

**ROYAL AIR FORCE
BOMBER COMMAND**

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**SQUADRON PROFILES
NUMBER 19**



61 SQUADRON

Per Purum Tonantes

RESEARCHED, COMPILED AND WRITTEN

BY

CHRIS WARD

**ROYAL AIR FORCE
BOMBER COMMAND
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GENERAL NOTES

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GENERAL NOTES

This profile is a reference work on the activities of the squadron during the Second World War. Bomber Command operated exclusively from stations in the UK, and used overseas bases purely for shuttle operations, or as advanced staging posts for specific purposes. For this reason, periods spent on detachment, or permanent postings to overseas Commands, do not fall within the scope of this work.

This profile is not intended to serve as a comprehensive squadron history, but to provide as much information as possible in a non-anecdotal form. The brief history narrative is basically an account of Bomber Command's war, with the individual squadron's involvement interwoven into it. The publications listed in section 5 are not only recommended reading, but represent the best available sources of information for serious students of the subject. The operational record is based almost entirely on the figures provided in *The Bomber Command War Diaries* by Martin Middlebrook and Chris Everitt, and I am indebted to Martin Middlebrook for allowing me to use them.

An aircraft is included in section 3 if; a) it spent time on squadron charge, no matter how briefly, and irrespectively of whether or not it operated. b) the type was used operationally by the squadron. Where a squadron has a Conversion Flight involving a type with which it is intending to re-equip, but then does not, as in the case of 101 and 460 Squadrons, these have been included, on the basis that they sometimes found themselves on operations. Information is restricted in most cases to; where from, where to, unless it completed its service with the squadron, in which case, some detail of its demise appears. Aircraft which failed to return have the date and target recorded. Where no information follows the serial number of a type still in use when the squadron departed Bomber Command, or at war's end, it can be assumed that the aircraft was still on squadron strength. However, where there is a blank space following the serial number of a type which has been withdrawn from service with Bomber Command, it signifies that I don't know its ultimate fate. An absence of information does not imply that the aircraft flew no operations during its time with the squadron.

Those squadrons which served with the AASF in France between the outbreak of war and the fall of France, were not technically part of Bomber Command from January 1940. Nevertheless, their service is deemed to be on behalf of Bomber Command for the purpose of the relevant Profiles, and their experiences are, therefore, detailed, and their aircraft listed. The Blenheim squadrons of the AASF are also treated as if under Bomber Command.

Finally, information has been drawn from a variety of sources, ranging from Records Branch to individuals with squadron connections, and I am grateful for their contributions. There will inevitably be errors and omissions when dealing with a subject as vast as Bomber Command, and I am happy to be corrected and/or updated by readers.

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SECTION 1



BRIEF HISTORY

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61 SQUADRON

MOTTO PER PURUM TONANTES (Thundering through the clear sky)

Code QR

61 Squadron first came into existence in the home defence role on the 24th of July 1917. In June 1919 it was disbanded, and remained on the shelf until the 8th of March 1937, when it was reformed as a bomber squadron. After operating Blenheims for thirteen months, the squadron re-equipped with Hampdens in line with the rest of 5 Group, receiving its first example of the type, L4103 on the 17th of February 1939, and a full complement of aircraft arrived on the squadron's station at Hemswell by the 7th of March. When war arrived on the 3rd of September of that year, 61 Squadron's introduction to action was gentle, and like many squadrons in existence from the start of hostilities, short detachments to Coastal Command would interrupt its record of service with Bomber Command. Overseeing the transition from peace to war was S/L Brill, who had occupied the position of squadron commander since 1937, but his time was soon to be over, and he handed the reins of command to W/C De Crespigny on the 26th of September.

Although one of 5 Group's front-line units, 61 Squadron was not heavily involved in the ill-fated daylight armed reconnaissance operations during 1939, which demonstrated the flaws in the theory that the self-defending bomber could hold its own against fighters. The squadron occupied itself with training, and it was this activity which brought about the first of what would be many written-off aircraft, when P1170 suffered an undercarriage collapse after landing at Doncaster, and it was subsequently destroyed by fire. A harsh winter helped to keep flying to a minimum, and no further incidents took place before the turn of the year.

1940

Early 1940 was taken up with training, patrols and occasional leaflet sorties, and the winter seemed to deepen with the arrival of February. W/C De Crespigny was posted out on the 12th, and he was replaced by W/C Denny. The "Phoney War" continued to maintain its grip on proceedings, and for the time being at least, neither protagonist was prepared to risk an escalation by bombing land targets. The squadron suffered its first fatal incident of the war, when L4111 crashed in Lincolnshire on return from patrol in the early morning of the 8th of March, possibly having been damaged by flak, and F/O Clinkard and crew were all killed. This was followed on the 12th by a training crash involving an Anson, which came down near the Oxfordshire-Wiltshire border, and P/O Hewitt and the other four men on board were also killed. The accidental slaying of a British subject in the Orkneys by a stray German bomb on the 17/18th, led to a reprisal attack by Whitleys and Hampdens on the Hörnum seaplane base on the island of Sylt on the 19/20th. The crews claimed this first genuine bombing raid on German territory as an outstanding success, and this was reflected by the ensuing headlines in the press. Sadly, aerial reconnaissance failed to detect any signs of damage to the target, but the propaganda value was immense, and that would suffice for the time being.

On the 9th of April, Germany invaded Denmark and Norway, and Bomber Command was thrust into the fray, in an attempt to slow down the enemy advance into the latter. The largest operation to date, by eighty three Wellingtons, Hampdens and Blenheims, was sent against enemy shipping at Stavanger by daylight on the 12th, and following the loss of nine of them, the pre-war theory of the self defending bomber was effectively laid to rest. The 13/14th brought the first mine-laying operation of the war by Bomber Command, a task to which the Hampden was to prove itself eminently suited. On the following night, twenty eight of the type carried out a similar operation in Danish waters and the Elbe Estuary, and 61 Squadron registered its first failure to return of the war. L4113 was lost without trace from the latter destination, presumably in the sea, and Sgt Emanuel and his crew became the first of many from the squadron to be posted missing. A training crash on the 17th caused the demise of L4116, following an overshoot at Hemswell, but P/O Morley and his crew walked away unscathed. Mining continued to be the main occupation for the Hampden squadrons for the remainder of the month, but the first actual bombing operation of the war for 61 Squadron came on the night of the 30th, with attacks on airfields at Stavanger. L4119 crashed in Leicestershire on return from Aalborg, after nine hours in the air, and F/O Glover and his crew lost their lives. This ill-fated campaign was lost before it began, despite the best efforts of Bomber Command's crews, and it was already petering out when the balloon went up on the 10th of May.

The gloves came off on this day, when the German advance began into the Low Countries. It signalled the massacre of the Battle and Blenheim squadrons of the AASF, and the Blenheim squadrons of 2 Group, which were thrust into the unequal fight against murderous flak and marauding BF109s. The so-called heavy squadrons of Bomber Command played their part by attacking communications behind enemy lines, principally in the Ruhr, and whilst the Hampden brigade participated in this campaign, its mining duties went on alongside. This next phase in the operational career of 61 Squadron was to be overseen by W/C Sheen, who replaced W/C Denny as commanding officer on the 19th. Fifty Hampdens took off as part of an overall force of 120 aircraft on the 23/24th, the crews briefed to attack railways, roads and bridges in Germany, Holland, Belgium and France. 61 Squadron's L4146 ran out of fuel and was force-landed by F/S Ross, who along with his crew, believed himself to be over friendly territory. In fact, they were in southern Germany, and they became the squadron's first representatives to be marched into captivity. By the end of the month, the Battle for France was effectively over, although it would not actually fall until the 22nd of June, and the mass evacuation of British forces from the beaches at Dunkerque was well underway, and was completed on the 3rd.

June was to be a testing month for 61 Squadron, characterized by frequent losses of aircraft and crews, and these began on the 7/8th, when P4349 arrived back from Hanover short of fuel, and was crash-landed in Norfolk by P/O Webster, who emerged with his crew unscathed. Two nights later, flak brought down P4336 in Germany during operations against communications targets, and S/L Lawrence DFC died with his crew. On the 13th, P4339 collided with an OTU Hampden seconds after take-off from Cottesmore, and two crewmen were killed in the ensuing crash, while P/O Helsby and one other survived with injuries. Briefings took place for a variety of targets in Holland and the Rheinland for the night of the

20/21st, and P4355 fell to flak over Germany, killing F/O Smith and his crew. A similar cause cost the squadron P4346 on the following night, when Schwerte was the target, and F/L Barrett was the sole survivor of his crew, falling into enemy hands. Having survived a landing crash at Hemswell while training in April, P/O Morley also found himself in enemy hands with two others of his crew, after being shot down by flak in L4112 while mining in Kiel Bay on the 27/28th. On the 29/30th, the squadron posted missing two more crews from operations to various targets, including Geestacht. Both fell victim to flak, P4341 crashing off the Dutch coast with no survivors from the crew of P/O Pascoe, and two men escaped with their lives from the crew of F/O Wyatt in P4356.

