was operating with his new squadron. Another of 605’s ex pilots, in fact its second commanding officer to be precise, was also working in the area. Wing Commander Lord Willoughby de Broke was by now Chief Controller at Kenley and would be there to direct his old unit, and his great friend Gerry Edge and the men in his charge in the battles to come. The move south was met with great excitement and some trepidation by the men in the Squadron who were all too familiar with the news of great air raids and battles over the south-east of England. The knowledge gained at Hawkinge and the recent raid in August would now prove to be very valuable indeed. The aircraft arrived at Croydon during the early evening of the 7th having refuelled on route at RAF Abingdon in Oxfordshire.

Cyril "Swede" Moulstone remembers the journey south - "So once again on to a troop train to arrive in London in the middle of an air raid and then transferred to buses for the run to Croydon. The airport had been heavily bombed with I might add a lot of casualties, many of them civilian. There were no billets or cookhouse, in fact it was quite a shambles. The bus driver was directed to the far side of the drome, so he decided to take the shortest route between two points, straight across the grass to the other side. We had covered quite a distance, when someone stopped the bus and mentioned to the driver that the round pegged out circles that he had driven over were unexploded bomb areas."
The first sight to greet the men was the great number of fires burning away in the distance and the huge clouds of smoke, reminders of the recent enemy air raids on London and the surrounding area. Bob Hall recalls the airmen's first impressions of their home. "I remember treading and climbing over debris in the foyer of the hotel amongst which were hundreds of 20mm shells, scattered over quite a wide area. I never discovered where they came from, or how they got there, but assumed they were intended for defence of the hotel originally, as 20mm cannons were being used on some airfields against German raiders. There was a very strong smell of perfume all around and the grass and everything seemed impregnated. We heard that a perfume factory manufacturing 'Soir de Paris' on the edge of the aerodrome had been hit during the raid and several girl employees had been killed, several days passed before the air cleared."

The airmen were billeted in local houses in Forester's Drive, which ran next to the airfield. Bob recalls "Forester's Drive had been evacuated on both sides, not all of the road had been requisitioned, and airmen moved into the empty houses after being issued with a 'Macdonald' folding bed and three 'biscuits' which formed the mattress for the same, and three smelly blankets and no sheets. The Sergeants' and Officers' mess were on the other side of the road. The airmen's cookhouse and mess were a bungalow situated at the southern end of Forester's Drive not far from the airmen's billets. The bungalow we were told belonged to a doctor, who I'm sure would have been petrified to see the transformation perpetrated by the RAF cooks. Food was stacked in the garage and electric boilers to heat water and cook food were all over the place, even up one side of the driveway and on the lawn; benches and tables had been put in every room and meal time had to be staggered to cope with approximately 150 mouths. The diet consisted mainly of soup with lashings of potatoes and cabbage and rock frozen kidneys which were chopped up with an axe from wooden cases. The wood often became mixed up with the kidneys which I'm sure improved the flavour. 'Bully beef' was an alternative, rounded off with huge loaves of bread, butter and jam, what a wonderful feast it was after a full day on the airfield with only a snack, which was brought out to us on the aircraft dispersal point. Pilots and ground crew were at full readiness from dawn and did not move from the airfield whilst aircraft were scrambled sometimes eight to ten times during this period to engage enemy aircraft approaching London. The main hangers at Croydon were used by 605 Squadron for aircraft major inspections and repairs, daily inspections and maintenance was carried out by the ground crews on dispersal points. Material such as aluminum sheeting was in very short supply, and damaged wings were often patched with metal from 'bully tins' and empty fruit tins from the cook house. The operations room was a four wheeled caravan, as used by Montgomery I believe, and nicknamed 'The Elephant House' for some unknown reason, and was protected by a high wall of sandbags."

"Croydon was an exciting time, if one can call war exciting" remembers Cyril Moulstone. "Something was always happening. For instance one man, Sgt Ralls, who one day whilst flying one of our oldest Hurricanes arrived back with the fabric covering streaming in the breeze. Apparently in a dog fight he climbed up to join a formation of aircraft he thought were ours. But they turned out to be the enemy, so discretion being stronger that valour, he performed a vertical dive, so fast that the speed indicator went right round the clock and jammed there, hence the streaming fabric. I don't think that machine ever flew again. F/O Cyril Passy is another name that comes to mind. He owned a retriever dog named "Havoc". On landing from a sortie he would start calling "Havoc, Havoc" until the dog appeared. He would then walk up to the pilot's rest area and ask me to put on his record "Hear My Song Violetta". I might add that, at this time I was on light duty in the pilot's tent owing to my arm injury at Drem. This entailed putting records on the wind up gramophone, the favourite being Chic Henderson singing "Begin The Beguine" and the runners up were Vera Lynn singing "White Cliffs Of Dover" and "Till The Lights Of London Shine Again". By the time we left Croydon all the above records were completely worn out."

The wait to see some action was short lived indeed, the Squadron being scrambled the morning following the move south. Gerry Edge's 253 were also alerted and both units were vectored towards a large enemy formation between Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells. According to Mike Cooper-
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Slipper's combat report the formation included 3 Junkers 88's, 50 Dornier 215s together with a fighter contingent of 20 Messerschmitt 110s and 70 Messerschmitt 109s, the first time 605 had been up against the Luftwaffe's main fighter aircraft. Contact was made at 16000 ft and McKellar leading 'B' Flight attacked the Ju 88s and the leading Do 215s and 'A' Flight led by Bunny Currant attacked the Do 215s from the port side. Whilst doing so they were in turn dived upon by a number of Me 109s. The attack forced the bomber formation to turn completely and return without unloading their deadly cargo. Alec Ingle claimed a Do 215 probably destroyed, Bunny Currant a Do 215 and a damaged Me 109 and Jim Humphreys another damaged Me 109.

Mike Cooper-Slipper's combat report "I was yellow 2 in 605 Squadron ordered to take off at 1150. Yellow section was the rear section of the formation which climbed to 17000 ft. A large formation of enemy aircraft heading west was sighted about 10 miles to the north. As the leading section approached the enemy bombers the enemy aircraft turned to meet them. At this time about 15 Me 109s came through a slight haze and attacked Yellow section. Yellow 3 was shot down in flames and I turned to meet the next wave of enemy fighters, one of which passed me on my right side and then turned to the left. I turned inside and slightly below him getting in a 2-3 second burst at about 100 yards. The enemy aircraft slid away on it's back and I did not see it again. P/O Ingle saw this aircraft going down in a steep spiral with large volumes of black smoke pouring from it. I broke away from the fight and after diving 10,000 ft found myself above and on the port beam of 3 Do 215s. I did a beam attack on the port enemy aircraft closing to 50 yards in a 4-6 second burst. The E/A appeared to lag behind the other two, then I went into some cloud and did not see them again. I returned to Croydon and landed at 1250."

The aircraft referred to as Yellow 3 in Mike's report was P/O Jack Fleming who had been acting as a weaver for the section when the formation of 15 Me 109s attacked the Squadron and Jack called out to the others "We're being bounced from behind, break, I'll go back and have a look at them." Jack turned his Hurricane to face the on-coming 109s and what happened next was in his own words "we had a private party". Jack managed to open fire on a number of them before his wings tips were shot off and bullets ripped into his radiator and a fire immediately below him made the footplate glow red hot. More enemy rounds ripped through the instrument panel and ignited the fuel in the reserve tank in front of the windsheen causing most of the burning liquid to fall into his lap. "There was a big 'whoomph' and I could not open my hood. I turned the aircraft upside down twice, but still could not move it, as well as the fact that I was still being fired on. I could hear bullets and on turning the aircraft upside down for a third time pushed off from the floor. I was thirteen stone ten and very fit so the hood came straight off the runners and I went out wearing it around my neck."

Jack made a delayed drop of 20000 ft before pulling his rip cord. As he floated towards the ground he steered himself into the middle of a field surrounded by woods, when all of a sudden bullets began whistling around his head. The culprits were some farm labourers who thinking he was a German pilot started taking shots at him. Thankfully their efforts to shoot Jack failed and he landed in the field with a bump, with every part of his clothing burnt away, and even the double stitching on his parachute was now only a single thread. At this point not surprisingly he lapsed in and out of consciousness and could not recall the remarkable act that followed. Seeing how badly burned Jack was the farm labourers came up with an ingenious idea, and fetched two tennis rackets from the farm and placed them under his forearms and tied his almost unrecognizable fingers to the mesh. They spread his fingers open and carefully tied each one, thus preventing the burned flesh from fusing together and leaving Jack with what was known as 'paddle hands'. Next they removed a nearby gate and used it like a stretcher to transport him from the field. Later on he found himself in Wroughtam Cottage Hospital, which at the time was being used to house twelve expectant mothers. He was later transferred to the RAF Hospital at Halton, where he was in his words "left to rot" after refusing to have both his legs amputated at the hip. Being blindfolded as a result of his burnt eyeballs and receiving an injection of morphine every four hours Jack was in a very bad way.

One man was about to change all this and give him a small glimmer of hope. This man was the famous surgeon Archie McIndoe who suggested that as Jack was far too badly burned for plastic
surgery he might like to go to the Queen Victoria Hospital at East Grinstead to try a new process
called the Saline Bath treatment. Jack was in no position to refuse and left for Sussex in October.
Within ten days of starting the treatment tiny dots of skin, indeed so small were they that they could
only be seen with a magnifying lens, began to grow. Jack stayed with McIndoe until August 1941
when he was discharged back to the RAF and posted to 23 OTU at Pershore, Worcs as Chief
Armament Instructor and Station Armament Officer. Jack remained in the RAF for a number of years
before retiring as a Wing Commander. Later the club known the world over as the 'Guinea Pig Club'
was formed by servicemen who had received terrible burn injuries during the war and were treated
by McIndoe, Jack became its Deputy Guinea Pig. The Chief Guinea Pig was another Battle of Britain
pilot Tom Gleave who was shot down whilst leading 253 Squadron, just a few days prior to Gerry
Edge taking command.

The next day and 605 were once again in the thick of the action accounting for at least six enemy
aircraft of which four were claimed by the CO. Sadly P/O George Forrester was killed when his
Hurricane collided with a Heinkel 111 during combat over Farnborough. George had been caught in
crossfire and hit an aircraft from Stab III/KG53 severing his starboard wing. The stricken aircraft
came down at Southfield Farm, Alton and George was buried at Odiham Cemetery, Hampshire.
Another of the pilots, Jim Humphreys was also shot down, and he too was caught in crossfire during
the same combat. Flying as Green 1, Jim had sighted some enemy aircraft stepped up in vics of 5
astern at 20000 feet. Joining with Blue section on a parallel course they intended to deliver a beam
attack, but the enemy aircraft turned 90 degrees and a head-on attack was made. Jim saw George
Forrester, who was flying as Blue 3 do a half barrel roll and strike the outside aircraft of the leading
vic on it’s port mainplane which broke off at the engine nacelle. Jim had fired a four second burst at
the lead aircraft causing it to break downwards just missing his own aircraft. Seconds later and Jim’s
Hurricane sustained serious damage, so much so that the left hand side of the cockpit had been
completely shot away causing a nasty injury to his hand which later resulted in the loss of his little
finger. It didn’t take long for him to realise that his only course
of action was to take to his parachute
which he did at 12000 feet, delaying the opening of his chute till 3000 feet.
At this point he believed that he was saved and would soon be safely back on the ground, but some
Canadian soldiers based at nearby Bordon Camp had other ideas. Presumably mistaking Jim for a
German several soldiers opened fire on him as he drifted over the camp, one bullet even pierced the
left breast pocket of his tunic leaving a weal on the left side of his body. This aggressive behaviour
by the Canadians didn’t stop here as they rushed to greet Jim who had landed just outside the camp
and subsequently relieved him of his buttons, flying maps and arguably the most valuable of all his
prized flying boots. Finally as a gesture of goodwill they transported him to the Cambridge Military
Hospital at Aldershot.

During this same fateful combat the Squadron did record a number of successes, Bunny Currant
and Ricky Wright destroyed a Me 110 between them, Bunny also shared a Me109 with another
squadron and Archie McKellar bagged 3 Heinkel 111s and a Me 109 the former with one burst of his
machine guns.

The story of McKellar’s claim was later told in the book "The Few" : “It was a beautiful day, with
some cloud at 4000 feet and a clear sky above. Heading south, the Hurricanes climbed steadily to
intercept at 20000 feet. They had reached 15000 feet when the voice of Archie McKellar came to his
leader over the radio-telephone 'Enemy ahead, sir' shouted the Scotsman as he caught sight of a
cloud of thirty Heinkel 111s with an escort of fifty Messerschmitt 109s about 4000 feet above them
and twenty Messerschmitt 110s to guard the flank. In the distance Wing Commander Churchill could
see no more than six Me 109s and at once went in to draw them off with his section in order to give
the other fighters a chance to get at the bombers which Archie McKellar told him were present.
Directly he had drawn off the first batch of Messerschmitts and seen them go flashing past, he saw
six more and as he was forcing them away a bullet grazed his leg and sent him spinning down out of
the formation.
By the time he recovered he had lost the bombers and his squadron, but he headed after them all out on the course they were following. To his amazement he soon observed the Heinkels still flying in the same direction as though unaware of the British fighters that were staking them. As he flew to overtake them, he saw Archie McKellar’s section of three turn up sun and swing round to the attack. At that very moment the Heinkels turned into the sun straight towards the Hurricanes which were concealed by the glare. The Germans were, in the parlance of the fighters ‘a piece of cake’, No deflection was necessary at all. Archie McKellar, seeing the leading Heinkel in front of him, just pressed the button on his control column and squirted at it, and Wing Commander Churchill watched it blow up in the air and knock the wing of the port Heinkel, which immediately went down just as the starboard Heinkel turned straight into Archie McKellar’s stream of bullets and got what is known in the service as a ‘gutser’. Black smoke began to pour from the engines, the nose of the bomber reared up for a moment, and the third Heinkel went down on its back.”

After such a hectic day the 10th was relatively quiet and gave the men and women a chance to catch their breath after this baptism of fire at Croydon, with no patrols being flown. Some found it hard to believe that they had only been in London for less than seventy-two hours. This relative lack of activity lasted only a few hours as the men took to the air the next day to see further action against a formation of 40 He 111s with the now usual cover of 110s and 109s, although on this occasion the number of fighters outnumbered the total bomber force. The rest day on the 10th was obviously not lost on the pilots of 605 as they accounted for several enemy aircraft between Rochester and Eltham, with the only injury received on their part being a slight flesh wound to the arm, albeit the CO’s arm.

Bunny Currant initially damaged two bombers, Archie McKellar probably destroyed another, the two Poles Glowacki and Budzinski bagged an Me 110 and a Me 109 respectively before the formation turned south and west before reaching London. After turning south the enemy formation was directly over Croydon and the men of the Squadron took great delight in witnessing the demise of a Heinkel 111 at the hands of Bunny Currant and the damaging of two others. Archie McKellar and Eric Jones chased another 111 from Farningham to Beachy Head after Eric had made the first attack. Despite both men being out of ammunition they continued to make feinting attacks and after a few minutes two of the crew bailed out and moments later the aircraft went into the sea. Eric later reported that the bomber had four white lines on the fin and white slashes down the port wing and was a duck egg blue underneath.

The next day, 12th, started rather cloudy and therefore would be a relatively quiet affair compared to the last few days. Two new pilots joined the ranks, P/O Charles English and Sgt Harold Howes coming from 85 Squadron. (Both men were quite experienced with several claims to their names, indeed Harold Howes had been in combat with 85 in France and had destroyed four Dornier 17s and possibly a fifth on one fateful day in May.) But later in the day Bunny Currant, Mike Cooper-Slipper and Ricky Wright destroyed a Dornier 215 between them whilst patrolling near Hastings finally bringing it down eight miles from the French coast, and “Our good friend Gerry Edge joined us for dinner and if that wasn’t enough excitement four bombs, including three that didn’t explode, landed about 100 yards from the Officers’ Mess at 2100 hours.”

On the 13th a local man from Croydon, P/O Peter Crofts joined the Squadron from another Auxiliary squadron, 615 (County of Surrey) at Prestwick. Peter was joined by Sgt Peter McIntosh who came from 151 Squadron. Although no action was seen the day was a good one for 605 with the news that the CO is to be awarded a well deserved Distinguished Flying Cross in recognition of the number of enemy aircraft he has destroyed. Indeed the 13th was a day for a double celebration as Gerry Edge also received news that he too was to receive a DFC for his grand efforts with 605 over Dunkirk and his qualities as a great leader of men. The Squadron log summed it up brilliantly: “Flt/Lt Edge (now S/L Edge) receives the DFC - No DFC could be more richly deserved.”

There was little to note on the 14th except for the departure from Croydon of 72 Squadron who were returning to Biggin Hill. But the next twenty-four hours were to prove to be decisive in what
was now becoming known as the Battle of Britain, and indeed the next few days would have a huge impact on the outcome of the war with Germany.

The 15th of September started uneventfully enough and quoting from Richard Collier's book “Eagle Day”: "At Croydon, 605's pilots, sprawled in deck chairs in the gardens of commandeered villas along the airfield perimeter, were absorbed in calculations of their own: how many rose-bushes and cigarette butts would their voracious billy goat, brought south as a mascot, eat before breakfast this morning? Covertly, their Squadron Commander, F/Lt Archie McKellar, studied every one of them, checking that each man had taken time to shave. If a 605 pilot died this morning, the fastiduous McKellar, as always, was determined that he'd died barbered and clean." It was somewhat ironic that the first line written that day in the Squadron log was "A beautiful still sunny day". On this day the Ops Room at HQ 11 Group, Uxbridge, had distinguished visitors, the Prime Minister Winston Churchill and his wife Clementine chose this Sunday morning to drop in on Air Vice-Marshal Keith Park and his controllers and plotters to see if any action was taking place. All was quiet and there was no evidence that the skies over Southern England would soon be reverberating to the roar of Luftwaffe engines telegraphing the arrival of the largest formation of enemy aircraft yet seen.

Churchill later wrote on his visit to "The Hole": "Air Vice-Marshal Park gave general directions for the disposition of his fighter force, which were translated into detailed orders to each Fighter Station by a youngish officer in the centre of the Dress Circle, at whose side I sat. Some years later I asked his name. He was Lord Willoughby de Broke. (I met him next in 1947, when the Jockey Club invited me to see the Derby. He was surprised that I remembered the occasion.)" Churchill didn't have to wait long before the WAAF plotters were expertly moving the coloured discs across the map, each indicating a large number of enemy aircraft. Things were certainly hotting up. The speed at which the discs were being placed on the map even surprised the senior controllers inside the two storeyed underground room. Over the shuffle of discs and the whisper of the radio conversations came the voice of the Prime Minister "There appear to be many aircraft coming in.". To which Park reassuringly replied "There'll be someone there to meet them."

Soon every squadron was on standby and even though he suspected yet another Luftwaffe feint, the duty controller W/Cdr Eric Douglas-Jones felt he could wait no longer. Moments later the aircraft on 72 and 92 Squadrons left Biggin Hill bound for the area around Canterbury. The first pilots to reach the commanded angels twenty were in for an unpleasant surprise, as for once it seemed the Germans held the upper hand and looked to have overwhelmed the forces of Fighter Command. The order to send more units into the air soon came, and the phone rang at Croydon sending the men running for their machines. A short while later and every fighter squadron in Southern England was involved in repelling this massive raid from reaching it's intended targets.

It was 11:15am when 605 were finally called to action to meet a formation of Dornier bombers over Surrey and Kent. Moments later the Hurricanes were diving into a flight of thirty or so bombers and seventy Me 109s, scattering bombers all over the skies. In the ensuing battle the Squadron shot down 6 enemy aircraft and damaged another. Bunny Currant, leading Red Flight initially ordered a beam attack as the fighters were guarding the front and rear of the formation. After the flight had split Bunny climbed back into the sun and running parallel made a head on attack in true Gerry Edge style. Bunny accounted for two Dornier 17s and another damaged, Sgts Ricky Wright and Harold Howes shot down one each and Archie McKellar, who was now showing a penchant for fighters as opposed to bombers bagged two Me 109s. During the melee Bunny Currant was hit in the port wing, and being unable to turn left as his aileron was damaged, made a right handed spiral descent and made Croydon at 1210. Less fortunate was Eric Jones who sustained far greater damage and had no choice but to bail out suffering slight injuries, his aircraft coming down at Drux Farm, Plaxtol.

Shortly after lunch and the Squadron were called upon again this time being sent to intercept a formation of three waves of bombers and fighters between Maidstone and Folkestone. Only the first wave benefitted from a fighter escort and this was the one that the Squadron attacked, once again doing exceedingly well. Archie McKellar got a Do 17 and a probable He 111, Bunny Currant, never far from the action, added a Me 109 and a He 111 to his morning tally as well as damaging a further two
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Do 17s. Sgt Howes claimed a Do 17 probably destroyed and Watty Watson damaged another one, but without a doubt the claim of the day has to be given to Mike Cooper-Slipper, who having run out of ammunition decided the only course of action would be to ram his foe. This he did after his lateral control had been rendered useless after return fire from a Dornier bomber. Being only able to move his control about three inches fore and aft he had very little control of his Hurricane. Mike rambled the second aircraft in a vic of three, amidships tearing one of it's wings off. Mike's aircraft was wrenched clear minus it's port wing and most of the engine. The cockpit filled with glycol and his machine fell out of control in an inverted spin. Quoting from his combat report "... so I left hurriedly. I pulled my rip-cord a couple of seconds later because I was much too scared to do a delayed drop. I saw the enemy aircraft explode after three people had baled out. I landed in a ploughed field near Marden and rapidly became a local hero." Mike returned triumphantly to Croydon that evening, unshaken from his escapades in the air, and sporting two German Mae Wests and a complete rubber dingy, given to him by the Maidstone police.

As darkness fell the Germans continued their tactics, albeit with much smaller numbers, and two bombs landed within two hundred yards of the sleeping men of the Squadron, neither exploding. Had they gone off one wonders how many men would have slept through the noise, considering how tired and weary they were becoming. Apparently McKellar had grown increasingly anxious over a period of several days in an effort to "bag" one of the German night bombers whose course, on the way to bomb London, took them over the aerodrome at Croydon. On the evening of September 15th, Mac had asked his ground crew to stand by in case he had a chance of getting to grips with one of these dastardly invaders. He had ordered his armourer, Jock Pryce to change the ammunition belts in his Hurricane so that they held a greater quantity of 'De Wilde' (explosive/incendiary) and tracer rounds, so that he would have a better chance of hitting the bomber at night. The belts could not be altered until the Squadron was stood down from readiness at dusk so Jock asked Norman Connew if he could lend a hand. Mac's aircraft was checked by the groundcrew and was ready for action.

Early that evening the sirens sounded and before long the tell tale 'throb' of a Heinkel's engines could be heard. Moments later the searchlights were frantically scouring the skies for the invader. Seconds later the bomber was lit up and the ack-ack batteries immediately opened up on him. McKellar, who had been watching events yelled to his fitter to start his aircraft up. Fortunately the fitter was already in the cockpit and in no time the Merlin engine spluttered into life and Mac was strapped in and opening his throttle, sent his machine across the airfield and into the night air. The bomber was being passed from one searchlight beam to another as he closed in. The ack-ack guns suddenly fell silent, presumably ordered to do so via a radio transmission from McKellar. Norman Connew waited on the ground with his colleagues and remembers ",... it wasn't long before we suddenly heard a couple of bursts of machine gun fire and wondered if 'Mac' had encountered the bomber. All we could do was wait for his return. When he landed and taxied to the dispersal point he climbed out of his aircraft. Jock Pryce asked "Any luck, Sir ?", to which 'Mac' gave the thumbs-up sign and remarked "Got the b******d !". McKellar was so chuffed about finally shooting down a night bomber he invited all of his ground crew to join him for a celebration drink at the Greyhound Restaurant."

The 16th was a dull drizzling day, not aided by a 7am patrol in solid cloud and snow over Folkestone. No real contact was made, although Watty Watson experienced a short skirmish with some Me 109s, one of which was reportedly flown by Major Molders of the infamous JG51 fighter squadron. Watty's aircraft was severely damaged and he made a forced landing at Detling, having sustained an injury to himself. The next two days heralded little enemy activity, and as the history books recorded Adolf Hitler was forced to postpone "Operation Sea Lion" indefinitely due to the overwhelming losses sustained on the 15th, a day which would later be referred to in the history books as "Battle of Britain Day". Sea Lion was to be the all out enemy invasion of southern England, but relied heavily on the Luftwaffe command of the skies, which had failed. Many thousands of German soldiers awaiting the order to set sail for England were stood down, never to gather in such
numbers for such an operation again. The importance of the 15th and indeed the major role played by the pilots and men of 605 cannot be over emphasized.

On the 18th several comings and goings took place at Croydon, 111 Squadron left to take up residence at 605's last home, Drem. The Squadron's Engineering Officer W/O Jones left for a posting to 232 Squadron and was missed by all concerned. On the plus front a new man joined the ranks, P/O James "Spud" Hayter, a native of New Zealand and a fine pilot having flown Fairey Battles in France with 103 Squadron. During his time over the Channel, Spud bombed an enemy held pontoon bridge at only twenty feet, despite being constantly attacked by Me 110s. Together with two other aircraft they held up a column of German tanks for several hours. 605 was Spud's second Auxiliary unit having just left 615 (County of Surrey) at Prestwick. Another arrival came on the 20th when P/O Peter Thompson, a twenty year old pilot joined from 32 Squadron based at Acklington.

The following day Croydon received a visit from the Secretary of State for Air, Sir Archibald Sinclair. More raids on the area came during the night of the 23rd when two bombs fell on the south western corner of the airfield, one of them landing only fifteen yards from a Bofors gun post.

On the 24th the Squadron were scrambled to intercept some Dornier 17s, Jock Muirhead sharing in the destruction of one of them. During the ensuing battle P/O Glowacki chased a bomber desperately trying to make the French coast. The luckless Pole was bounced by three Me 109s and was shot down. Mystery surrounded the death of Glowacki, many believing he had been killed instantly when hit by the 109s, but in a book published in the early 1990s in Germany about the units JG77 and LG2 the riddle was solved. The story goes that he had been injured and managed to force land his aircraft on French soil, and was taken by the Germans to their nearest sick quarters for treatment, where it was hoped he would make a speedy recovery. However he was given an anti-tetanus injection to which he showed an allergic reaction, dying within a few hours. The pilots of LG2 were very upset by this and he was buried in the Guines Communal Cemetery later being awarded the VM (Virtui Militari) (5th Class) by his country. A photograph showing a wounded Pilot Officer, with possibly a Czech or Polish badge, next to a severely crumpled Hurricane with the Bear and Ragged Staff of 605 on the fin was discovered by aviation enthusiast Michael Payne of Salisbury which clearly supports the German version of events.

On the 26th P/O Derek Forde joined the Squadron from 145 Squadron, with whom he saw action over Dunkirk in May, being shot down on the 27th luckily he was unhurt and quickly rejoined his unit. Later that day a call from nearby Kenley revealed that Gerry Edge had been shot down whilst on patrol over the Channel with his squadron. His aircraft had been hit many many times and he was forced to bail out suffering several burns to his hands and body. Landing in the sea he was picked up by a motor boat and admitted to Ashford Hospital. Whilst with 253 Gerry had turned around their fortunes and made them one of the best fighter units in 11 Group.

The next day 605 received another new pilot from 145 Squadron at Tangmere who seemed set on sending the Squadron their best men, but the men certainly did not complain, especially as they had sent what the Squadron believed to be the best of the lot, F/O Peter Parrott a man with much experience. Peter was with 607 Squadron in France and 145 at Tangmere during the Dunkirk evacuation having shot down several enemy aircraft and surviving a crash landing in May after being hit by return fire from a Heinkel 111. Not only was he a great pilot he cut rather a dashing figure, so much so that the RAF chose him to represent an RAF pilot on their recruiting poster "Volunteer For Flying Duties" which was as he said "plastered everywhere".

The 27th was the busiest day since the 15th and the Squadron saw much action this time against the enemy's fighters, once again to great effect, Archie Milne, Jan Budzinski, Bunny Currant all destroy an Me 110 each, Ricky Wright probably got another and Mike Cooper-Slipper shot several large pieces out of a Me 109 after a skirmish over Sittingborne.

On the 28th Ralph Hope was shot down by a Me 109 over Tilehurst and had to bale out thankfully unhurt. The following is an extract from a letter to his family detailing his story. "Saturday was not quite such a success from my point of view, as on our third patrol I lost my aircraft. We were at 21000 ft when we got involved with a squadron of Me 109s. They got me before I even saw them,
which is quite annoying. I first felt a kind of funny bump, and as I turned to see what was up, my controls suddenly felt funny, and lots of red sparks and black smoke appeared round my feet and a cloud of white smoke, probably glycol began streaming back from the engine. The aircraft began going downhill fast. I slid back the hood and began to get out, my goggles were stripped off and my helmet began to lift up in the slipstream: I realized I hadn't undone my straps so I pulled out the retaining pin and stood up, standing on anything which came handy (the seat, the instrument panel, top of the stick, I don't know really). The air seized hold of me and there was a wrench as my oxygen tube snapped off (I had forgotten to undo it) and I shot out into the sky. The aeroplane disappeared.

It was nice and cool falling. I was head down of course but found the position quite comfortable: there was no sense of speed or feeling of falling. I had a look at the clouds below (they were about 4000-5000 feet) and then collected the odd bits of my helmet and had a look around. My parachute was still on my seat, both my boots were on, and I did not seem to have lost anything except my goggles, and a handkerchief and map which must have fallen out of the pockets in my knees when I first went upside-down. After a while I thought about pulling the rip cord. 'What about giving the old "brolley" a try out?' I thought. I seemed to have fallen a goodish way, so I pulled. The canopy streamed out, there was a hard jerk, and there I was right side up, quite comfortable and floating slowly. Oh! so slowly earthwards. I was about 9 to 10000 ft so I had fallen free for about 8 or 9000 ft (from about 18000 ft) and might have fallen further with advantage.

When I looked up I could see a shining white canopy above me, and little silver specks having no end of a dog-fight in the clear blue above me. A Spitfire dived down past me with a high pitched whine, but that was the only disturbance. The parachute began to swing me about and it wasn't long before I felt sick, very sick indeed in fact by the time I landed. It was fun going into the clouds, as the sun played a sort of 'Spectre of the Brocken' effect on my shadows as I approached them. When I emerged the countryside looked pleasantly open, and after drifting quite a way I thought I saw where I should land. Two farm hands had the same idea. We were all wrong as in spite of attempts on my part to avoid it, I came down in a spinney of young trees, pulling up short about 20 feet from the ground, hanging in my harness. I managed to get hold of a trunk, pull myself over to it, get out of the parachute harness and climb to the ground, where I remained quite still until I was found. The Army soon took charge of me, gave me a drink and some lunch, and drove me back to Croydon. The only damage I sustained was a hefty bruise on my right shoulder from hitting the tail as I jumped, and a bruise on my leg, and a torn trouser from the somewhat unceremonious descent through the upper branches of the oak tree. Now I go about with my arm in a sling, feeling particularly good as I have been given a week's sickleave."

During the same combat the Squadron lost Peter Crofts who fell to his death when his parachute failed to open. Peter's loss was great as he had only been with the Squadron for fifteen days and was only a young man of 22. A small stone memorial to him was erected on the spot where he fell at Red Pale, East Sussex. Peter was buried in All Saints' churchyard at Tilford in Surrey.

The end of the busiest month in the Squadron's history saw Bunny Currant destroy a Bf 109 on the 28th and the arrival of P/O Peter Kennett from 3 Squadron at Wick.

The beginning of October brought with it a change of command when Walter Churchill was posted to form the first of the "Eagle" Squadrons, which were units manned mostly by Americans. The first unit, 71 Squadron was formed at RAF Church Fenton in Yorkshire and as they progressed they deservedly earned the reputation of being some of the finest pilots in Fighter Command. On Churchill's recommendation Archie McKellar was promoted to Squadron Leader and took over as CO. Later that year Walter left 71 Squadron and came off flying after suffering from sinus trouble, but after a short spell commanding RAF Valley he received a telegram in July 1942 ordering him to Malta to lead the Spitfire wing at Takali. Walter planned and led the first fighter offensive sweeps over Sicily but on the 27th August he received a direct hit from an anti-aircraft shell over Biscara leading a low flying attack and was killed.