July's operations followed a similar pattern, with small numbers of aircraft being despatched to multiple targets in Germany, France and the Low Countries. An objective which was to have a special association with 5 Group throughout the war, the Dortmund-Ems Canal, accounted for the squadron's P4390 on the 7/8th, when it was brought down by flak from the small town of Nordhorn, and one man was killed, although F/L Fewtrell and two of his crew survived as POWs. On the 20/21st, the squadron suffered its heaviest loss to date, when three aircraft failed to return from mining the approaches to Wilhelmshaven. Light flak was a constant danger to low flying bombers on mining duties, and if shot down, there was little opportunity to abandon ship. Flak accounted for all three Hampdens on this night, P4343 going down into the sea in the harbour area, with the pilot, P/O Davis, the sole survivor of his crew, P4344 crash-landed, and deposited the entire crew of P/O Jones into the hands of their captors, and P4358 was crash-landed on mudflats by P/O Gould, who survived with two others, the fourth man having baled out too low, and he lost his life. As the Battle of Britain raged overhead during August, Bomber Command continued its attacks on industrial targets in the Ruhr, with a particular emphasis on oil. It also bombed airfields in the occupied countries, and maintained the pressure on German ports, but despite the most committed and enthusiastic efforts of the gallant crews, most raids were of little more than nuisance value, and although the numbers of aircraft would increase with time, the effectiveness of operations would barely improve for a further eighteen months.

On the 5th, P4357 crashed into the sea off the Yorkshire coast while on a training flight, killing one of Sgt Blakeman's crew, and on the 12/13th, two of the squadron's aircraft failed to return from raiding Salzbergen. P4335 was lost without trace with the crew of P/O Cundill, and P4379 crashed in Germany, with no survivors from the crew of P/O Sheldon. This was the night on which Hampdens of 49 and 83 Squadrons attacked the Dortmund-Ems Canal, and F/L Learoyd earned a Victoria Cross, the first to be awarded to a Bomber Command crewman since the war began. A spate of losses afflicted the squadron through aircraft running short of fuel on return from operations, and this was the fate of P2089, after having been to Bordeaux on the 19/20th. Fortunately, P/O de Mestre and his crew survived their forced-landing in Dorset without injury, as did F/O Tunstall and crew in P4324, when returning from the distant target of Merseburg on the 26/27th. Sadly for them, however, their forced-landing occurred on the Frisian island of Vlieland, and they quickly found themselves in captivity. X2894 also ran out of fuel on the way home from Stettin on the 5/6th of September, but at least managed to reach Norfolk before crashing, and one of F/L How's crew subsequently succumbed to the injuries he sustained. As events turned out, it was the briefest

of reprieves for the survivors. As the Battle of Britain reached its peak, invasion fever began to mount, and operations against the barges being assembled in occupied ports became an important feature of operations. Boulogne was one of four ports targeted on the 13/14th, and X2922 was shot down into the sea off the French coast, and this time there was no lucky escape for F/L How, who died with the rest of his crew. Taking-off for Calais on the 24/25th, X2911 crashed after colliding with P4397, also of 61 Squadron, and Sgt Hills was killed and his crew injured, and two nights later, P2090 crashed in Sweden after being damaged by flak during a raid on Kiel, and there were no survivors from the crew of P/O Earl.

This was the first of a succession of crashes and failures to return over the succeeding six weeks, all of which would result in total loss of life. X2970 crashed in Yorkshire on return from a mining sortie on the 5/6th of October, and this accounted for P/O D'Arcy-Wright and his crew, and a similar outcome in Norfolk attended the return from Merseburg of P/O Clemerson and crew in X2979 on the 16/17th. Sgt Loadman and his crew were lost without trace from an operation to Kiel in X2971 on the 25/26th, and on the 5/6th of November, S/L Oldfield and his crew crashed in the target area while mining in the Kiel Canal in P2082. On the 12th, W/C Valentine became the new commanding officer, just in time to preside over the next losses, which resulted from an operation to Hamburg on the 13/14th. This was one of five targets for the night, and few crews actually reached their assigned objectives. X3006 was one of these, failing to get beyond the airfield at Hemswell before crashing and killing F/L Moncrieff and one other, while P4396 crashed into the sea off north-western Germany having been downed by flak, and there were no survivors from among the crew of P/O Langford. Fifty aircraft set off for Berlin on the 14/15th, half of them failing to reach it, and X2967 fell victim to flak, and unusually, in the light of past events, the entire crew of P/O Young escaped with their lives and became POWs. Returning from Duisburg late on the 22nd, X2987 undershot on landing, and in the ensuing crash, Sgt Ivatt and one of his crew were killed. Also on the 22nd, AVM Harris departed his post as AOC 5 Group, to take up duties as second deputy to Sir Charles Portal, who had become Chief of the Air Staff early the previous month. Harris's return to the Command in fifteen months time would be a greatly significant event. Two nights later, X3064 crashed in England during the course of an operation to Kiel, and none survived from the crew of Sgt Hopkins. Düsseldorf was one of the objectives for the night of the 8/9th of December, while other Hampdens patrolled the south-west in search of enemy bombers. X2975 failed to return from Germany, having been dispatched by flak, and Sgt Williams alone of his crew survived to fall into enemy hands.

British cities had been undergoing their own trial by bombing since September, and apart from London, Coventry and Southampton had suffered particularly severe damage. As an act of retaliation, the government authorised an attack on the centre of a German city, in a foretaste of what was in store for Germany later in the war. Mannheim was selected for this purely area attack, and two hundred aircraft were detailed for the 16/17th. In the event, poor weather reduced the size of the force to 134 aircraft, but this still represented the largest effort to date to a single target. The bombing missed the centre of the target, but 240 buildings suffered destruction or damage, at a cost to the Command of just three missing aircraft. Among them was 61 Squadron's X3128, which was lost without trace with the crew of Sgt Cowan. This represented the squadron's final operational loss of the year, although F/L

Cooper and his crew were killed on the 20th, when X2981 exploded and crashed during a training flight to test an Imp mine. It had been an arduous year for the Hampden squadrons, and 61 Squadron particularly had suffered more than its share of casualties. The first half of 1941 would be equally testing, although partly for other reasons, but at least the casualty rate would decline substantially.

1941

The New Year threw up little change for the crews, with targets in Germany's industrial areas remaining the main objectives. The squadron registered its first incident of the year following an operation to Bremen on the 2/3rd of January, from which X3126 returned early and crashed at Hemswell, injuring F/L Powdrell and one of his crew. January was a month of few major operations, and the high point came in mid month, when Wilhelmshaven was raided on the consecutive nights of the 15/16th and 16/17th, the former one of the most impressive operations by the Command to date in terms of damage. Also on the 15th, a new Air Ministry directive informed Sir Richard Peirse, the C-in-C of Bomber Command since October, that from now on, he should direct the main thrust of operations against Germany's synthetic oil industry, and thereby, it was believed, strike a telling blow at Germany's capacity to wage war. A list of seventeen oil related targets was drawn up accordingly, the top nine of which represented 80% of Germany's production, but it would be February before Peirse could implement the policy.

February got off to a bad start for 61 Squadron, when AD725 was involved in a ground accident in the hands of Sgt Lloyd, and the other occupant of the Hampden was killed. An attempt to bomb Wilhelmshaven by a small force of Hampdens turned into a futile waste of effort on the 9/10th, and P4405 crashed in Norfolk on return, killing F/L Frutiger and his crew. The month's big operation took place on the 10/11th, when a new record force of 222 aircraft took off to attack various industrial targets in Hanover. Gelsenkirchen, Sterkrade and Homburg twice, were targeted in line with the oil policy, but the numbers of aircraft involved precluded any likelihood of effectiveness, even had the crews been able to deliver their bombs with accuracy. Enemy warships began to figure during this period, as Brest played host to a number of them, and Tirpitz was also attracting attention at Wilhelmshaven. The Brest situation would be a constant thorn in the flesh of Bomber Command, until it resolved itself twelve months hence. A mini campaign against Cologne spanned the turn of the month, and began with a disappointing raid on the 26/27th. A follow-up on the 1/2nd of March was infinitely more effective, and produced some useful destruction in the docks area. Six aircraft failed to return from the 130 dispatched, but the real problems awaited the crews on their return to fog-bound airfields. 61 Squadron was the hardest hit of all on this night, and lost three aircraft to the weather conditions. P1253 ran out of fuel, and was abandoned over Suffolk while diverting, and one of P/O Noble's crew was killed, while the others all sustained injuries. Less fortunate even than that were the other two crews, those of Sgt Clarke in X3147 and Sgt Cooper in AD723, the former crashing in Norfolk, and the latter in Lincolnshire, and neither produced a survivor. On the 8th, a new shape landed at Hemswell, Manchester L7307, which was to be used for crew familiarization in preparation for the squadron to be the third unit to become operational on the type after 207 and 97 Squadrons.

L7315 arrived on the 18th, but conversion would be a slow process, and three months would elapse before the first tentative sorties were launched.

On the 9th of March, a new Air Ministry directive had notified the Command of a new emphasis, which would take priority over oil. For the next four months, the main effort was to be against the U-Boat menace, and its partner in crime, the long range reconnaissance bomber, the Focke-Wulf Kondor in an attempt to reduce the prohibitive losses of Allied shipping in the Atlantic. These craft were to be hunted down where-ever they could be found, at sea, in their bases, at the point of their manufacture in the shipyards and the factories, and wherever their engines and other vital components were being produced, but oil targets could also be attacked as opportunities arose. A new list of targets was drawn up to include the major U-Boat construction centres of Kiel, Hamburg, Vegesack and Bremen, each of which contained at least one shipyard, and the last mentioned was also home to a Focke-Wulf factory. Lorient, St Nazaire and Bordeaux also fell within the directive, because of their U-Boat bases and support facilities, and would all be raided during the course of the month. The new campaign began on the 12/13th, when Hampdens were the most populous type in a mixed force of eighty eight aircraft bound for Hamburg. It was a very useful raid for the period, and the Blohm & Voss shipyard in particular suffered damage to slipways and offices. Bremen and Berlin were also attacked on this night, and twelve high explosive bombs struck the Focke-Wulf factory at the former, while the latter produced only scattered damage. A return to Hamburg on the following night produced further damage in the Blohm & Voss yards, and a total of 119 fires were start there and in the city generally.