The RAF lost one of its finest pilots and without a doubt one of its greatest leaders. A newspaper extract said of him "Like all true leaders, Walter Churchill had formed the highest ideals of service
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and duty. He had instinctively the quality of “man management” which means so much. Always
generous in his appreciation of junior officers, NCOs and airmen, he was nevertheless quick to show
disapproval of slackness or inefficiency. Those who served with him will best remember his
frankness; his ready laughter and humour; his tactical knowledge, and the care and skill with which
he planned. His main concern was always for the less-experienced members of the formations he
led. He died as he would have wished. He was true to the spirit of the Service, and his name and his
prowess will be an undying inspiration to his old Squadron.” In a letter to his widow the AOC RAF
Mediterranean, Sir Keith Park wrote “If it was ordained that Walter Churchill was to give his life for
his country I feel sure that he would have chosen to end as he did, leading a fighter formation on a
daring and most successful fighter sweep over enemy territory. All of us here feel his loss very
deeply, and we send you our most sincere sympathy.” Walter was laid to rest in Syracuse War
Cemetery, Italy with all the military honours deserved of such a great man.

At Croydon Bunny Currant shared a Ju88 on the 4th and three days later the Squadron had a very
eventful day, with several successes and a tragic loss. In two sorties the Squadron shot down seven
enemy aircraft, Jan Budzinski and Cyril Passy got one between them after Ricky Wright and Budzinski
had made the initial attack the enemy finally crashing in a large plantation with a lake two miles
north of it near Cranbrook. Bob Foster shot down a Me 109 and Archie McKellar destroyed five
including four in one devastating onslaught, his report telling the tale: "I attacked the number one
and saw a bomb being dropped from his machine. I fired and pieces fell off his wing and dense white
smoke or vapour came from him as he went into a violent outside spin. In my mirror I could see
another 109 coming to attack me and therefore turned sharply right and found myself just below
and behind another 109. I opened fire and it burst into flames and went down inverted east of Biggin
Hill. As I again had a 109 on my tail I spiralled down to 15000 feet and by this time there appeared to
be 109s straggling all over the sky. I followed one, pulled my boost control and made up on him. I
gave a burst from dead astern and at once his radiator appeared to be hit as dense white vapour
came back at me and my windscreen fogged up. This speedily cleared and I gave another burst and
this machine burst into flames and fell into a wood west of Maidstone. I then noticed another Me
109 nipping in and out of the clouds, which were very broken and scattered. I followed him, still with
boost pulled, attacked him from astern, and saw his machine catch alight and the pilot bale out. This
enemy aircraft crashed slightly north of the Ashford railway line between Ashford and Tonbridge.”

Two of his victims were Uffz Paul Lederer and Uffz Paul Lege from 5/JG27 . Paul Lederer recalls " On
the 7th October we escorted our third mission of the day. There was Jansen, Paul Lege and me
under the command of Dullberg and we were escorting a squadron of Fabo 190s. As we were still
cruising some ten minutes or so over London after having finished the mission, we were surprised by
a squadron of Hurricanes from behind. Dullberg and Jansen did get home but they got Lege and me.

After the first attack the engine was blowing white smoke. I knew what was going to happen, but I
couldn't get rid of the Hurricane. I was watching it closely by turning my head, and as soon as I got
into the firing line I dived and turned so that he didn't hit me or at least not badly. After I lost a lot of
height I tried to get away in a low-level flight. After a short while the aircraft was getting more and
more unstable, and I had very little power, and the Hurricane was still behind me. I did not have any
ammunition left as the guns did not fire anymore. I had very little speed left and after flying over a
little wood it was the end. I pushed the aircraft down and after stroking the tops of some trees I
crashed head first into a ditch. Before this I had been calling for Paul. Inside petrol was leaking from
a broken main. It was lucky for me that the machine did not burn because I could not open the
cockpit. I was able to push the hood open with my back. I had only scratched my forehead and knee.
People from the village took me to a cottage where I was picked up by soldiers. Five and a half years
of captivity began, five of these in Canada.”

Paul’s long time friend Paul Lege was not so fortunate and was killed in this combat. 5/JG27 was not
the only unit to suffer casualties as 605 lost Charles English who was killed when his parachute
became caught on his tailplane after bailing out. Charles Sones remembers this terrible sight vividly
as poor English attempted to free himself as the Hurricane plunged to the ground, but sadly all his
efforts were in vain, and Sones could do nothing to help. English was buried in his native Newcastle and would be greatly missed by all who knew this immensely likeable chap. Jock Muirhead was also hit after first attacking a Me 109 causing pieces of his prey to hit his own aircraft where upon a loud explosion at the rear sent the aircraft into a spin. The rudder controls had been severed and Jock was unable to recover his machine, having no choice but to take to silk. Undoing his radio lead and waiting until he was low enough to breathe without the use of his oxygen supply, he left the aircraft at 4000 feet and landed in a wood near Dartford, his Hurricane crashing and burning out nearby.

The next day the Squadron received two awards, a very well deserved DFC for Bunny Currant and a Bar to the DFC for Archie McKellar who’s citation read "During a period of eight days in the defence of London, F/Lt McKellar has destroyed eight hostile aircraft, bringing his total to twelve. He displays an excellent fighting spirit, is a particularly brilliant tactician and has led his squadron with skill and resource." And so as to celebrate his DFC Bunny Currant shared in the destruction of a Ju 88 later that day.

The next few days yielded little in the way of enemy activity, but on the 12th a large gaggle of 109s were met by 605, Alec Ingle and Norman Howes shot down one each but Peter McIntosh was killed and controversy surrounded the discovery of his body when his family were originally notified that he was reported missing in action, being last seen going down in the Romney Marsh area. Peter’s father and elder brother went there to investigate, and, after making enquiries, located his body still inside his aircraft, near Littlestone golf course. Although deeply regrettable, in the confusion of battle such incidents did take place. Peter was buried in his local church, St John’s, Shirley, Croydon and today his grave is attended by Croydon Airport Society member and aviation historian Colin Brown. Another new pilot joined on the 12th, P/O John Rothwell who had seen action with both 601 and more recently 32 Squadron at Acklington.

On the 14th the Squadron lost it’s last serving pre-war auxiliary pilot when Ralph Hope was killed chasing a He 111 into London. The Squadron log book recorded “F/O Hope, losing his way flew into the IAZ where he was either shot down or ran into a cable at South Norwood.” A local newspaper ran the story of Ralph’s death under the heading "Pilot Died To Save Civilians" and went on to say "An RAF pilot died in preventing his plane from crashing on houses in south-east London. He was Flying Officer Ralph Hope, twenty-eight, nephew of Mr. Neville Chamberlain. His Squadron Commander has received detailed reports from the police and other witnesses which show that he stayed in his fighter until it was over the only piece of open ground in the district. Hope could have saved himself by bailing out. Had he done so, the aircraft would have crashed on the housetops. Though losing height rapidly, he stayed at the controls and, according to one witness, seemed deliberately to aim for some allotments. When the Hurricane was going straight down towards this open ground, he baled out, but his parachute did not open in time. The aircraft crashed on the allotments and no one was hurt.” "Ralph Hope was the type of fellow who would do a thing like that and think nothing about it” said his CO. "He was very brave and thought little of his own safety where that of others was concerned.”

Many years after the war had ended Cyril Moulstone, one of 605’s groundcrew at Croydon and a veteran of the Far East was travelling with a workmate through a town in Australia when his colleague suggested they call in on his mother for a cup of tea. Cyril takes up the story “On going into the lounge I stopped dead, my eyes rivetted to a large head and shoulders portrait of F/O Ralph Hope. His mother asked me if I knew this man ? Naturally I said yes very well as he was a most popular pilot in the Squadron. But I asked “How come you have this portrait out here in Australia ?” She told me that she had been the nanny for the Hope family, and when he was killed the family sent her the portrait." Cyril finishes by stating "I found this a very touching and remarkable experience.”

As if this loss wasn’t enough for the Squadron to bear they lost another great pilot and friend, Jock Muirhead the very next day. Jock was a seasoned campaigner, survivor of two previous parachute descents and holder of 605’s first ever medal, and a marvellous influence on the younger men of the Squadron. Jock was shot down by Me 109s over Maidstone and fell at Speke’s Bottom, Darland near
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Gillingham. In a letter to Jock’s mother, Archie McKellar wrote "From police evidence it would appear that he was attacking enemy aircraft, one of which he may have destroyed, when his machine was badly damaged by another enemy machine. Presumably he decided to attempt a forced landing, because his plane was quite low, when it caught on fire, so low that after he had baled out his parachute did not have time to open properly. He was killed instantaneously, and it was most unlikely that even up to the last second he had any idea other than he was going to accomplish yet another successful descent. It was a gallant fighting end, entirely worthy of the man. Like you, we find it difficult to believe we have lost him; he will always be affectionately remembered by his friends here."

Norman Connew, who had often been called upon to re-arm Jock’s aircraft on several occasions remembers Jock’s little Opel car which was always parked at the dispersal directly behind his Hurricane. so as soon as his flight was released from duty he would jump into it and shoot off to the Officers’ Mess. After Jock was killed his car remained where he had left it. "One had to pass his car daily, realizing that we would never see him jumping into it again. It was then that we realized what a brave chap we had lost". Jock’s best friend and with whom he joined the Squadron, Bunny Currant wrote of him "He died a man doing his duty fearlessly and bravely, the town may well be proud of that lion with wings", a sentiment echoed by all who knew Jock. During this combat Bob Foster claimed a 109 probably destroyed and Bunny Currant added another to his ever mounting tally. Another replacement pilot P/O Alec Scott joined the Squadron from 607 at Tangmere, and who as his name suggests hailed from Glasgow, and learnt to fly with the Oxford University Air Squadron whilst studying at Brasenose College.

On the 19th the Squadron welcomed its second Czech pilot, Sgt Raimund Puda from 310 Squadron at Duxford. Raimund had learnt to fly in his native Czechoslovakia in 1930, and was such a good pilot he was the Solo Aerobatic Champion at the European International Aerobatic Championships held in Zurich in 1937. After fleeing the country in 1939 during the invasion by the Germans, Raimund made his way to France where he and many of his compatriots joined the Free French Air Force and after familiarization with his new mount was posted to a Curtiss Hawk fighter squadron near Strasbourg. After the Germans invaded France, they flew south to the Spanish border and then on to Morocco, where the news came that the French had capitulated and they were discharged. Meeting up with 200 fellow countrymen in Casablanca they arranged to be taken to Gibraltar by fishing boat and then in a convoy with 30 other vessels, a coal carrier brought them to Liverpool from where Raimund found himself in the RAF with 310 Squadron (Czechoslovakia) at Duxford. Joining at the same time as Puda, albeit via a more traditional route was Sgt Ken Jones who had learnt his trade under the expert guidance of Peter Townsend at 85 Squadron.

The next day another sergeant pilot, Sgt Harry Pettit joined from 1 Squadron at Wittering and instantly became good friends with Ken Jones, later that day Archie McKellar destroyed yet another Bf 109 to add to his impressive total. On the 22nd Peter Parrott received news that he had been awarded a very well deserved DFC Also on the 22nd Archie Milne was shot down by a Me 109 and crash landed his aircraft near Dorking, suffering a fractured hip. This incident does in fact have a happy ending for Archie as during his stay in hospital he befriended a nurse whom he later married. Three days later Sgt Norman Howes received the first Distinguished Flying Medal for a 605 pilot, and a very deserved one indeed as he had destroyed at least ten enemy aircraft with both 85 Squadron and now 605, including four Do17s on the same day in May.

On the 26th Alec Ingle shot down a Me 109 and Archie McKellar another Bf 109, but the Luftwaffe equalled this tally by shooting down Spud Hayter and Cyril Passy, thankfully both men survived this action. Spud was forced to abandon his aircraft at 25000 feet and parachuted into the ground of Great Swifts, the home of Major Victor Cazalet, who was hosting a cocktail party at the time to which his latest guest was duly invited.

Cyril Passy wasn’t quite so fortunate, force landing at Town Row Green, Marks Cross relatively unhurt. Cyril had been chasing a 109 when he fell into a very steep dive which threw the petrol in his machine into the top of the carburettor which caused his engine to cut. (The 109 never suffered
from this as it benefitted from a petrol injection system which did not use a float chamber). Moments later when the force of gravity was restored the Merlin engine came back on at full power as Cyril had left the throttle wide open. The propeller had been moved into fine pitch to try and help keep the revs up when the power had failed. Before the airscrew could re-adjust itself the engine was already turning way above it's maximum permitted revs per minute and then failed completely. Cyril tightened his straps and manoeuvred the aircraft into a glide desperately searching for a suitable place to land. As he neared the field he had chosen he saw with horror that it had been protected from the landing of enemy gliders with wooden stakes. Time was running out and he had to find another place to land but in doing so his speed had dropped and the Hurricane went into a short spin and hit the ground and broke up. Cyril was thrown clear and was still strapped into his seat. A very worried little man appeared from a nearby house and ran over offering him a drink from a flask. Cyril replied "No thanks. I never drink before sundown".

Alec Ingle had something of a mixed day on the 27th when, after destroying a Me 109 he was hit in both wings by another 109 and had to bring his machine down in a field at Sewells Farm, Barcombe, receiving slight cuts to his face in the process. On the same day, Archie McKellar continued his impressive form with another Bf 109 to add to his ever impressive tally. On the last day of October the Squadron bade a sad farewell to Peter Thompson, a very popular pilot and who was later awarded the DFC and retired from the RAF at the end of the war as a Group Captain.

On the first day of November Archie McKellar was killed when he failed to return from combat over Kent with some Me 109s. McKellar's aircraft was seen some way down the Kent coast from where the other 605 pilot's were engaged with enemy fighters, and was apparently looking for somewhere to land when it inexplicably turned onto it's back and fell into some trees then crashed through a garden wall before finally coming to rest against the side of Woodlands Manor. The engine from the Hurricane detached itself from the fuselage and demolished a pair of wrought iron gates and ended up in the scullery, the scar of the wall where it was later repaired is still visible today. Mercifully no one was injured in the manor but sadly Archie was already dead by the time the locals reached him. McKellar's long time friend Sandy Johnstone and the Commanding Officer of 602 (City of Glasgow) Squadron wrote of the wee Scot "Nothing means more to a fighter pilot who is leading a formation than to know that there is a team behind him, and as one who always had Archie as right-hand man, I can safely say that no finer team mate ever existed. Fine weather or foul, upside down or the right way up, Archie was always there flying alongside." Archie was laid to rest in the New Eastwood Cemetery in Glasgow on the 6th, 605 being represented by former adjutant S/Ldr R.C. Longsdon, and Wing Commander the Duke of Hamilton was one of the pall bearers. The Squadron did record a success on the same day, albeit somewhat overshadowed by McKellar's death, when Ricky Wright destroyed a Bf 110.

Bunny Currant was made acting Commanding Officer and recalls a somewhat lighter incident later that month "One very cold bright sunlit day I was leading the Squadron on patrol at 28000 feet in the Rochester vicinity. The temperature I would guess was possibly about 45 degrees below, it was extremely cold. Anyhow I didn't seem to remember reading any reports of how we got on when nature took its course and we were caught short, as it were. I'll tell you, on this occasion my bladder was at crisis point, bursting at the seams for release. I thought that even if I handed over to my No 2 and flew back to Croydon flat out and landed and raced to the nearest loo, I'd never make it. So in agony for release with very great difficulty I undid my straps and unzipped my Sidcot heavy flying suit, and with unzipping this and that I was able to perform. Now the compass in the Hurricane is on a small plinth between the legs on the floor in front of the pilot. The stream hit the compass and to my astonishment and sheer disbelief it froze solid instantly until the compass was a dome of ice. But the relief was heaven. I couldn't have cared what happened so long as the pressure was released. I sat back in sheer gasping joy at the release and laughing almost hysterically at that moment. I'll never forget it and all the time behind me, eleven pilots kept in perfect position in vics of three, unaware of the trauma of their leader. There is a sequel. From then on I had a reputation that Bunny was OK, but no bloody good at navigation as he could never read his compass! When I landed back
at Croydon I had to ask my ground crew to cut a hole in the fabric at the tail to allow the fluid to escape. Otherwise wet rot, mildew, rust, goodness knows what could have developed until the tail fell off." Bunny finishes by stating "I know one thing, that laughter is a great healer."

On the 5th, one of the Czech pilots, Raimund Puda was forced to bail out of his machine unhurt, after sustaining severe damage to his oxygen system and control surfaces during combat with some Bf 109s over the Thames Estuary. The next day Jim Humphreys was promoted to Flying Officer, a very well deserved promotion, and two days later the news came through that Archie McKellar had been posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Order, the first for the Squadron, for which he had been recommended sometime before his untimely death. McKellar's citation and final epitaph "(Since killed in action). This officer has led his squadron with outstanding courage and determination. He has destroyed twenty enemy aircraft, and his magnificent fighting spirit has proved an excellent inspiration to his fellow pilots."

The 6th was certainly a busy day with the welcome visit of HRH the Duke of Kent who expressed his sympathy at the loss of the CO. The Duke's visit was however the subject of much amusement after he had a painful encounter with the Squadron's adopted mascot the imaginatively named, Billy the goat. The animal had a reputation for chewing the fabric off the parked Hurricanes and was therefore housed in a tent behind the Officers' Mess, being tethered by a long rope so that he could graze outside. The day of the Duke's visit was very foggy and his arrival time kept being put back until finally word came that he would be unable to attend after all. There was nothing for it but to start eating the feast that had been laid on for his tea, when soon afterwards there was a knock at the window of the Mess, and a very flustered airman panted "He's here". As the men straightened their uniforms and opened the french windows to greet His Royal Highness he appeared through a gap in the fence and seeing the men pouring out to meet him, he stopped in front of Billy's tent and saluted. The goat was naturally incensed by a stranger stopping in front of his home, so he shot out behind the Duke and delivered a very shrewd blow to the royal behind. The goat's horns were both long and sharp and he propelled him towards the group of men at high speed. The Duke, somewhat shaken by his encounter with the wretched creature was very good about it and belatedly joined the men for tea, although they do recall him rubbing his posterior from time to time. The punishment for the goat, if indeed there was any is not recorded.

The next few days were dominated by Alec Ingle who damaged a Bf 109 on the 8th and destroyed another three days later. It therefore came as no surprise that Alec was appointed 'B' Flight Commander and was now showing the sort of leadership that would later establish him as one of the top squadron (609) and Wing (124) commanders of the war. The lull of the last two weeks was soon to end when the Luftwaffe changed tactics and commenced with hit and run raids throughout the south of England. This new form of aggression did not quite go according to plan with 605 alone shooting down three on the 15th, but losing P/O Gauze who had only just joined the Squadron. Eric Jones was also shot down over North Foreland, but thankfully he managed to bale out unhurt. The 15th was also the day Bunny Currant was awarded a Bar to his DFC, the first man to receive such an award with the Squadron, and a more deserving recipient it would be hard to find. His citation stating "Since September 1940 this officer has personally destroyed six enemy aircraft and damaged several others, bringing his total to thirteen. He has led his flight, and on occasions his squadron, with great success, and shows a sound knowledge of tactics against the enemy."

On the 16th Spud Hayter was married at Harrow-on-the-Hill and the next day Sgt Ricky Wright was awarded the Distinguished Flying Medal, his citation stating "This airman has displayed fine qualities of leadership, skill and courage. His sound tactics and efficiency have enabled him to destroy at least six enemy aircraft." Ricky would later become the most successful NCO fighter pilot to have served with the Squadron. Croydon became the focus of two very welcome visitors when Lord Willoughby de Broke visited on the 17th and five days later Air Vice-Marshal Keith Park made a personal visit to congratulate the men for their marvellous efforts during the Battle of Britain.

Without doubt the most popular and successful pilot not to have received an award so far had good reason to celebrate on the 26th when Mike Cooper-Slipper finally got news that he was awarded a
DFC for his efforts since joining the Squadron earlier in the year. Mike's citation, which mentions the most dramatic of his victories, went "Flying Officer Cooper-Slipper has displayed great skill and daring in air combat. On one occasion he deliberately rammed and destroyed a hostile aircraft after his own controls had been practically shot away. He has destroyed seven enemy aircraft and damaged three others." Great news came at the end of what had been a very up and down month, when Jim Humphreys returned to the ranks after recovering from his ordeal on the 9th of September, and another man who had also recently been recuperating from the same fate, Gerry Edge returned to his beloved 605, this time as Commanding Officer. Every man who served with Gerry was naturally delighted and those who had not yet had the pleasure were certainly looking forward to the opportunity of working with him.

On Sunday 1st December, the squadron were scrambled early in the morning. The sky was clear and a little ground mist was too thin to obscure the blue sky. It was a bright, cold, clear Sunday morning with a touch of frost, but promising a fine December day, almost windless. Peter Parrott takes up the story. "We were vectored to the south towards Brighton by the Kenley controller. As we climbed out of Croydon, I took up position to the rear of the Squadron and a couple of hundred feet above the rear section and then started "weaving" to spot any enemy aircraft attacking from behind. We were told to climb to "Angels 15 (15000 feet)" or possibly higher, so I knew that the high flying Me 109s, some probably carrying bombs, were expected. As we approached the south coast nearing 20000 feet the controller ordered a turn to port onto an easterly heading. As the Squadron turned, I was caught at the southerly end of my zigzag and so fell behind the Squadron. As the leader straightened up on the new course the controller told us that the nearest bandits were 20 miles east of us, so I thought it safe to straighten up myself for a few seconds to get back into position over the Squadron. Less than ten seconds later, it seemed, I saw bright red sparks overtaking me on the starboard side immediately followed by several bangs on the armour plate behind my seat-back. I pulled over into a steep spiral dive, a manoeuvre I had used once before to shake off a Me 109 and it worked again this time. I called the leader on the radio but received no reply and had the feeling that it had been hit anyway. On the way down, I knew that there was a lot of oil on the foot rests (engine or hydraulic I do not know) and the aircraft was vibrating badly. When I straightened out and pulled out of the dive, I found that the rudder-bar was no longer connected to the rudder, the engine was running very roughly and there was no increase in power when I opened the throttle. I was now down to about 2500 feet and started to look for a field in which to make a wheels-up landing. A few seconds later, there was a flash of flame from the exhaust stubs or through the gaps in the cowlings.

A few weeks previously, three of us had visited John ('Killer') Milne in East Grinstead Hospital. He had been shot down and injured and although not himself burned, was in a ward with half a dozen chaps who had been. They were all swathed in bandages with only small holes for the mouth and nose and their arms from the elbows were upright and also swathed. The most noticeable feature was that they lay in their beds unmoving. There was also a very strong smell of ether in the ward. After a few minutes, I heard a voice saying "Look out, he's going". The next thing I knew, was that I was sitting on a chair with someone pushing my head down between my knees. (Many of the Hurricane pilots who were burned had suffered from flames from the 25 gallon reserve petrol tank which was located between the rear end of the engine and the bulkhead on which the instrument panel was mounted. This was only three feet or less in front of the pilot. It was then not surprising, perhaps, that when I saw the flames I panicked! My one aim was to get out of the cockpit as quickly as possible. I did not even pull the nose up to decrease speed, and the last time I had looked at the airspeed indicator, it was reading nearly 200 mph. Having pushed the hood back, I tried to release the small exit panel on the port side. It was jammed, so I tried the emergency panel on the starboard side, with the same result. I then stood in the cockpit and was immediately blown flat on my back on the hood, where I stuck. I then remembered that I had failed to disconnect my oxygen tube and radio lead. I managed to reach forward and pull them free. Still stuck, I wriggled around and suddenly slid down the top of the fuselage hitting my shoulder on the
tail-fin very hard before spinning off spread-eagled. I was dazed by the impact with the fin and my right arm refused an order to move that hand upwards to pull the ripcord, but I still had the wit to hook my left thumb through the D-ring and so deploy the parachute. Even then the fractional delay between pulling or rather pushing, the cord and the jerk when the parachute opened fully, was long enough for the fear that the 'chute had failed to open to go through my mind. The relief when it did open was quite tremendous and the sudden deceleration produced a momentary impression of actually going up. Looking down, the ground seemed to be coming up remarkably quickly. I was swinging from side to side but had no time to try pulling the shrouds to stop the swing before I slammed into the ground on my right leg and shoulder again and again I felt half-stunned.

I opened my eyes and found I was lying on grass with a field-hedge a short distance away. Everything was quiet and so peaceful after the turmoil of the last few minutes. I closed my eyes again. There was not a breath of wind, no sound, and I felt no pain. Then I began to wonder if I was still in this world or the next. The doubt was resolved after a short time when I heard the soft sound of footsteps in the frosty grass and a voice asked me if I was all right. Opening my eyes, I saw a pair of sturdy boots leading up to corduroy trousers tied with string below the knees, a jacket which had seen better days, a kindly face surmounted by a black tin helmet with the letters W/P or something similar painted on the front. I got to my feet and started to take off several layers of extra clothing which we wore, as the Hurricane had no effective cockpit heating for high altitude flying. While I was doing this, Mr Blount, a farm worker, observed chattily that he thought I had left it too late that time, and went on to tell me that a German had landed in the same field only the previous week, so he was rapidly becoming used to aircrew arriving unexpectedly in his bailiwick. My aircraft had crashed into a wood only a hundred yards or so from where I had landed. The rest of the Squadron did not make contact with the enemy and had an uneventful patrol. On landing back at Croydon, the Flight Sergeant counted them all in and found himself one short. Nobody said anything about the missing aircraft and he eventually decided by a process of elimination that I was the missing one. He then approached Bunny Currant, my flight commander, and asked him where F/O Parrott was. Bunny had no idea, nor did anyone else. I had not been missed and the Squadron had completed the sortie blissfully ignorant that they had no weaver. Oddly, that day two others bailed out on a later sortie, Cyril Passy and Alec Ingle."

There was another name to add to the above list of three 605 men who were shot down as Norman Howes was also forced down, crash landing on Gravesend aerodrome. Bunny Currant and Spud Hayter tried in vain to redress the balance, both men destroying a Bf 109 a piece.

On the 5th, Bunny Currant was promoted to Flying Officer, and this was also a time of much excitement amongst the pilots with the loan of a Mk II Hurricane, as well as the attachment to the Squadron for ten days of Ronnie Harker from Rolls Royce, who would help the Squadron assess the new machine. Ronnie soon became a great friend of the Squadron, so much so that a story arose that Ronnie had taken a group of friends to the pantomime in Nottingham during the first Christmas of the war. The comedian on stage challenged the audience to give him a couplet which he could finish. One of Ronnie's party stood up and said "It was on the good ship Mizzen, they were sitting in the stern", but before the comedian could come up with something suitable the challenger finished with "She was holding his'n and he was holding her'n". Ronnie had repeated this story to his new chums in 605 and was very proud of his anecdote and often teased about it. Sometime later he brought a Hurricane to Croydon with the throttle interconnected to the airscrew pitch control for the pilots to try out. After the test the men retired to the Officers' Mess to discuss their findings with Ronnie, during which the words "The good shop Mizzen" were painted in large letters down one side of the test Hurricane and picture of a small boat with two heads sticking out on the other. Ronnie was kept talking for so long that he would have been unable to call at another aerodrome to have the legend removed before returning with the Hurricane to Rolls Royce at Hucknall. The modification he had come to share with the squadron became officially known as the Mizzen Interconnection Control.
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The Mizzen story has stayed with Ronnie ever since, so when he came to take his seat at the 605 Reunion Dinner and 50th Anniversary of the Battle of Britain in 1990 he found a small model boat at his place with "The Mizzen" painted down one side, courtesy of Alec Ingle and company.

December was a month of transition when several men were posted away. Jim Humphreys, who had only recently returned to operations left to join 15 Flying Training School at Oxford as a staff pilot and Cyril Passy, Eric Jones and Charles Sones left to join the newly formed Hurricane Night Fighter Unit, 96 Squadron at Cranage, a posting that brought the following comment in the Squadron log "We are all sad to lose them after having been with the Squadron for so long. We have been constantly - and in increased intensity - bothered with pinpricks like this. We have been down here nearly four months, doing fine teamwork in the air and on the ground, and yet they pick upon the front line squadrons with requests to denude themselves of their better pilots, often receiving in exchange pilots with very little experience indeed." Charles Sones was credited with destroying at least two enemy aircraft and sharing another up until his transfer to 96 Squadron.

Further discontent was recorded in the Squadron log when rumours were rife that it was soon to leave Croydon. "A considerable flap caused in the Squadron when we were told we should be moving to Heston very soon after Christmas. This is the last thing we want to do. We are well 'dug in' here, have made ourselves very comfortable in our own little Mess, and are a happy family by ourselves as a Squadron. The idea of the move is to make one flight operational and the other experimental with Hurricane IIs." It didn't take Gerry Edge long to resolve the problem. "After constant telephone conversations S/L Edge has arranged that we may stay here during our half operational and half experimental period. Much relief all round".

The CO, Gerry Edge remembers one particular incident that could have resulted in the search for another boss. "Coming out of Croydon I was driving back to the unit when I saw an Army Officer coming out of a house on the roadside. He flagged me down but stopped to light a cigarette. He then came up to my car and asked for a lift. He settled in the seat and then asked me if I would mind stepping on it a bit, as he said he had been trying to make a land-mine, which was swinging from a tree, safe but had been unable to do so as it was moving about too much and he thought it might fall out at any moment. We had gone about 200 yards when there was an enormous bang. He said "I thought it was a bit close!".

On the 22nd of December the Squadron lost it's most successful sergeant pilot and the first of such to receive the DFM, when Sgt Norman Howes was killed. Four days earlier, the Squadron's other very successful sergeant pilot and also a recipient of the DFM, Sgt Ricky Wright, received his very well earned commission and promotion to Pilot Officer. Christmas at Croydon was made as festive as possible, not surprising considering what the men had been though during the last four months. Much credit for the Christmas arrangements was given to the hard work of Sgt Shakespere as the Squadron Log testifies. 24.12.40 "Cold and grey again. We had previously obtained permission from the Southern Railway Co. to use their pavilion almost adjoining the aerodrome for the men's Christmas Dinner, so that all might be seated at once. Much work under the guidance of Sgt. Shakespere, has been put in to make the place look gay, and final touches were made to-day, with splendid result. No air raid warning to-night (a most unusual event) nor over the whole country. The Officers celebrate Christmas Eve with dinner at the Greyhound Restaurant, Croydon, and afterwards in our Mess, till a late hour."

25.12.40 "A grand day, thoroughly enjoyed by everybody. Wing Commander Prickman calls in to see us this morning. We are very fortunate in that our half day release, i.e. after 13.30 hours falls today. The Officers have their dinner 13.30 hrs the men, 1800 hrs and the Sergeants 19.30. Officers and Senior NCOs waited on the men as usual, and everyone thoroughly enjoyed themselves. 162 sat down to dinner, and congratulations are due to Corporal Lines and the other cooks who turned out a first class meal. No enemy aircraft over the country by day or night". Four days later and Peter Thompson introduced a new recruit to the ranks, Timothy the Goat. The new arrival didn't receive the blessings of all as it was a billy and therefore smelt awful, which meant it had to be constantly moved and kept tethered down wind. A very heavy raid was made that night, so much so that the
fires in London were reflected in the windows at the aerodrome. On the 30th Air Marshal Sholto Douglas, the new Commander-in-Chief of Fighter Command came to talk about the Squadron's new role with the recently arrived Hurricane Mk IIs. The first such operation would take place in February 1941 when they acted as escort to a squadron of Blenheims from No 2 (B) Group, who were tasked with bombing the French city of Boulogne, the Hurricanes attacking ground gun positions as no enemy aircraft had attempted to intercept the allied raid.

1941

1941 didn't start well for 605 when Alec Scott was killed on the 2nd of January and was buried in St Mary's Churchyard, Black Bourton, Oxfordshire. The 29 year old Scot was a very popular man and friend and one whose presence and wit was missed greatly. Early January also saw the sad departure of Bunny Currant, albeit a posting to 52 OTU at Debden. Bunny had without doubt been one of the most successful pilots in the history of 605 and whose leadership, wit and outstanding fighting spirit would be very sorely missed. After his spell with 605 Bunny's career continued to flourish, the award of a DSO with 501 Squadron, a flirtation with Hollywood when he appeared with David Niven in the film "The First of the Few", the award of the Croix de Guerre from the Belgian people and leadership of the Ibsley Wing. He later commanded 122 Wing TAF and finally retired from the RAF in 1959 as a Wing Commander.