Oil was the objective on the 14/15th, and significant damage was inflicted on a refinery at Gelsenkirchen. Further operations were launched to Bremen on the 17/18th, Kiel on the 18/19th, where one of its U-Boat yards was hit, Lorient on the 21/22nd, and Kiel again on the 23/24th. It was as a result of this last named operation that 61 Squadron suffered the loss of its next aircraft, X3005, although happily, by the time that it crashed in Yorkshire, P/O Pritchard and his crew had abandoned it to its fate, and all came safely to earth by parachute. Sadly, as proved so often to be the case, the reprieve for this crew would be only temporary. On the 29th, the German cruisers Scharnhorst and Gneisenau were reported to be off Brest, and by the following morning they had taken up residence, thus beginning an eleven month saga. That night, a major operation was launched against the port, but the ships incurred no damage. The first week of April brought three more attacks, and then the force was switched to Kiel on the consecutive nights of the 7/8th and 8/9th, the former involving 229 aircraft, the largest commitment of aircraft to a single target to date. This was an unusually effective raid for the period, and caused extensive damage in the docks area and disruption to important U-Boat yards. The latter operation by a smaller force also produced worthwhile results, and this time fell mainly on the town area. A single Hampden was among the four missing aircraft on this night, and it was AD827 of 61 Squadron, which was shot down by flak in the target area, killing F/O Glennie and his crew. Remarkably, this was the first crew of the year to fail to return from an operation, all the other losses having occurred in England.

On the 13th, the squadron's B Flight was detached to 2 Group, to operate out of Watton and Bodney and participate in daylight cloud cover operations, for which the undersides were

painted blue. The weather rarely obliged, however, and few of the operations were completed. The first sorties under 2 Group control were despatched from Bodney on the 18th, with Cherbourg as the target, and involved AD727, AD732, AD804, AD806 and AD825. AD804's sortie was abandoned, AD732 was shot down by flak in the target area with just one survivor from the crew of F/L Aldridge, and AD825 was successfully abandoned near Swindon, having also been hit by flak, which wounded the pilot, Sgt Metcalfe. On the 21st, an attempt by X3127 and X3140 to reach Antwerp and Rotterdam was abandoned, and a repeat effort on the 23rd was thwarted by cloudless skies. Two aircraft each took off for Cologne, Münster and Osnabrück on the 27th, but an absence of cloud again prevented the operation from being completed as planned, and Sgt Glover and his crew in AD804 bombed De Kooy as an alternative, and Sgt Asson and crew in X3120 attacked Ijmuiden. Six Hampdens were despatched to Germany on the 28th, but none reached their briefed objectives, and four bombed alternative targets in Holland. The final two sorties were launched against Emden on the 29th by AD804 and AD826, but these again had to be abandoned, and the Flight returned to Hemswell on the following day. Meanwhile back at Hemswell, there had been a further influx of Manchesters, L7279, L7281 and L7304 having been collected from 207 Squadron for crew training on the 15th. L7292 arrived on the 22nd, and was followed by L7387 and L7388 on the 24th, and L7294 on the 27th.

May would prove to be a loss free month for 61 Squadron, despite the fact that the crews were busy training in the ill-fated Manchester, which was beset with constant technical problems, and subject to a never-ending programme of modifications. This slowed the progress of the squadron to operational status with the type, and even once this stage was reached, the crews would be forced to spend much of their time on the ground with nothing to fly in. The working up period coincided with the grounding of all Manchesters from the 17th of May, while a solution was found to the recurring problem of failing engine bearings, and in the meantime, the crews soldiered on with the reliable but ageing Hampdens. The onset of June brought a return to losses, when X3120 ditched in the North Sea on return from Düsseldorf on the 2/3rd, and Sgt Asson and his crew drifted into the waiting arms of the enemy. More fortunate were their colleagues in P2144, which ran out of fuel, and had to be force-landed by Sgt Sleight in Norfolk, a feat which he accomplished without injury to his crew. Small-scale operations followed until the 11/12th, when over 170 aircraft were despatched against Düsseldorf and Duisburg, neither of which was successful, and among other activities during the night, was a mining operation by a force of Hampdens around the north German coast. 61 Squadron's AD727, one of the mining contingent, crashed into Kiel Bay, and F/O Pritchard and his crew, who had survived a descent into Yorkshire by parachute in March, this time went down with the Hampden. After four and a half weeks on the ground, the Manchester was again declared fit for operations on the 21st, and this signalled the opportunity for 61 Squadron to make its operational debut with the type, in an all Manchester raid on shipping and the docks at Boulogne in company with 207 and 97 Squadrons. 61 Squadron provided a third of the eighteen Manchesters, and its contingent was led by W/C Valentine in L7387. The other aircraft and crews for this momentous occasion were, S/L Weir in L7388, F/O Parry in L7389, F/O Webb in L7304, F/O Hall in L7307, and F/L Riley in L7315. It was a relatively gentle introduction to the squadron's operations in a Manchester, and all returned safely having bombed the target. On the 23/24th, the squadron contributed

five Manchesters and five Hampdens to a small scale operation to Düsseldorf, again led by the commanding officer in L7387, and once more there were no losses to report. Kiel was the target for the 26/27th, and the force of forty one aircraft included an element of five Manchester from 61 Squadron, with W/C Valentine continuing to lead from the front. The inevitable first loss of a 61 Squadron Manchester occurred on this night, and it was L7304 which failed to return, and F/O Webb and his crew died in its wreckage in Germany. On the 29th, L7315 suffered an engine fire while on a training flight, and crashed in Lincolnshire killing P/O Colbourne, after the only other occupant, the wireless operator, had baled out. On the following day, Manchesters were grounded again for engine modifications, and it would be a full five weeks before they returned to the order of battle.

Operations continued with the trusty Hampden, however, and AD806 failed to return from Osnabrück on the 5/6th of July, and was lost without trace with the crew of Sgt Holden. Two nights later, a nightfighter accounted for AD937 over Holland during an operation to Mönchengladbach, and P/O Braithwaite alone of his crew survived to fall into enemy hands. A new Air Ministry directive was issued on the 9th, which highlighted the enemy's transportation system and the morale of its civilian population as its weakest points. Consequently, operations were to be carried out during the moon period against the major railway centres ringing the Ruhr, while on moonless nights, the Rhein cities of Cologne, Düsseldorf and Duisburg would be easier to locate. On dark nights with less favourable weather conditions, however, operations were to be mounted against more distant targets in northern, eastern and southern Germany. On the 17th, the squadron changed address with a move to North Luffenham, and a week later, on the 24/25th, posted missing its first crew from there, that of F/O Parry, who were all killed when AE189 was shot down off the Dutch coast by a nightfighter. The last major raid of the month, by over a hundred aircraft on Cologne on the 30/31st was a dismal failure, and two 61 Squadron crews found themselves in difficulties on their return to England. P4399 crashed in Kent, and only the pilot, Sgt Baker, survived, and AE266 crashed while trying to put down at Upwood, killing P/O Adshead and two of his crew.

The Manchester's grounding was lifted on the 7th of August, and operations resumed that night, although 61 Squadron's Manchester Flight remained inactive. A predominately Hampden force raided Kiel on the 8/9th, but in keeping with the times, almost completely missed the mark, in return for the loss of three aircraft. Both missing Hampdens were from 61 Squadron, X3127 crashing in the target area, after P/O Graham and two of his crew took to their parachutes, and AE263 was lost without trace with the crew of Sgt Craven. AE259 was serenely approaching the Lincolnshire coast, when it fell foul of the famed poor aircraft recognition skills and the "fire-first, consider-the-consequences-later philosophy of an Allied convoy. The Hampden suffered flak damage which necessitated a crash-landing near Boston, from which P/O Metcalfe and his crew emerged unscathed. It was on the 18th, that civil servant Mr D M Butt completed his analysis of the Command's recent operational performance, and its disclosures were to send shock waves resounding around the War Cabinet, the Air Ministry and the Command. Having studied around four thousand photographs taken during a hundred night operations in June and July, he concluded that only a fraction of bombs were falling within miles of their intended targets, and it was a bitter

blow to the morale of the Command, and forever unjustly blighted the period of tenure as C-in-C of Sir Richard Peirse. It also provided ammunition for those who were calling for bomber aircraft to be diverted to other theatres of operation. The squadron's Manchester Flight managed just two sorties during the month, one of these an air-sea rescue search, and it was left to the Hampden Flight to continue the fight in the final weeks of its operational service with the squadron. The final loss of a Hampden came at the end of the month, on the 29/30th, when AE247 was lost without trace during the course of a large operation to Frankfurt, which was another dismal failure, and Sgt Richmond and his crew became the last from 61 Squadron to be posted missing on the type.

On 2/3rd of September, W/C Valentine took the controls of L7388 for an operation to Berlin, with G/C Barrett, the station commander, as a passenger. It was the only 61 Squadron Manchester operating that night, and it was shot down by flak over the target without survivors. Having been almost ever present whenever his squadron's Manchesters took to the air, his loss was keenly felt. He was replaced by W/C Weir on the 5th, under whom a full conversion and return to operations would be accomplished. He presided over the squadron's move to Woolfox Lodge on the 16th of October, a month of very restricted activity for the squadron, and consequently no losses were sustained, a happy situation which would be maintained throughout November. The squadron became the chief beneficiary of an influx of brand new Manchester IAs during October, as these began to exit the factories in numbers, and the venerable old Hampden finally ended its association with 61 Squadron and departed. L7520 suffered technical problems during a training flight on the 2nd of November, and was force-landed in Bedfordshire by P/O Searby without crew casualties.

Operations during September and October had been dogged by poor weather conditions, and it had not been uncommon for aircraft to be recalled while outbound. Certainly, results continued to be disappointing, and perhaps frustrated on both counts, Peirse organized a major night of operations for the 7/8th, involving a record 392 sorties. Berlin was to be the main target, for which over two hundred aircraft were detailed, but doubts about the weather prompted AVM Slessor of 5 Group to object to the plan, and he was allowed to withdraw his seventy five strong element of Hampdens and Manchesters, and send them instead to Cologne. 169 aircraft ultimately took off for the Capital, while a third force of fifty three Wellingtons and two Stirlings from 1 and 3 Groups targeted Mannheim. The night turned into something of a disaster, when twenty one aircraft failed to return from Berlin after a disappointing effort, and whilst 5 Group came through unscathed, damage at Cologne was barely noticeable. No bombs at all fell on Mannheim, and seven Wellingtons went missing, and further losses from the night's minor operations brought the total to thirty seven aircraft, more than twice the previous highest in a single night. This was the final straw for the War Cabinet and the Air Ministry, and Peirse was summoned to a meeting with Churchill to make his explanations. On the 13th, he was ordered to restrict operations, while the future of the Command was put under consideration, and this edict would remain in place for the next three months. The need for an independent bomber force was to be keenly questioned in high places during this period, most notably at the Admiralty, where it was felt that bomber aircraft could be more profitably employed to combat the huge losses to U-Boats in the Atlantic, while others wanted them to redress reversals in the Middle East.

Operations began again for the squadron on the 7th of December, when four Manchesters, L7519 W/C Weir, L7494 S/L Riley, L7496 F/L Sooby and L7472 F/L Gascoyne-Cecil were sent against Boulogne docks, while the other two Manchester units raided Aachen. L7494 was seen to explode on the run in to the target, the victim of a direct hit by a flak shell, and there were no survivors from the crew of the A Flight commander, S/L Riley. This was the final loss of a frustrating year for the squadron, which had seen only limited operational activity with the troublesome Manchester, to the tune of a paltry twenty three sorties, despite having received the first example back in March. 1942 would bring changes in policy and leadership for the Command, and eventually new equipment for the squadron, but the first six months of the coming year would require it to soldier on with the improving but still under-achieving Manchester. As far as the Command as a whole was concerned, it had been a bad year, with few major advances on the performances of 1940. Not only had the Manchester failed to meet expectations, but the Stirling and Halifax also, and all three types had spent far too long away from the operational scene undergoing essential modifications, and having more minor technical failures rectified. The crews had done their best with the equipment available, but their best had not been enough in the face of a still advancing enemy, which had yet to taste defeat.

1942

The year began in earnest for the squadron on the 9/10th of January, when it contributed six Manchesters to an attack on the docks at Cherbourg led by F/L Paape in L7518, and P/O Gunter took R5786 nickelling to Rennes. R5789 developed an engine fire while outbound, and reluctant to jettison the bomb load for fear of casualties on the ground, P/O Matthews ordered six of his crew to bale out, while he and the second pilot attempted a forced-landing in Wiltshire. Sadly, the Manchester struck trees and crashed, and both men were killed, although the remainder of the crew arrived safely on the ground. On the following night, L7497 was the sole 61 Squadron Manchester to venture forth, as part of a force of 120 aircraft bound for Wilhelmshaven. It was another disappointing raid, and there was only a marginal improvement at Hamburg on the 14/15th, for which the squadron contributed two aircraft. When a force of almost a hundred aircraft return to Germany's second city on the following night, thirty six large fires were left burning in return for the loss of four aircraft, and the squadron's L7495 was one of eight further aircraft which crashed in England on return, it having run out of fuel over Lincolnshire, forcing the crew of F/O Beard to abandon it to its fate. 83 Squadron joined the operational ranks of the Manchester brigade on the 28/29th, when Boulogne was raided by a small force which included two from 61 Squadron, two others being briefed for Brest, a target which would be almost obsessively attacked until the situation there resolved itself in February. Brest was again the objective on the last night of the month, for which the squadron put up a record nine Manchesters, led on this occasion by F/L Page in L7396. It was a disastrous night, which saw a third of the 61 Squadron element fail to return. F/L Page's L7396 crashed into the sea, and all eight men on board were killed, L7472 was hit by flak and partially abandoned, before being ditched off the French coast, from where F/L Fraser and five of his crew were taken prisoner, and R5787 crash-landed in France, also the victim of flak, and P/O Parsons died with one of his crew at the scene, while

two others succumbed to their injuries, two became POWs, and the seventh man ultimately evaded capture.

There had been no fewer than eleven raids of varying sizes against Brest and its lodgers during January, and february would bring just two more. 5 Group sent forty six Hampdens and Manchesters on a mining operation off the Dutch Frisians by daylight on the 6th, the 61 Squadron element of five led by the commanding officer in L7433, and all returned safely. That night, fifty seven Wellingtons and three Stirling set out for Brest, but only a modest twenty one crews claimed to have bobmed the primary target in the face of cloud cover. An operation to Bremen on the 11/12th was one of a number of small scale raids laid on for the night, and involved six Manchesters from 61 Squadron. It cost the squadron R5834, which suffered engine damage to flak over the target, and almost span into the sea on the way home. This was compounded by a shortage of fuel by the time the crippled aircraft reached England, and it became necessary for F/S Underwood to carry out a forced-landing, which he accomplished near Horsham-St-Faith without crew casualties. Also on that evening, eighteen Wellingtons returned to Brest, and it was within hours of this, that the situation there found a resolution.

In the very early hours of the 12th, the Scharnhorst, Gneisenau and Prinz Eugen, with an escort of destroyers and other light craft, slipped out of port under the cover of atrocious weather conditions, and headed for the English Channel in an audacious bid for freedom. Operation Fuller had been prepared by the British authorities for precisely this eventuality, but so secret was it, that few of those charged with implementing it, seem to have been fully appraised of its requirements. It was already late morning by the time that the enemy fleet was spotted, when only 5 Group was standing by at four hours readiness. Frantic efforts were made to launch a response, but it was not until 13.30 hours that the first sorties were airborne. Despite the largest daylight commitment of aircraft to date, 242 by Bomber Command alone, including five by 61 Squadron led by W/C Weir, the squally conditions and very low cloud base thwarted the best efforts of the crews involved, and only a modest number of attacks were carried out, none of them scoring hits. The operation cost the Command fifteen aircraft, and all to no avail, as the ships passed through the Straits of Dover and into open sea making good their escape, and although Scharnhorst and Gneisenau struck mines recently laid by 5 Group aircraft, which slowed their progress to some extent, the fleet arrived in home ports by the following morning. It was a huge embarrassment to the government and the nation, but at least this annoying distraction would no longer claim Bomber Command lives, or divert effort from targets to which the bomber force was better suited. That night, two of the squadron's crews joined a mining effort without loss, but a similar operation off the Frisians on the 16/17th accounted for L7433, which crashed into the sea, killing F/S Webster and crew. Two days after the Channel Dash debacle, a new Air Ministry directive opened the way for the blatant area bombing of Germany, without the pretence of aiming for industrial and military objectives, and reaffirmed the assault on the morale of the enemy civilian population, particularly its workers. Waiting in the wings was the leader who possessed both the will and the determination to pursue this policy to the utmost.

On the 22nd, ACM Sir Arthur Harris arrived at the helm of Bomber Command, and did so with firm ideas already in place on how to win the war by bombing alone. In the past, the policy had been to divide the available forces to carry out what amounted to pinprick attacks on multiple targets simultaneously, and leave the details up to individual crews as far as timings, routes and bombing height were concerned. The result had been to dilute the effectiveness of operations, and this was a situation immediately addressed by Harris. He recognised the need to overwhelm the defences by concentrating an attack in time and numbers, and this would require a uniform and co-ordinated approach to the task. He was also aware that urban areas are destroyed most efficiently by fire rather than blast, and it would not be long before the bomb loads carried by his aircraft reflected this thinking. In the meantime, he maintained the attacks on German ports for the remainder of the month, and it was during one of these that one of the war's great ironies occurred. While attacking the floating dock at Kiel, one of the Wellingtons, Hampdens and Halifaxes involved landed a bomb on the bows of the Gneisenau, now supposedly in safe haven after enduring eleven months of bombardment at Brest, and her sea-going career was ended for good.