Awards to the Squadron were not only confined to those bestowed by the King, but also to those awarded to overseas pilots by their grateful countrymen. One such award was the Krzyz Walecznych which was presented to Pole Jan Budzinski in February in recognition of his outstanding efforts against the Luftwaffe, something not lost on the besieged people of Poland. On the 2nd of February the Squadron lost two sergeant pilots when Ken Jones and Harry Pettit failed to return from a patrol. Their ultimate fates were not known for a very long time, when news reached the squadron that they had been ambushed by a group of Me 109s resulting in the death of Harry, a great friend of Ken who managed to find his way to what he thought was an Allied airfield. Harry's body was never found and the untimely death of the likeable 20 year old from Essex is remembered on the Runnymede Memorial, panel 50.

Ken had lost most of his instruments and was therefore unable to calculate his exact position, but time was running out as his aircraft began to fail, and locating a suitable place to land was now his prime objective. Sighting an airfield below he made his descent and brought his machine down perfectly, taxiing it along the track and pulling up outside an unmarked hut. The airfield was devoid of both aircraft and vehicles and was therefore unrecognisable. Ken undid his straps and climbed out of the cockpit just as the door of the hut opened and out strode a man dressed, to Ken's horror, in a Luftwaffe uniform. Ken was unarmed and could not tackle this man, but as quick as a flash he reached for the Very pistol inside his aircraft and hastily stood back and fired the flare into the open cockpit. His Hurricane was soon ablaze and minutes later was totally destroyed. His quick thinking had prevented the German boffins from getting their hands on a complete Hurricane and being able to assess it's capabilities to fuel their war effort. Ken was captured and became the Squadron's second prisoner of the war, and was destined to spend the remainder of the war as such until his release in May 1945.

On the 18th of February Sgt Ron Noble joined the ranks, having a total of 128 hours flight time of which only 15 were on Hurricanes. This figure highlights just how inexperienced some men were when first joining a front line unit, and how important it was to increase their knowledge and training whilst maintaining a first class fighting machine. Later in February Spud Hayter was made a Flight Commander, replacing Bunny Currant and happily the Squadron welcomed back Graham Austin, who had now recovered from his injuries sustained when he was shot down over Dunkirk in May 1940, and who now returned and took up the post of Squadron Adjutant. Graham's return coincided with a visit by the Squadron's great friend and former CO, Walter Churchill. On the 22nd John Rothwell was killed, and was buried in Poynings Cemetery, Sussex. John was only 20 and had
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been with the Squadron for only a short time, but none the less his loss was a considerable one, and would act as a reminder of the danger of air combat during the somewhat less hectic early months of 1941.

A few days later and the Squadron were to bid farewell to Croydon, a place that held so many memories, some good some not so, and were posted to RAF Martlesham Heath in Suffolk, home of 242 Squadron, who were under the command of the remarkable legless pilot Douglas Bader, although he was not to everyone's taste, his cavalier "devil may care" attitude to flying and life in general was often a cause for contention. Some problems were being encountered by the Mk II Hurricanes when it came to refuelling them after a patrol which had involved flying at height. The problem lay with the oil which would get so hot it would froth, and would subsequently have to be left to cool before the oil tank could be opened to be checked and topped up. The problem was conveyed to Group HQ who not believing there was such a problem dispatched a Wing Commander Engineering Officer to investigate and witness the problem first hand. The Squadron sent a Hurricane off with the order to reach 30000 feet and run the engine until it got hot, and then return so that the oil could be inspected. The Wing Commander from Group instructed an airman to remove the cap so he could peer inside. Gerry Edge immediately intervened and ordered the airman to do no such thing, knowing full well what the consequences of such an action would be. Ronnie Harker from Rolls Royce was also in attendance and confirmed what Gerry had stated would happen if the tank was opened straight away. The man from Group was not impressed and demanded he be given a spanner so that he could open the tank himself. As he approached the Hurricane the men around him took several paces backwards and were rewarded with the sight of a Wing Commander who was by now covered in hot oil, and the problem was now fully understood and appreciated!

On the 24th March a lone raider bombed the airfield but was later damaged by Bob Foster who had managed to catch up with it, before it disappeared into low cloud. Two days later a Dornier 17 was intercepted patrolling over a British convoy and was quickly turned into a speedboat and then into a submarine which did not re-surface. A new sergeant pilot, John G.S. Beckett joined the Squadron soon after the move to Suffolk, but was soon nicknamed Joe by Gerry Edge, a name that would stay with him for evermore. The stay at Martlesham Heath was relatively short lived and a return to the Midlands was made at the end of March when the Squadron were posted to RAF Ternhill in Shropshire, a popular move as it meant that those original Auxiliaries who were fortunate to gain leave did not have far to travel back to their native Birmingham.

April was a busy month with several old friends leaving for new postings and many new fledgling pilots filling their boots. Archie Milne left to become an instructor at Crosby-on-Eden with 52 OTU, later returning to operations in the Western Desert and a posting as Chief Test Pilot to Assam. Eric Jones also left to become an instructor but would later return to 605 two years later on Mosquitoes, a feat not achieved by any other. Peter Parrott was posted to Central Flying School at Upavon for an instructors course, later serving overseas in Malta and Sicily and commanding 43 Squadron in Naples. Awarded a Bar to the DFC and an AFC Peter had a long and distinguished career with the RAF before his retirement in 1965 as a Wing Commander. Spud Hayter also left in April, joining 52 OTU at Debden as an instructor, surviving two crashes in June within two days of each other, both with the same pupil. This was not the end of Spud’s exploits, and perhaps deciding operations was a safer bet joined 611 Squadron only to crash land the following month after suffering flak damage. The award of a DFC was followed by a move to the Middle East, where once again he crash landed after being attacked by a Ma 202, which he subsequently brought down as it overshot his stricken machine. The Italian pilot survived and joined Spud in the nearby Australian lines, sharing in a very welcome bottle of whisky. Spud’s further exploits would merit a whole chapter in themselves, suffice to say he received a Bar to the DFC, two Mention in Dispatches and would survive the end of the war to return to his native New Zealand.

The last of the April departures was Jan Budzinski who left to join 302 (Polish) Squadron at Kenley, later receiving a Bar to the K.W. he was awarded in February. Several officers from the Squadron attended the wedding of Graham Austin in Chichester on the 5th of April, a cause for much
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celebration amongst the men who all conveyed their best wishes to the happy couple. One of the Squadron’s Czech pilots Sgt Raimund Puda was posted on in June as was Graham Austin who left on the 23rd to take over No.3 Delivery Flight at Hawarden near Chester. He was later posted to the Merchant Shipping Fighter Unit (MSFU) as Sdn/Ldr Training, and was awarded the AFC and an OBE for his outstanding services to the RAF.

Whilst at Ternhill, Ronnie Harker and Gerry Edge witnessed a flying accident when they noticed that an Avro Manchester from Rolls Royce which had just joined the circuit, was in trouble when smoke started to appear from it's port engine. The aircraft turned down wind and started it's run to the airfield, when it suddenly straightened out and rapidly lost height, coming down between two trees a few hundred yards from the aerodrome. Ronnie and Gerry jumped into Gerry's car and rushed to where the aircraft had come down. As they neared the flaming wreckage, two of the crew came running down the lane. Gerry parked the car on the grass verge and ran to the wreckage. The rear of the fuselage was intact, the fire being confined to the front side. The two crew had stated the pilot had not yet vacated the aircraft and so Gerry clambered inside and hurriedly made his way to the cockpit door. As he reached for the handle there was a loud explosion and the aircraft lurched to port throwing him to the ground. He struggled back to the door and opened it, fortunately there was a rush of air into the cockpit and he could see the pilot through a mass of flames and smoke. Despite Gerry's valiant efforts the pilot, a very experienced pilot from Rolls Royce called Curlew was already dead. Having witnessed the crash Gerry felt that he had deliberately steered his stricken machine away from the heavily populated airfield, thus not risking any loss of life on the ground. Perhaps these actions reduced his own chances of survival, in any case, he was undoubtedly a very brave man indeed.

During the stay at Ternhill the Squadron had the opportunity to really test their aircraft and see what they were capable off at height, often up to 36000. The Station Commander, W/Cdr Isherwood would often accompany them in these tests. On the first of July a move even closer to home was made when the Squadron were ordered south to RAF Baginton in Warwickshire, with detachments being made to the nearby aerodromes at Bramcote and Honiley, an airfield that would later play a key role in the history and development of 605. This move was timed with the departure of one of the stalwarts of the Squadron Alec Ingle, who was posted to 59 OTU at Crosby-on-Eden to impart his great wealth of experience as an instructor. Receiving the AFC and later an even more deserved, but somewhat belated DFC, he commanded his own Auxiliary unit, 609 (West Riding) Squadron in 1943 who were equipped with the mighty weapon the Typhoon. It was during one sortie, whilst commanding 124 Wing, that Alec was shot down in August, and despite his aircraft blowing up and being only a matter of feet from the ground he managed to survive. Evading capture for a few hours, he had no choice but to give himself up to seek urgent medical attention for his painful burns. Alec was incarcerated in Stalag Luft III, made famous by the Great Escape, and was freed in 1945 to rejoin the RAF, later retiring in 1966 as a Group Captain.

On the 2nd of September came the final and without doubt the most painful blow to the Squadron when the last of the original auxiliary pilots Gerry Edge was posted to form and command 73 OTU at Aden in the Middle East. His posting was inevitable but none the less a tremendous loss, especially amongst the ground crews, many of whom had served with him since he first joined the Squadron way back in 1936. Gerry’s departure was met by the arrival of a new CO, S/Ldr R. Reid and the move two days later to nearby RAF Honiley and an opening of a new chapter in the history of the Squadron. Bob Foster left on the 25th to become an instructor with 55 OTU and later Ricky Wright, the last man who had flown with the Squadron during the Battle of Britain was promoted to Flying Officer.

Rumours were rife that the Squadron were destined for a posting overseas, although there was much speculation about the final destination. On the 7th of October the Squadron’s Hurricanes were flown to Sealand near Chester for crating, although their final destination remained a secret. Finally the news was confirmed that indeed a move overseas was on and the destination was Malta. Ron Noble, Philip Wigley and Joe Beckett all received their commissions on the 13th and became pilot
officers. The Hurricanes of 605 and 242 were loaded aboard the old training aircraft carrier HMS *Argus*, which had carried the very first Hurricanes to serve in Malta a year earlier. The *Argus* together with their pilots departed Gourock in Scotland on 30th October whilst the ground crews readied themselves for their later departure. 258 Squadron also departed for Malta, their aircraft being crated and loaded aboard the special transport vessel HMS *Athene*. Both vessels docked at Gibralter on the 5th of November where a number of Hurricanes and men were transferred to HMS *Ark Royal*.

The two carriers left a few days later with all the aircraft belonging to 242 Squadron together with the majority of 605’s machines. The two ships dropped anchor some six hundred miles from Malta and the men and machines were readied for departure. The pilots, many of whom had never flown over such a large stretch of water, let alone flown off an aircraft carrier, must have viewed the enterprise with some misgivings! The Hurricanes were equipped with long range fuel tanks and one by one left the *Argus* to cross the Mediterranean bound for the island of Malta. The flight took nearly four hours and was never flown above 1000 feet and in all thirty seven Hurricanes departed under the codename Operation *Perpetual*. During the take off Pete Lowe’s Hurricane swung violently and removed the *Argus*’ “Flying In Progress” flag, almost knocking off his tail wheel in the process. Many expected to see Pete disappear into the drink but he regained control and completed his flight, although the damaged tail wheel did collapse during his landing. The flag was claimed as a Squadron souvenir and was hidden in another aircraft later reappearing on the island with the legend “605 Scorched Earth Gang” emblazoned on it.


The Ark Royal was sunk whilst returning to Gibralter for the remaining aircraft and men, but events in the Pacific were about to change the whole war and more so the fate of those who were awaiting their transportation to the Mediterranean. The day before the departure of the ground crew from Gourock to Malta aboard the ship H.M.T Z 16, by coincidence it was formerly the Union Castle Liner *Warwick Castle*, the Japanese orchestrated an unprovoked dive bomb attack on the United States’ Naval Establishment at Pearl Harbour, thus bringing a full declaration of war by the United States on both Germany and Japan. This intervention by Japan and indeed it’s threat to the Dutch East Indies brought with it a change in destination of the *Warwick Castle* and the men were informed that they would not be joining up with their pilots in Malta, but instead now be sailing for Java to bolster the Dutch forces and prevent the Japanese from its occupation. The journey and exploits of the men who left for Java will be told in another chapter.

News of Japan’s action reached the pilots in Malta who realized that it may be some time before they would see their ground crews again. A change in leadership came when S/Ldr Reid was posted back to Britain and S/Ldr S.E. Andrews DFM, who came from 242 Squadron took command. Andrews had been a Battle of Britain pilot serving with 32 and 257 Squadrons. A double blow hit the Squadron in Malta when George Allen was killed on the 12th February and three days later Pete Lowe was lost. On the 27th February the last reports were made from Malta in the guise of 605 Squadron and on the 18th of March the Squadron was formerly disbanded and all men and machines were absorbed into 185 Squadron. On the same day Chuck Lester was shot down by four Me 109s and was rescued from the sea wounded. The men who served 185 Squadron did so with great courage and distinction, four of them Ron Noble, Joe Beckett, Mac McKay and Philip Wigley returned to RAF Filton, despite the fact that the aircraft that transported them from Malta to Gibralter, a BOAC crewed Curtiss Wright 20, overshot the runway at Gibralter and ground looped breaking the tail. A short stay in the Rock Hotel followed before finally completing their journey home.
During the short stay at Honiley many rumours had been circulating about the final overseas destination of the squadron. One such story was that the men were being sent to Russia after someone had allegedly seen a store room full of fur hats and coats. Sometime later the men realised that Russia was no longer the favourite, especially when they were finally issued with tropical kit. This was a cause of great amusement as airmen went about their business wearing large sun helmets and greeting each other with "Dr Livingston, I presume".

It was a frosty morning in early December when the men finally left Honiley by truck bound for the nearby Berkswell railway station and for trains which would carry them north to Gourock in Scotland. The destination was still a secret at this time as the men were transported by small boats and a ferry named 'Queen Mary', out to the awaiting ship, the appropriately named Warwick Castle which had served the Union Castle Shipping Line before the war. Once aboard all the arms were taken to the ships armoury and locked away, and the armourers were detailed to man rocket guns on the bridge in case of an attack by enemy aircraft. The rockets were fitted with a cable which trailed behind the advancing shell which would hinder any low flying aircraft.

The Warwick Castle set sail close to midnight on the 7th of December under a thick murky sky as the men aboard wondered about their plight and when they would see the shores of Great Britain again. The ship set a course for the Atlantic and journeyed through very rough seas before being met by several other ships to form a convoy. The events at Pearl Harbour had led to a declaration of war by the United States of America and speculation grew, especially as another theatre of war had opened up in the Far East.

The seas never seemed to rest and coupled with constant snow and icing it made the journey very unpleasant. Most of 605’s men were billeted on the mess deck, although some lucky ones had found themselves in cabins. The convey was protected by HMS Ramilles and a small group of corvettes, and the men spent their time with lectures and playing cards. News filtered through that the Japanese were now attacking Kota Bharu and the Malay Peninsular and threatening the area known as the Dutch East Indies. The convoy had continued sailing west for some time when the order came to set a southerly course which would take them close to the Canary Islands where some of the ships left the convoy bound for North Africa.

A few days later on the 21st the Warwick Castle anchored off the coast at Freetown in Sierra Leone. The stay lasted four days during which time the ship was refuelled and the men, who had been refused shore leave, amused themselves by tossing coins into the crystal clear water for the local boys to dive in and collect. The contrast in weather from the icy blast of the Atlantic to the searing heat at Freetown could not have been greater, and they had the added annoyance of being attacked each night by mosquitoes. They departed Freetown at 10 am on Christmas Day, some trying to enjoy their traditional Christmas lunch, which consisted of chicken and a bottle of beer, despite the humidity and extreme heat which was making life very uncomfortable. The feast was made all the more palatable by the fact that it was served by the senior N.C.O.s and Officers.

They crossed the equator on the 29th and docked in Cape Town, South Africa on the 5th of January where the men were allowed to leave the ship to enjoy the South African hospitality. Many were taken by locals to see the incredible local landmark, Table Mountain and others were given a tour of the city. There were lines of cars to greet the ship and take the passengers out for the day. Some men were even taken in by local families who were very kind and treated them extremely well, an act for which the men were very grateful. Regrettably the stay was short lived and on the 9th the Warwick Castle once again set sail, this time for the Indian Ocean, meeting up with a number of other ships who had been docked in Durban. The final destination was still unknown at this point, although they had an idea that it was going to be either Singapore or the Dutch East Indies.

A few days were spent circling the ocean as orders were received which dispatched some of the convoy to India and Egypt before the remainder continued east, as the rumours again surfaced about their final destination of which Rangoon seemed to be the popular choice. After passing
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Krakatoa the convoy spilt with one half continuing to Singapore and the other, including the Warwick Castle journeying on down the coast for the port of Tandjeon Priok, Batavia, Java. The ships had kept so close to the side of the coast that the men could actually see crocodiles in the muddy water. The ship docked on the 3rd of February just as action stations were sounded in the belief that a Japanese aircraft was about to make an attack. The attack came to nothing but it did bring home to the men that some sort of attack from the advancing Japanese could be expected at any time.

The men disembarked and were taken to the nearby Dutch Army barracks, later manning a small local airfield for three days. They were then taken by a small ship to the port of Oosthaven in Sumatra on the 6th, and later boarded a train for the town of Palembang which was an important target due to it's oil wells. At long last the men were in familiar territory, finally being back on an airfield for the first time in two months, although none of the squadron's aircraft or pilots had yet arrived. The billets consisted of a large disused warehouse with no furnishings, so the men had little choice but to bed down on the bare stone floors. Food was scarce and there were no cooking facilities. Most of the first day was spent digging slit trenches on the perimeter of the airfield, which stopped briefly at 9 o'clock when the men saw what they thought were Lockheed Hudsons flying towards them.

On the evening of the 13th a message was received from H.Q. that all the rifles and ammunition issued to RAF ground staff were to be handed in. The arms were to be given to the Dutch Army to replace the weapons they had lost when they had evacuated Singapore. Many believed that this was a "fifth column" ploy to disarm the men defending the P.1 aerodrome at Palembang, prior to the dropping of Japanese paratroops the following day.

Timmy Rigger, alias Des Timmins recalls those early events in the jungle; "We were sent to Sumatra ostensibly to service Hurricanes. On our second day there, sixteen of us were sent by lorry to P.1, the aerodrome north of Palembang, an airstrip surrounded by tropical jungle. On arrival there were no aircraft for servicing, so we gathered under the rubber trees on the side of the aerodrome for breakfast. While Brummie Naven was cooking some tinned bacon, we heard planes approaching. Going out into the roadway we saw numerous, what we thought to be American Lockheed Hudsons, but as they arrived we suddenly found ourselves in the midst of dozens of explosions which turned out to be anti-personnel bombs, which made a crater about three feet wide. We all dived into slit trenches, and within minutes the planes had passed over and half of our small party were lying dead or injured. Two of the dead, Alf Perks and Jack Broadmoor, two inseparable pals, and popular members of the Squadron, were lying fatally injured. I was stooping in the slip trench when I felt a push in the back, which pushed me onto my face, which I thought had been caused by the blast. I climbed out to help push the injured into the lorry, which was badly damaged. Titch Hornsby, a Brighton lad, said "What's the matter Timmy?", I said "Nothing, why?". Whereupon he ripped the back of my shirt and wrapped his field dressing around my body. Evidently I had a hole in my back from a bomb splinter."

Les Brownless was with Alf and Jack; "Alf, Jack and myself were working in the dispersal area; around 9.00am the Flight Sergeant relieved us from our duties so that we could go and have breakfast. After we had eaten we had about 30 minutes to spare so we decided to go to the banana plantation on the edge of the airfield, and got a few hands of bananas for the boys in the Cook House. We were in good spirits, joking and laughing enjoying ourselves little knowing what was in store for us. We reached the plantation and we each hacked off a hand of bananas with our bayonets. Suddenly we heard this dull roar of engines which sounded like a squadron of Hudsons and I remember saying "It looks like the Yanks are on the way to give us a hand." Then we looked up at the sky in the distance, and saw this awesome sight of wave after wave of bomber planes heading for the airfield and we could clearly see the Japanese markings on the wings. I shouted "Come on we've got to get back." We dropped our bananas and took off and headed back to the nearest trucks. I was in the lead sprinting like mad with Alf and Jack following. I reached the slit trenches and dived into the nearest one just as I heard the whistle of the first shower of bombs, then Alf fell on top of me followed by Jack."
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The noise was deafening, bombs were exploding all around us. I shouted "Come on lads, let's get out of here", but I received no answer from them. I tried to move but I was pinned down by the weight of Alf and Jack on top of me. I shouted for help and eventually a Corporal came over and lifted Jack out. I was then able to lever up Alf who was on my back, and the corporal with the aid of another airman was able to lift Alf out. I climbed out of the trench and was overcome with shock to see my two mates lying there on the ground. I've always kept them in my memory, two very special 'mates', who were loved by everyone who knew them, they were born entertainers, delighting everyone in the squadron with their antics on board the Warwick Castle on the way over from England to Java. It was a special privilege for me, that I was their friend.

The Japanese also ambushed another truck full of 605 personnel and despite being unarmed Corporal Bill Kelly was shot in the stomach and died shortly afterwards. In the same incident LAC Reynolds received a head wound, the bullet smashing his glasses which left him livid.

Norman Connew adds; "Cover from the strafing was hard to find if you happened to get caught some distance from jungle cover. I remember diving for a very small clump of bushes only to be covered from head to foot by the giant red ants which had a habit of biting you if an attempt was made to brush them off. Quite frankly, in these circumstances it was a hard choice to decide whether it was best to take a chance and risk a bullet or be bitten to death."

February 14th was not without its successes, one of note being Martin Lovejoy who had spotted a Japanese 'Mary' bomber approaching the airfield from the north and had opened fire on it with a Lewis machine gun, managing to pepper it's underside as it passed overhead. His aim was true and the bomber was last seen billowing smoke as it plunged gracefully into the jungle. Martin proudly claimed this as his kill, and was probably the first ground crew member to gain such a prize.

Another group of men set off back to the town of Palembang in the damaged lorry but had only travelled about a mile when on rounding a corner they were confronted by a party of six or seven Japanese Paratroopers who were blocking their passage with trucks and cars. The driver of the truck suddenly abandoned his cab and ran off in the direction of the jungle but was shot dead by one of the paratroopers. The lorry, which was still in motion, ran off the road into a ditch and tipped over, spilling it's cargo of survivors and the dead and dying into a heap. The Japs shouted for them to get out and one started firing his revolver in their direction. They were ordered to lie down in the ditch. After about fifteen minutes, Titch Hornsby suddenly said to Des Timmins "Keep your head down Timmy!". There was a sudden crack of rifle fire and moments later most of the Japs were lying dead in the road, all except one who ran off into the jungle.

From the opposite side of the jungle appeared the men's saviour in the form of half a dozen Javanese troops together with a Dutch Officer. One of the troops went after the escaping Jap and returned later exclaiming that he had met the same fate as his dead colleagues."

Once the bombing had ceased and the dropping of paratroopers started in earnest a number of the squadron dived into the dense jungle to see if they could reach the Control Tower, which they did, arriving in tatters having had to fight through the thorny bushes and undergrowth. On reaching the tower they were met by an RAF officer who inquired what trade they were to which they replied armourers. Bearing in mind the squadron now possessed no weapons, he suggested that they went over the remaining unserviceable Hurricanes and removed the eight Browning machine guns with the idea of using them against the advancing Japanese. The men knew this ploy was completely unworkable and decided to use a nearby petrol bowser to get back to the town and try and locate some small arms from the Dutch Army. The ten or so men now festooned on the bowser took off along the perimeter track but as they rounded a bend in the road they were confronted by a group of Japanese paratroopers standing in their way brandishing machine guns. The driver began to slow down but he was persuaded by one of his passengers in the cab to put his foot down in an attempt to scatter the troops.

This tactic succeeded, but as the bowser hurtled by, the Japanese opened fire and hurled hand grenades at the vehicle. Norman Connew and his close friend George Jones were on the opposite running board of the bowser as they came under fire. Norman felt as if he had been hit in the foot,
but George yelled that the round had hit the sole of his boot, a close escape. More was to come as either the driver was hit or a tyre had burst causing the vehicle to roll over and dump the men on the ground. Norman takes up the story; "It was at this point that my clear understanding of what took place next is rather hazy. Apart from suffering a badly fractured wrist, I was also concussed. The first thing I remember was opening my eyes to find George with his arm round me looking a bloody mess. He had a badly gashed chin - the bone almost visible with blood pouring from it, his two front teeth had been broken clean in half. Despite his own injuries he kept saying that I would have to try and help myself as the Japs were advancing down the road firing at anything in sight. Fortunately I was able to struggle up and with George’s help we managed to get into the jungle. Apparently I was frequently flaking out and the coming to for the two hours we were hiding in the jungle”. Later they were met by some Dutch troops who took Norman and George to one of their first aid stations for medical attention. There can be no doubt that had it not been for George’s actions in helping and encouraging Norman he would not have survived to be able to recount his story today.

About 100 to 130 men spent that night in the jungle, sometimes wading up to their chests through the inhospitable swamps, vulnerable and unarmed. The first set back came that night when a native guide who had offered to help was bitten by a snake and was dead within minutes. If a local could not survive in these hostile conditions, what chance had a group of men more use to the streets and suburbs of Birmingham or any other town for that matter? As darkness fell visibility became so bad that if a man let go of the man in front of him he was sure to be lost. Loud roaring noises could be heard on both sides as they trudged through the thick undergrowth, keeping the red glow of the burning airfield behind them as they headed for the red glow of the burning oil wells in Palembang. Back at the aerodrome the situation had worsened and those left behind could soon see the invading Japanese troops coming up the road. In an act of desperation Flying Officer Paddy Creegan and LAC Bill McDermott when to parlay with the Japanese and despite such a risky move succeeded in getting them to agree to allow those able-bodied men to put the wounded men onto a lorry and leave at once.

On February 15th Singapore finally surrendered which meant that the full force of the Japanese was now directed on Java and Sumatra. The paratroopers who had attacked Palembang were now assisted by the Japanese Navy and Air Force and the out-look for the men of 605 looked grave indeed. Eventually a number of the squadron returned to Java where they spent a short time servicing aircraft at a local aerodrome, which was itself being constantly bombed by Japanese Zero dive-bombers each morning.

One morning a request was made for a party to return to Sumatra to recover a Merlin engine and some aircraft spares that had been left behind in the evacuation of the port at Oosthaven. It was widely believed that Sumatra was now in the hands of the enemy, so the thought of going in there was certainly not relished.

Soapy Hudson remembers the moment when they first realised that they were POWs; "On the return we retreated into the interior towards a town named Bandoeng. Shortly afterwards the main party of airman were concentrated at a small town named Garoet, and it was here we were informed that the Dutch had capitulated and we were then prisoners. At first the Japanese troops, who were from the Imperial Guard treated us with a certain amount of respect, but as they moved on, more troops who were delighted to treat us with utter contempt arrived and troubles started. At first they wanted to march us back to Batavia, this was no doubt to allow the natives to see the white man at his mercy. However after some discussions, we were taken by train back to Batavia, where on arrival the officers and men were taken to a native civil prison called Boei Glodok. At the gates of the prison, Japanese troops stood with wooded staves and beat us to move faster into the prison. Inside, the men were driven into cells which had a sign showing that they were for 12 prisoners, our numbers ranged from 30 to 40. When the doors shut on the cells, the men knew without doubt that their term as P.O.W.s had arrived."
Those that thought their luck was in by having a bed were soon regretting their good fortune as they were found to be alive with huge bed bugs, and the following morning the beds were broken up and hurled out of the cell windows. The first meal duly arrived that first morning of incarceration, which consisted of a small amount of rice and a small dried fish which was unceremoniously pushed under the cell door. Another problem was the fact that each cell was only fitted with a single hole which constituted the toilet. In normal circumstances this could be shared by 30 to 40 at a push, but the situation was exacerbated by the fact that at least 20 percent of the men in each room were suffering from dysentery.

Conditions were very poor but some comfort came from an unlikely source in the shape of the Japanese war effort. They were running very short of raw materials and so removed the metal cell doors and window bars to use as scrap. This gave the men the chance to utilise the courtyard between the cell blocks, which was a very welcome relief from the cramped conditions inside.

Some working parties were formed by the Japanese, working on the local airfield filling in the bomb craters made by allied bombs. Others were tasked with cleaning up the gardens at a nearby hospital, which gave an opportunity for the wounded Japanese troops to gloat over and curse at the men, who believed that as they were still wearing their RAF shirts with the badge on the upper arm, they were pilots and as such they should be maltreated as the Hurricanes of the RAF had inflicted a great deal of damage to them and their comrades.

After about six months the Officers and men were taken to the docks and were placed aboard a number of waiting ships. Most of the 605 contingent were herded aboard the "Yoseda Maru" which was bound for Singapore. On arrival they disembarked and were placed aboard another vessel the "Dai Nichi Maru". This ship was described as "a Japanese hell ship" and was chiefly responsible for the rapid deterioration in the health of some of the men, which later resulted in their untimely deaths. Conditions on the ship were absolutely deplorable, there were many deaths on board, so many, that no one knew exactly how many but it was fairly obvious that burials were taking place on the upper deck. The prisoners were kept locked away in the lower hold, sleeping on ballast which was some form of ore which was soaking wet. Large rats frequented the girders of the ship above them and food was lowered down in baskets. If one wished to go to the toilet, and unfortunately many of them did several times a day it meant having to climb a vertical ladder under the deck of the ship, which was heaving and tossing most of the time. The ship seemed to be constantly in a typhoon and once up the ladder the men had to use a flimsy wooden toilet which was hung over the side of the ship. "It is not possible to describe the utter misery of the voyage", later wrote Soapy Hudson.

The ship sailed from Singapore to Saigon and from there to Shimonoseki in Japan where they arrived on November 25th in a snow storm which was a shock to the system, especially considering that the men were still wearing RAF tropical kit. Some had to be helped to walk off the ship and on to the railway station there. Before leaving the ship a further indignity was put upon the men, a medical examination watched by Japanese civilians which consisted of dropping the trousers and being inspected by medical orderlies. This was obviously a complete waste of time as no action was taken and no medicine was used on men who were clearly sick and dying. Walking through the streets the civilians watched in silence unmoved by their appearance.

By now the men of 605 were split into several locations, some were dispatched to the island of Ambon to build a runway for the Japs, some were sent to Hokkaido in northern Japan, some went to the mines of Nagasaki and a few remained behind in Java and Sumatra. Few realised at this stage what was in store for them during the remainder of the war. The prisoners at Shimonoseki were taken by train to Onomichi and then by ferry to the island of Innoshima, where they were taken to their final destination, the dockyard at Habu. On arrival at the dockyard the POWs were marched to the prison camp helping along their friends many of whom were unable to walk let alone march. Finally they received some clothing which consisted of a poor quality suit as worn by the Japanese, but at least it was an improvement on their now tattered and filthy RAF tropical kit.
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Sadly the new clothing came too late to save eight poor souls who later died from pneumonia, each the result of wilful neglect and ill treatment by their Japanese captors. During this time there were no medical supplies and a make shift sick-bay was manned by a few volunteers, two of these being Sergeant Hodson and Corporal Soapy Hudson. The dead were placed in rough wooden coffins and taken by a hand cart at night to the local crematorium where the Japanese guards would call the men to attention for a brief moment. Many were to remark that the dead were being shown more respect than the living.

Soapy later wrote of that time in Japan; "The next three years consisted of a regular routine of being woken by the guards and getting our meal which consisted of a small bowl of rice and a cup of hot water. This meal was repeated at dinner time in the dockyard, and again on return to the camp in the evening. The only variation was the arrival of Red Cross parcels, we had three and a half in the three years instead of a parcel a month. Many parcels were found rotting in warehouses all over Japan after the war ended. Little or no medical attention could be obtained; they had a R.A.M.C. Corporal W. Mogford who was a medic, but of course he had no medical supplies." Many of those men who would return from the Far East three years later, had Mogford to thank for their survival and despite many attempts over the years by various members of the Squadron Association to locate him he was never seen again. Perhaps one day he or a member of his family may read this account of 605 so that the squadron can take this opportunity to thank him for all he did to ease the suffering of the men interned at Innoshima and make life a little more bearable.