In a sign of things to come, Harris sent 235 aircraft, the largest force to date to a single target, to attack the Renault lorry factory at Billancourt in Paris on the night of the 3/4th of March. The three wave operation was led by experienced crews, and with extensive use of flares to provide illumination. S/L Paape headed a 61 Squadron contribution of nine Manchesters, which contributed to the destruction of 40% of the factory buildings in what was an outstanding success for the loss of just one Wellington. The bombing was carried out from low level in the face of negligible defences, both to increase accuracy and to avoid civilian casualties, but sadly, colateral damage to nearby residential areas resulted in the deaths of over three hundred people. It was something of a paradox, that Harris, as a champion of area bombing, should gain his first major success by way of a precision target. A record ten Manchesters were despatched by the squadron on the 8/9th, eight of them for the main operation to Essen, which was led by Gee equipped aircraft, and two to lay mines off Lorient. It was a disappointing raid, but all of the squadron's crews returned home. They did likewise from a highly accurate and satisfying attack on Cologne on the 13/14th, but L7395 had been forced to return early, and was abandoned to its fate over Northamptonshire by P/O Hubbard and his crew, and they all arrived safely on the ground. Thereafter, minor operations saw the Command through to the 25/26th, when a new record number was sent against Essen, the fourth of five attacks on this target during the month. It was not a success, and 61 Squadron posted missing two crews, the first time that this had happened during its Manchester era. Both aircraft fell to nightfighters, L7497 over Germany with no survivors from the crew of Sgt Furby, and L7518 over Holland, and this time P/O Hubbard and four of his crew were not able to take to their parachutes, and died in the crash, while their two colleagues became POWs. In another sign of things to come for Germany in the years ahead, Harris sent a force of 234 aircraft, which included an element from 61 Squadron, to the Baltic port of Lübeck, which was selected for its coastal location, the combustible nature of its half timbered buildings in the narrow streets of the old centre, and the paucity of its defences. Carried out along the lines of the Billancourt raid at the start of the month, it was an outstanding success, and 30% of the city's built-up area was destroyed by fire. 61 Squadron came through unscathed, but a sad end to the month was completed by the loss without trace of L7454

during a mining sortie, and P/O Churchill, operating for the first time as captain, was posted missing along with his crew.

April brought the arrival of the squadron's first Lancasters on the 12th, and it thus became the seventh operational unit to receive the type. It was to be May before the squadron was ready to take the Lancaster to war, and in the meantime, operations continued with the Manchester. A new record force went to Cologne on the 5/6th, and failed to produce results commensurate with the effort, and the weather helped to ruin an attempt to hit Essen on the following night, from which L7470 failed to return, having been despatched by a nightfighter over Belgium, and there were no survivors from the crew of F/S Noble. A new record force failed at Hamburg on the 8/9th, and while over 250 aircraft were active at Cologne on the 10/11th, a contingent of freshman crews raided Le Havre. 61 Squadron's R5785 was ditched in the Channel after being damaged by flak, and this began a five day ordeal in a dinghy for the crew of Sgt McSporrán, who was flying as captain for the first time. One man drowned after attempting to swim ashore, and the survivors eventually drifted onto the French coast, where they fell into the arms of their captors. Disappointing results at Essen on the 12/13th, Dortmund on the 14/15th and 15/16th and Hamburg on the 17/18th, demonstrated that the Command still had a long way to go before it became an effective force. In an effort to repeat the success gained at Lübeck, Harris launched a series of four raids on consecutive nights against Rostock, also on the Baltic coast, beginning on the 23/24th. The presence of a Heinkel factory nearby was an added attraction, and a proportion of the effort was directed specifically at this. The first raid was disappointing, but the following three inflicted widespread damage on the town, and the Heinkel factory was hit during the last two. By the end of the series on the 26/27th, 60% of the town's built-up area lay in ruins, with over seventeen hundred buildings destroyed.

Among examples of the Lancaster taken on squadron charge during the course of the month were R5511, R5543, R5544, R5545, R5560, with R5562 and R5563 arriving on the 26th and R5561 on the 27th. R5545 was promptly written off while trying to land at North Luffenham during training on the 1st of May, but Sgt Stewart and his crew emerged from the wreckage unscathed. The squadron operated Lancasters for the first time on the night of the 5/6th, just twenty four days after taking delivery of the first example, and having earlier in the day moved to Syerston. The honour fell to F/L McNaughton and F/O Archibald and their crews, in R5562 and R5846 respectively, to drop leaflets in the Toulon/Marseilles area, and both returned safely. Sadly, neither crew would survive for long, and the following month would see them both posted missing. Working up continued on the Lancaster, and by the end of the month, the squadron was fully converted, and was the first to begin phasing out the crew position of second pilot in favour of a flight engineer, and this propelled a number of pilots to captaincy a little earlier than they might have expected. Following an unsuccessful attack on Mannheim on the 19/20th, activity was restricted to minor operations, as Harris prepared for his masterstroke, the Thousand Plan.

On taking up his post as C-in-C, Harris had asked for four thousand bombers with which to win the war, and while there was not the slightest chance of getting them, he needed to ensure that those earmarked for him were not spirited away to what he considered to be less

deserving causes. In other words, to secure the future of an independent bomber force, he needed a major success and, perhaps, a dose of symbolism and this was to be accomplished by the commitment of a thousand aircraft in one night, against an important German city. Harris did not have a thousand front-line aircraft, and in order to achieve the magic figure, he required the cooperation of other Commands, principally Coastal and Flying Training, and this was forthcoming in letters on the 22nd and 23rd respectively. Following an intervention by the Admiralty, however, Coastal Command underwent a change of heart, and withdrew its support. Undaunted, Harris, or more likely his able deputy, AM Sir Robert Saundby, scraped together every airframe capable of controlled flight, or something close to it, and called in the screened crews from their instructional duties. Come the night, not only would he achieve the figure, he would comfortably surpass it. The arrival on bomber stations from Yorkshire to East Anglia of aircraft from the training units gave rise to much speculation, but it seems that only the NAAFI staff and the local civilians knew what was going on. The only remaining questions surrounded the weather, and as the days ticked inexorably by towards the end of May, it was refusing to comply. An air of frustration began to descend on Bomber Command HQ, and a genuine danger arose that the giant force might draw attention to itself, and compromise security. Finally, at "morning prayers" on the 30th, the chief meteorological advisor, Magnus Spence, gave a grudging and qualified nod in the direction of the Rheinland as the region most likely to experience a break in the cloud, while north-western Germany and Hamburg, Harris's original choice for Operation Millennium, would be hidden beneath an unbroken blanket. Thus did the fickle finger of fate decree that Cologne would host the first one thousand bomber raid in history.

The first of the 1047 aircraft began their take offs around 23.00 hours, some of the older hacks from the training units doing so somewhat reluctantly, and were lifted more by the enthusiasm of their crews than by the power of their engines. A number of these, incapable of climbing to a respectable height, would fall easy prey to the defences, or simply drop from the sky through mechanical breakdown. The four engined brigade were the last to depart their stations, and they would form the final of three waves. Among these were thirteen of fifteen Lancasters detailed by 61 Squadron, and four Manchesters, which for once, all behaved themselves, and their crews were able to bomb as briefed. Two Lancasters returned early, ten bombed the primary target, and R5561 crashed in Germany with the loss of P/O Underwood and his crew. The operation was an outstanding success by any standards, and resulted in the destruction of over 3,300 buildings, with another nine thousand damaged to some degree, but it cost the Command a new record of forty one aircraft missing. Harris was determined to use the force again as soon as possible, and after a night's rest, 956 aircraft and crews answered the call for a maximum effort on the 1/2nd of June, with Essen this time the target. In contrast to Cologne, this was a dismal failure, which scattered bombs all over the Ruhr, and caused only superficial damage within Essen at a cost of thirty one aircraft. The squadron's contribution on this occasion was six Manchesters and eleven Lancasters, and it was again one of the latter which failed to return. R5544 was brought down in Germany, and there were no survivors from the crew of F/O Tofield. On the following night, a smaller force returned to Essen, and again failed to find the mark, and this disappointment was compounded for the squadron by the loss of two more Lancasters, R5562 and R5613. The former crashed in Germany killing P/O Siebold and five of his crew, and the latter fell to a nightfighter over

Belgium, with just one man also surviving and evading capture from the crew of P/O Clarke. Bremen was the objective for a medium raid on the 3/4th, and this time some effective damage resulted to residential areas and the harbour. For the fourth operation in a row, 61 Squadron posted missing a crew, and it was that of F/O Archibald in R5627, which was shot down over Belgium by a nightfighter, and again only one man survived as a POW.

It had been a testing period for the squadron, but no further losses were to be incurred until the final week of the month. Essen was raided three times up to mid month, each one a resounding failure, and Emden four times, three of the attacks falling over a four night period from the 19/20th. It was from the last of these, on the 22/23rd, that the squadron next registered a missing aircraft, and this was R5517 containing the crew of flight commander S/L McNaughton, who were all killed. This was the first loss presided over by the new commanding officer, W/C Coad, who had taken up his post on the 19th. The Thousand Force was employed for the final time on the 25/26th, and it was also the swansong for the operational career of the much maligned Manchester. 960 Bomber Command aircraft were available for this raid on Bremen, but instructed by higher authority to participate, Coastal Command also sent a force that night in what was classed as a separate operation, and the total numbers involved actually exceeded those sent to Cologne. Along with its full complement of Lancasters, 61 Squadron despatched its final two Manchester sorties, undertaken by L7477 and R5835, with the crews of F/Ss Shriner and Hobson, but both returned early, and this in its way, summed up the aircraft's troubled career. While not achieving the success of the Cologne raid, the attack on Bremen far surpassed the debacle at Essen, and it was residential areas which bore the brunt of the destruction. A new record loss of forty eight aircraft did not include any from 61 Squadron, but a follow-up on the 27/28th led to the failure to return of R5615, and F/S Gregory and his crew died in its wreckage in Germany.