The work in the dockyard was divided between various jobs such as working on the dock railway, cleaning ships and assisting in assembling new ships which was against the Geneva Convention which prevented a country from using prisoners to assist in it's own war effort. The men in charge of building the new ships would use a Japanese symbol on the components to indicate if the part belonged to the port or starboard side of the vessel. These were often written in chalk and soon the prisoners realised the havoc that could be brought if they obtained some chalk and reversed these symbols and fitted the wrong parts to the wrong side of the ship. Everyone went about their normal business and the Japanese never realised that their new ship was being constructed the wrong way round. Over the three years the POWs suffered from many ailments including dysentery, sores, failing eyesight and severe loss of weight which in some cases caused their weight to drop to as little as six stone.

As the tide of war turned against the Japanese, the dockyard was attacked by some Royal Navy Corsair aircraft from HMS Indomitable. Their raids were very accurate as they destroyed machine shops and sunk a ship moored alongside the quay during their attacks. The prison camp was not marked as a POW camp, so it suffered some damage as the wooden huts looked like just another part of the dockyard. Fortunately despite a number of deaths amongst the Japanese workers only a small number of POWs were slightly injured during these raids. The prisoners could also see large formations of American B-29 bombers, sometimes up to 300 in number heading for the Japanese mainland. These raids grew in number and continued day and night which indicated to the men that the war may soon be over, but this great advance was tinged with the sobering thought that if they turned their attention to the dockyards, all would be destroyed.

Soapy Hudson recalls the events that led to the end of their term as POWs; "One morning at about midday, the dockyard fell silent, and if you have worked in a dockyard, the silence is wonderful. The tannoy system was going great guns and the Japanese seemed to be bowing to the speakers. The guards rounded the POWs up and marched them back to camp and drifted away as we neared the camp. By this time we had got the gist of what had happened, the war was over, Japan had surrendered. The voice they had heard was that of the Emperor and the Japanese people had also heard the voice for the first time. At the camp the army guards had gone and the POWs were left to look after themselves. After a few days some US Marines arrived by boat from a large ship in the bay. They were shaken by the appearance of the POWs and sat talking to us whilst giving out cigarettes. They were informed of the food situation and a few days later a drop of food and other items was arranged. The aircraft (a US B-29) that dropped the food was named "The Uninvited", and
many years after the war it was sighted languishing in Texas by Hedley Bonnes (one of the men who had been in the POW camp that day) during a holiday to the United States. The drop, whilst being most welcome was also very dangerous, as they crates were pushed out of the bomb bays at low altitude and they sailed down damaging a number of nearby houses. The men in the camp had gone up a nearby hill for safety".

Soon word came that they could leave the camp for the last time and they were ferried to the mainland and from there they went by train to Yokohama where they were welcomed by a US Army band and several dignitaries from the US Army and Church. After a hot bath, new uniforms and a good meal they left Japan on the fleet carrier HMS Ruler and sailed through the two hundred ships now amassed in Tokyo Bay, heading for Australia. Their destination was Sydney from where they disembarked and were settled in the Golden Hind at a place called Warwick Farm, another strange coincidence for the men of 605. The reason for their journey to Australia and the subsequent hospitality shown by the good people who took them in was to give them time to recover from their ordeal as POWs, a plan that certainly succeeded and for which the men of 605 were eternally grateful.

Martin Lovejoy wrote of the journey from Yawata; "First a train from Yawata, the POW camp also known as Fukoka No.3, which was to take the inmates to Nagasaki. Of this part two items stand out; first the sight of the desolate city with ruination abounding, but there beside the rail track I will always remember seeing, amazingly a fist size clump of grass that had been sheltered from the atomic blast; and second, in the station a fumigation section was set up and where we were stripped and deloused and given some new clothes. Now we were loaded onto HMS Speaker, a cargo boat that had been converted into a form of aircraft carrier. Still the fangs of that country held hard to those frail bodies, for that night a typhoon was reported to be near at hand and by midday on 18th September 1945, we at last bade farewell to the land of the rising sun. The next landfall was Okinawa and in the bay there was the greatest gathering of ships we had ever seen.

We stayed here for two days while arrangements were made to transport us further and at 2 am on the 21st, the ten of us who had been booked to go out on the next flight were held back because the plane had problems. The plane we had been turned back from, a B-24, had taken-off with it’s bomb-bay doors open too wide and four men unluckily fell out. That four could have been any of the men in my group." Martin and his party soon got away and journeyed back to England via Pearl Harbour and by ship to Vancouver before travelling across Canada by train. They finally arrived at the port of Halifax where they boarded the French ship 'Ile de France' which arrived in Southampton on October 31st. Their arrival was something of an anti-climax as there wasn't a soul to meet them and no band to welcome them home from three years in hell fighting for King and Country. Most of the POWs in Australia finally sailed home aboard the Merchant Ship the ‘Dominion Monarch’, which also berthed in Southampton. From here the men were sent back to the Midlands to RAF Cosford for demobilization.
Sunday June 7th 1942 is an extremely significant date in the history of 605 Squadron. It was on this day that the Bear of Warwickshire was reborn and the Squadron reformed to once again stand in defiance of Adolf Hitler and his war machine. The new squadron was to be based at RAF Ford on the Sussex coast and was to be commanded by the legendry fighter pilot W/Cdr Peter Wooldridge Townsend, DSO DFC and Bar. The origination of the decision to reform 605 cannot be found, although some have speculated that Lord Willoughby de Broke was probably behind it.

The new men who would staff the Squadron had heard many tales of the "first squadron" and their heroic efforts, but knew little of their fate in the Far East at the hands of the Japanese. The men of the "second squadron", as those who had served before liked to refer to it, had a fine reputation to maintain, a task they were to fulfil magnificently during the next three years of battle. The Squadron was reformed as an intruder unit whose role was to attack the enemy in their own back yard; they were equipped with the American manufactured Douglas Boston Mk III, a twin engined high wing light bomber which was being used to replace the aging Blenheims in the RAF and a number of similar Douglas Havocs.

Arthur Antony remembers first arriving at Ford on the 6th of June with 23 other ground crew members. "The Squadron consisted of absolutely nothing, just half a hut for an orderly room. We were put into a pool and got on with all the camp odd jobs, then we were attached to 23 Squadron to pick up all the gen on Havocs flown by them as intruders. Then on the 3rd of July, 605 acquired the aircraft from 23 Squadron, who were being re-equipped with the night intruder Mosquito. Wing Commander Townsend arrived on the 2nd of July and the Squadron acquired a General Electric Owlet for pilots to practise with a tricycle undercarriage".

The first operational sortie took place on the 14th of July when the CO, Peter Townsend, together with P/O Palmer (Observer) and Sgt Wiseman (Air Gunner) took off at 23:59 hours to bomb the marshalling yards at Caen in Northern France. At this stage the Squadron was far from operational, having only five aircraft to it's name, although the men were very keen to make their presence known to the Germans.

They crossed the French coast at Cabourg at 3000 feet at 00:38 hours sighting beacons at Fecamp, Le Havre and Trouville. Two searchlights at Le Havre tried in vain to illuminate the loan raider as it headed onwards towards Caen. They arrived over the target area just before one o'clock and made a run east to west but overshot before attempting a run from south to north which proved successful. At 01:06 hours they dropped from 2000 feet towards the railway sidings just west of Mandeville Power Station and offloaded their payload of one 250lb instant bomb, one 250lb delayed bomb and twelve 40lb instant bombs. The crew felt the bomb blasts but failed to see what damaged had been caused due to the light flak they had encountered behind them. The visibility remained good as they re-crossed the French coast and landed back at Ford unscathed. 605 were back.

New aircrews soon began to arrived at Ford, Pilot Officers Colin Ponsford and Les Hodder, P/O Peter Wood and Sgt Dudley Wood and F/Lt Ken "Scruffy" Sutton DFC were some of the first to arrive. Ken was a handsome New Zealander and a veteran of France and the Battle of Britain, receiving a mention in Dispatches, and a DFC in March 1942. Ken formed a very useful partnership with W/O Stan Streeter, DFM who also flew several missions as navigator to an American pilot, Lt Col Klatz who was attached to 605 for a time. Recruitment amongst the ground crews for training as Flight Engineers began in earnest, and having no idea what this entailed, Arthur Antony duly applied, receiving the encouraging news from some of the old hands that he "must be tired of living".

Arthur recalls "I was just coming to my 19th birthday and was conscious to get a trip up to find out about flying. Eventually I got airborne with P/O Colin Ponsford. I was in the nose as he turned to kite inside out, low flying, the lot, and I wasn't long before my last meal was brought up. I felt dreadful and more was to follow. I got out of the nose compartment, and I was in such a state I pulled the wrong lever on the hatch exit (the emergency one) and fell to the ground with my parachute pack in my hand and still feeling groggy. Instead of holding the handle as I left the aircraft I pulled the rip
cord and the whole lot went billowing over the airfield. I got ribbed a lot by the lads, and was told by quite a few of them that I would be useless as air crew and it cost be the standard charge of half a crown to have to vomit cleared up.

A few days later on the 20th of July I had the chance to get airborne again, this time in the Wireless Operator/Air Gunner position. Two kites practised attacks on each other and I managed to save my half a crown. We landed to change crews and I sat on the grass nearby, intent on going up again. Three Canadians soldiers, who were in the area awaiting the raid on Dieppe, approached me and begged me for a flight. I explained that it was not up to me, and that they should go and see the pilots. The three on them returned all smiles and said it was ok, so I gave up my parachute, realising that I would have plenty of chances to fly later. I was given the afternoon off, as I would be busy refuelling the aircraft when they returned so off I went. Returning half an hour later Chiefy, F/Sgt Taffy Wells told me to go and get my tea. "But what about the refuelling" I asked. "You won't be doing that. I've just had a phone message to say the both Havocs have collided in mid air and all six (3 Canadians and 3 RAF) are dead."

The three 605 men were P/O R.J. Bennett, F/O A.C.R. McLure and P/O A.H. Tustain. F/O Andrew McLure, a native of Edinburgh and served with 87 Squadron during the Battle of Britain had only been with the Squadron two days. Another tragedy stuck on the 2nd of August when S/Ldr Jack D. Humphreys DFC, W/Off D.L. McConnel and Sgt William Ralph Wells were all killed, failing to return from an operation over Beauvais. S/Ldr Humphreys, who was 'A' Flight Commander had served with 29 Squadron on Blenheims during the Battle of Britain and was later awarded the DFC in October 1941.

The loss of six men in ten days was terrible and for a while morale was low. On the 11th of August W/Cdr George Lovell Denholm DFC took over command from Peter Townsend, who after a much deserved rest, reported to Staff College in October. By this time Peter was totally exhausted having been flying continually since the beginning of the war without any time for recuperation. George was a very popular man, known affectionately as 'Uncle George', and was an Auxiliary, joining 603 (City of Edinburgh) Squadron in 1933 and later commanding the Scottish outfit during the Battle of Britain. He had shared in the destruction of a He 111 in October 1939, which was the first enemy aircraft shot down over British territory during the war. On the 17th August the Squadron received the news that the bodies of S/Ldr Humphreys and W/Off McConnel had been washed up on Brighton beach, but there was no sign of William Wells whose name is remembered on the Runnymede Memorial.

August saw the arrival of more crews when the following men arrived to join the squadron, Sgt B. "Bunny" Day, Sgt Arturo T. Linn, F/O R.R. Smart, F/O J.K. Sutcliffe, P/O Robert C. Muir, P/O Ken Pierpoint, Sgts Jock Warrender, E.G.M. Smith and "Horse" Smith. On the 19th of August 'B' Flight Commander, Ken Sutton led a pre-dawn attack with F/Lt Mike Olley and some machines from 418 (City of Edmonton) Royal Canadian Air Force Squadron, on gun positions covering the harbour prior to the famous allied raid on Dieppe. On the same day the Germans had visited Ford and dropped four bombs near the Squadron office, damaging two Bostons.

Joining the ranks of 605 on the 19th was a twenty year old pilot - Peter Rudd, a moment he had only ever dreamed about, because as a young lad his favourite pastime had been to cycle to his local aerodrome at Castle Bromwich to watch, enthralled, the machines of 605 Squadron. Pete witnessed the evolvement of the Squadron and their aircraft until finally he was old enough to apply for a Short Service Commission in the RAF. Peter attended the Selection Board, passing his medical, but was not offered a place at the RAF College at Cranwell, something on which he had set his heart. Peter recalls in his own excellent book of his life in the RAF "Sleep is Just a Waste of Time" :- "It was naturally a great blow and I was obviously bitterly disappointed but I can recognise now the wisdom of the Selectors who realised that, at the time, my application was premature. The dog was still to have his day!"

On completion of Peter's flying course he was asked to make one final choice before leaving the OTU at Cranfield - which intruder squadron would he prefer to join? Peter remembers the options
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"The choice was between 23, 418 or 605. Yes, 605! I had no hesitation in deciding. My surprise and delight at being able to go to 605 can be imagined; here I was, able to join the very squadron that I had watched so enviously at Castle Bromwich before the war and which of course was my home county’s, Warwickshire, unit. A crowning of my ambitions indeed." Peter’s hopes for an immediate start on operations were nipped in the bud by George Denholm during his joining interview when he asked to see his log book which recorded a total of 275 flying hours. Returning the book, the CO deflated the eager young pilot in front of him with the words "and now we will teach you to fly". Wise words from a caring man.

On August 28th, one of the men who had joined the Squadron only a few days before was killed when during a night flight practise, P/O Ken Pierpoint was caught in some searchlights and crashed between Ford and Bognor Regis. A number of the crews had been out that evening to the Crown at Littlehampton and were walking back to Ford when they witnessed Ken’s accident. Ken had been caught by the searchlights and coned with considerable skill by the men who operated the lights. The 605 men were horrified to watch as his aircraft slowly lost height in a gentle dive and flew straight into the ground, scattering burning wreckage not far from the road. "Jesse" James, a member of the ground crew had seen Ken off a while earlier, was dispatched to the crash site and recalled "the aircraft had smashed through a chicken farm, then into a corn field. The Boston aircraft had broken up. No sign of the pilot who was flying solo."

Fred Harrison also saw what happened "He was on a searchlight co-operation exercise involving three searchlights, when I saw the Boston come into land, mistaking the perimeter track for the runway. Two of the lights were extinguished but the other remained on, shining in the cockpit, as he flew low passed the hangars, obviously dazzling him. He managed to clear the Bognor to Littlehampton road before exploding in a ball of fire in an adjoining field."

Two days later on the 30th, Pilot Officers G.M. Jordan and his navigator T.A. Dunphy were killed when they crashed near Arundel on a practise flight in the Owlet. Their air gunner, George Smith could count himself fortunate that he hadn’t joined his crew for this fateful flight. September was a relatively quite month, during which time the inexperienced crews had the opportunity to fine tune their skills at intruding, with many flights taking place at night. Time was also needed for the different crews to get to know each other and gel together to become an efficient flying unit, each relying on the other in the team.

The Squadron recorded another loss when Sgt N.E.A. Ross was killed on October 21st, when his aircraft collided with a Hurricane from 534 Squadron. Two more new faces joined the Squadron at the end of October when F/Lt Mervyn Henry Maggs and F/Lt A.W. Mack became the latest recruits. F/Lt Mack, who became ‘B’ Flight Commander, had flown with Bomber Command, taking part in the first allied bombing raid of the war, and the first allied sortie to Berlin, dropping leaflets to the German people on September 8th 1939.

The Squadron found a new temporary role in November when they took part in leaflet dropping, otherwise known by the codename 'Nickelling’, to many different destinations in Europe. Rather tongue in cheek the Squadron log recorded “16th November :- "Nickelling" apparently is to be our new occupation now that "intruding" is not a very profitable pastime owing to a lack of potential custom. It’s rather trying now that we are fully operational, to find that the Hun has more or less deserted the north western area of France of aircraft which fly by night. Still, while it’s bad luck for us, its probably a good thing and a definite sign of the time. Anyway we have been provided with a large dose of "Nickels" for the edification of the Belgians which we proceeded to distribute for the first time." Later in the same report the writer reported "The second man off was Sgt Brochocki in UP/N, with his crew of "Apostles", James and Johns as Air Gunner and Observer respectively. It’s a pity Brochocki’s Christian name is an unbiblical "George."

F/Lt John Williams received the news on 16th November that he was to be the first 605 man to receive an award since it had reformed, getting a DFC, his citation stating "This officer is an exceptionally keen and skilful air gunner. During the intense air fighting over Dunkirk in May 1940, he assisted in the destruction of five enemy aircraft within two days. This officer, whose fine record
of service includes a large number of sorties by night as well as by day, has set a praiseworthy example." The citation refers to his efforts as an air gunner with 264 Squadron, apart from which he was also a daredevil parachutist with over four hundred jumps to his name. John left the Squadron at the end of the year, the Squadron log recording "his cheerful personality will be greatly missed in this squadron".

On the 24th November the official Squadron badge, approved by King George VI, was presented to George Denholm by Air Marshal Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory, during which he conveyed the tremendous news that the Squadron would soon re-equip with the night intruder version of the "wooden wonder", the de Havilland Mosquito.

Towards the end of the year a near fatal accident occurred witnessed by Arthur Antony "One of the mechanics had just started up a kite ready for a night cross country training flight. I was in the dispersal hut when I heard the engines cut out. I said "Danny's forgotten to switch on the petrol." Not so, suddenly all hell broke loose. A chap on the ground crew had walked into the props. I shall never forget the scene. Blood everywhere, the poor chap was screaming and jumping about . He was a strong, well built boy (a boxer) and it took six of us to hold him still while one of the officers from the flight crew broke open a first aid kit and jabbed him with some morphine. I later learnt that he had survived and had a silver plate put in his head."

As well as the usual complement of pilots and ground crews that made up the squadron strength the unit also had an attachment of W.A.A.F. drivers who were the first women to proudly serve with the Warwickshire unit. One driver, Cherry Symonds (nee Pring), who happened to live only a short distance from Croydon aerodrome when 605 were based there in late 1940, recalls how she came to join 605 : - "As I did not join the WAAF until August 1942, it was as a civilian that I witnessed the German aircraft fly over Croydon to bomb the airfield. I used to work in Croydon, and on Thursday 15th August 1940 was waiting to meet a friend. I was standing in a shop doorway at about 7.00pm when I saw the German planes fly over, there had been no air raid warning, and I quite thought that the aircraft were British until I saw the bombs come down. There were shouts of "It's a raid" and everyone ran for the nearest air-raid shelter. I also saw many of the air battles, which were to follow, fought in the skies over that area, known of course as the Battle of Britain.

In August 1942 I was called up for the WAAF and after my initial training and 'square bashing' at Gloucester, I spent twelve weeks on a maintenance and driving course in Pwhelli, North Wales. On the 15th December I was then posted to Ford in Sussex as an M.T. driver attached to 605 Squadron. I can't remember just how many drivers there were there at that time, but later on there was a complement of about eight or ten. The only names I remember at Ford are Margaret Wilkinson and Alma Mitchell, because like me they were with the Squadron until they went overseas. Later on we were joined by Lynn Bagge and Freda Hutchinson. Audrey Sharpley I can remember was with us at Castle Camps because she was my friend and was injured when the camp was bombed.

All drivers worked a 24-hour shift duty, from 8.00am to 8.00pm. Four girls were assigned as Flight drivers, two working for 'A' Flight and two for 'B' Flight. Throughout my time with the Squadron I was a 'B' Flight driver. Two other girls used to drive for the signals and radar section. The Flight drivers duties consisted of transporting the ground crews to and from various parts of the airfield, sometimes with equipment, which was done mainly in the morning. In the afternoons and evenings and throughout the night until the Squadron was released from flying duties we were mainly driving the air-crews about. Often this meant transporting them from their billets to the airfield which were sometimes situated quite some distance away. We would drive them to their aircraft prior to take-off and collect them on return and take them to the flight huts, and afterwards on to the cookhouse for a meal, before returning them to their billets.

I often wondered just how nervous the crews felt when we drove them about after dark, because our vehicle headlights were blacked out, except for a small slit of light which did not help the visibility".

On the 22nd November the Squadron welcomed a new Flight Commander for 'A' Flight when S/Ldr Charles Tomalin AFC came on board, arriving from No 60 OTU at East Fortune. Charles was a very
accomplished high board diver having represented England in three British Empire Games, Canada 1930, England 1934 and Australia in 1938 winning one gold and three silver medals. He also represented Great Britain in the European Championships in 1934 and without doubt every athlete's dream, competed in the Olympic Games in 1936. He had joined the RAF in 1936 and served with No 151 Squadron at North Weald, receiving the AFC in 1942 whilst at RAF College, Cranwell. Charles took Bob Muir as his navigator and together they were to form a deadly and efficient partnership as the number of intruding missions increased greatly during November, despite the awful weather at times. Only six days had elapsed, when on a leaflet dropping flight to Peruwelz and Tournai they attacked and damaged two locomotives.

In November the Squadron displayed its prowess on the football field by beating 141 Squadron 2-0, the Fleet Air Arm 4-0 and SHQ 3-2. A chance of revenge was given to 141 Squadron when two friendly rugby games were played but once again 605 came out on top beating them 10-5 and 23-13. December was a typically poor month as far as the weather was concerned, but when it did eventually break the airfield was a hive of activity as the Bostons under the cover of darkness left at prearranged intervals to search out their prey. In between the inclement conditions and the operations much time was spent by the crews practising air to sea firing and night flying tests. What follows is a combat report from a typical intruder flight:

22 Dec 42 - Boston UP/H. Sgt RUDD, P/O MILLS and Sgt GRAHAM took off FORD 22.35 hours to patrol LISIEUX. Landed FORD 0020 hours. Crossed channel 400 feet and over CAEN ESTUARY 23.09 hours at 2000 feet. LISIEUX reached 23.16 hours but no activity of any kind. Stationary train south east of Lisieux attacked from astern flying east from 1000 feet down to 600 feet with a 3 second cannon burst resulting in many strikes on the engine and a quantity of steam. This is claimed as damaged. Another stationary engine 1/4 mile further east was attacked from the beam with a 3 second cannon burst from 1000 feet down to 700 feet but no results observed. Boston then delivered a beam attack on a third train going west from COURTONNE with a 1 second burst and a 2 second MG burst from 1000 feet down to 700 feet, strikes being observed on the engine and slowing down the train which is accordingly claimed as damaged. Returning to the second train, Boston attacked it from the beam in a shallow dive from 1000 feet down to 500 feet with a five second M.G. burst. Strikes were seen all over the engine and it is claimed as damaged. At 23.26 hours Boston set course for coast (there was still no activity at LISIEUX aerodrome) and crossed out over CAEN ESTUARY 23.33 hours at 2500 feet.

Christmas Eve and Christmas Day both drew a blank the Squadron log recording that they were "not able to give any 'offensive' gifts on Christmas Eve" and "a good time was had by all" on the 25th. In fact no patrols were possible until the 30th when S/Ldr Tomalin flew the sole sortie to Creil. The last night of the year was a very busy one with seven machines airborne, all reporting varying degrees of success although the crew of Sgt Warrender, Sgt Veitch and Sgt Stirrat failed to return in UP/Z. The three Scots were killed when their aircraft hit the ground during their approach to the airfield. Later it was believed that the pilot had ignored his altimeter, but this could only be supposition, but what was known was that the Squadron had lost a very promising crew.

The Squadron welcomed two new crews at the end of the year, although for different reasons, F/Lt Welch DFC and P/O Shuttleworth DFC were posted from 23 Squadron and P/O Williams, Sgt Ricketts and Sgt Botting were received from 418 Squadron. 23 Squadron had recently been posted overseas, but the two decorated men remained in this country for special duties. The three men from 418 were transferred "in the hope that the change would benefit P/O Williams who evidently got into financial trouble among the Canadians!"

George Denholm brought 1942 to a close with the following comments: "Uncertainty as to the future of the air gunners and navigators (all the navigators except three) who will leave the Squadron when re-equipment with Mosquitoes takes place. This is expected to start in the next few weeks. In spite of the drawbacks, flying during the month has been satisfactory and the general progress has been such that more interesting patrols would be a cheerful tonic. There is, fortunately, some slight sign of more activity at the French night flying aerodromes and it is hoped that the
Squadron’s becoming operational in Mosquitoes will coincide with an improvement in enemy activity”.

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According to the Squadron log “The new year opened in a most dismal fashion. Apart from seven night flying tests by day and one aircraft on local flying by night there was no activity at all.” And went on to record the next day "The celebrations of New Year the previous night was quite mild and orderly, in spite of several members of the Squadron hailing from north of the border". The weather was particularly poor during January when it seemed to rain and rain for most of the first two weeks.

When the rains finally subsided on the 13th several sorties took place each night culminating with the night of 17th January when eight operational sorties were carried out, a record number since the Squadron had reformed. The plan on the 17th had been to cover several German aerodromes in France in the hope of catching the Luftwaffe returning to base after responding to the allied bombing of Berlin. Despite patrolling the airfields and the surrounding areas from 2100 hours on the 17th straight through until 0725 the following morning only one sighting was made but no contact was forthcoming. January 17th was a date one young man and indeed a whole squadron would remember, it was the date that one Brian Williams reported for duty as a pilot, having just left 418 Squadron, and life in 605 would never be quite the same again!

Nine Avro Lancasters from Bomber Command made an impromptu visit to Ford on the night of the 22nd "after paying an unfriendly call to Dussledorf". Earlier in the day 605 had been joined by three Mosquito Mk IIs from 264 Squadron, based at Colerne, who were planning to operate from the airfield for a short while having just finished a short stint at Bradwell Bay flying sorties to enemy bases in Holland. The visit from 264 Squadron was made all the more interesting as it gave the men from 605 the chance to have a good look at the machine they would soon be flying themselves in February.

A poignant reminder of the menace of war came on the 25th January when F/Lt Mike Olley took to the air with his crew to scatter the ashes of the late F/Lt Richard Hillary, author of "The Last Enemy". Hillary, who had suffered terrible burns as a fighter pilot in September 1940, spent three months under the expert plastic surgeon Archie McIndoe, becoming one of his courageous Guinea Pigs. Richard had returned to flying status and was on a practise night flight in a Blenheim from 54 OTU at Charter Hall on January 8th, when inexplicably the machine spun into the ground, killing both him and his navigator. 605 was chosen because Hillary had been flying with 603 (City of Edinburgh) Squadron when he was shot down, who was then commanded by the present CO, W/Cdr George Denholm.

Another change in personnel was made in January when the Squadron Adjutant, F/Lt L.O. Ludgate was posted to RAF Martlesham Heath, his replacement being F/Lt E.H. Tidswell from 609 (West Riding) Squadron. Hal had served the Yorkshire squadron superbly having been with them since September 1940, and perhaps knew a little about what made an Auxiliary unit tick.

Towards the end of January 1943 the Squadron said a sad farewell to Ken "Scruffy" Sutton and his navigator Stan Streeter who were posted to 85 Squadron at Hunsdon for special duties, plotting short and long range German radar and making daylight intruder sorties over occupied France. Ken was sorely missed not only for his fine leadership but for his experience and friendship. Ken continued to serve both the RAF and his native RNZAF until his retirement in 1947. Another blow came in February when Colin Ponsford’s navigator Les Hodder was posted to 157 Squadron as their Navigation Officer and navigator to the CO. The Squadron were delighted for Les but were very sorry to lose yet another good friend and outstanding officer.
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Trains, Planes and Doodle-Bugs

Most of January was spent working up to the arrival of the Mosquitoes in February, the first machine, a dual control Mk III version, arriving on the 2nd amid great excitement and expectation. The Squadron were to receive the Mk II night fighter version of de Havilland's "Wooden Wonder", so named as it was almost entirely constructed of wood and was perhaps the most versatile combat aircraft to have been made during the war. Side by side with the night fighter versions, several reconnaissance and bomber variants were developed, each proving to be equally indispensable and tremendously effective. During the test flight stage of the prototypes in 1940 and 1941 two main characteristics were revealed: great manoeuvrability and a high maximum speed. The Mk II was powered by two Rolls Royce Merlin XXI engines giving it a maximum speed of 356 mph and was armed with four 20mm cannons and four machine guns.

The Squadron log refers to the arrival of the new aircraft "In fact in November, a "book" was opened and if memory serves aright the odds of five to one were laid against delivery in February. The only snag is that the Officer who made the "book" has been posted. Needless to say everyone in the Squadron is on the touchline about things and the pilots are simply falling over themselves to have a crack at the new type. But it did not fly today!"

'A' Flight became non-operational on February 10th and their Bostons were either allotted to other units or transferred to 'B' Flight, as they subsequently devoted all of their time to a period of intensive training, when the weather allowed. Fortunately an Airspeed Oxford from 141 Squadron had been made available for initial training as many pilots, who had grown accustomed to landing an aircraft fitted with a tricycle undercarriage, experienced some difficulty in controlling an aircraft on take-off and landing that was fitted with a tail wheel. By the end of the month 'A' Flight was almost fully operational as far as the pilots were concerned.

February 10th was also the day Ford was bombed and Cherry Symonds was busing ferrying members of the ground crews across the open airfield when the bombs started to fall and the sound of enemy machine guns filled the air. She promptly stopped the 30 cwt Bedford lorry and ran with the others for cover. Moments later she was catching her breath in the relative safety of a building which turned out to be the male toilets!

The training of navigators however did pose a problem that severely extended the ingenuity and resolve of the Commanding Officer. As a Boston Intruder Squadron a crew consisted of pilot, navigator and wireless operator/air gunner. On re-equipping, the air gunner became surplus to requirements and the navigator needed to be able to operate the wireless set. At this stage the Squadron could count on the skills of only five navigators who were proficient in the wireless operating area, so a decision had to be made whether to accept the trained navigators straight from an Operational Training Unit or put the non-qualified men through a signals course.

As it was seven navigators left on 12th February to No 51 OTU, but it became obvious that it would be more expeditious to train them whilst still with the Squadron. General serviceability was a problem for a couple of weeks with the new type, but despite a lack of slings, jacks and spare parts the ever resourceful Squadron ground crews had still managed to reduce the time it took for a daily inspection down from a first week high of four and a half hours to only two hours by the end of the month.

The Squadron received some very welcome news in February that two former Commanding Officers, G/Cpt Cpt Alan Cecil Wright and G/Cpt Lord Willoughby de Broke had both been duly recognised for their unswerving duty and dedication to service with the award of the Air Efficiency Award:

Air Efficiency Award - Group Captain J.A.C. Wright, AFC, TD, MP

"He was born in 1886 and his home is at Long Sutton, Hants. He was commissioned in the ASC and attached to the RFC in 1917. He was commissioned as Squadron Leader in the RAF in 1921, and after completion of his active service was appointed to General List as Wing Commander in 1936. He was called out for active service in August 1939. He was awarded the AFC in January 1931".
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Air Efficiency Award - Group Captain Lord Willoughby de Broke, MC, AFC
"He was born in 1896, his home is at Kineton, Warwickshire. He was commissioned in 1936 and called out for active service in August 1939. He reached his present rank in 1940. He was awarded the AFC in July 1940 and mentioned in dispatches in January 1941".

F/Lt Mack was promoted to the rank of Squadron Leader on the 12th February and given command of 'B' Flight. He duly celebrated his good fortune by engaging and damaging a Dornier 217 with his crew of Sgts Harrison and Churchill, just north of Paris the following night. The Squadron log proudly recorded :-

"Lots of people, quire incorrectly, imagine the thirteenth day of the month to be unlucky ! The 13th of February 1943, however, proved to be the day we have been waiting for nearly nine months - the day we made our first claim against the Hun. S/Ldr Mack was the lucky man to whom the opportunity came of taking a shot at an enemy aircraft. He found some at Evreux and made the Squadron's first claim - one Dornier damaged"

The twin engined German bomber was again the prey when two days later F/O Colin Ponsford and Sgts Irvine and Webster went one better and destroyed it over Melun, just east of Paris, and once again the writer of the log recorded "From a damaged Hun on the 13th to a destroyed Dornier on the 15th, after so many months with no luck at all is almost too good to be true. F/O Ponsford of 'B' Flight did the trick at Melun with a burst of not more than two seconds. It proves conclusively that all these months of training have not been in vain. Given the opportunity its a Hun every time !"

The Boston was certainly proving itself more than capable of matching the machines of the Luftwaffe, despite its pending retirement from duty with the Squadron, and further success were recorded on 16th February when the crew of Sgt Brochcki, Sgt Jones and F/Sgt Wettone destroyed an unidentified twin engined enemy aircraft over Evreux, 20 miles south west of Paris and the same night F/O Ray Smart, P/O Sutcliffe and F/Sgt Short bring the tally to two destroyed and two damaged in just three days when they attacked and damaged a Dornier 217 also over Evreux.

Colin Ponsford, who was one of the first pilots to join the Squadron when it reformed, was rewarded in March, for his outstanding service to the Squadron by receiving the rank of Acting Flight Lieutenant and being promoted to Deputy Flight Commander of 'B' Flight. F/Lt Eric Jones made Squadron history in March, when he rejoined the Squadron, having previously flown Hurricanes with the unit in 1940 during the Battle of Britain. Eric had the enviable distinction of being the first, and indeed only, pilot to have flown with both the "first" and "second" squadrons.

A colleague from HQ Staff, 8th Fighter Command, United States Army Air Corps, Lt Col W. Kratz spent some time on attachment to 605 during February before returning to America to take command of an American night fighter school. After several abortive attempts to get him on an operational sortie, having made a number of training flights on Bostons and Mosquitoes, he finally got his chance on February 18th when W/O Vipond accompanied him as his navigator on a patrol to Isigny. The American had become very anxious to "win his spurs" as he could have been recalled to the States at any time, but alas having finally been given the green light they had to return to base owing to poor visibility over the target area. An occupational hazard for an Intruder Squadron, especially in England in February !

The Squadron spent the first day of March on photograph duty. Apparently the "Wings for Victory" campaign that was running at the time was making good use of the Auxiliary squadrons for publicity purposes. This involved the supply of photographs of Squadron personnel to the various towns from which the squadrons originated. The photographer was shown round the Squadron and later taken up in a 'B' Flight Boston to photograph a formation of four 'A' Flight Mosquitoes, a copy of which is to be found in this book.

The very last operations with the Bostons took place on 9th March, after which the remaining aircraft were transferred away mostly to maintenance units for disposal. The departure of the Bostons was regretted by all the crews who had operated with them. Since the first sorties in July 1942 over 2,800 hours had been clocked up on them during which time not a single technical failure had occurred. This unfailing reliability coupled with the ease of landing with the tricycle
undercarriage and the protection of a rear gunner had placed the aircraft high in the esteem of all concerned. On the same day F/Lt Mervyn Maggs received a DFC, due recognition of his long service with the RAF, having first joined the Royal Flying Corps as a Sopworth Camel pilot from the infantry during the First World War, and was by far one of the oldest hands in the Squadron at the age of 43. His citation: "This officer, who has completed a large number of operational missions, is a skilful and determined air gunner. During a long career he has displayed exceptional keenness and unswerving devotion to duty. He has destroyed two enemy aircraft at night".

The first operational sorties with the Mosquito Mk II took place on the 10th March, but alas it was not an auspicious start with the new machines as FlLt Mike Olley AFC and his navigator W/O Vipond were killed on an intruder sortie to Tours. The Squadron log wrote of the men: "F/Lt M.G. Olley, apart from being an absolutely first class pilot and an exceptional instructor, was a man of great personal charm and was very good company. His keenness and eager desire to stop the Hun (which were probably his undoing) set a fine example to the other members of the Squadron. W/O H. Vipond was the same sort of NCO that F/Lt Olley was an officer - quiet, efficient and keen. Equally tall, they were a well matched pair."

Two days later the Squadron recorded it’s first successes with the new aircraft which coincided with the first visit to Holland, when S/Ldr de Bocock and Sgt Brown destroyed a Dornier 217 over Eindoven. During their attack the Mosquito was hit by shrapnel from the disintegrating enemy aircraft which damaged the starboard engine so badly it ceased to function. Despite this S/Ldr de Bocock brought the aircraft back to Manston, later attributing the successful return to the exceptionally clever navigation of his companion Sgt Brown, who steered them back whilst avoiding all the flak defended areas. W/Cdr George Denholm and Sgt Ray damaged another enemy aircraft on the same night over Gilze. From this time the Squadron and ‘A’ Flight in particular, usually maintained a state of readiness, generally consisting of two aircraft for Holland and two for France.

After two days of speculation about an impending move and a visit from the CO to an airfield in the east the Squadron’s worst fears were confirmed when they upped roots on the 15th March and were ordered to RAF Castle Camps, Cambridgeshire. The purpose of the move east was to make the enemy airfields in Holland more accessible. The move coincided with the transfer of 157 Squadron from Castle Camps to Bradwell Bay, and the subsequent move of 418 Squadron from Bradwell Bay to Ford.

"See Rome and die - see Castle Camps and pass out!" was the entry in the Squadron log for 15th March "That expresses the general feeling of the Squadron when it arrived at it’s new base, but actually it’s not as bad as that by any means. It’s the comparison with Ford which makes the chaps feel browned off, but they will get used to it. It’s the isolation and distance from civilisation which gets them down, but they will get used to it."

The new aerodrome certainly presented something of a bleak appearance compared to Ford, although the Squadron soon settled in, finding some consolation in the excellence of the food. The officers were accommodated in a very comfortable house some three miles from the camp at Walton’s Park, and the NCOs were quartered about the same distance in the opposite direction in a fine house at Shudy Camps. S/Ldr de Bocock had the unenviable distinction of being the first pilot to be wounded in combat since the Squadron reformed when he sustained a slight arm injury to his arm on 24th March, when his aircraft was shot up quite badly by flak over Deelen. Not to be overshadowed his navigator, Sgt Brown received a grazed hand during the same flight. On 26th March the Squadron received a limited supply of long range fuel tanks which increased the fuel capacity by 150 gallons, which allowed S/Ldr de Bocock to fly his aircraft on a five hour patrol to Stavanger on the Norwegian coast on the 8th April.

The 25th Anniversary of the forming of the RAF was celebrated on April 1st with dances at Debden Officers’ Mess and at the Sector Operation’s Room to which a number of the Squadron’s personnel were invited.
The transfer inland heralded the arrival of a number of new crews in early April. F/Lt Dave Blomeley DFC, a veteran of France and later the Battle of Britain with 151 Squadron, and his navigator F/O R. "Jock" Birrel, F/O Ken F. "Dizzy" Dacre and Sgt S.R. Didsbury, F/Lt Alec Lawson, F/O Alan Eagling who became the navigator for F/Lt Knowles. Sgt Dudley Wood received his well deserved commission in early April. Dave Blomeley had at least ten enemy aircraft to his name and had been shot down in June 1940 over occupied territory, but managed to evade capture and returned to his unit some days later.

Two more scores were recorded in the middle of the month when S/Ldr Charles Tomalin and P/O Bob Muir damaged an enemy aircraft over Soesterberg and F/O Ray Smart and F/O P.J. Wood bagged the Squadron's first double, destroying two Junkers 87s over Avord, which was some 110 miles south of Paris. Their haul that night also included three damaged locomotives and one destroyed, which they had seen explode after they had hit the fire box. In fact Ray Smart and his navigator joined a very select band, becoming only the third crew to destroy two enemy aircraft whilst flying an Intruder sortie.

On the 24th April S/Ldr I.M.T. de Bocock and Sgt R. Brown were killed when their Mosquito dived into the ground at Housedean Farm near Lewes, Sussex, the cause of the accident was unknown. S/Ldr de Bocock was a South African, having been posted supernumerary to the Squadron on 1st February 1943 and by his persistence and anxiety to engage the enemy had done much to increase the fighting spirit of the whole Squadron. He had been in the RAF since 1933 and above all he was an excellent comrade, always willing to impart his very wide knowledge of service procedure and flying experiences in a most charming manner to anyone in need of help. There is no doubt that his death was a great loss not only to 605 but to the whole service to which he had devoted his life. Sgt Brown, despite not having been in the Squadron for long was a quiet and self contained man and shared in his pilot's determination to engage and destroy the enemy.

The topic of conversation, and consternation on the 27th April was the report that the CO was to be posted and elevated to the rank of Group Captain in No. 12 Group. While everyone was delighted to hear of his promotion they were exceedingly sorry to think that they were to lose a CO who had done so much for the squadron from every point of view and who had always been approachable and considerate. W/Cdr Denholm had truly been a great leader and a good friend. On 30th April he officially left the Squadron and the Squadron log speculated about his replacement: -

"When a CO is posted the inevitable question is "who will take his place?". Needless to say we have all been itching to know the answer and today the answer was supplied in a manner which is most satisfactory and also in the way we had hoped - S/Ldr C.D. Tomalin. AFC and OC 'A' Flight has been given the command of the Squadron, and we are all delighted and offer our congratulations to S/Ldr Tomalin who will be "elevated" as from May 1st."

F/Lt Les Hodder made a very welcome return from his rather brief stint with 157 Squadron in early May, this time pairing up with S/Ldr Gibb DFC who was posted to the Squadron to replace W/Cdr Tomalin as 'A' Flight commander on 17th May. S/Ldr Gibb came from 264 Squadron and had recently been specialising in "Rangers", a type of operation in which the Squadron would soon be involved.

May was certainly a mixed month for the Squadron, F/O Brian Williams and F/O Dougy Moore opened the scoring on the 5th over Eindhoven when they sighted four enemy aircraft and after chasing a pair managed to damage a Dornier 217. The enemy aircraft was later confirmed as destroyed but more significantly a newspaper report carried the news that the navigator of this particular aircraft was a Major Walter Bradel, Kommodore of Gruppe II, KG2. Bradel was widely respected and admired amongst the Luftwaffe having taken part in countless operations against the allies and been decorated several times. His unit had sustained many recent losses and his presence on this mission was probably a morale booster, which obviously backfired. The pilot of the aircraft was named as Lt Andreas and was believed to be the best pilot of the Geschwader. Andreas was seriously injured in the crash which killed his CO.

F/O Arthur Woods and Sgt Wilf Johnson damaged a Heinkel 111 in the Laon/Athies area of north eastern France on the same night but alas a double blow was dealt when Sgt C.C. Adams and Sgt E.
We Never Slept - The Story of 605 Squadron

Wright were lost during only their second operational sortie on the 20th to Evreux, and six days later Sgt E.G.M. Smith and Sgt A. Chilton were also killed.

A new operation was flown on the night of the 22nd April when S/Ldr Mack with Sgt Wilf Harrison and F/O Ray Smart with F/O Sutcliffe flew in a new role known as "Operation Distil" which involved a long sea flight at "zero feet", but on this particular night was unsuccessful due to a bank of thick sea fog which they encountered after completing 160 miles, forcing their return to base. The Squadron were joined the following night by fourteen “Ranger” Mosquitoes from seven night fighter units of No 9, 10 and 11 Groups to assist with the intruder effort against the Dutch bases. Five aircraft from 605 were dispatched to Holland but apart from a chase by F/O Angus Michie and John Tredwen no contact was made by the Squadron, although a pilot from 151 Squadron did damage one at Vechta. Sgt Auturo Linn and F/O May rounded off the month on a positive note by destroying a Dornier 217 over St. Trond, 35 miles east of Brussels on the 30th.

June was another transitional month with the posting away of F/Lt Alec Lawson to 23 Squadron in Malta and the departure to Canada of F/Lt Colin Ponsford to join 36 OTU and the opportunity of imparting his knowledge and wealth of experience gained in intruding onto the young trainee pilots. Colin was not only missed as a pilot but also for sporting prowess being responsible for the recreational activities of the Squadron, who wished him the very best of luck in his new position and hoped that he would be able to return to the fold at the end of his OTU "tour".

But in fact June 1943 was the most successful month for the Squadron since reforming with five confirmed and one damaged enemy aircraft with no losses in aircrew. The Wood duo of P/O Wood and F/O started the rout destroying an enemy aircraft over Gilze on the 12th and four days later F/O Ray Smart and F/O Sutcliffe destroy a Heinkel 177 over Aalborg in Denmark. The 177 was quite similar to the Dornier 217, being a high wing twin engined but was somewhat larger and was deemed to be a complete failure as a strategic bomber, and of the one thousand built, eight hundred never took to the air.

An unusual addition to the score was chalked up on the night of June 14th, although not actually claimed, when W/Cdr Tomalin and Bob Muir left to patrol the Deelen area. During their sortie they attacked and damaged two enemy barges but later the guns defending the airfield they were patrolling suddenly opened up but managed to shoot down the enemy aircraft they were stalking, obviously mistaking their own aircraft for the Mosquito. Even so it was one more enemy aircraft that would not be visiting these shores again.

The other successes in June were made by the "Irvine Team" of F/Sgt and Sgt Irvine who damaged an unidentified enemy aircraft over Venlo, near Dusseldorf on the night of the 17th, F/O Ken Dacre and Sgt Didsbury who got their score off the ground magnificently by destroying a Dornier 217 over Compiegne near Paris and a Messerschmidt 110 over St. Dizier. Sgt Auturo Linn and F/O May recorded another Squadron first by being the first crew to destroy a Messerschmidt 410, which they did over Venlo. The 410 was a recent introduction into the Luftwaffe armoury, first deliveries took place in January 1943. and in many ways it was very similar in size and shape to the Mosquito, being a twin engined fighter bomber armed with four machine guns and two cannons.

At the end of June the Squadron began to re-equip with the newer Mosquito VI which was a fighter/bomber variant, being able to carry 2000lb of bombs as well as the four cannons and the same number of machine guns. The top speed of the Mk VI’s had been increased from the 356 mph of the MK II to 380 mph and it’s operating range had been improved by 300 miles to 1850. Another fine crew joined the Squadron in early July when S/Ldr Taylor AFC and F/O E.T. "Pip" Orringe became the latest recruits. Pip was soon known by the nickname "Beauvais Orringe" due to his continued inability to locate that particular occupied airfield. His plight was made all the worse by a rather sweeping and misguided statement he made to the Squadron Navigation Officer "You can't teach me anything about map reading", which was overheard by some of the men.

More successes were recorded on the 13th and 14th July when S/Ldr Mack and F/Sgt Wilf Harrison damaged a Dornier 217 over Eindhoven and F/O Ray Smart and F/O Sutcliffe destroyed another in the same area twenty four hours later. On the 22nd July F/O Peter D. Wood received a DFC, his
citation stating "Flying Officer Wood is a navigator of high merit. He has participated in many sorties and has contributed to the destruction of three enemy aircraft. Flying Officer Wood has rendered valuable service."

On the 26th the skies over Holland again proved to be a valuable hunting ground as F/Lt Clive Knowles and F/O Alan Eagling destroy a Dornier 217 over Soesterberg and S/Ldr Mack and F/Sgt Wilf Harrison damage another of the same type over Eindhoven. The following night F/O W.R. Urquhart and F/O A.G.M. Watson failed to return from an operation, and despite an air sea search of the North Sea by W/Cdr Tomalin and Bob Muir no trace of them or their aircraft were found.

F/O Ray Smart was awarded the DFC on the 27th July his citation stating :- "This officer has completed a number of intruder sorties over France, Belgium, Holland, Germany and Denmark, in the course of which he has destroyed at least 3 enemy aircraft. He has also destroyed 1 locomotive and damaged 5 others. Recently Flying Officer Smart flew on an intruder sortie which necessitated a sea crossing of over 500 miles each way and during which he destroyed an enemy aircraft. At all times this officer has displayed enthusiasm and a fine fighting spirit, setting a splendid example to all."

On July 30 F/O Arthur Woods and Sgt Wilf Johnson destroyed a Me 110 and damaged another unidentified enemy aircraft over Luneburg, twenty miles south east of Hamburg. Unfortunately Ray Smart failed to celebrate his DFC with an addition to his score as both he and his navigator, F/O Sutcliffe had come to the end of their tour of operations a few days after his award. Unlike most pilots Ray wasn’t posted to an Operational Training Unit, which was considered by most to be a chance to recuperate, but he pressed on with operational flying but was later reported missing from a night sortie with a Fighter Interceptor Unit.

August began in frantic fashion, F/O Arthur Woods and Sgt Wilf Johnson claiming an enemy aircraft possibly damaged over Parchim, eight miles north west of Berlin on the night of the 1st, but the next night the Squadron lost F/O Albert P. Aylott and P/O James Samuel Evans from a night intruder mission. Unfortunately neither men were found and their names are remembered on the Runnymede Memorial, panels 123 and 124.

On the 3rd August a new pilot arrived when F/O W.A. "Dickie" Bird came to Castle Camps, unfortunately minus his navigator who according to Dickie; "started being sick while flying in a Mosquito. So I re-crewed with Les Hodder, which I considered my very good fortune. He was a very modest man and an excellent navigator, respectful and liked by everyone. He was also a tough character and played for his local rugby club until his fortieth year.”

F/Lt Dave Blomeley and F/O Jock Birrel caused a stir on 17th August when they returned from a trip with the news that they had destroyed an Me 109 which had jumped them in moonlight over Jagel, some 60 miles north of Hamburg. Their claim was met with some disbelief until Blom explained what had happened. He saw the 109 start to engage him from behind and just as the German was about to open fire, Blom suddenly pulled the Mosquito nose up and the startled fighter, not expecting this manoeuvre flew straight underneath his prey. As he flew past, Blom dropped the nose and was then in a perfect position to open fire which he did with all four cannons giving the German no chance at all. Perhaps it was Dave’s past experience as a fighter pilot or just his sheer ingenuity that enabled him to claim such a prize, either way it was certainly a splendid piece of flying and a Me 109 stood out somewhat on the Squadron scoreboard amongst all the usual fare of Do 217s and the like.

The above occurrence wasn’t the only incident of note on the 17th, as S/Ldr Mack and F/Sgt Harrison also recorded a remarkable sortie when they left to patrol the same area as Blom and Jock. During their sortie over the aerodrome at Jagel their Mosquito was hit in the starboard wing by some unidentified object. It wasn’t until they returned to base and inspected their aircraft did they realise that they had flown into a cable which had acted like a cheese wire and neatly severed three feet off the starboard wing and all but twelve inches of the aileron. Despite this Mack brought home his aircraft from the 430 mile trip and landed safely, which is some testament to the pilot and indeed the resilience and stability of the Mosquito.
August 23rd was a landmark date for 605, it was night on which the Squadron aircraft were tasked with visiting the German capital, Berlin for the first time. Although there was little to report about the trip, psychologically it was an important moment for the Squadron who were able to fly unmolested to the capital city of the enemy. P/O Dudley Wood completed his tour on September 1st and was posted away only to lose his life sometime later whilst flying with 515 Squadron.

F/O Ken "Dicer" Dacre and Sgt Didsbury started September in what was to prove to be an eventful month for this duo when they damaged an Me 110 over Parchim, 80 miles north west of Berlin on the 1st. Six days later they were successful again when they destroyed a Junkers 88 over Keerbergen and possible damaged another unidentified enemy aircraft in the same area over Tirlemont.

During the early part of September three 605 crews and some ground crew members were selected to take part in a mission together with 418 (RCAF) Squadron to act as fighter escort to No 617 Squadron during their raid on the Dortmund-Ems canal. 617 were better known as the "Dambuster" squadron after their historic and daring raid on the German dams in May 1943, and there was much excitement at the possibility of working with such legends. The notion of using six Mosquitoes had come from G/Cpt Marwood Elton of HQ Bomber Command who thought they would be perfect, especially with dealing with the light flak that was expected over he target area. The signal was received to select three suitable crews and aircraft who would be placed under the operational control of the AOC 5 Group, Bomber Command for both the training and the operation itself. It was agreed that the senior 605 pilot, S/Ldr Gibb would proceed to RAF Coningsby on 3rd September for discussions about the planned mission.

S/Ldr Gibb was given overall control of the six Mosquitoes and reported to Coningsby together with his navigator F/O H. Mills and the two crews of F/O Arthur Woods with Sgt Wilf Johnson and F/O Angus Michie with F/Sgt John Tredwen on 5th September to commence training. The attachment was expected to last no more that three weeks. Arthur Woods remembered his first impression being "the sheer number of medals, including Victoria Crosses that were on show in the 617 Squadron Officers' Mess."

The brief was quite simple, the Mosquitoes would formate on the Lancaster bombers and as they approached the target area they were to break away and shoot up any searchlights and anti-aircraft gun positions. Training started on 6th September which comprised of the Mosquitoes formatting with the 617 Lancasters at about 170 mph, having to use about 10 degrees of flap in order to maintain their position. During one of the practise formations one of the 605 aircraft suffered a bird-strike which presented the ground crews of 617 Squadron with a headache as they were used to working on all metal aircraft and therefore didn't have a carpenter on site who could repair the damage. So a request was hurriedly sent to Castle Camps for a couple of "chippys" to travel to Coningsby and sort out the problem and remain there for the duration of the attachment.

After several days practising low level formation flying by day and night the attack was scheduled for the night of the 14th when eight Lancasters and their escort of six Mosquitoes left Coningsby bound for the canal. It was obvious from the start that the weather was against them and after a few minutes the call came to abandon the mission and return to base. During the turn for home the Lancaster piloted by S/Ldr Maltby was lost when it crashed into the North Sea. Arthur Woods witnessed the bomber's demise and patrolled the area for some time desperately scouring the sea for survivors until the air sea rescue people arrived. Despite their combined efforts the whole crew of seven were lost.

The next night it was decided that S/Ldr Gibb would fly a recce patrol to determine the state of the weather prior to the formation taking off. His report was favourable and so for the second time the aircraft took to the air, the Lancasters being led by W/Cdr Holden. The two leaders had decided beforehand that the two groups would approach the target area separately and meet up just before the bombers commenced their runs. One Lancaster piloted by Geoff Rice was forced to return to base over the North Sea, suffering from technical difficulties and another aircraft was lost when it crashed into the ground just over the Dutch coast, reason unknown.
The weather remained clear and the visibility was good as the aircraft crossed the Dutch coast but gradually it worsened as they approached the intended target, the Dortmund-Ems Canal. The Mosquitoes, who were flying above the bombers could see very little but at least the visibility was improved slightly for the Lancasters, enough for one pilot Micky Martin to radio that he could see enough of the target to make a run at it, which he did. In fact Martin was the only man to make an attack on the canal the others being unable to make out the target.

The losses being inflicted on Bomber Command were brought home to the Mosquito crews when it was announced that a further five Lancasters had failed to return that night, resulting in the total loss of forty-nine lives in just two nights, including the leader of the second nights raid, W/Cdr Holden whose aircraft was shot down when hit by ack-ack fire over Holland. The attack was cancelled and the Mosquitoes returned to their base on September 17th.

The RAF weren't alone in making intruder patrols to the airfields of their enemy as the Luftwaffe duly demonstrated when a lone Fokker Wolf Fw 190 shot down a Stirling bomber not far from Castle Camps on September 7th.

On the 15th September Dacre and Didsbury recorded their third straight kill when they disposed of a Dornier 217 near Paris. This brought their tally to four destroyed, one probably destroyed and one damaged since joining the Squadron only six months ago, and more remarkably made them 605's most successful crew, a tremendous accomplishment considering they were relative newcomers to the Squadron. F/Lt Dave Blomeley and F/O Jock Birrel destroyed a pair of Junkers 88s over the Skagerak, Denmark on the 21st September but sadly on the following night Ken Dacre and Sid Didsbury failed to return from an intruder sortie to Ardorf near Hannover.

The wreckage of their Mosquito was located and Ken was later identified as the pilot on the discovery of a scarf he always wore, bearing the name "L. White" or something similar embroidered on it. The two men were buried in the New Cemetery at Oldenburg and much later the man in charge of the cemetery claimed he had seen their aircraft brought down when it flew into some high tension cables, although he stated that his memory of this was not terribly clear. Just prior to his death Ken received the news that he had been awarded a DFC although it was only gazetted on October 9th.

Sometime before his untimely death, Ken's exploits had been the subject of a story written by Cpl Norman Wilkinson, a 605 ground crew member. His story was entitled "A Piece of Cake", a slang phrase frequently used by Dacre, and after Ken's death formed the basis of a BBC broadcast,(without the author's approval) entitled rather imaginatively, "Intruder Broadcast", the script of which is repeated here:

"How often do you hear on the broadcast news that our Intruders were out over enemy territory last night. Let me tell you what this means because it is my particular job. The original function of Intruders was to follow enemy bombers back to their own bases and shoot them down as they came into land. We had to hunt without being detected and watch out for landing lights on the ground, or evidence betrayed by navigation lights that an enemy aircraft was there to be shot down. More often than not we went home with an empty bag but with added experience.

When enemy night raids on England became fewer the original function developed into attacking of ground targets and in co-operation with our bombing raiders so as to keep the enemy fighters on the ground, or to force them to seek other landing grounds with a possibility that they would run out of petrol in doing so. We use Mosquitoes for Intruder work and they are just grand for this job, for they are very fast and easy to handle. If there is any fault to find with a Mosquito, it is that the cockpit is very warm in summer even with the heater turned off, but how we appreciate this heat in winter. So much for the aircraft, now let me tell you about a successful sortie.

We have food at about seven o'clock and then rattle off in a van to the Operations Room. Here we collect flying kit, maps and await orders. The secret telephone rings. The bombers are out again for Berlin. Our job is to cover the enemy airfields on the route, in Holland, Belgium or Germany itself. The Flight Commander gives us our detailed orders. My navigator works out the course. All the information necessary for our journey is given to us and carefully studied. Our aircraft is "R" for
Robert and has been tested on the ground and in the air during the day and the ground crews who always work like blacks to get everything on top line have checked up and reported. They're a fine team and they take a personal interest in the coming hunt.

Time for take off. Once more into the van and down to the dispersal area. Oh ! I've forgotten my scarf. The WAAF driver offers me hers. I tell her I'll give her ten bob if I see a Hun. The engines start. "R" for Robert is marshalled along to the runway with the aid of hand torches. We're off, a rapid acceleration between the path of lights and we are airborne. In a few minutes we are out over the sea with it's white crested waves. Then land, towns and the miles flash by. My navigator has brought me right over the enemy airfield. We have got there undetected and the runway lights are full on.

Circling round, my navigator suddenly clutched me by the arm. "Look, there's a light over there to port". We give chase but in order not to overshoot, I open my radiator flaps to slow up. The light was in fact navigation lights of an enemy aircraft. We close in astern, nearer and nearer. One burst from the eight guns is enough. The enemy goes down in flames to the ground and the airfield's lights suddenly go out. As we break away the enemy aircraft is burning on the ground. So much for that one. As we recovered height we spotted a second, unsuspecting and with lights burning.

We've been out now sometime. It is tempting to stay longer when hunting is good, but someone else will be taking up patrol to timetable, and petrol is running low. Reluctantly we make for base and as we land once more with a feeling of satisfaction, the ground crews run up to open the door. "Any joy ?". "Yes, two down". They too share out triumph and another night's work is done, but what about the scarf. I'll gladly pay that WAAF a quid. However, the scarf brought me luck and I'm keeping it as a gift in exchange for another one. The night's work over, we go in to give our report. Then there is bacon and eggs and a nice cup of tea served by a cheerful WAAF whose help and presence has always brightened our camp life.

A member of the ground crew that Ken refers to in his broadcast, Thomas Curror wrote to Ken's mother telling of the last time a member of the Squadron saw him alive :

"It was my sorry duty to start up his engines and guide him out to the runway in the dark. I was the last man to speak to him. That night, the warning had just gone, and the NCO in charge detailed the fitters to their respective machines to go out and stand by ready for a quick take off. I was detailed for "R" for Robert, the machine your son flew. I felt quite proud as he was the idol of all the lads and it was an honour to see him off. I had seen him off once before, and he got a Hun that time.

Well, I had everything ready, and to save time I took the Form 700 out to the machine to save him going to sign it. Well, that night he wasn't in his usual hurry to get off. He asked me for a pen to sign the 700 and he took time to speak about my fountain pen being a "good wee pen", he was imitating my Scots tongue. Well, after wishing him the customary "Good luck Sir" I closed the door and started up his engines, and guided him out to the runway. I can't remember how many machines flew that night, but the other fitters had their machines back and filled up with petrol, and I was waiting for "R" for Robert to return.

All the lads were sitting discussing how many Huns your son would get. It came to the last hour that he would have petrol for. I spent most of that hour outside, listening intently for that Mosquito. When it came that he had only petrol left for ten minutes, all the lads were out scanning the morning sky. None of them would admit that they were upset, for we couldn't think that there was a Hun flying who could trap our Dacre. Well, Mrs Dacre he died after he had fought a major share in the war against the Hun. But he will always be remembered by all in 'B' Flight, 605 Squadron as an ace flier and a very gallant gentleman".

The memory of Ken and Sid were never to be forgotten, and several years after the war had ended Ken's parents, who had retired from the Service as Air Commodore and Group Officer respectively were wondering how their son could be remembered when a conversation between Mrs Dacre and Sir Basil Embury concluded that a trophy would be made and awarded each year to the most proficient squadron in Fighter Command. The trophy was commissioned and was presented to the proud winners by Air Commodore Dacre and after his death by his widow Group Officer Elizabeth Dacre. The 605 Association were proud to have made Mrs Dacre a Honorary member of the
Association having enjoyed her company and humour immensely at the Annual dinner on two occasions until her death in 1995. Something of a postscript to Ken's death was made known to the author by Mrs Dacre, who told of a telephone call from Leigh-Mallory who advised her he would be taking Ken as his personal pilot to the Far East, "where it would be a bit safer". He was reported missing two nights later.

The Squadron enjoyed some pleasing news on the 24th September when S/Ldr Arthur William Mack received a DFC, his citation recording the fact that prior to his tour with 605 he had completed a tour with Bomber Command, and it also made reference to his eventful sortie in August when his lost four feet off his starboard wing but still managed to return home safely.

On September 25th the Squadron welcomed a new Commanding Officer when W/Cdr Charles Tomalin handed over the reigns to W/Cdr Bertie Rex O'Bryen Hoare, DSO, DFC. Charles was posted to HQ Fighter Command as Officer I/C Intruder Operations Room and everyone in the Squadron were very sorry to lose such an inspiring leader who had led it with distinction. Charles enjoyed a long and distinguished career in the RAF until his retirement in 1966 as an Air Commodore, receiving a Mention in Despatches in 1945 and being awarded the OBE in 1953 and the CBE in 1966.

The Squadron score for the period June 1942-September 1943 was as follows :-

**Enemy aircraft**
- 20 destroyed,
- 3 probably destroyed
- 9 damaged.

**Locomotives**
- 5 destroyed,
- 79 damaged.

**Ammunition trains**
- 2 destroyed.

**Barges**
- 15 damaged.

**Tugs**
- 2 damaged.

The losses during the same period were eight aircraft and crews, two of which were not due to enemy aircraft. The total score of enemy aircraft since the beginning of the war was calculated as 90 destroyed, 22 probably destroyed and 49 damaged.

The new CO, W/Cdr Hoare was extremely experienced when it came to intruding having flown his first sortie way back in the winter of 1940 when the role was first put into practise, since then he had destroyed six enemy aircraft. As the new CO he took the opportunity to write to G/Cpt Lord Willoughby de Broke and inform him :-

"I think I am exceedingly lucky to have command of 605 and a better Squadron it would be hard to find and very soon I hope we shall be celebrating the destruction of our hundredth Hun. I don't know if you have any ideas as to what form the celebration should take, but I thought a party for all ranks here as well as a sweepstake, the prize money to be divided between the air crew and ground crew who shoot down the 100th Hun and the winner of the ticket."

The march to the 100th enemy aircraft destroyed began in earnest on 27th September when Sgt H.J. Collins with Sgt Norton destroyed two over Vechta, near Bremen and S/Ldr Heath and F/O Richards bagged a Dornier 217 over Parchim, 80 miles south west of Berlin. The new CO and his navigator F/O Potter also got in on the act and added another Do 217, destroyed over Dedelstorf, to the ever mounting tally.

The Squadron gave a warm welcome to a new "colonial" crew on September 28th when F/O E.L. Williams and F/O F.E. Hogg, DFC and Croix de Guerre became members of 605. Leo Williams, who hailed from Southern Rhodesia had already completed a very successful tour of intruding with 23 Squadron, destroying three enemy aircraft. His navigator, Frankie Hogg, a New Zealander, had
completed two tours, the first with Bomber Command and the second with the Squadron's Canadian rival No 418 (RCAF) Squadron during which time he received his DFC.

Another experienced pilot came along a few days later, F/Lt Alan Wagner DFC who teamed up with Pip Orringe and before long had the legend "Wag's War Wagon" emblazoned on the crew door of his Mosquito. Wag had seen a great deal of action, having completed no less than 118 sorties, destroying three German aircraft and two Japanese Zeros. He destroyed the Zeros when he was operating out of Ceylon when the Japs launched an attack by carrier based aircraft. Alan had travelled to the Squadron by train, and as was customary he was duly collected by one of the duty WAAF drivers, who turned out to be Cherry Symonds. The driver was most surprised to see that Alan was one of her passengers, as she had worked with him before the war in Croydon and whose father had been her employer.

Castle Camps was bombed during the night of October 2nd, most of the damage being suffered by 'A' Flight. One of the WAAF drivers, Audrey had been blasted out of the hut she was in and was only found several hours later in a field by a searchlight crew going off duty. Thankfully, despite suffering severe bruising and sustaining some damage to her lungs she was alive and was rushed to Addenbrook's Hospital in Cambridge. This was the last entry in the Squadron log as far as Castle Camps was concerned as a move to RAF Bradwell Bay in Essex was made on October 6th.