The third follow-up raid opened the July account on the 2/3rd, and this was a reasonably effective operation which caused extensive damage to shipping in the port. Six Lancasters carried out mining sorties around Denmark on the 3/4th, and the two which failed to return were from 61 Squadron. R5488 went into the sea with no survivors from the crew of S/L West DFC, and F/S Williams was the sole survivor of his crew, after R5663 crashed in shallow water off the Swedish coast, and he was interned. Duisburg was selected to receive a series of raids beginning on the 13/14th, but bad weather added to the usual difficulty of industrial haze encountered at Ruhr targets, and the results were disappointing. On the 16th, the squadron sent eight aircraft on detachment to Coastal Command to replaced a 44 Squadron contingent at St Eval. On the very first patrol, launched on the 17th, F/L Casement and crew in R5724 found and sank U-751 off the Bay of Biscay. It was a solitary success in a frustrating and costly period, during which ninety six patrols were mounted, logging nearly nine hundred hours of flying. Of greater concern, however, was the loss of four Lancasters and crews in attempting to sink the 12,000 ton SS Corunna, a blockade runner, off the coast of Spain in August. Three of these failed to return on the 19th, F/O Searby and crew in R5561, F/S Shriner's R5663, and F/S Haynes and his crew in R5605. S/L Weston attacked the ship in R5543 but missed, as did F/S Hobson in R5562, while F/S Dale in W4111 was driven off by ferocious defensive fire, and finally, F/S Turner in R5679 claimed to have scored a

number of hits. On the following day a search was carried out to relocate the tanker, and P/O Harrad and his crew failed to return in R5543, and on the 22nd, the detachment returned to Syerston. While these events had been in progress under the control of Coastal Command, operations for the remainder of the squadron carried on from Syerston. The campaign against Duisburg continued with only moderate success on the 21/22nd, 23/24th and 25/26th of July, but a very destructive raid fell on Hamburg on the 26/27th, which left over five hundred large fires burning in predominately residential districts. A follow-up two nights later was thwarted by the weather, and then Saarbrücken was subjected to an accurate and damaging attack on the 29/30th, from which the squadron's R5737 failed to return, having crashed in France with no survivors from the crew of P/O Stewart. The final raid of the month was delivered on Düsseldorf on the night of the 31st, when elements from the training units took part. Almost five hundred crews claimed to have bombed the primary target, and 450 buildings were destroyed there and in nearby Neuss.

August brought the start of a new era, with the formation of the Pathfinder Force on the 15th, but it began with minor operations until the 6/7th, when the last of the current series against Duisburg took place. Osnabrück followed on the 9/10th, with modest success, and then Mainz on the 11/12th and 12/13th, where quite extensive damage was caused in central districts. Although opposed in principle to the idea of an elite target finding and marking force, once overruled by higher authority, Harris gave it his unstinting support, and sent it into battle at the earliest opportunity. This arose on the night of the 18/19th, when the northern port of Flensburg was selected for its ease of location. It was an inauspicious beginning for the fledgling force, which failed entirely to find the target, and no bombs fell anywhere near it. The second Pathfinder led raid was to Frankfurt on the 24/25th, and this was only marginally better, the majority of the bombs falling into open country. The squadron posted missing the crew of F/L Meyer from this operation, and they were all killed when R5662 crashed in Germany. The first success for the Pathfinders came at Kassel on the 27/28th, when good illumination was exploited by the main force to produce some serious damage in the south-western districts. A smallish force by current standards attacked Nuremberg on the 28/29th, but again, many bomb loads fell outside the target area. R5742 was one of twenty three missing aircraft, four of which were Lancasters, and there were no survivors from the crew of Sgt Northgate.

September began badly for the Pathfinders, when they marked the non-industrial town of Saarlouis in error for Saarbrücken on the 1/2nd, but thereafter, the Command embarked on an unprecedented series of effective operations during the first half of the month. It was not destined to be a happy month for 61 Squadron, however, and its troubles started with the failure to return from Karlsruhe on the 2/3rd of S/L Forsyth DFC and his crew, who were lost without trace in W4136. It was at least a very effective operation, and the success continued at Bremen on the 4/5th, where almost five hundred buildings were destroyed, and thousands more were damaged. The squadron's R5682 was hit by flak and finished off by a nightfighter over Holland, and after four of the crew escaped by parachute, the Lancaster crashed, killing F/S Joslin and two others. Duisburg suffered its heaviest raid of the war on the 6/7th, and this was followed by the only failure during the period, which was at Frankfurt on the 8/9th. It was back to winning ways on the 10/11th, when over nine hundred houses were destroyed at

Düsseldorf, but it brought more misery for the squadron, with the failure to return of two crews with no survivors between them. R5888 and W4111 both crashed in Germany, and the names of F/S Robson and Sgt Davies and their crews were added to the growing squadron Roll of Honour. Over eight hundred houses were destroyed at Bremen three nights later, Wilhelmshaven suffered its most destructive raid of the war on the 14/15th, and even Essen was more effectively hit than ever before on the 16/17th. This last mentioned operation also cost the squadron a crew and two Lancasters, L7571 having been borrowed by a 207 Squadron crew, who failed to bring it back, but happily all survived to spend a period of extended leave in a POW camp. The 61 Squadron crew of W/O Osman was less fortunate, and they all died in the wreckage in Germany of W4173. It could perhaps be said that September was the month when Bomber Command turned the corner, as new technology and tactics came together at the same time that the Pathfinder crews began to get to grips with their demanding role. Failures still outnumbered successes, and would continue to do so for a considerable time yet, but at least the gap was narrowing. A predominately Lancaster force of under a hundred aircraft attacked Munich on the 19/20th, from where W4166 failed to return, and this Lancaster also fell in Germany without survivors, this time from the crew of Sgt Owen. A bad month became worse on the 24/25th, when R5679 crashed in Denmark while mining in the Baltic, killing Sgt Morrison and his crew, and R5724 crash-landed at Wittering after surviving a flak hit and the attentions of nightfighters, and although there were no fatalities, F/S Campbell and four of his crew sustained injuries.

When R5703 set off for a 5 Group raid on Wismar on the 1/2nd of October, it was quickly brought back to earth by an unfortunate incident involving an inflating dinghy, which wrapped itself round the tail, robbing S/L Weston of control, and all on board were killed. This tragic loss was compounded by that of F/S Dale and his crew, who failed to return in R5759, and only one man escaped with his life to become a POW. It could have been seen as an ill-omen for the month, but in fact only one more crew would go missing before the year ended, although there would be some narrow escapes. The first of these came after a moderately useful attack on Kiel on the 13/14th, which would have been more successful, had decoy fires not lured away half of the bombs. W4233 crashed in Yorkshire on the way back to Syerston, killing two of the crew, and the pilot, Sgt Game, sustained injuries. On the 17th, the squadron joined other elements of 5 Group for a daylight attack on the armaments works at Le Creusot, and the nearby transformer station at Montchanin. The squadron contributed seven Lancasters in all, R5560, W4198, W4301, W4326, W4629, W4769 and W4774, five of them for the main target, and the other two to join two each from 9 and 106 Squadrons under the command of the latter's commander, W/C Gibson, to attack the Montchanin site. The whole operation was under the control of 49 Squadron's W/C Slee, and was carried out on the factory from medium to low level with generally modest results after much of the bombing fell short. Gibson's gang of six attacked from low level, and the only loss out of the ninety four Lancasters despatched happened here, 61 Squadron's W4774 being observed to crash into the target, possibly caught in the explosion of its own bombs, and S/L Corr and five of his crew were killed. A campaign against Italian cities began on the 22/23rd, with a raid by 5 Group on Genoa. It was in support of Operation Torch, which would eventually lead to Montgomery's victory over Rommel at El Alamein. Another daylight exploit took 5 Group to

Milan on the 24th, where complete surprise was achieved, and extensive damage was caused to the city.

November began slowly for the heavy squadrons, and the Group's first real outing involved a smallish force of Lancasters at Genoa on the 6/7th, in company with a Pathfinder element from 83 Squadron. A return was made to this city on the following night, and both operations were pronounced to have been successful. A largish mining effort was mounted on the 10/11th, which took crews to the Bay of Biscay and the Frisians, and it was while W4244 was on approach to Exeter from the former, that it crashed in Devon, killing P/O Campbell and all others on board. This was the squadron's only casualty in a month which saw the Group carry out other raids on Genoa on the 13/14th and 15/16th, and Turin on the 18/19th, 20/21st and 28/29th. The only major operations to Germany were directed at Hamburg on the 9/10th, which resulted in modest damage, and Stuttgart on the 22/23rd, when a number of residential suburbs were hit, and over four hundred houses were destroyed or seriously damaged. The first major raid of December was intended to fall on Mannheim on the 6/7th, but it was a complete failure, and R5859 crash-landed in Norfolk on return, happily though, without injury to F/S MacFarland and his crew.

On the 8th, the entire bomb load of R5864, including its 4000lb "Cookie", exploded at Syerston, following a fire during preparations for the night's operation to Turin. The Station Commander, the irrepressible G/C Gus Walker, a former commanding officer of 50 Squadron, was caught in the explosion while attempting to help, and a flying piece of metal took off the lower part of his right arm. Following recovery from his injuries, he resumed what was an illustrious career, and he became a station and base commander in 4 Group, where he remained as one of the Command's great characters throughout the war. Returning from another raid on Turin on the 9/10th, W4168 was involved in a crash-landing at Swinderby, but the crew of Sgt Goodwin all emerged unscathed. Duisburg was attacked on the 20/21st, to good effect according to returning crews, on a night of great significance for the Command, and indeed, Germany. Since joining the Pathfinders in August, 109 Squadron had been developing the Oboe blind bombing device in its Mosquitos under the direction of its commanding officer, W/C Hal Bufton, and on this night, he led six crews to drop the first Oboe aimed bombs on a target in Holland. The final incident of the year to afflict 61 Squadron came on the 21/22nd, when a smallish 1 and 5 Group force failed to find the mark at Munich. R5699 did not reach the target, having been forced to return early, and the Lancaster crashed while on approach to Syerston, fortunately without serious consequences for the crew of P/O Dierkes. Also at the end of the year, 61 Squadron was selected to carry out operational trials on the Hercules powered Mk II Lancasters, and a C Flight was created for the purpose. An initial complement of six aircraft, DS604-610 was taken on charge, with a view to employing them on operations beginning in January.