It seems that the Station Commander was not sorry to see the back of 605, he was last seen chasing a 3-ton truck driven by Cpl Norman Wilkinson, which was allegedly spiriting away some of his precious cotton bed sheets, whilst bidding a fond farewell with the sentiment "Get off my station, you 605 lot would roll up the runway if you could."

The first successes at the new airfield were recorded on the night of the 9th October when W/Cdr Sammy Hoare with F/O Potter damaged two enemy aircraft over Dedlestorf and F/Sgt H. Collins with Sgt Norton damaged an Me 410 over Vechta. Dave Blomeley was promoted to acting Squadron Leader on October 12th and the following day the Squadron said a fond farewell to S/Ldr Mack who had just completed his second operational tour. Bradwell Bay was the scene of a tragic accident on the 22nd October when a 605 Mosquito caught some trees beyond the end of the runway during take-off and was destroyed on impact with the ground. The crew of Sgt R.J. Stenuit (Belgian) and F/Sgt J.F. McEwan (Canadian) were killed, and had been taking part in an operation to Abbeville and Amiens with two other aircraft when the accident occurred. On the same night F/Lt Clive Knowles and F/O Alan Eagling destroyed a Do 217 over Wunstorf during a separate sortie.

The Squadron had good reason to celebrate during the last few days of October when Acting S/Ldr Dave Blomeley was awarded a DFC on the 23rd and five days later W/Cdr Charles Tomalin also received a DFC. Although W/Cdr Tomalin had left the Squadron by the time his award was gazetted it was given in recognition of his time with 605 and is therefore included with the other 605 awards.

Sgt Sid Didsbury, who was killed in September whilst navigating for Ken Dacre was posthumously awarded the DFM on the 23rd which meant that both men had now received recognition of the successes they notched up during their six months with the Squadron.

November was a rather quiet month as far as operational sorties went, but was a time when a few friends finished their tours, notably F/O Peter Wood and the crew of Sgt Arturo Linn and F/O Dougy May who all left. On the credit side the Squadron welcomed the pairings of P/O E.T. Cosby with F/Sgt W.J. Robertson and S/Ldr Richard Angelo Mitchell with P/O Stan Hatsell. S/Ldr "Mitch" Mitchell was starting his third tour of operations having destroyed quite a large number of enemy aircraft with 603 (City of Edinburgh) Squadron. F/O Leo Williams and F/O Frankie Hogg damaged an enemy aircraft over Venlo on the 3rd November and S/Ldr Dave Blomeley and F/O Jock Birrel added another to their personal tally by destroying an Me 110 over Aalborg on the 9th.

Eleven days passed before another success was recorded, when on the 20th F/O Jock Reid and Sgt Phillips damaged an unidentified enemy aircraft over Rennes, France. On November 26th the Squadron lost another crew when F/Lt G.O.C. Hyne and F/Sgt G.H. Walder were killed. There was very little activity to report for the next three weeks until F/Lt Mike Negus and P/O Gapper got things going again on December 20th when they damaged an enemy aircraft over Handorf. This
action was followed with a double on Christmas Eve when F/Lt Alan Wagner and F/O Pip Orringe destroyed a machine over Fassberg and F/O Leo Williams and F/O Frankie Hogg damaged another over Pretzsch, which concluded the year’s flying in a positive fashion.

Most of the men managed to enjoy the Christmas festivities at Bradwell Bay, at one point most of the officer’s swopped their uniforms with the other ranks, the result being complete chaos, no one quite knowing who the “real” officers were and who they were supposed to be saluting!

1944

1944 began inauspiciously with the loss of F/Sgt Richard George Aldworth and P/O Kevin Joseph Mulcair (RCAF) on January 10th when they failed to return from one of the first operational sorties of the new year. The two young men, Aldworth who was only 20 years old and Mulcair who one year his senior were never found and both are remembered on the Runnymede Memorial on panels 215 and 252 respectively.

In stark contrast to the previous days events, the 11th witnessed an event the Squadron had been waiting for, when W/Cdr Sammy Hoare with F/O Bob Muir dispatched a Ju 188 at Chievres in UP/R, thus recording 605’s 100th enemy aircraft destroyed. The pair had been patrolling the target area for a short while when they spotted something moving on the port side heading south-east. The CO throttled back and got behind and underneath his prey and followed him round and identified the aircraft as a Ju 188 as he turned into the Visual Lorenz. As he reached the end of the Visual Lorenz the CO attacked from below and quarter astern as the enemy pilot, clearly oblivious to his plight, lowered his undercarriage.

Sammy Hoare gave him two 2-3 second bursts with ½ ring deflections from about 800 feet and strikes were seen on the fuselage sending the aircraft straight down as the Mosquito passed overhead. Bob Muir momentarily believed they themselves were suddenly under attack from below as many sparks and flashes were seen as the Junkers hit the ground.

Plans could now be laid for the inevitable party and presentation to which a number of past Commanding Officers would be invited, and cordially entertained, by the current serving members of the Squadron. Further successes were chalked up on January 21st when F/O Leo Williams and F/O Frankie Hogg damaged one enemy aircraft and W/Cdr Sammy Hoare and F/O Bob Muir damaged another, both at Stendal. S/Ldr “Mitch” Mitchell taxied his aircraft into a large log off the perimeter track on the 28th, his excuse being that a moveable glim lamp had been knocked over at the corner and he could not see the next one, causing him to veer onto the grass.

Poor weather had persisted over the continent during much of January and it had only been possible to operate on twelve nights and most of those had little to show for them. Five day ranger sorties had also been possible but the only contact was a Fw 190. On the plus side F/Lt A.C. Dunn was awarded an MBE and W/Cdr Sammy Hoare and LAC J.J. Smith both received a Mention in Dispatches.

S/Ldr Dave Blomeley completed his tour in early February and the Squadron said a fond farewell to a marvellous and very successful pilot and comrade. ‘A’ Flight lost their Commander when S/Ldr T.A. Heath AFC was posted to ADGB the vacancy being more than ably filled by S/Ldr “Mitch” Mitchell.

W/Cdr Sammy Hoare and F/O Bob Muir opened the February account by damaging one enemy aircraft over the Belgian capital and possibly damaging another at Le Culot on the 4th. This victory began a long sequence of successes against the Luftwaffe over the next three weeks, chiefly aided by the improved weather conditions. F/Lt Alan Wagner and F/O Pip Orringe claimed another as damaged at Chievres on the same night. During the early part of February the airfield was forced to use the “Fido” (Fog Intensive Dispersal Of!) which was designed to burn away the fog that prevailed from time to time in the Bradwell Bay area. One of 605’s ground crew members, Peter Freeman-Pannett wrote in his dairy for February 7th :-
"Fido" in action tonight. Really is fantastic, mind you don’t know which is thickest, the fog or the smoke from "Fido". Must look incredible from the air, to see two massive lines of flames, but to anyone up there trying to find a landing place it must be a godsend".

More new Flight Lieutenants joined the ranks in late January and early February, when firstly F/Lt Jack Pengelly started on January 24th and later on February 10th F/Lt Ken Carver joined up, a man who had seen action during the Battle of Britain in 1940 with 29 and 229 Squadrons. Additional successes in February were recorded on the 13th when F/Sgt Cassidy and F/Sgt Stickley got their first by destroying an unidentified enemy aircraft at Chievres, and six days later F/O Leo Williams and F/O Frankie Hogg continued their impressive scoring spree by damaging one machine at Le Culot, damaging a Junkers 188 and destroying another of the same type at Brussels. A recent arrival and one of only two Americans to have served with the Squadron, Technical Sergeant Chipman together with his navigator, F/Sgt Morrison a New Zealander, got on the score sheet on the same night by claiming an aircraft destroyed at Handorf. February 20th was another productive night for the Squadron’s intruder experts when W/Cdr Sammy Hoare, who incidentally was taking part in his 100th Intruder Sortie, and F/O Bob Muir damaged an aircraft over Soesterberg and F/Lt Dickie Bird and F/Lt Les Hodder fared slightly better by completely destroying a Hun over Chievres.

This splendid run of victories was tarnished on 21st February when F/Lt R.C. Pickering and F/O E.J. Edwards failed to return from an operational training sortie south of Cherbourg, their loss only to be officially confirmed a short while later as killed in action. The Squadron's other American pilot, Flight Officer Bud F. Miller claimed his first success on the night of the 23rd when he and F/Sgt Stirling (Miller’s usual partner F/O Winlaw, a highly efficient Canadian, was unfortunately sick on this night) destroyed an unidentified twin-engined enemy aircraft over Brussels, an area that was proving to be a fruitful hunting ground for the Mosquitoes of 605. Despite the loss on the 21st February continued to yield many more successes, F/Lt Dickie Bird and F/Lt Les Hodder also claimed one as damaged on 23rd, and F/O Leo Williams and F/O Frankie Hogg destroyed what was easily proving to be their favourite target, a Junkers 188.

The excellent work on the 23rd did not go unappreciated, the following messages being received in recognition of the sterling efforts:

From:- Headquarters, No. 11 Group "AO 94 23 Feb. Please convey to Officers Commanding and Aircrews of No. 418 and No. 605 Squadron and Control staffs concerned my heartiest congratulations on their successes and good work last night. Saunders."

From:- Air C-in-C, AEAF to the Air Marshal Commanding ADGB "My heartiest congratulations to you all and all those who took part in last night's very successful engagement of the enemy raid against this country. A very fine effort which I hope will be repeated as soon as they come again. Good luck to you all. Leigh Mallory."

From:- Air Marshal Commanding, ADGB "I wish to add my personal congratulations. Please pass this message to all concerned. Roderic Hill."

F/Lt Holland and F/O Wilkinson closed the book for the month by damaging one aircraft over Brussels on the 24th and damaging an Me 110 in the Ober/Olm area two nights later. F/Lt Holland was in the proverbial dog-house on the same day he saw his first action, when he taxied the Squadron's Airspeed Oxford into a contractor's lorry damaging the starboard wing. The accident was made all the worse by the fact that the aircraft had only been back on the Squadron strength for one day after a three month absence due to it's unserviceability!

Sgt Alf Phillips, the engineering NCO for "A" Flight was the next to get his name on the score sheet, but for all the different reasons when he announced he was the proud father of a bouncing baby boy who had made his debut, in true 605 night intruder fashion, at 03:30 hours on February 25th. F/Lt Eric Jones was posted away from the Squadron in early March, this being the end of his second "tour" with 605, the first being as a Hurricane pilot in 1940, a distinction only he could claim.
Chipman and F/Sgt Morrison damaged an Me 110 just north of Paris on the 2nd and S/Ldr Mike Negus and F/O Gapper damaged one and destroyed another over Juvincourt and Laon/Athies respectively during the same night. Bradwell Bay received a new unit on March 4th when the Hawker Typhoons of No. 3 Squadron arrived, from where they would be operating over the skies of Europe. Accommodating the new unit meant a move for ‘A’ Flight who had to double up with ‘B’ Flight sharing their dispersal area due to a general lack of space, and the 605 Orderly Room was relocated into Eastwick House.

Rumours of an impending move heightened with the arrival of the Typhoons, RAF Manston in Kent being the favoured new location for the Squadron but no confirmation was forthcoming; but the next day news came through that a move was on the cards but it would not take place until the beginning of April.

A visiting crew from 515 Squadron consisting of their CO, W/Cdr F.F. Lambert and F/Lt Morgan, flying under the guise of 605 to study the technique of intruding at first hand destroyed a Heinkel 177 over Melun during their first trip on March 5th, but their performance was somewhat overshadowed by F/Lt Alan Wagner and F/O Pip Orringe who destroyed two Me 410s, one Fw 190 and damaged another Me 410 over Gardlegen. What a performance, setting a new record for 605 and for a single Intruder sortie by any unit. The base was a German Night Fighter Training establishment and Wag and Pip had timed their run to perfection as training was in full swing as they approached.

This remarkable haul was made even more astounding by the fact that their Mosquito UP/J, lost most of it's paintwork when one of their victims blew up very close to them causing the paint to burn away. "Wag's War Wagon" as Alan had nicknamed it returned safely and with it's pilot and navigator was certainly the toast of the Squadron.

The next night F/O Jock Reid and F/Sgt Phillips claimed their first by destroying an Me 110 over Gardlegen, the same venue that had witnessed Alan and Pip's record breaking sortie the night before. On their way back Jock spotted an ammunition train which moments later was racked by several violent explosions after he opened fire with both his cannons and machine guns from 150 yards. A postscript was added to their combat report when the Intelligence Officer, F/O R.C. Southcott wrote :

"It only remains to be added to this story of an exceptionally fine sortie the fact the subsequent photo recce established that the damage wrought by the ammunition train blowing up was reckoned to be equivalent to that which would have been produced by 500 heavy bombers. F/Sgt Phillips was later commissioned before the tragedy which resulted in the loss of an excellent crew when they had but one more sortie to do before taking a 'rest' ".

March 10th was an eventful sort of day, 'A' Flight held their long awaited "Flight Party" which according to Peter Freeman-Pannett "... went off with quite a splash. W/Cdr Atkin and W/Cdr Hoare paid it a visit for a while and all got very merry. Drank all the beer and enjoyed it. "B" Flight lost 'O' to-night. Don't quite know what happened. Aircraft hit balloon cable, crew baled out after making height." The crew was F/Lt Allison and P/O Tamplin who had been returning from Dungeness when they hit a balloon cable at 820 feet which rendered the aircraft uncontrollable making a landing impossible. They managed to climb to 9000 feet and baled out safely, landing near Huntingford, their Mosquito crashing some two miles away.

A fatal accident occurred the next day when a Mosquito from another unit stalled and dived in upside down on take-off just after dinner. One man from 605 managed to get within twenty yards of the wreckage when the petrol ignited and the whole machine was engulfed in flames. Flt/Off Bud Miller and F/O Winlaw continued their good start by damaging two enemy aircraft over Brussels on March 14th, and on the same night S/Ldr Mike Negus and F/O Gapper bagged a pair of Dornier 217s over Eindhoven.

The Squadron broke another record for a squadron in Fighter Command on the night of March 15th, inspiring a rather proud CO to congratulate the Squadron by issuing a "Special Order of the Day" :-
"Congratulations to all ranks on the most outstanding achievement of last night. In reply to Bomber Command's request for maximum support, 22 aircraft and crews were brought to readiness, all of which went out on Intruder sorties, amassing the formidable total of over 102 night operational hours. Both the number of aircraft dispatched and the number of flying hours, is, by a very great margin, a record for any Squadron of Fighter Command of ADGB.

During the course of these patrols 1 enemy aircraft was destroyed as well as a large number of trains and barges. To achieve these magnificent results meant a tremendous amount of hard work on the part of every member of the Squadron as well as a very great number of personnel of 3094 Echelon and of the Station. Their willing co-operation and dogged hard work, coupled with their zeal and enthusiasm is deserving of the highest praise, for indeed without it the results could not have been obtained. The aircrew also responded in most splendid style and a special word of praise is due to the new members of the Squadron who acquitted themselves like veterans.

I can only say again how greatly honoured and proud I am to command this redoubtable Squadron whose enthusiasm, morale and fighting spirit is second to none, and who, by their individual and collective efforts, spell disaster, damnation and destruction to the Hun."

Wing Commander B.R. O'B. Hoare, DSO DFC, Officer Commanding 605 Squadron.

The next night S/Ldr Mitchell and F/O Stan Hatsell claimed half a Junkers 88 destroyed over Bobingen and F/Lt T.M.L. Woods and P/O Ray also claimed a half over the same area. In the absence of the relevant combat reports one can only assume that it was the same aircraft, but at least it keeps the Squadron score book in round figures.

There was no confusing F/Lt Holland and F/O Wilkinson's claim on the 19th when they destroyed a whole Ju 88 over Rheine. The next three days were certainly some of the most eventful for a very long time when the claims came in thick and fast, awards were gazetted and regretfully one crew was lost.

Successes on the 22nd were recorded by F/O Leo Williams and F/O Frankie Hogg who damaged an Me 110 over Hanau, F/Lt G.J. "Wilbur" Wright and F/O Ray Bourne who destroyed two enemy aircraft over Stade, P/O Cosby and F/Sgt Robertson damaged another over Quakenbruck and Flt/Off Bud Miller and F/O Winlaw claimed another as damaged over Ober/Olm. Lastly F/Lt Holland and F/O Wilkinson destroyed a Fw 109 and another unidentified machine over Neuberg, as well as bagging five trains and a staff car for good measure. Unfortunately the above claims were not without cost, when F/Lt John Rogers Beckett, an Australian and his navigator F/O Frederick Dutton Topping, flying UP/K, failed to return from a sortie to Gardlegen. The two men were buried as they had served together, side by side in the General Cemetery near Amersfoort.

Events on the 23rd were completed with the news that three awards had been made to 605 personnel as follows:-

Bar to the DFC - F/Lt Clive Edward Knowles DFC - "This officer has completed a very large number of sorties, including many successful attacks on airfields, locomotives and barges. In air fighting, Flight Lieutenant Knowles has destroyed three enemy aircraft, one of which he shot down after a long pursuit in bad weather. He is a most skilful and determined fighter whose example of devotion to duty has been beyond praise."

DFC - F/O Arthur George Woods, DFM - F/Sgt Wilfred Henry Johnson - 'As pilot and observer respectively, this officer and airman have completed very many sorties, including many attacks on airfields in Northern France, Belgium, Holland and Germany. They have displayed great skill and cooperation and have attacked numerous targets on the ground with success. In addition they have shot down two enemy aircraft. Flying Officer Woods and Flight Sergeant Johnson have displayed outstanding devotion to duty."

The next day brought no respite from the previous 24 hours for the crews of 605, further claims being made by S/Ldr Mitchell and F/O Stan Hatsell who damaged a Ju 88 over Perleberg, F/Lt Pete Garner and F/O Duncan who damaged an enemy aircraft over Erfurt, W/Cdr Sammy Hoare and F/O
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Bob Muir who did brilliantly to shoot down an Me 109 over Burg losing one engine on the return they landed at Woodbridge, having flown a distance of 400 miles on the other. The final claim of the day fell to F/Lt Alan Knowles and F/O Pip Orringe who destroyed a Ju 88 over Juterbog and damaged another together with a Hs 129 spotter plane over Pretzsch. S/Ldr Evans and Sgt Couchman had a close escape as they left to patrol Ardorf when they caught the port propeller on the either the sea or the sea wall just after take-off, which must have shaken the pilot, especially as his altimeter was reading 400 feet when it happened! He brought the aircraft straight back and was astonished to see that all three blades on the propeller had been bent back 180°.

The next few days yielded little by way of action, mainly due to bad weather. P/O McManus and P/O Tamplin went to Buckingham Palace to receive their DFM’s from His Majesty the King on the 28th, but other than that there was no activity. Things picked up again on the 30th when F/O Rotheringham-Parker and Sgt Bond damaged a machine over Giesson and F/Lt Pete Garner and F/O Duncan attacked two aircraft in a hangar believed to be Me 410s, strikes being seen on both aircraft and the building.

March 1944 had become the most successful month for the Squadron since it had reformed with 17 confirmed enemy aircraft destroyed, which rather belatedly included one for S/Ldr T.A. Heath DFC and F/O G. Richards for the night of 22nd September 1943 which had been claimed as damaged but had recently been ungraded to a kill following a POW report. Other successes included one aircraft probably destroyed and a further 14 damaged.

Two more awards were forthcoming in early April, W/Cdr Hoare receiving a Bar to his DSO, becoming the only man in 605 history to have received such an accolade.

Bar to the DSO - Wing Commander Bertie Rex O'Bryen Hoare, DSO, DFC:-

"This officer has participated in more than 100 sorties, involving attacks on airfields in Germany, Belgium, Denmark, Holland and France, escorts to bomber formations and a variety of other missions. He is a magnificent leader whose personal example of courage and devotion to duty has inspired all. In addition to his activities in the air, Wing Commander Hoare had devoted much of his energy and skill towards the training of other members of the squadron with excellent results. This officer, who has destroyed at least eight enemy aircraft, has rendered most valuable service."

DFC - F/O Ernest Leopold Williams

"This officer is a courageous and determined fighter, whose keenness to inflict loss on the enemy has always been evident. He has completed a large number of sorties during which he has attacked airfields and a variety of other targets, including rail and road transport, with good results. Amongst his other successes, Flying Officer Williams has destroyed five enemy aircraft at night. His example has been worthy of the highest praise."

S/Ldr Mitchell and F/O Stan Hatsell really went to town on the night of 5th April when they destroyed three large enemy aircraft on the ground during an operation to the Metz area of France. On the next night S/Ldr Mike Negus DFC and F/O A.J. Gapper were killed on an operation to the Strasbourg/Lake Constance area, a loss made all the more tragic when, six years later Mike's father, Lieutenant-Colonel Raymond Negus passed away leaving his estate to his missing son. Mike's father had never accepted that his son was gone, believing that he would one day return and inherit the £43,500 estate. Mike's room at the family home in Essex had remained locked and untouched since his last visit on leave, but sadly the 605 man would never return. Four days after they went missing a report came through that a Mosquito had been seen crashing into Lake Constance on the same night, which was probably their aircraft.

The impending move to RAF Manston in Kent was made on April 7th, most of the aircrew being accommodated in a large house (Hurlingham Lodge) on the sea front at Westgate taking their meals at nearby Doon Hall. Three days later a new CO was welcomed when W/Cdr Norman John Starr DFC took over from Sammy Hoare who left to take up a posting in 100 Group. To say the men and women of the Squadron were sorry to see him leave would be a gross understatement considering how magnificently he had led the unit, and his place in 605 folklore would be assured. The new boss,
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“Jackie” Starr, arrived with an excellent reputation being an intruder pilot of vast experience, some of which was gained in Malta.

Sammy Hoare continued to serve in the RAF being posted to the Far East after the war. On March 26th 1947 he was reported missing whilst ferrying a Mosquito from Singapore to New Zealand. It later transpired that he had been forced to land his aircraft on the small uninhabited Sydney Island in the Gulf of Carpentaria due to mechanical problems. The island contained no source of food or water and after a ten day search along their original flight route their aircraft was spotted from the air. Unfortunately Sammy and his navigator F/O J. Colvins were found lying dead under the wing of the aircraft, a deeply tragic epitaph to a man who had survived over 100 operational sorties over some of the most heavily defended skies of Europe, only to perish in peacetime on a ferrying flight.

Sammy’s last duty with 605 was to attend a party at the Dorchester Hotel and to receive a magnificent silver Mosquito, a replica of the machine he was flying with Bob Muir when they shot down the Squadron’s 100th enemy aircraft in January. The party was held on April 15th and was attended by A/Cdr Sir Lindsay Everard MP, 605’s Honorary Air Commodore, who kindly presented the trophy. Also present were seven former COs of the Squadron including Group Captains Alan Wright MC AFC and Lord Willoughby de Broke and two old friends and pre-war officers Air Commodore Lord Bearsted AFC TD MP and Air Commodore S.D. MacDonald DFC.

The writer of the Squadron log kept up with his wit and good humour commenting on the Dorchester party:- "After the party broke up varied bands proceeded to the well known and lesser known night haunts of London, returning to their beds at outlandish hours in the morning in many cases with little or no clues on the navigation entailed to proceed from point "A" to point "B". No serious accidents or injuries were sustained."

The Squadron log for the 10th recorded "A fine clear day. Things have got more settled now and almost everybody likes the new station. S/Ldr Mitchell making a wide orbit of the aerodrome during a Night Flying Test was fired at by the enemy defences in France!"

F/Lt Pete Garner and F/O Duncan possibly damaged an enemy machine over Neuberg on April 13th and five days later F/Lt Allison, obviously recovered from his parachute descent in March and F/O Insoll destroyed a Fw 190 over the Rheine/Hopsten area of Germany. The Squadron welcomed back two old friends on the 19th when F/O Peter Rudd DFC and F/O Don Messingham DFC returned to start their second operational tour with 605 (having first joined the unit shortly after it reformed in 1942.)

Yet more enemy aircraft were added to the increasing tally on the 20th when P/O Collins and F/Sgt Stirling damaged an aircraft over Juvincourt and F/O Walton and Sgt Pritchard damaged a Do 217 over Gilze. The following day the high scoring pairing of F/Lt G.A. Holland (RCAF) and F/O R.H. Wilkinson were killed, failing to return from a night sortie. F/Lt Geoff Wright and P/O Ray Bourne claimed an enemy aircraft over Langesalza as damaged on the 22nd and these marvellous efforts continued throughout April when F/Lt Alan Wagner and F/O Pip Orringe destroyed a Ju 88 over Neuberg on the 24th, (the same day that four aircraft from 617 Squadron had visited Manston to operate with five Mosquitos from 605) and further claims of enemy aircraft being damaged came from F/O Chipman and F/Sgt Morrison on the 25th, F/O Craven and Sgt Woodard the next day and F/O Roy Lelong and F/Sgt McLaren on the 27th. During this orgy Les Hodder was promoted to Squadron Leader and posted away, his tour complete and the vacancy of Squadron Navigation Officer was left in the most capable hands of Jock Birrel. An abundance of awards hit the Squadron at the end of April, all gazetted on the 28th :-

Bar to the DFC - Flight Lieutenant Alan Derek Wagner DFC.

"Since being awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross this officer has completed very many sorties at night and has displayed skill, gallantry and devotion to duty of a high order. One night in March 1944, whilst over enemy territory, Flight Lieutenant Wagner engaged first a Focke Wulf 190 and then two Messerschmidt 410s, all of which he shot down. In the last of these Flt. Lt. Wagner pressed home his attack at such close range that his aircraft was enveloped in burning petrol and oil which obscured the windscreen and burned the outer covering of the fuselage and the tail unit. Despite
this Flt. Lt. Wagner intercepted another enemy aircraft which he attacked with damaging effect. He has now destroyed a further four enemy aircraft, all of them at night."

DFC - Acting Squadron Leader Michael Negus (since killed in action)
"This officer has taken part in a very large number of sorties. He has achieved much success, including the destruction of three enemy aircraft at night and damaging attacks on ground targets. He is a most efficient Flight Commander, whose example of determination and devotion to duty has proved most inspiring."

DFC - Flying Officer Robert Campbell Muir
"As observer, Flying Officer Muir has taken part in a very large number of sorties during which numerous ground targets have been successfully attacked. He is a cool and determined member of aircraft aircrew and his undoubted skill has played a good part in the results obtained, Flying Officer Muir has also assisted in the destruction of an enemy aircraft."

DFC - Flying Officer Eric Thomas Orringe
"As observer this officer has participated in very many sorties at night. He has displayed exceptional skill and has assisted in the destruction of four enemy aircraft, three of which were shot down in one sortie. He has at all times displayed great keenness and devotion to duty and his example has been most commendable."

Bob Muir was posted to ADGB on April 11th for Intruder Intelligence Duties, a sad loss considering how long he had been with the Squadron, having completed over 50 sorties during his posting. His keenness to operate was aptly demonstrated on one memorable occasion when leaving the Ops Room at Bradwell Bay he made his way to the aircraft in which he was to navigate S/Ldr Heath. Bob tripped in the darkness and fell into some water completely soaking him and his maps and helmet in his hands. Despite the extreme cold of winter he made his way out and clambered into his seat without uttering a word, and the only reason the trip was cancelled was that S/Ldr Heath could not communicate with his navigator through the intercom as Bob's wet helmet was turning the transmission into a deafening whistle!

Fine results were recorded on four consecutive nights in early May when W/Cdr “Jackie” Starr and P/O Irvine destroyed their first enemy aircraft, an Me 110 over St. Dizier, S/Ldr Evans and Sgt Couchman damaged a Heinkel 177 over Laon and F/O Roy Lelong and F/Sgt McLaren damaged a trio, - Ju 88, He 111 and a Fw 190 over Neuberg. F/Lt Alan Wagner and F/O Pip Orringe damaged an enemy aircraft over the Ansbach/Wurzburg area on May 9th to end the impressive run. This was Alan and Pip's last success with 605 as they left to join Fighter Intercept Unit a few days later. Some time after this posting, Wag joined 501 Squadron flying Tempests at night reaping havoc against the German V1 rocket sites but was killed returning one night in bad weather, a huge loss to his squadron and the RAF.

The sequence of victories against the Germans was marred on May 11th when F/Lt T.L.M. Woods and F/O K.H. Ray were killed when their aircraft crashed into the ground near Deal in Kent, whilst they were returning from an operation during which they had attacked a German vehicle convoy. The next day F/Lt Rhodes and F/Sgt Little claimed their first success, destroying a Do 217 over Wertheim. F/Lt Les Hodder got a well deserved DFC on the 19th :-

DFC - Flight Lieutenant Leslie Henry Hodder
"Flight Lieutenant Hodder is an outstanding observer, who has completed numerous patrols by night. He has shared in the destruction of one enemy aircraft and has damaged others together with numerous trains and barges. His resourcefulness and enthusiasm have been unfailing and on a number of occasions he has completed bombing attacks on the enemy’s main airfields."

W/Cdr Starr and P/O Irvine continued their good start with the Squadron on May 19th by destroying a German aircraft over Florennes. The number of victories continued to increase during the next week, F/O Leo Williams and F/O Stan Hatsell damaged one over Eindhoven, F/Lt John Pengelly and F/Sgt Couchman claimed another damaged over Steinwyk and on the 28th S/Ldr Geoff Wright and F/O Ray Bourne destroyed a pair of Ju 88s over the Frisian Islands and on the same night F/Lt Welch and F/O Page destroyed another over the same islands.
F/O Leo Williams had parted company with his navigator Frankie Hogg, who was posted back to his native New Zealand a few days earlier, and teamed up with Stan Hatsell. A change of partner obviously did not effect his ability to shoot down the enemy in his own inimitable and efficient way. Another 605 pilot received a DFC on June 2nd, the worthy recipient being F/Lt Dickie Bird:-

DFC - Flight Lieutenant William Arthur Bird

"This officer has completed a very large number of sorties, involving attacks on airfields, locomotives and other targets. He has displayed skill and courage of a high order, setting an excellent example. In the course of his activities Flight Lieutenant Bird has destroyed one and damaged several more enemy aircraft. He has also inflicted damage on very many locomotives."

A few days after his award Dickie had completed his tour of operations, and together with his navigator Les Hodder had completed over 60 sorties with the Squadron. Just as one dear friend leaves the fold another returns, P/O Arturo Linn to be exact, who reappears for his second tour, teaming up with W/O Wilf Harrison.

In his diary, Peter Freeman-Pannett wrote for June 5th "Nothing flew last night, but all aircraft are required for tonight ..... Seems to be something big on!" How right he was. "We have 21 aircraft of both flights on state tonight."

Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force

Soldiers, Sailors and Airman of the Allied Expeditionary Force !

You are about to embark upon the Great Crusade, toward which we have striven these many months. The eyes of the world are upon you. The hopes and prayers of liberty-loving people everywhere march with you. In company with our brave Allies and brothers-in-arms on other Fronts, you will bring about the destruction of the German war machine, the elimination of Nazi tyranny over the oppressed peoples of Europe, and security for ourselves in a free world.

Your task will not be an easy one. Your enemy is well trained, well equipped and battle-hardened. He will fight savagely.

But this is the year 1944! Much has happened since the Nazi triumphs of 1940-41. The United Nations have inflicted upon the Germans great defeats, in open battle, man-to-man. Our air offensive has seriously reduced their strength in the air and their capacity to wage war on the ground. Our Home Fronts have given us an overwhelming superiority in weapons and munitions of war, and placed at our disposal great reserves of trained fighting men. The tide has turned! The free man of the world are marching together to Victory !

I have full confidence in your courage, devotion to duty and skill in battle. We will accept nothing less than full Victory !

Good Luck ! And let us all beseech the blessing of Almighty God upon this great and noble undertaking.

Signed

Dwight D. Eisenhower.

And so began D-Day and 605’s mission on that fateful day, June 6th in support of the allied airborne landings across the Channel. The brief included the attackng of enemy searchlight and ack-ack positions prior to the mass parachute drops early in the morning. 605 put up a total of eighteen aircraft, most of which left Manston just before midnight, slipping away into the night with their individual targets. F/O Roy Leelong and F/Sgt McLaren had been sent to the Evreux and St Andre areas, crossing the French coast at 0020 hours. On arrival they found both airfields to be inactive but at 0130 hours St Andre lit up and moments later as Roy was just about to make a bomb attack they were extinguished. Despite this he made another run and dropped two 500lb and two 250lb bombs on the aerodrome. Minutes later it was the turn of Evreux to light up and Roy obtained a visual on an aircraft at 1000 feet silhouetted against the clouds, and with the help of the moon he recognised it to be an Me 410.
The aircraft was carrying no lights. Roy then flew in a steady climb to just underneath the enemy aircraft and confirmed it as the type he had first recognised. He then throttled back and pulled up to dead astern and at a range of 150 yards opened fire with a 1½ second burst at a height of 1000 feet. Strikes were seen around the cockpit area and the aircraft then burst into flames, in the light of which it was without doubt confirmed as an Me 410. It then lost height slowly in a spiral dive and finally crashed about 7 miles south-east of Evreux airfield. The attack was timed at 0148 and was later confirmed as being the first enemy aircraft destroyed by any unit on the morning of D-Day.

Ken Carver and Jock Birrel in UP/P were tasked with the special operation to Caen to destroy the searchlights and ack-ack positions there. In his combat report he wrote "Arrived in area 0010 hours. Bombed searchlight and ack-ack position north of Caen with 2x500 and 2x250 bombs. Shot up two flak posts with cannon. Quite heavily engaged by light ack-ack over Caen, F/Lt (Pete) Garner & F/O Duncan in "Y" took the opportunity to shoot up these guns. Shot up another likely gun post on our way out by St Valery. F/O (Jock) Reid & F/S Phillips dropped the first bomb in this area. We were the first three aircraft to take part in the opening of this bridgehead of the Second Front, a very great honour."

The Squadron's crews also recorded the following successes on June 6th, F/O Leo Williams and F/O Stan Hatsell destroyed a Ju 88 over Orleans/Bricy, F/Lt Pete Garner and F/O Duncan damaged another type over Juvincourt and W/Cdr Starr and P/O Irvine damaged yet another over Dreux.

F/Lt A. Whitten-Brown and F/Lt V.G. Brewis failed to return from an operation to Leuwarden during the same night. The pilot was the son of Sir Arthur Whitten-Brown who together with Sir John Alcock were the first men to fly across the Atlantic Ocean when they made their epic flight in a Vickers Vimy in 1919. Twenty four hours later the Squadron were mourning the loss of another crew, F/Lt D.H. Gathercole DFC and W/O A.H. Wettone. F/O Roy Lelong and F/Sgt McLaren destroyed a Ju 88 at Coulommiers and W/Cdr Starr and P/O Irvine claimed an Me 410 at Chateaudun on the 10th. F/O Leo Williams and F/O Stan Hatsell possibly damaged another two at Chievres two days later on the 12th, the same day (night of) on which the Germans launched their new secret weapon, the V1, against London.

The V1, known as the "Doodle Bug" by the public, or "Diver" as it was known in the RAF, was an "athodyd" (a type of pulse-jet) propelled bomb which struck fear into the hearts of the public, especially those in the firing line who would listen intently to its drone then wait in silence as the engine cut out and the wretched thing fell to earth. The impact on the citizens of London was devastating and whilst the military set about working how to locate and destroy the bases from where they were being launched, others were concerning themselves on how to stop them once they had been fired.

June 13th was a dark day for 605, and will be remembered for a terrible accident that occurred as Mosquito UP-Z was being readied for a sortie later that night. During its rearmament the payload of one 500lb and eight 20lb bombs went off killing three armourers of 6605 Servicing Echelon, AC1 P. Foster, AC1 L. Leyburn and LAC R. Townley. The Squadron's Engineering Officer F/Lt Rebeck who was nearby was injured although not seriously. The cause of this catastrophic accident was never discovered.

Several squadrons in Fighter Command had received orders to the tune that they were to spare no efforts in the campaign to shoot down the V1 rockets and to this new brief 605 set about its work. The first actually fell at 0418 on 13th June at Swanscombe, four and a half miles west of Gravesend. On the night of 14/15th June F/Lt J.F. Musgrave and F/Sgt Samwell were the first to shoot one down (and would continue to return splendid figures against them as the numbers fired increased dramatically.) F/O Leo Williams and F/O Stan Hatsell busied themselves against the more traditional intruder targets on that night by destroying an Me 110G and a Fw 190 and damaging an unidentified twin-engined machine at Le Culot and damaged another over Brussels rounding off a very good night's work! A postscript to their combat report added by the I/O went: "This extract (Combat Report) show clearly the outstanding individuality and brilliance of 'Leo' Williams; 2 E/A destroyed
"We Never Slept" - The Story of 605 Squadron

and 2 E/A damaged within 14 minutes at 2 airfields on a dark night below cloud, and one E/A (the Me 110G) was picked up and destroyed although it was not burning a single light."

Not content with being the first to destroy a Diver, F/Lt J.G. Musgrave and F/Sgt Samwell went on the next night to destroy another, and following hot on their heels were F/O Peter Rudd and F/O Don Messingham and F/O Jock Reid and F/Sgt R.E. Phillips who all achieved the same result, one Diver destroyed. S/Ldr Geoff Wright and F/Sgt R.E. Phillips got their first the next day and the other Wright, F/Lt G.C. Wright AFC and F/O J.G. Insall claimed a record haul of three on June 17th.

Following these impressive results against the Divers F/O Peter Rudd and F/O Don Messingham damaged a twin engined enemy aircraft in the Brussels/Evere area on the 19th, the same day a first Diver success was credited to F/Lt Angus Michie and W/O John Tredwen. The "expert" 605 diver crew was without question F/Lt Musgrave and F/Sgt Samwell who finished with a personal tally of 13, and three crews shared the record for three destroyed on one sortie, F/Lt Wright and F/O Insall (17 June), F/Lt Brian Williams and W/O Stephen Hardy (6 July) and F/O Bensted and P/O Burrage (28 July).

During the "Diver Offensive" many amusing anecdotes were passed between the different squadrons responsible for shooting them down, especially the Spitfire and Tempest ones where competition to shoot down the highest number was fierce :-

"Our Ops. B says there are many more kinds of flying bomb that are reported but its all hushed up by the Intelligence Officers who don't want to expose their ignorance."

"The story that a flying bomb recently fired the correct colours of the day when attacked by a Spitfire XIV is quite untrue. The colours fired were incorrect, which made it look even more suspicious."

"The latest flying bomb has twin tails, twin jets, twin warheads and twin fuselages, our ROCLO reports. It has frequently been seen in the evening by observers on the south coast. It flies very fast (about 900 mph) and every now and then does a couple of upward rolls. The Air Staffs won't hear of this, as they're all in the pay of Rolls Royce and don't believe in jet propulsion."

"Our MP is going to ask the Secretary of State if he is aware that the Tempests and Spitfire XIVs spend so much time elbowing each other out of the way that the doodle bugs get through and fall on Wandsworth every time."

"The pilot of XXX Squadron says he doesn't trouble to elbow a Spitfire out of the way. He just shoots it down. He doesn't tell his Intelligence Officer as he wouldn't understand and might let on to his Squadron Commander."

"Our Controller's Aunts have calculated that at the present rate of fire everyone in London will be killed at the end of 300 years, but that at the present rate of advance the Army will be in Germany in 200 years, so we are still winning. They are going to write to their MP about it."

The regular business of intruder operations continued unabated during the "diver" offensive. Sadly on June 26th F/O Jock Reid and P/O R.E. Phillips were killed on a Night Flying Test when their Mosquito UP/E was flying at about 1000 feet when it seemed to suddenly catch fire and then without warning it broke up and dived through the cloud into Margate Railway Station. Their loss was a great blow, not only were they a very successful and experienced crew they were very popular and have always been described by everyone who came into contact with them as "a couple of great chaps".

Another two new crews joined from 60 OTU at High Ercall on June 27th, the New Zealand pair of John Worthington and Alan Friar and B.M. Singer and I.C. Rogerson. W/Cdr Mitchell received a Bar to his DFC on July 5th :

Bar to the DFC - Acting Wing Commander Richard Angelo Mitchell DFC.

"This officer has completed numerous sorties and has destroyed three and assisted in the destruction of a fourth enemy aircraft at night. He has also executed several damaging attacks on locomotives. He is a keen and courageous fighter whose personal example and efficiency have been reflected in the fighting qualities of his flight which has won much success."
Continued successes in intruding were made in July, F/Lt Jack Pengelly and F/Sgt Couchman damaged a He 177 and damaged another twin engined machine at Schwabishe-Hall/ Crailsheim on the 6th, W/Cdr Starr and P/O Irvine destroyed another at the same location on July 17th and the "ace" pair of F/O Roy Lelong and F/Sgt McLaren damaged another two on the 29th at Crailsheim. The kill made by the CO was quite spectacular in that he attacked from a very short range of only 20-50 yards and the subsequent explosion of the enemy aircraft was so bright he was completely blinded for three minutes during which time P/O Irvine had to give directions. This was further complicated by several pieces of the Hun striking the Mosquito jamming the rudder. On inspection of their aircraft in the daylight the following morning it was found that all the paint on the fuselage, tailplane and mainplane inboard of the engines had been burned away and a third of the rudder surface was missing. One blade of the port prop was bent forward and the whole perspex hood was black with oil. There was a six inch hole in the port side of the nose and a piece of Hun landing wheel tyre was lodged just behind the instrument panel and bits of wood were scattered over the cockpit.

The Squadron said a fond farewell to one of it's most successful intruder pilots on July 9th when Leo Williams was posted "tour expired". Including his fine scoring with 605 he was then credited with at least 8 destroyed, 1 probable and 12 damaged making him one of the leading intruders in Fighter Command. Leo was posted to FIU and later joined 501 Squadron where he gained much joy with their Tempests against the German V1 rockets, having specialised with the FIU in hunting them at night. He remained on operations and joined the FEF flying "Daylight Rangers" chalkling up still more victories, receiving a Bar to the DFC in May 1945 shortly before he failed to return one day and was regrettably presumed to have been killed.

The Squadron welcomed a new character on July 10th, F/O G.F. Labram who had completed his first tour with 605's Canadian counterpart No. 418, during which he made a name for himself as he had a particular penchant for attacking the enemy's railway engines. Rarely would he return for an operation without having sought out his favourite prey, regardless of the op he was flying, and was therefore given the very appropriate nickname of "Chuffy" Labram.

One of the very excellent Kiwi aircrew members, of which the Squadron had been blessed with it’s fair share, Frankie Hogg, was awarded a very deserving Bar to the DFC on July 13th:

Bar to the DFC - Flying Officer Francis Emslie Hogg DFC.

"Since being awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross this officer has completed a large number of sorties, many of them far into enemy territory and often in adverse weather. He is an observer of high merit and has played a worthy part in the successes obtained in attacks on a variety of targets, including railway installations and locomotives. Flying Officer Hogg has set an excellent example of determination and devotion to duty."

Operationally July 20th was a dead duck but the statisticians in the Squadron were certainly tempted to add two Me 109s to the Squadron score book when a pair landed at Manston and gave themselves up! Obviously the airfield defences knew they were not hostile and allowed them in!

Successes in August were few, F/O Roy Lelong and F/St McLaren recorded another for their impressive tally at Chievres on the 29th and P/O "Chuffy" Labram and F/Sgt Lees bagged their first, surprisingly not a train but an aircraft at Prenzlau the next night. The crew of F/O Bob Brigden and W/O Tom Harris failed to return from a strafing sortie to the airfields of Gilze and Eindhoven on the last night of August; their aircraft had been hit by ack-ack fire and had crashed near the River Maas. Sometime later it was heard that Bob had been killed but Tom had managed to bail out and was taken prisoner by the Germans. The Germans buried Bob as a then unknown English pilot in the little cemetery of Heesbeen where he still rests to this day.

F.O Stan Hatsell became the latest to be awarded a DFC on September 1st:

DFC - F/O Stanley Harry Hatsell

"This officer is a highly skilled and resolute member of aircraft crew. He has taken part in very many sorties, during which a variety of targets on the ground have been attacked with good results. He has also assisted in the destruction of two enemy aircraft in the air at night. He has at all times displayed the greatest keenness and devotion to duty and his example has been most commendable."
On September 17th a change of leader was made when W/Cdr N.J. Starr DFC left the Squadron (he was awarded a Bar to his DFC in November 1944) and W/Cdr R.A. Mitchell returned to his old unit as the new Commanding Officer. In early January 1945 W/Cdr Starr was returning from the continent to England as a passenger in an Anson in order to get married when the aircraft crashed near Dunkirk, killing him, the officer who was to have been his best man and the rest of the crew.

Activity over the enemy's airfields picked up in late September and on the night of the 26th nine aircraft were airborne on intruder missions. Three Mosquitoes were sent to patrol the airfields of Varrelbusch and Ahlhorn, and of these three only one crew returned. The four men lost were F/Lt John N. Andrews and his navigator Sgt Bill Freeman and F/Lt Johnny L. Storer and his navigator F/Sgt Norman J. Lees. The aircraft that did return was piloted by S/Ldr Welch who had encountered much searchlight activity and very accurate flak combined with poor visibility which made conditions extremely hazardous.

P/O John Irvine received a DFC on September 26th his citation recording the fact that he had assisted in the destruction of two enemy aircraft in the air at night. On the night of October 2nd F/Lt B.G. "Bouncing" Bensted and P/O C.L. Burrage were killed, the same day that F/O Roy Lelong and P/O J.A. "Mac" McLaren rewrote the Squadron history book by destroying a record number of enemy aircraft in one sortie. Roy's combat report best recorded what happened:

"Course was set for Siel Island crossing over the Flensburg Peninsular and out into the Baltic through Kiel Bay and to the target area. Patrol was uneventful and when in position we set course for Kubitzer Bay, crossing the Isle of Rugen and skirting the southern shores of Great Jasmunder Bay. At 1408 I spotted 13 Do 24s moored in the southernmost corner of the bay. They lay in lines of three abreast and line astern. A motor launch was also seen to be pulling away from the seaplanes heading for the shores.

I turned starboard and commenced attack: The planes appeared to be unmanned and as there was no reaction from the area, I went in very low and flew from south to north taking a Do 24 in the northern line first. A one second burst from point blank range and the aircraft immediately stated smoking and growing in intensity and later flames could be seen licking up from the part of the hull nearest the water. In all seven or eight attacks were carried out at very close range, flying at times through thick smoke and at one time through heavy turbulence caused by a Do 24 exploding on the water.

After attacking from 1410 to 1417 hours all cannon had been expended and by this time we could see that 5 Do 24s were now completely destroyed and a further 2 damaged. Of the five destroyed, three were burning and smoking so furiously as to be a total loss, and two which were not only burning and smoking, but were tilted over (at an acute angle) with superstructure broken. Smoke from the bay, black and thick, could be seen on the return home some 80 miles away in the vicinity of Fehmarn Island."

This intrepid pair were not quite finished and attacked and damaged a B & V 138 which had first opened up on them hitting the port propeller of the Mosquito. During their trip home the port engine burst into flames and had to be feathered, which fortunately extinguished the fire and allowed them to land safely on one engine.

A footnote to their combat report reported "Roy Lelong and 'Mac' were posted to 605 on 7th March 1944, as Pilot Officer and Sgt respectively. They completed their tour in October 1944 and had by that time become an outstanding crew having destroyed 9, probably destroyed 1 and damaged 11 enemy aircraft. They also collected 3 'Divers' destroyed and numerous barges, trains etc. Both were awarded the DFC in November 1944, Mac had been commissioned in September 1944. They did not 'rest' after their tour and shortly afterwards both won Bars to the DFC for their work with FIU."

Roy and Mac's sterling opening for October was continued by the rest of the Squadron, F/Lt John Pengelly and F/Sgt Couchman damaging an enemy aircraft at Bonn on the 6th and a day later the Squadron sent a pair of Mosquitoes on a daring daylight raid to Vienna. The four men that took part
on this venture was F/Lt A.J. Craven with F/Sgt L.W. Woodard and S/Ldr Welch with F/O Page and between them they had a 'field-day', their haul was as follows:

F/Lt Craven & F/Sgt Woodard
- Destroyed:
  - 2 Junkers 88's
  - 2 Fiesler Storchs
  - 1 Junkers 52
  - 4 u/i enemy aircraft
- Damaged:
  - 2 Fiesler Storchs

S/Ldr Welch & F/O Page
- Destroyed:
  - 2 Junkers 52's
- Damaged:
  - 2 Junkers 88's
  - 1 Heinkel III
  - 1 Me 108

Craven and Woodard's claim was later confirmed by Fighter Command after studying their combat film as 9 destroyed and 2 damaged which took the record from Roy Lelong and catapulted this crew into 605 folklore. Two days later a War Report told of their epic sortie....

605 started from a forward base on the Continent (St. Dizier) and skimmed the trees as they passed over Germany. F/O L.R. Page DFC (Nav) takes up the story -

"The strange thing was that, even though we were flying at tree top height, we only saw a handful of people, there were only farm labourers working in the fields. As soon as they saw us coming they dived for cover, behind hedges, haystacks, anything they could find. How they knew we were enemy aircraft I don’t know, unless the Germans never fly there by day. Another thing we noticed was that the roads and railways were absolutely empty. We never once saw a train of any kind.

When we arrived at our first target aerodrome near Vienna, we noticed that the city was covered with a thick pall of smoke. There were numerous fires. There had just been a raid by our bombers based in Italy. We only discovered this when we got home.

F/O Page's pilot, S/Ldr L.W.H. Welch DFC continues....

"We skirted round Vienna along the northern bank of the Danube to Fishanend Markte aerodrome which is on the south side of the river about ten miles south-east of Vienna. Here we found a number of aircraft on the field, mostly Ju 52s. We went straight in very low, opened up with our cannons and set two of them on fire. We saw four people walking about the field and looking up at us no doubt wondering who it was who was doing such fast low-flying, but when we opened up they all fell flat on their faces, and double quick. I did a steep turn and then dived down for another attack, but light flak started coming up so I decided to go on to the next target. The next aerodrome was at Munchendorf. The place was simply littered with aircraft, the aerodrome itself and the fields around the perimeter, Ju 87s, Heinkel 111s, Me 109s and many others. Just as I started diving down to the attack I saw an Me 108 coming in to land. I hit him and he went careering across the aerodrome and over the hedge on the far side. I climbed up, turned round and down again for a further attack. By this time bursts of heavy flak were coming rather close. Then I felt a sudden jolt. We'd been hit. Our Air Speed Indicator was put out of action. I reckoned it was time to go home."

F/Lt A.J. Craven, pilot of the second Mosquito describes what the airman sees as his bullets plough into aircraft on the ground...

"During the actual attacks we shot up a number of parked aircraft of different types. The attack which sticks out most vividly in my mind is when we went for two Stukas. First I got one of them in my sights, fired and he blew up with a terrific explosion. Our Mosquito lurched from the force of the explosion as we went over him. We then set the other Stuka on fire. When you fire at parked aircraft you see first the clouds of dust as your shells beat the ground all round it. Then you see them sinking into the aircraft itself, and bits fly off in all directions. There's a thin pale wisp of smoke and if you've hit the petrol tanks a deep red flame followed by clouds of dense black smoke as the petrol goes up. Finally the whole aircraft disintegrates. It's a very satisfactory sight."
On October 10th 605 dispatched three Mosquitoes even further afield on a 2500 mile trip deep into occupied territory to attack two German held airfields 60 miles south of Prague, Czechoslovakia and another two at Zagreb in Yugoslavia. The three crews consisted of the CO, W/Cdr Mitchell with F/Lt Stan Hatsell, S/Ldr Ian McCall with F/Sgt Tommy Caulfield and F/Lt Jack Pengelly with F/Sgt Couchman. The three departed Manston on the morning of the 10th and called in at Istres (Grouppe 3 East) for fuel and a weather report. They stopped at Lesi in Italy before setting off the following morning in an inverted vic three formation, passing over Ancona on course for their first target of Zagreb where W/Cdr Mitchell damaged an Me 110 which Jack Pengelly finished off.

Jack also shared a B 71 with Ian McCall before the CO called up ordering the three to leave the area and set a course for the aerodrome at Pleso where Jack destroyed an Me 109 and the CO claimed two Junkers 88’s and Ian McCall a Ju52. As they broke away from the airfield 'Mitch' called up and said that he had been hit, so Jack and Ian formed up on him and escorted him safely back to Lesi, where they found that all three had been damaged by flak.

Intruder work nearer to home continued, F/O Arturo Linn and W/O Harrison damaged an Fw 190 at Lubeck/Blankensee on October 15th and F/Lt A.J. Craven with his navigator F/Sgt L.W. Woodard damaged another enemy aircraft at Herzogenaurach on the 19th. Sadly this was to be their final claim as they failed to return from a sortie on October 31st, a great blow for all concerned especially as they held to the 605 record for the highest number of enemy aircraft destroyed on one sortie. They were awarded the DFC and DFM respectively in February 1945.

Jock Birrel's DFC was gazetted on the first day of November, his citation stating that he had assisted in the destruction of four enemy aircraft and three flying boats. On the 9th the New Zealand crew of F/Lt Bill M. Singer and F/Lt Ian C. Rogerson were killed on an intruder sortie to the aerodromes of Ardorf and Marx. Their aircraft had crashed in a wood near Arnhem in Holland and the two were buried next to the wreckage of the Mosquito. Ian's grave had a wreath on it made up of the remains of the safety straps and harness of a parachute and Bill's grave was covered with a map and a flying helmet was placed on top of the cross. Their final resting place was discovered and photographed months later as advancing armies liberated Holland.

On November 21st the Squadron left Manston and set up base at RAF Hartford Bridge linking up with No. 418 (RCAF) Squadron to form No. 136 Wing, 2nd Tactical Air Force. The move coincided with the awarding of a Bar to the DFC for W/Cdr N.J Starr and a DFC for Acting S/Ldr Ken Carver. W/Cdr Starr’s citation made mention of his two victories in the air and two on the ground, and that under his command the Squadron had destroyed at least 18 enemy aircraft and 68 flying bombs. Ken's citation covered his service during the Battle of Britain when he destroyed two He111s and severely damaged another before his Hurricane was shot up and set on fire forcing him to abandon it at 18000 feet. Also worthy of mention was Ken’s excellent intruder record and the success achieved by his Flight since his promotion in May, largely due to his magnificent example of courage, enthusiasm and devotion to duty.

The Squadron became non-operational for a period of six weeks after the move to Hartford Bridge, during which the men became understandably considerably fed up with the situation. W/Cdr Mitchell held the Squadron together until finally the first sorties was flown on the night of December 31st, when he and Stan Hatsell were the first of eleven aircraft to depart that night.

1945

On January 14th 1945 the crew of F/O Roy Lelong and P/O John "Mac" McLaren were both awarded the DFC for their marvellous record on intruding, including the destruction of six enemy flying boats during one sortie in October 1944 and S/Ldr Leonard William Henry Welch was awarded a Bar to the DFC. Also gazetted on the same day was the award of a DFC to F/Lt Arnold John Craven and a DFM to F/Sgt Leonard William Woodard who were killed at the end of October 1944 after achieving record breaking results for 605. On the night of the 17th the Australian crew of F/O G.M. "Lasher"
Lumsden and F/O C.G. "Hoot" Gibson were killed and on February 9th F/O R.P. Bulman and F/O D.F. Warren were killed when their Mosquito crashed after being hit by heavy flak.

On February 22nd the squadron provided 19 Mosquitoes as part of "Operation Clarion", the RAF's all out attack against Hitler's rapidly dwindling lines of communication. Results for the Squadron were very mixed, a large number of ground targets were destroyed but at a cost of five men who lost their lives during the operation and a further three who were shot down and captured. The men who gave their lives were F/Lt E.L. Jones and his navigator F/O G. Phillips, F/O R.J.R. Owen and his navigator P/O G. Thirwell and F/Lt Jack George Enticott whose navigator, F/Sgt Derek C. Hinton survived and was made a POW. The last pair had been crossing the airfield at Eelde when they were hit by anti-aircraft fire making their Mosquito uncontrollable. Both men took to their parachutes but Jack's failed to open and he was killed and was buried in the village cemetery at Eelde.

Several Squadron aircraft were shot up during the operation, W/Off Donaldson and F/O 'Junior' Allen limped back to base after their starboard wing had been badly damaged after colliding with a building, pulling up from a 'low' level attack. W/O Osbourne and W/O Read returned on one engine and F/O H.B. Archer with Sgt Riley suffered the same fate when they lost the use of an engine after being hit by flak. The aircraft that received that most damage belonged to F/Lt Rix DFM and F/O Burrows who had successfully bombed a railway junction and destroyed a railway engine before their whole hydraulic system was disabled by flak. They returned to base where the pilot executed a masterly belly landing which was described as "a treat to watch."

After attacking their nominated target S/Ldr Ian McCall and P/O Tommy Caulfield flew down the Kusten Canal and set a barge on fire, and as they pulled up to pass over a bridge in order to attack another the nose of the aircraft was hit by 20 mm flak, shattering the instrument panel. Swinging round, the Mosquito collided with some telegraph wires and a pole which damaged the port mainplane forcing Ian to make a crash landing in a nearby field. Ian and Tommy survived the landing and extricated themselves from the aircraft. Ian had sustained seven wounds during the attack, four in the leg, two in the arm and one in his back. Ian had also suffered a compound fracture of his left arm and Tommy had received some minor flak wounds. Moments later the aircraft was consumed by flames and was completely burnt out.

Ian was taken prisoner by a Hitler Youth and a farm labourer and taken to the nearest village where he was locked up in the local pub. He received no medical attention and was told there was no doctor in the vicinity. Later that evening he was interviewed by a Flak Officer who asked very few questions of him but took away some of his equipment such as his escape kit. By midnight a small wagon appeared and took him and Tommy to some nearby detention barracks where Ian received a shot of morphine from an Australian prisoner who also bandaged his broken arm.

The next day, and still without any medical attention and a temperature they were told to get up and sent out into the rain and marched to a private house some 15 kilometres away. (It is believed that the reason for sending them out of the village was the fact that a Mosquito had sometime previously killed 15 people when it attacked the barracks). They arrived at the house and received their first meal of some soup and brown bread from some French prisoners who were billeted there.

On the 25th, Ian, still with a temperature, no sleep and a loss of blood from his arm which had swollen up considerably was ordered, with the other prisoners to the nearest railhead. After a journey of 50 kilometres by horse and cart he was taken to a hospital and treated by Captain Madoux, a French POW who had been there for three years. He did what he could for the new inmates, despite having no staff or medical equipment. The food consisted of three slices of black bread per day with two tins of acorn coffee, one at night and one in the morning. Occasionally soup was served which was so revolting that the majority of the casualties could hardly stomach it. Ian remained here for three weeks as the hospital gradually filled with Germans from the Russian Front.

It was about March 15th when the guards were ordered to escort Ian to Frankfurt (Tommy had been sent on there after the second night at Lingen). He later wrote :- "The journey to the prison camp was a nightmare. We travelled in a train packed with German civilians who were being evacuated from the Ruhr and they were most unfriendly. On several occasions they threatened to
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lynch us. And every five minutes the train came to a standstill and we had to jump into holes by the railway line as some Mustangs or Lightnings or some solitary heavy bomber beat up the train. It went on right through the night when our own Mosquitoes hammered the line. It seemed strange that probably some of my own boys were giving us the wrong end of the stick."

Eventually after six days of travelling they arrived at Frankfurt, having endured frosty nights in the open at Osnabruck, attacks by civilians at Marlburg and a night spent in a forest and another under a railway engine. From Frankfurt they walked to a camp at Oberusel and then on to Dulag Luft where Ian was transferred to a hospital in Wetzlar where he arm was looked at by a doctor. Ian struck up a friendship with a Canadian, F/O Dunwoodie who was the sole survivor of a Halifax that had crashed on Christmas Eve. He had been blinded in both eyes and had been saved from the hands of the locals by some soldiers. Then a comical thing happened - comical at the time. Although he was blind and wounded in both legs a German solider stuck a revolver into his stomach and said "Don't try to escape. I don't want to kill you."

On March 30th Ian was returned to the camp at Dulag Luft, thinking he may be evacuated but the camp had already been overrun and he was evacuated by the Americans from whom he received excellent medical attention.

F/O Arturo Linn and W/O Wilf Harrison had a lucky end to their operational tour on March 3rd when, as they were making their third determined attack to finish off a train they were hit by light flak. One of the shells entered the cockpit and sheered off the petrol cut-off switch and another pierced Wilf's flying maps. On March 9th the crew of F/O Bill G. Oldham and Sgt Jimmy Fry failed to return from a sortie and on the 15th the Squadron made it's first ever posting to the European Continent when it was transferred to Coxyde (B. 71) in Belgium in order to bomb the enemy's position in support of Montgomery's push into Germany.

On the night of March 17th tragedy struck when the CO, W/Cdr Mitchell and F/Lt Stan Hatsell were posted missing from a sortie. This was a major blow, losing both the boss and the Squadron's Navigation Officer, and as Norman Parsons put it "we began to wonder what chance we novices had." Before the new CO, W/Cdr Angus Horne DFC, AFC could take over another crew was lost when F/O K. Dunin and F/Lt Leslie Alexander Smith were killed. Although listed amongst some 605 papers as a Canadian, no mention is made of this on the Runnymede Memorial where F/Lt Smith is remembered.

The Squadron's last V1 was destroyed on March 25th by F/Lt John Worthington and F/O Alan Friar bringing the total to 71. The top scorers were F/Lt G.J. Musgrave and F/Sgt F.W. Samwell with 12, F/Lt G.C. Wright AFC and F/Lt J.G. Insall with 8 and F/O B.G. Bensted who flew with several navigators who also claimed a total of 8 destroyed.

The Squadron lost two more crews, F/O Raymond Wilson and F/O Frank Thompson who went missing on March 27th, and are remembered on the Runnymede Memorial and F/Lt John R. Tracey and F/Lt Frank Beresford who were killed on April 10th. Jack Pengelly was awarded a DFC on the same day, his citation remembering his sortie to Zagreb and "...he has at all times displayed great courage and tenacity of purpose."

The Squadron were on the move again on April 28th from Coxyde to Volkel (B. 80) in Holland. Norman Parsons recalls "Each crew were to share a tent, that were lined up in rows alongside the hardstanding dispersals. It was a very warm sunny day when we arrived and to my surprise Bert (Jackson, Norman's pilot) being in the advance party had started to dig a channel around our tent to keep the water out. The following night there was a terrific storm and in the morning many of them were flooded out and their kit was floating around the camp beds. Bert went up in my estimation."

F/Lt Brian Williams and W/Off Stephen Hardy had the distinction of destroying 605's very last enemy aircraft on May 2nd when they destroyed an Fw 190 and damaged another unidentified machine at Lecke, south Denmark in UP/K. On May 8th the Germans finally made an unconditional surrender and the war in Europe was finally over. Sgt Ted Mansfield recalls "All the aircraft were locked up, as alcohol of every sort was flowing and some pilots wanted to fly. They would have killed themselves if they had been allowed to. Two or three Mitchell bombers flew in and took all the
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ground crews of 605 on a sightseeing tour of the bombing of Germany. It was amazing the damage that had been done."

More awards were gazetted for 605 pilots and navigators, F/O Arturo Linn and his navigator W/O Wilf Harrison received their DFCs on June 29th, W/O Stephen Hardy received the same award on 21st July. DFCs for S/Ldr Ian McCall, F/Lt Colin Ponsford, F/Lt John Worthington and F/O Alan Friar were awarded on September 14th and the final medals were given on October 2nd when F/Lt Gordon Robertson received a DFC and F/Lt Arthur Woods DFC received a very well earned Bar to his DFC. Also awarded was Angus Michie and John Tredwen who were Mentioned in Dispatches for their efforts.

On August 3rd, W/Off Johnny Collins was killed when the Oxford he was flying in crashed at Croydon. Hostilities in Japan ceased on August 15th and the thoughts of those men and women serving in Holland inevitably turned to those 605 men who had been captured by the Japanese in 1942.

On 31st August 605 was officially disbanded and the personnel and aircraft were now No 4 Squadron, Royal Air Force, a move that didn't entirely meet with the approval of the population of the County of Warwick Squadron. Angus Horne remembers how the telephone would ring in the Orderly Room and if the person on the other end asked if that was No. 4 Squadron the receiver was immediately replaced and this continued until the correct unit, 605 of course, was requested.

Success against the "Pilotless aircrafts" were as follows.