1943

The new year began with a continuation of the Oboe trials programme. Seven small-scale raids were directed at Essen during the first two weeks of January, and one at Duisburg, all involving the Mosquitos of 109 Squadron, and Lancasters of 5 Group, with 1 Group support.

It didn't take long for 61 Squadron to register its first missing crew of the year, and it was, in fact, the very first of the Essen raids, on the 3/4th, which accounted for W4769 and the crew of F/S Bird, who all died in the crash in Holland. This total loss of life was the start of a trend, and it would be June before the first crewman survived from one of the squadron's missing aircraft. The Mk II Lancaster was operated by the squadron for the first time on the 11/12th, when Essen was again the target, but it was a standard Mk I, W4192, which failed to return from another crack at Essen on the 12/13th, having crashed in Germany, and F/L Gillett and his crew were all killed. In a desperate attempt to address the U-Boat problem, a new Air Ministry directive was issued on the 14th which authorized area attacks on those French ports which contained bases and facilities, and Lorient received the first of five raids during the month on the 14/15th.

Two operations were mounted against Berlin on consecutive nights in mid month, and were predominately 5 Group affairs. The first, on the 16/17th, was attended by the first use of genuine target indicators, but despite this, there was no outstanding success to celebrate, and the only damage of note was the destruction of the ten thousand seater Deutschlandhalle, the largest covered venue in Europe. Also on the credit side was the loss of just one Lancaster, but that was no consolation to 61 Squadron, the owner of the empty dispersal which should have been occupied by it. ED332 crashed in Germany, and there were no survivors from the crew of S/L Parker. Among the 61 Squadron aircraft operating on this night were two more Mk IIs, and they both reached Berlin and returned safely. When the operation was repeated on the following night, again without results commensurate with the effort expended, twenty two aircraft failed to return, and 61 Squadron was again represented among the missing. W4767 fell victim to flak over Kiel, and the crew of P/O Woolford all died in the ensuing crash. Lancasters played a very minor role in two attacks on Lorient on the 23/24th and 26/27th, but it was the dominant type when the first Oboe ground marking was carried out in a raid on Düsseldorf on the 27/28th. Extensive damage was inflicted on southern districts of the city, and this augured well for the future. The month ended with another first on the 30/31st, the maiden H2s attack of the war, and this was by 1, 5 and 8 Groups against Hamburg. It was a disappointing debut for the device, which would prove its worth eventually, but in the meantime, there was no improvement at Cologne on the 2/3rd of February or at Hamburg again on the 3/4th.

Lorient continued to occupy much of the Command's attention up to mid month, by which time it was a deserted ruin. It cost the squadron a crew during the operation of the 7/8th, when ED359 crashed in the target area, and Sgt Lewis and his six colleagues were killed. The trials with the Mk II Lancaster terminated in February, and 61 Squadron handed its examples over to 3 Group's 115 Squadron, and reverted to being an all Merlin powered unit. It also welcomed a new commanding officer on the 11th, in the form of W/C W M Penman, who is frequently confused with D J Penman of 97 Squadron, a participant in the epic Augsburg raid of April 1942. That night, cloud cover over Wilhelmshaven forced the Pathfinders to use the least reliable skymarking method, but despite this, at least one bomb load fell onto a naval ammunition dump, and 120 acres of dockland and the town were laid waste in the ensuing explosion. Lorient's heaviest raid of the war was delivered by over four hundred aircraft on the 13/14th, and this was followed by a disappointing attack on Cologne in the absence of a

Lancaster element twenty four hours later. The Lancasters were active elsewhere, conducting a concentrated assault on Milan for the loss of just two of their number. On the 18th, Sgt Warne and his crew took W4270 for a training flight, and all died when an engine fire led to a crash in the Bottesford circuit. That night brought the first in a disappointing series of three raids in a week on Wilhelmshaven, and then Nuremberg escaped serious damage on the 25/26th. In the light of the previous month's efforts at Berlin, this demonstrated that it was still beyond the ability of the Command to hit distant targets with concentration. Having said that, however, only a quarter of the four hundred strong force despatched to the closer range city of Cologne on the 26/27th, actually found the mark. Never-the-less, Oboe was about to come into its own at the shorter range Ruhr targets, and it would at last negate the industrial haze which had thwarted the crew's best endeavours to date.

Before the Ruhr campaign was launched, two more major operations remained to be negotiated, and these were to Berlin on the 1/2nd of March, and Hamburg on the 3/4th. Despite difficulties with marking, and a widely scattered attack, it was the most destructive raid thus far on the Capital, and cost seventeen aircraft, among which was 61 Squadron's W4920, and this was lost without trace with the crew of Sgt Champion. Many of the bombs intended for Hamburg also fell outside the target area, but those which found the mark left numerous fires burning. The Ruhr campaign began on the 5/6th, and Essen, the home of the giant Krupps armaments manufacturer, and major centre of war production was fittingly selected to receive the opening salvoes. A force of 442 aircraft took off, but an unusually high proportion of early returns, and the bombing of alternative targets, reduced the numbers attacking as briefed to 362. 61 Squadron contributed twelve Lancasters and crews, nine of which did reach the primary objective, and they were S/L Cecil in W4903, F/L Barlow in W4269, F/L Dierkes in W4198, P/O Cockshott in W4900, F/S McFarlane in R5618, and Sgts Dashper, Dundas, Leight and Oldham in ED314, W4798, W4357 and W4317 respectively, and all returned safely. The operation was an outstanding success, and a highly encouraging start to the campaign against Germany's industrial heartland, and apart from damage to fifty buildings within the Krupps complex, over three thousand houses were destroyed. The above mentioned F/L Barlow and P/O Cockshott were to have associations with 617 Squadron, the former losing his life during Operation Chastise, and the latter serving as a flight commander in 1944/45. In one of those coincidences thrown up by war, the day on which he arrived at Woodhall Spa from 1660CU, the 31st of July, would be the day on which another celebrated former 61 Squadron pilot, F/L Bill Reid VC, failed to return from a daylight operation. A week would elapse before the next raid in the series, which would also be to Essen, and in the meantime, Harris switched his attention to southern Germany, raiding Nuremberg on the 8/9th, Munich on the 9/10th and Stuttgart on the 11/12th. The first two enjoyed moderate success, but both cost the squadron a crew. W4903 crashed in southern Germany during the former, killing the crew of F/L Giles, and ED703 failed to return from the latter, also falling in Germany, and there were no survivors either from the crew of Sgt Walters.

When Essen was attacked on the 12/13th, substantially less buildings were destroyed, but much of the bombing centred on the Krupps works, which suffered 30% more damage than a week earlier, and it was another major success for Oboe. Minor operations occupied much of the remainder of the month until the 26/27th, when it was the turn of Duisburg, but technical

failures among the Oboe Mosquitos led to a disappointing operation, and the target escaped serious damage. Two raids on Berlin at the end of the month failed to achieve the hoped for results, but the squadron came through unscathed, and had not posted missing a crew for three weeks. A few days earlier, the previously mentioned F/L Barlow, one of many Australians serving with the squadron, had been posted as a founder member to 617 Squadron at Scampton, and he took with him his flight engineer Sgt Whillis, and his bomb aimer Sgt Gillespie, a veteran of thirty three operations. Also joining him from 61 Squadron were F/O Burgess as navigator, F/O Williams as wireless operator, F/O Glinz as front gunner, and Sgt Liddell as rear gunner, he also having one tour already under his belt. Williams, in his thirty fourth or thirty fifth year, would be probably the oldest man to take part in Operation Chastise, and Whillis was also over thirty. Briefed to attack the Sorpe Dam, their Lancaster would crash in Germany while outbound, and sadly all would lose their lives.

The Ruhr campaign continued on the 3/4th of April, and Essen wilted under another accurate attack. April would prove to be the least rewarding month of the spring offensive, largely because of the number of operations conducted against more distant targets beyond the range of Oboe. The largest non-1,000 force to date of 577 aircraft was launched against Kiel on the 4/5th, but difficulties with marking led to a very disappointing outcome. It was a similar story at Duisburg on the 8/9th and 9/10th, and at Frankfurt on the 10/11th. A change of scenery took a predominately Lancaster force to La Spezia in Italy on the 13/14th, where heavy damage was caused to the docks, and the squadron's ED717 was forced to ditch off the Isles of Scilly on return, from where F/O Chivers and his crew were rescued after two and a half days in their dinghy. The creep-back phenomenon, which was a constant feature of Bomber Command raids, rescued a misdirected attack on Stuttgart on the 14/15th, and caused some useful industrial damage. On the 16/17th, an attempt was made by the Lancaster and Halifax squadrons to bomb the Skoda armaments works at distant Pilsen in Czechoslovakia, while a diversionary effort was directed by predoniatly Wellingtons and Stirlings at Mannheim. The Pilsen raid was a dismal failure, which was compounded by the loss of a massive thirty six aircraft, split evenly between the two types, and the squadron posted missing its first crew for five weeks. It was W4317 which failed to return, and P/O MacFarlane and his crew were all killed when it was shot down by a nightfighter over Belgium. Another long range operation took place on the 20/21st, to Stettin on the Baltic coast. In contrast to recent disappointments, this was an outstanding success, which destroyed an estimated one hundred acres in central districts. Among the twenty one missing aircraft was the squadron's W4795 of P/O Rossignol, and again there were no survivors. Following a partially effective raid on Duisburg on the 26/27th, extensive mining operations were laid on for the 27/28th and 28/29th, the former employing 160 aircraft, and the latter over two hundred, and it was from this one that W4898 failed to return, having crashed into the Baltic, and taking with it the crew of W/O Collenette. The month's operations were concluded with another attack on Essen on the night of the 30th, and in comparison with other visits there during the campaign, this enjoyed only modest success.