14 June 1 F/Lt J.G. Musgrave and F/Sgt Samwell
15 June 1 F/Lt J.G. Musgrave and F/Sgt Samwell
  1 F/O P.R. Rudd DFC & F/O D. Messingham DFC
  1 F/O Jock Reid and F/Sgt R.E. Phillips
16 June 1 S/Ldr Geoff Wright and F/O Ray Bourne
17 June 3 F/Lt G.C. Wright AFC and F/O J.G. Insall
19 June 1 F/Lt Angus Michie and W/O John Tredwen
21 June 1 F/O Bud Miller and F/O J.C. Winlaw
  1 F/Lt G.C. Wright AFC and F/O J.G. Insall
  1 F/Lt T.E. Knight and F/O A.J. Davey
23 June 2 F/O B.G. Bensted and Sgt C.L. Burrage
  1 F/Lt Singleton DSO DFC and F/O Haslam DFC
  1 F/Lt J.G. Musgrave and F/Sgt Samwell
24 June 1 S/Ldr Ian McCall and Sgt Tommy Caulfield
  1 F/O R.C. Walton and Sgt F. Pritchard
25 June 1 F/O Arturo Linn and W/O Wilf Harrison
  1 F/O Roy Lelong and F/Sgt J.A. McLaren
27 June 1 F/O B.G. Bensted and Sgt C.L. Burrage
  1 S/Ldr Geoff Wright and F/O Ray Bourne
  1 F/Lt J. Pengelly and F/O L.R. Page DFM & Bar
  1 F/O R.C. Walton and Sgt F. Pritchard
28 June 2 F/O R.C. Walton and Sgt F. Pritchard
  2 F/Lt G.C. Wright AFC and F/O J.G. Insall
  1 F/O Arturo Linn and W/O Wilf Harrison
  1 F/Lt J.R. Rhodes and F/Sgt J.H. Little
29 June 2 S/Ldr Ken Carver and F/Lt Jock Birrel
  1 W/Cdr Nicky Starr and P/O J. Irvine
  1 F/Lt G.C. Wright AFC and F/O J.G. Insall
2 July 1 F/Lt J.G. Musgrave and F/Sgt F.W. Samwell
3 July 1 S/Ldr Ken Carver and F/Lt Jock Birrel
**We Never Slept** - The Story of 605 Squadron

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<td>F/O A.J. Craven and Sgt L.W. Woodard</td>
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<td>29 September</td>
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The Auxiliaries Return To Warwickshire

The Squadron was officially reformed as a Night Fighter unit in the Auxiliary Air Force on 10th May 1946 at RAF Honiley near Kenilworth, in its home county of Warwickshire. The new Commanding Officer was a regular officer, S/Ldr R.J. Walker DSO. It was a return to an airfield that had played host to the Squadron in 1941 and from where they left to fight in Malta and the Far East. The Squadron Adjutant was a certain Donald Healey whose name would one day become synonymous with the sports motor car; F/Lt Basil Cheverton was appointed Squadron Engineering Officer The first man to sign up for the new Squadron was Aircraftsman David Rose, a car-body builder from Perry Barr.

The Engineering Officer remembers the infamous winter of 1947 - "Shinwells Winter": "We were snowed up almost from January to April and the camp was closed. Nearly all RAF personnel were sent home because of the general fuel shortage, so that for a while I was presumed Station Commander. Flying was of course out of the question."

The biggest problem in the early days was the shortage of technicians and ground crews. Recruiting was slow at first, not surprising after six years of war and the conditions of service which required the attendance for 12 weekends and 15 days for annual camp and completion of 100 hours of "non-continuous" training. The air crews brief was slightly different in that they had to put in 125 flying hours each year.

1947/8

The first operational night fighter aircraft, a de Havilland Mosquito Mk 30 arrived in April 1947 and at last the Squadron could start to resemble a flying unit again. The Mk 30 was a Night Fighter variant of the famous "wooden wonder", a machine which held an esteemed place in 605 history. The role of the Squadron changed in July 1947 as it had in January 1939 and once again 605 became a day fighter squadron. The night flying duties in which many of the men had specialised were deemed to be unsuitable for "week-end flyers", mainly because of the strain on volunteer ground crews who, apart from their normal business activities during the week, were expected to give up Saturday night to service aircraft on exercises and spend Sunday sleeping.

The first annual camp was held in the summer of 1948 when the Squadron renewed an old acquaintance with RAF Tangmere, again putting the clock back to 1939. Perhaps the residents of Bognor Regis and Chichester were given a poignant reminder of those dark days (not a reference to 605's last visit) when the Squadron last took to the air over their towns and villages. F/Lt Ron Goodwin remarked "Paris looked great, and some of those French villages look a lot different now" as he stepped from his Mosquito. Another pilot F/O Philip Bolton looked on as another Mosquito came in to land and commented to a waiting newspaper correspondent "My younger brother Geoffrey is flying that kite. Unfortunately an Air Ministry ruling prevents us from flying together."

Both brothers had flown the venerable Mosquito during the war.

The Squadron also joined the jet age in 1948 by becoming the first Auxiliary Squadron to receive the de Havilland Vampire. To assist the pilots on re-equipping 2 Spitfires and 2 Harvard trainers were provided which would at least give the pilots some experience which vaguely resembled the performance of the new machines but in fact had little else in common.

The first Vampire F1 arrived during the summer camp at Tangmere and caused quite a stir amongst the men who were going to fly it. The aircraft was Britain’s second ever jet aircraft and had first flown in September 1943. It was powered by the Goblin jet engine and had a maximum speed of 540 mph at 20,000 feet and an armament of four 20 mm cannons. The new machine was delivered by the Regular Adjutant, F/Lt Johnny Button DSO DFC, who had come straight off his conversion course.

The Squadron's new Honorary Air Commodore Air/Cdre Alan Cecil Wright visited the Squadron at Tangmere and congratulated the ground and air crews on the work they had accomplished in their first week at camp, during which 130 flying hours were logged.
The arrival in the skies of Warwickshire of the new jets didn't meet with complete approval, especially amongst those that lived under it's path. The vicar (Rev. George Mortimer) of the nearby village of Barston claimed that the whistling noise of the jet engines was disturbing his parishioners and demanded a ban on Sunday flying. "We decided to protest to Sir John Mellor, M.P. for Sutton Coldfield, because we feel that as we are not at war there can be no justification for training on the Sabbath. Surely this can be arranged during the week. Great empires have fallen in the past through ignoring the sanctity of the Sabbath."

S/Ldr Ron Goodwin replied to the call for a Sunday ban on flying by saying "The auxiliary services have to be maintained and that can only be done by week-end flying. Auxiliary squadrons are composed of personnel who are working in the office and factories during the week and their only opportunity of flying training is at week-ends."

Ron had joined 605 in October 1947 and succeeded S/Ldr Sing, a regular officer, as Commanding Officer in September 1948. Sing had taken command of the Squadron for a short time after the retirement of S/Ldr Johnny Walker. The Goodwin family had been connected with 605 in the past, Ron's two cousins Barrie and Mac had served just before the war. Unfortunately both were killed, Barrie in a flying accident at RAF Drem in June 1940 and Mac was killed when he was shot down during the Battle of Britain whilst serving with No. 609 Squadron.

Another arrival of note in 1947 was F/O Hugh Louden who had gained much experience as a Mosquito pilot during the war with No. 515 Squadron and had been attached to 605 for four days at Manston in April 1944. Hugh and his navigator went missing from a sortie in September 1944 when their aircraft was severely damaged by shrapnel from a railway engine they had just shot up. Hugh brought the machine down in the sea off the coast of Holland and ended up on a beach still strapped into his seat and up to his waist in water. He spent the remainder of the war as a POW in Stalag Luft 1, a fate that had befallen another 605 pilot, F/O Johnny Timmis.

A full squadron inspection took place on April 25th 1948 when A/Cdr G.H. "Tiny" Vasse CBE AOC No. 63 Group, Reserve Command visited Honiley to view the men of 605 and those of 2605 Light Anti-Aircraft Squadron. A parade of the two units was made led by the Station Commander S/Ldr Sing DFC. In the afternoon a formation fly-past of six Squadron Mosquitoes was carried out and a Dining-In night was held in the evening when Air/Cdre Alan Cecil Wright related the story of how the Squadron came to adopt the Badge of the bear and ragged staff. He claimed it was the first squadron in the whole of the RAF to have it's own badge.

Permission, he said, was obtained from the Earl of Warwick for his family crest to be used. This consisted of a muzzled bear and a ragged staff, and, it had appeared as such until shortly before the war. However he had noticed that the bear was no longer muzzled in 1948 and he could offer no explanation of why this was. As a result of this anecdote by the Honorary Air Commodore the members of the Squadron went off to search through the Squadron archives to try and solve "the puzzle of the muzzle", the result of which was never recorded!

No 605 Squadron, the Royal Warwickshire Regiment and the Warwickshire Yeomanry were granted the freedom of Stratford-on-Avon in October when the qualities of the Warwickshire people was summed up by Field-Marshal Viscount Montgomery who proclaimed "There are no finer men", a tribute that evoked cheers from thousands of people assembled in Bridge Street to witness the presentation of illuminated copies of the Town Council's resolutions conferring the freedom on the three units.

Later in the same month six of the Squadron's Vampires piloted by S/Ldr Ron Goodwin, F/Lt Johnny Button DSO DFC, F/O Johnny Timmis, F/O Geoff Bolton DFC, F/O J.A. Lawley-Wakelin, P/O Hugh Louden and P/O H.R. Taylor led the jet wing as part of the air escort when the King reviewed the Territorial Army in London. The wing also consisted of six Meteor fighters from No 500 (County of Kent) Squadron and the whole formation was led by Ron Goodwin.

1949
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The Squadron returned to the European Continent in 1949 when the summer camp was held at Sylt in Germany, the first time the Squadron had journeyed overseas since reforming. Restrictions on the men came as a result of regulations with which they had to comply as temporary members of the British Air Force of Occupation. These included a currency restriction that prevented anyone from taking more than £5 out of the country, which capped the lowest ranks from drawing more than £4.

In July 1949 S/Ldr Ron Goodwin retired from the Squadron owing to the pressures of business and S/Ldr Johnny Timmis took over as Commanding Officer. Also on the move was the very popular regular Squadron Adjutant F/Lt Johnny Button DSO DFC who was promoted to S/Ldr and was posted to the Air Staff of 61 Group. His successor was F/Lt H.A. Asker who had been his assistant for two months and filling his place was F/Lt J.P. Anson.

1950

Summer Camp in 1950 was held at RAF Horsham St. Faith in Norfolk in late June where the Squadron were given the opportunity to "go into action" against the Boeing Super-Fortresses of the United States Air Force. Another Auxiliary unit from Scotland was also at Camp in the eastern counties and controlled the Vampires against the Americans, in one of the first exercises in which an auxiliary squadron had participated.

1951

The Squadron were to spend a much longer spell at Horsham St. Faith in 1951 when the officers and men were called up for three months due to the Korean War. Laurie Gamble, whose father had served with the Squadron back in 1927 at Castle Bromwich and was later Mentioned in Dispatches, remembers well the stay near Norwich :- ". not forgetting the night out at the Muscle Club (The Sampson and Hercules) when on our return we had a running fight with the Station Police, they with their sticks and Alsatians, whilst we only had hose-pipes and fire extinguishers, 605 won... Happy days !".

In July the Squadron were in trouble with the locals again when two Vampires were seen to be flying "at roof top level" in the Bartley Green area of Birmingham during a low level exercise. This incident even reached the House of Commons where the Under-Secretary for Air Mr. George Ward in a written reply to the MP for Northfield, Mr Donald Chapman replied ".... They were instructed to maintain a minimum height of 2000 ft, over built up areas and I very much regret this was not observed." The MP asked the minister if he would pay compensation to a couple in Cromwell Lane for a broken window, ruined curtains, personal shock and cuts and injuries suffered during the last exercise. That must have been some sortie !

By July the Squadron began to operate with the Mk V version of the Vampire. The FB 5 was powered by the Goblin 5 powerplant and had an improved maximum speed of 548 mph at 30000 feet. As well as being armed with four 20 mm cannons it could also carry 2,000lb of bombs, or long range fuel tanks.

On August 5 Hughie Louden had a fortunate escape when the engine in his Vampire failed over the Severn Estuary and he force-landed in a field at Frampton-on-Severn. His touchdown was perfect but the aircraft continued across the field and hit a ditch, completely wrecking the machine. Thankfully apart from a strained back and shoulders Hugh was relatively unscathed.

In October 1951 S/Ldr Martin Walton took over command of the Squadron from Johnny Timmis who was emigrating to Southern Rhodesia the following month. Martin had been with 605 for three years and was a fourth year student at Birmingham University studying mechanical engineering which explains the nickname he was given by his fellow officers "The Flying Scientist". The announcement was made on the 27th during a dinner in the Drill Hall at Castle Bromwich to celebrate the Squadron's Silver Jubilee and to pay tribute to the Auxiliary members who had been called up for three months regular training. John Timmis replied to a toast by stating that although
some members had suffered individual hardship everyone enjoyed himself and attained a high standard of efficiency in the air and on the ground.

1952

The year began well with the Annual Dinner being held at the Vittoria Restaurant in Birmingham on January 23rd. The CO, S/Ldr Martin Walton congratulated the Squadron on its record in 1951 for achieving 80 percent availability and serviceability for its Vampire aircraft, a higher figure than any regular RAF squadron. He proudly stated "In the past year we have flown 2,400 hours, partly during the call-up. We are now flying 120-150 hours a month, which is very good going on week-end flying. We can be more efficient than the regular squadrons on sheer keenness and enthusiasm." Rumours of a new honour for the Squadron abounded, and were confirmed by the Squadron Honorary Air Commodore Alan Cecil Wright, but he refused to disclose what form the award would be. Popular consensus was that the city of Coventry was considering awarding the Freedom of the City to the Squadron following the first coming from the good people of Stratford-upon-Avon.

In fact the rumours were accurate and on May 3rd the Conferment of Freedom of Entry into the City of Coventry was made by the City Council and the Lord Mayor Councillor Harry Weston J.P.. The ceremony was held at the Butts Stadium and the many honoured guests and dignitaries included the Lord Lieutenant of Warwickshire Lord Willoughby de Broke MC AFC, Air/Cdre Alan Cecil Wright AFC TD DL, The Secretary of State for Air Lord de l'Isle and Dudley V.C., AOC Fighter Command Air Marshal Sir Basil Embry KBE CB DSO DFC AFC and AOC No 12 Group Air Vice Marshal R.L.R. "Batchy" Atcherley. Alan Wright and the Lord Mayor inspected the Guard of Honour and then the Town Clerk read the resolution conferring Civic Recognition upon the Squadron as follows :

At a meeting of the City Council held on the 4th March 1952 it was resolved :

"That in recognition of the close association between the City of Coventry and the 605 (County of Warwick) Squadron, Royal Auxiliary Air Force, in which many of its Citizens have served and are serving, and of the distinguished services of the Squadron to the Country in the 1939-45 World War, the Council confer upon the Squadron the right, on all ceremonial occasions, of marching through the City of Coventry with drums beating, bands playing, colours flying and bayonets fixed."

The Mayor then presented an illuminated copy of the resolution to Alan Wright who then replied. As a memento of the occasion a handsome silver bowl was also given and it was proposed that it would be competed for annually by personnel of the Squadron.

On June 19th the squadron were well and truly put to the test, taking part in a large exercise in the Midlands called "The Eyes of Fighter Command". In a unique broadcast the BBC gave the people of the Midlands the opportunity to follow every stage of the air battle between an 'enemy' force of bombers and the fighter defences of the targeted city. The name of the city was not disclosed until the broadcast was started, whose transmissions came from reporters on the ground and with the bombers in the air. Listeners were conducted around the Fighter Control Room of 3605 Fighter Control Unit from where they heard a detailed description of how an operations room operated. In a dramatic pause the warning of approaching raiders was sounded to the personnel of 605 at Honiley. From the control tower at Honiley they awaited the order to 'scramble' from the Control Officer some miles away who in turn was watching the path of the bombers on his radar screen. The timing of the take-off was all important as the aircraft consumed so much fuel, that an error of calculation by the Controller could result in them having to return to base before they had made contact with the 'enemy'. The order finally came and the listeners had the scene described to them as Martin Walton led the Squadron into the air in threes. Two minutes after the call came to scramble their Vampires they were airborne. The important roles of the Observer Corps was covered and the job of controlling and plotting was described by Cliff Michelmore, himself a former engineer in the RAF and the equally vital tasks performed by the WAAFs was also mentioned.
“We Never Slept” - The Story of 605 Squadron

Describing the scene from the point of view of the bombers was easily recognisable the voice of one time pilot Raymond Baxter who described the "excitement" of diving at hundreds of miles an hour whilst being pursued by Martin Walton and his band of merry men. In all a very useful exercise for the forces involved and importantly a public insight into the lives of the men and women who guarded the peace, and protected the skies of the Midlands.

There was much excitement in June 1952 when the Squadron left Warwickshire for the sunnier climbs of Malta for summer camp. The Squadron's Vampires night stopped at North Weald on the 27th and made another for fuel at Istres before arriving on the island at Takali, an airfield from where the Squadron had operated during the war in 1941. The ground crews travelled by Hastings from Transport Command, and for many this was their first time abroad. Unfortunately F/Lt G. Jones fell ill during the flight and was forced to land at Lyons where he was rushed to hospital with suspected blood poisoning. Apparently he was a farmer in Shropshire and had damaged his hand when a cow had trodden on it and the wound had turned septic. Happily he did make it to camp a few days later.

In all seven Auxiliary Squadrons travelled to Malta for their summer camp in 1952. Conditions were described as "slightly primitive" but the pilots said this was all forgotten when they were soaring over the blue Mediterranean. In all the Squadron sent nine aircraft and work each day finished at one o'clock when the officers and men could go bathing where apparently underwater fishing was the latest craze.

1953

On May 10th F/Lt D.F. Shepherd and his co-pilot F/O Jerry Edgerton escaped unhurt when their Gloster Meteor crash landed in a field near Baginton aerodrome, Coventry. Several residents spoke highly of the pilot's skill and handling of the aircraft which was severely damaged, as he brought it down close to some houses. On the 25th the Squadron took part in a flying display for the public at Elmdon Airport. On June 6th they took to the air once more in a formation over the Council House in Birmingham to celebrate the coronation of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. The officers and men of 2605 Light Anti-Aircraft Squadron also took part being led by S/Ldr C.B. Barratt in the ground parade.

The Squadron revisited Sylt in Germany for their summer camp in June and later in August took part in Operation Momentum.

1954

1954 was a memorable year for 605. The Squadron was presented with its Standard by Her Royal Highness The Princess Margaret on 11th March in a ceremony at Honiley. On parade that day were the following officers serving with the Squadron :-

HONORARY AIR COMMODORE

SQUADRON COMMANDER
Squadron Leader P.M.R. Walton

REGULAR ADJUTANT
Flight Lieutenant G.M. Scarrott

ENGINEER OFFICER
Flight Lieutenant J.H. Cater, A.F.C.

TRAINING OFFICER
Flight Lieutenant D.H. Ross
In presenting the standard Her Royal Highness said: -

"Squadron Leader Walton, I am very proud to be here today and to have the opportunity of presenting this standard which the Queen has awarded to 605 (County of Warwick) Squadron. During the clouded days of the last war the youngest of our armed forces proved itself to be one of our greatest, and the Squadron which you command won renown remembered far beyond it's native country. In the Battle of Britain, in the Middle East and far across Western Europe it forged a great tradition and we remember with pride and thankful hearts such courage and sacrifice.

Now that the war is over, the Squadron does not rest upon it’s hard won laurels but still fixes it’s gaze upon the years ahead. The pace and scope of invention increases daily, making new demands on your technical ability. But although science has given man mastery of the air, there is one thing that scientific discovery alone can never give. That is the gallantry and spirit of adventure of the men who fly these great machines.

Auxiliary squadrons comprise a new citizen air force on which the Royal Air Force relies for it’s support today and on which, should some new emergency arise, may depend the existence of this Realm. For should war come again our country can never hope for a breathing space in which to assemble its reserves and in which to complete their training.

When we listen to the roar of jet engines speeding across the weekend sky we realise the hours of time, and leisure so ungrudgingly given not only by those whom we see for an instant high above us in the skies but also by the ground crews on whose skill and perseverance depends their lives and
"We Never Slept" - The Story of 605 Squadron

ours. Your motto is "We never sleep". That is a noble pledge of service, a pledge worthy of Warwick and of England. I present you with this standard, confident that you will guard it with valour in war and with that unswerving devotion in peace which is for ever our best defence."

In accepting the standard, S/Ldr Martin Walton said:
"We are very grateful and proud that the occasion has been graced by the presence of your Royal Highness. Your coming here today will make a most memorable occasion in the history of the Squadron. I am sure it is the ambition of all the officers and airmen serving today to deserve the glory and honour obtained for the Squadron by those past comrades in arms, and to match it by their own courage and enthusiasm in what ever role the future may demand of them. This standard, which has now received God's blessing, we will cherish in peace and in war."

P/O Derek John had the honour of being the Squadron Standard Bearer on a day when all those men and women who served 605 throughout it's existence, could be justifiably proud.

Summer camp in 1954 was held later than usual, in early September when Tangmere again played host to the Squadron.

1955

In April, Honiley welcomed a new Station Commander when S/Ldr Paddy Barthropp DFC AFC took command of the station. Paddy had flown with 603 (City of Glasgow) Squadron during the Battle of Britain and was later made a POW after being shot down. Paddy was one of the RAF's true characters and was a joy to have around. In September the Squadron held it's summer camp in Gibraltar.

1956

In June the Squadron journeyed to Gibraltar for what was to become its last ever summer camp.

1957

January 7th 1957 is a date that sticks in the mind of Jerry Edgerton. It was on that day that he climbed into Vampire 'B' and took to the skies over Warwickshire on the very last flight by a 605 aircraft. In his log book he recorded against the column marked 'Duty' column:

"LAST AUX PILOT TO FLY ON '605'"

There must have been a lump in the throat of those who witnessed that final flight that day as the distinctive whistle of the Vampire's engine could be heard for the last time as Jerry touched down on the tarmac at RAF Honiley.

The official announcement came on January 16th that the Air Ministry was ordering the disbandment of the Royal Auxiliary Air Force with effect from March 10th. The decision had been somewhat pending since 1954 but had not come about due to the public opposition against it. Also scrapped was No 2605 (Field) Squadron.

The editor of "The Aeroplane" wrote:

"It is hard to imagine the poverty of imagination that lies behind the decision to disband the Auxiliaries. In these days when financial reward and material gain are alleged to be the only springs of conduct and employment, is there nobody in high places who realises that the spirit behind the Auxiliary Air Force is priceless ? Nothing could be madder than to discourage those who wish to allocate their spare time to serving their country."

And so on 11th March 1957 the skies of Warwickshire fell silent and the Bear and Ragged Staff of No. 605 (County of Warwick) Squadron, Royal Auxiliary Air Force was no more; but its spirit lives on - for the Squadron Standard is laid up in the little church of St. Cuthbert’s which serves the community...
“We Never Slept” - The Story of 605 Squadron

on the Castle Vale Estate, in the centre of what was the airfield at Castle Bromwich. An appropriate resting place, but so different now.
### ROLL OF HONOUR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank and Name</th>
<th>Date of Death</th>
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<tr>
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<td>?? February 1935</td>
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<tr>
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<td>27 August 1939</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1 April 1940</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flying Officer P.J. Danielson</td>
<td>17 May 1940</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sergeant Moffat</td>
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<tr>
<td>Squadron Leader G.V. Perry</td>
<td>27 May 1940</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flying Officer G. Wright</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pilot Officer B. Goodwin</td>
<td>24 June 1940</td>
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<td>Pilot Officer G. Forrester</td>
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<td>Pilot Officer W.J. Glowacki</td>
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Sergeant J. Harris 18 November 1942
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Leading Aircraftman S.R. Butcher ? December 1942
Corporal W.R. Durk 1 December 1942
Sergeant W.T. Poulson 1 December 1942
Leading Aircraftman F.C. Dowding 2 December 1942
Leading Aircraftman A.F. Russon 2 December 1942
Aircraftman 1st Class R.J. Gibbs 3 December 1942
Aircraftman 2nd Class H.L. Thomas 4 December 1942
Leading Aircraftman W.H. Whitfield 4 December 1942
Sergeant I.G. Parry 8 December 1942
Aircraftman 1st Class E.W. Nelson 10 December 1942
Leading Aircraftman A.D. Robinson 13 December 1942
Sergeant J. Warrender 31 December 1942
Sergeant R. Veitch 31 December 1942
Sergeant J.C. Stirrat 31 December 1942
Flight Lieutenant M.G. Olley, A.F.C. 10 March 1943
Warrant Officer H. Vipond, D.F.C. 10 March 1943
Leading Aircraftman E.E. Belfield 22 April 1943
Squadron Leader I.M.T. de Bocock 24 April 1943
Sergeant R. Brown 24 April 1943
Sergeant C.C. Adams 20 May 1943
Sergeant E. Wright 20 May 1943
Sergeant E.G.M. Smith 26 May 1943
Sergeant A. Chilton 26 May 1943
Leading Aircraftman J.N. Tasker 14 June 1943
Leading Aircraftman H.J. Reynolds 14 June 1943
Flight Sergeant G.H. Bryan 21 July 1943
Flying Officer W.R. Urquhart 27 July 1943
Flying Officer A.G.M. Watson 27 July 1943
Flying Officer A.P. Aylott 2 August 1943
Pilot Officer P.J.S. Evans 2 August 1943
Aircraftman 1st Class T. Harper 12 August 1943
Flying Officer K.H. Dacre, D.F.C. 22 September 1943
Sergeant S.R. Didsbury, D.F.M. 22 September 1943
Corporal J. Hart 1 October 1943
Aircraftman 1st Class A.A. Crofts 6 October 1943
Sergeant R.J. Stenuit 22 October 1943
Flight Sergeant J.F. McEwan 22 October 1943
Flight Lieutenant G.O.C. Hyne 26 November 1943
Flight Sergeant G.H. Walder 26 November 1943
Leading Aircraftman E. Parsons 22 December 1943
Flight Sergeant R.G. Aldworth 10 January 1944
Warrant Officer K.J. Mulcair 10 January 1944
Leading Aircraftman H.L. Lewis 21 January 1944
Leading Aircraftman W. Anzani 24 January 1944
Corporal E. Horler 17 February 1944
Flight Lieutenant R.C. Pickering 21 February 1944
Flying Officer E.J. Edwards 21 February 1944
Flight Lieutenant J.R. Beckett 23 March 1944
Flying Officer F.D. Topping 23 March 1944
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<tr>
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<td>G. Houser</td>
<td>?? ?? 1955</td>
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### “We Never Slept” - The Story of 605 Squadron

#### Appendix 2

**HONOURS & AWARDS**

**Bar to the Distinguished Service Order**

Wing Commander B.R.O’B. Hoare, D.S.O., D.F.C. & Bar  
April 1944

**Distinguished Service Order**

Squadron Leader A.A. McKellar, D.F.C.  
November 1940

**Bar to the Distinguished Flying Cross**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Officer Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Pilot Officer C.F. Currant</td>
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**Distinguished Flying Cross**

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Flying Officer R.E. Lelong January 1945
Pilot Officer A.J. McLaren January 1945
Squadron Leader J.I. Pengelly April 1945
Flying Officer A.T. Linn June 1945
Warrant Officer W. Harrison, D.F.M. June 1945
Flight Lieutenant B. Williams July 1945
Warrant Officer S.E. Hardy July 1945
Flight Lieutenant C.F. Ponsford September 1945
Flight Lieutenant J.C. Worthington September 1945
Flying Officer F.A. Friar September 1945
Squadron Leader I.F. McCall September 1945
Flight Lieutenant G. Robertson October 1945
Flying Officer W.H. Johnson, D.F.M. October 1945
Pilot Officer A.E. Gregory Unknown
Squadron Leader T.A. Heath, A.F.C. & Bar Unknown
Warrant Officer H. Vipond Unknown

Air Force Cross

Flight Lieutenant M.G. Olley Unknown

Distinguished Flying Medal

Sergeant H.N. Howes October 1940
Sergeant E.W. Wright November 1940
Sergeant S.R. Didsbury October 1943
Flight Sergeant W.H. Johnson March 1944
Flight Sergeant L.W. Woodard January 1945

Member of the Order of the British Empire

Flight Lieutenant A.C. Dunn Unknown
Flight Lieutenant D.J.N. Rebbeck Unknown

British Empire Medal

Flight Sergeant R.P.H. Gibbs Unknown

Mention in Despatches

Flight Lieutenant A.M. Michie
Flying Officer J.K. Sutcliffe
Flight Sergeant G. Ritchie
Leading Aircraftsman J.J. Smith
Pilot Officer D.H. Wiseman
Pilot Officer E.J. House
Sergeant R.C. Martin
Sergeant W.A. Winpenny
Warrant Officer J.W. Tredwen
Sergeant J.D. Hanson
Warrant Officer H.J. Collins
Wing Commander B.R.O’B. Hoare, D.S.O. & Bar, D.F.C. & Bar
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Appendix 3

COMMANDING OFFICERS

Squadron Leader J.A.C. Wright October 1926
Squadron Leader Lord Willoughby de Broke, M.C., A.F.C. March 1936
Squadron Leader G.V. Perry December 1939
* Flight Lieutenant R.F. Grant-Ferris, M.P. May 1940
Squadron Leader W.M. Churchill, D.S.O., D.F.C. June 1940
Squadron Leader A.A. McKellar, D.F.C. September 1940
* Flight Lieutenant C.F. Currant, D.F.C. November 1940
Squadron Leader G.R. Edge, D.F.C. November 1940
Squadron Leader R. Reid September 1941
Squadron Leader S.E. Andrews, D.F.M. January 1942
Squadron Leader E.W. Wright, D.F.M. February 1942
Wing Commander P.W. Townsend, D.S.O., D.F.C. June 1942
Wing Commander G.L. Denholm, D.F.C. August 1942
Wing Commander C.D. Tomalin, A.F.C. May 1943
Wing Commander B.R.O’B. Hoare, D.S.O., D.F.C. & Bar September 1943
Wing Commander N.J. Starr, D.F.C. April 1944
Wing Commander R.A. Mitchell, D.F.C. & Bar September 1944
* Squadron Leader A.G. Woods, D.F.C. March 1945
Wing Commander A.W. Horne, D.F.C., A.F.C. April 1945
* Squadron Leader I.F. McCall, D.F.C. July 1945
Squadron Leader R.J. Walker, D.S.O. May 1946
Squadron Leader Singh ?
Squadron Leader R.T.C. Goodwin December 1947
Squadron Leader J.A. Timmis July 1949
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Squadron Leader P.M.R. Walton                        August 1951

Squadron Leader Tickner                               ?

* denotes Acting Commanding Officer
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Appendix 4

BASES

R.A.F. Tangmere, Sussex 27 Aug 1939 - 11 Feb 1940
R.A.F. Leuchars, Fife 11 Feb 1940 - 27 Feb 1940
R.A.F. Wick, Caithness 27 Feb 1940 - 21 May 1940
R.A.F. Hawkinge, Kent 21 May 1940 - 28 May 1940
R.A.F. Drem, Lothian 28 May 1940 - 7 Sep 1940
R.A.F. Croydon, Surrey 7 Sep 1940 - 26 Feb 1941
R.A.F. Martlesham Heath, Suffolk 26 Feb 1941 - 31 Mar 1941
R.A.F. Ternhill, Shropshire 31 Mar 1941 - 1 Jul 1941
R.A.F. Baginton, Warwickshire 1 Jul 1941 - 4 Sep 1941
R.A.F. Honiley, Warwickshire 4 Sep 1941 - Dec 1941
R.A.F. Hal Far, Malta 12 Nov 1941 - 27 Feb 1942

Squadron disbanded 27th February 1942, remaining personnel joined No. 185 Squadron.

Batavia, Java 3 Feb 1942 - 10 Feb 1942
Palembang, Sumatra 10 Feb 1942 - 14 Feb 1942

Squadron disbanded 14th February 1942, remaining personnel joined forces with Nos. 238 and 242 Squadrons.

Squadron reformed 7th June 1942.

R.A.F. Ford, Sussex 7 Jun 1942 - 15 Mar 1943
R.A.F. Castle Camps, Cambridgeshire 15 Mar 1943 - 6 Oct 1943
R.A.F. Bradwell Bay, Essex 6 Oct 1943 - 7 Apr 1944
R.A.F. Manston, Kent 7 Apr 1944 - 21 Nov 1944

Coxyde (B.71), Belgium 15 Mar 1945 - 28 Apr 1945
Volkel (B.80), Holland 28 Apr 1945 - 31 Aug 1945
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Squadron disbanded 31st August 1945 and renumbered No. 4 Squadron, R.A.F.

Squadron reformed as an Auxiliary Squadron, 10th May 1946.


Squadron disbanded 11th March 1957.
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