May would bring a return to winning ways with a number of stunning successes, and one operation which would pass into bomber folklore as the most famous bomber exploit in history. A worrying feature, however, would be the consistently heavy losses incurred by the

Command at Ruhr targets, and they began at Dortmund on the 4/5th, when a record non-1,000 force of 596 aircraft destroyed over a thousand buildings, and seriously damaged twice that number. Thirty one aircraft failed to return, and this toll was exceeded by three with the next operation, which was to Duisburg on the 12/13th. This raid was at least an outstanding success, the first against this target during the campaign, and it left almost sixteen hundred buildings in ruins, and sank or damaged sixty thousands of tons of shipping in the port. 61 Squadron posted missing the crew of Sgt Alderton on this night, and they were all killed when W4269 was despatched by flak over Holland, but on the credit side, a loss free period would extend over the next four weeks. A moderately successful attack took place on Bochum on the 13/14th, while a predominately 5 Group force tried again but failed at Pilsen, and on the 16/17th, during a nine day lull in main force operations, 617 Squadron carried out its epic attack on the Dams, also at a high cost in crews. On the 23/24th, another new record non-1,000 force of 826 aircraft took off for the second time in the month for Dortmund, to leave the hapless city devastated, and counting the cost of a further two thousand buildings in ruins. Despite the success, it was attended by the heaviest casualty figures of the Ruhr offensive to date, amounting to thirty eight aircraft, of which Halifaxes accounted for almost half. A raid on Düsseldorf on the 25/26th was a rare failure for the period, and Essen escaped with only moderate damage on the 27/28th, in exchange for which, the combined total of missing aircraft over the two nights amounted to fifty. On the 29/30th, over seven hundred crews were briefed for an attack on the town of Barmen, the western half of the twin towns known jointly as Wuppertal. An attack of unprecedented accuracy and concentration devastated the town, and when the smoke had cleared, around 80% of its built-up area could be seen to be in ruins, and over three thousand of its inhabitants were reported to have been killed.

There were no major operations in June until the 11/12th, when the Command tried again at Düsseldorf, and this time produced extensive damage in central districts. Over twelve hundred people were killed, and a further 140,000 were rendered homeless, and this despite an errant Oboe marker which lured away a proportion of the force. It was another night of heavy losses, however, thirty eight aircraft failing to return, and this was followed by the loss of twenty four at Bochum on the 12/13th, where a large area in the centre was reduced to rubble. Oberhausen fell victim to a concentrated all Lancaster attack on the 14/15th, but in the absence of the more vulnerable other types, seventeen of the 190 employed on the raid were lost. Only half of the force of two hundred Lancasters bombed at Cologne on the 16/17th, but this was sufficient to destroy over four hundred houses, at a cost of fourteen aircraft. Among them was the squadron's W4789, its first loss for a month, and this Lancaster contained the eight man crew of P/O Pullen, only one of which escaped with his life to become a POW.

Following a special operation by elements from 5 Group on the Würzburg radar factory at Friedrichshafen on the 20/21st, the Command undertook a hectic round of four major operations in the space of five nights, beginning at Krefeld on the 21/22nd. Over six hundred aircraft delivered 2,300 tons of bombs into the town, after the Pathfinders had marked with great accuracy, and the catalogue of destruction included five and a half thousand houses. The success was marred by the heaviest loss to date at a Ruhr target of forty four aircraft, most of them caught by nightfighters, but 61 Squadron was not represented on this occasion. On the following night it was the turn of Mülheim to reel under a concentrated assault, which left

eleven hundred houses in ruins, and many thousands more damaged. Thirty five aircraft failed to return, but again 61 Squadron remained unscathed. After a night's rest for most of the main force, the Elberfeld half of Wuppertal was subjected to an attack of similar ferocity to that which devastated its twin Barmen at the end of May. Housing and industry suffered alike, and an estimated 90% of the town's built-up area was reduced to rubble. A further thirty four aircraft were missing, however, and "Happy Valley's" reputation was gaining strength with every operation. The run of outstanding successes came to an end at the important oil industry town of Gelsenkirchen on the 25/26th, when bombs were sprayed all over the Ruhr, and few fell on the intended target. This night did cost the squadron an aircraft, and two crew men, when a flak damaged W4830 was abandoned by Sgt Pearce and four of his crew over Lincolnshire on return, but they were more fortunate than the thirty other crews who failed to return at all.

A series of three operations against Cologne spanned the turn of the month, and eclipsed anything experienced by this city so far during the war. Six hundred aircraft took off on the 28/29th, and delivered an attack of such accuracy and concentration, that almost six and a half thousand buildings were destroyed. A return was made on the 3/4th of July, and it was the districts on the eastern bank of the Rhein which suffered badly on this night. The series ended on the 8/9th at the hands of an all Lancaster heavy force, after which the city's authorities were able to count the combined cost of over eleven thousand buildings destroyed, five and a half thousand people killed, and a further 350,000 bombed out of their homes. The cost to the Command of this mini campaign was sixty two aircraft, at an average of twenty one per operation, and in the light of recent losses, this could be considered moderate and acceptable. Another attempt to hit Gelsenkirchen on the 9/10th failed to produce more than superficial damage, and other neighbouring towns received most of the bombs intended for it. W4763 was brought down by flak over Holland, and although F/O Ingram was killed in the ensuing crash, his crew escaped by parachute, and all survived as POWs. Two more operations to the region would take place at the end of the month, but the Ruhr offensive had now effectively run its course, and Harris could look back over the past five months with genuine satisfaction at the performance of his squadrons. Losses had been grievously high, but the industrial centres of Germany lay in ruins, and the aircraft factories were more than able to keep pace with the rate of attrition, while the Empire Training Scheme was pouring eager new crews into the gaps. Turin was raided with great accuracy by Lancasters of 1, 5 and 8 Groups on the 12/13th, and on the 15/16th, twelve 5 Group Lancasters, including an element from 61 Squadron, joined 617 Squadron to attack transformer stations in Italy. They were not successful, and having completed the attacks, the force carried on to bases in North Africa. 61 Squadron's EE190 crashed while trying to land at Blida in Algeria, but F/L Stewart and his crew were unhurt.

With confidence high following his successes at the Ruhr, Harris determined to deliver a knock-out blow against a major German city, in a short, sharp series of operations until the job was done. Having been spared by the weather from hosting the first one thousand bomber raid at the end of May 1942, Hamburg now came into the spotlight, satisfying as it did, all of Harris's criteria. As Germany's second city, Hamburg's political status was undeniable, as was its importance as a centre of U-Boat construction and other war industry. Its location

close to a coastline would aid navigation, and avoid the need to traverse large tracts of enemy territory, and it was also close enough to the bomber stations to be reached in the few hours of darkness afforded by mid summer. Finally, beyond the range of Oboe, which had proved so decisive at the Ruhr, it had the wide River Elbe as a distinguishing feature to provide good H2s returns for the navigators high above. The first round of Operation Gomorrah was launched on the night of the 24/25th, and was attended by the first operational use of "Window", the tinfoil-backed strips of paper designed to blind the enemy nightfighter, searchlight and gun-laying radar. 791 aircraft took off, and few crews encountered fighter activity while outbound. A number of aircraft were shot down during this stage of the operation, but they were off track, and outside of the protection of the bomber stream. Once over the target, the effects of Window were immediately made manifest by the absence of the usually efficient co-ordination between searchlights and flak. The marking was slightly misplaced, and an extensive creep-back developed, which cut a swathe of destruction from the city centre, back along the line of approach across the north-western districts, and out into open country, where a proportion of the bombing was wasted. It was a promising start to the campaign, and was accomplished for the remarkably low loss of twelve aircraft.

On the following night, Harris switched his force to Essen, to take advantage of the bodyblow dealt to the enemy defensive system by Window. It was another outstandingly successful raid on this target, and the Krupps works suffered its most damaging raid of the war. 61 Squadron posted missing the crew of F/O Alderdice in ED613, and there were no survivors. After a night's rest, another large force returned to Hamburg, and what followed was both unprecedented and unforeseeable. A period of unusually hot and dry weather had left the city a tinderbox, and the spark to ignite it came with the misplaced but highly concentrated Pathfinder markers, which fell into the densely populated working class districts of Hamm, Hammerbrook and Borgfeld. The main force followed up with unaccustomed accuracy and almost no creep-back, and delivered much of its 2,300 tons of bombs into the relatively compact area. It was this combination of factors, setting up a chain reaction, which unleashed a meteorological phenomenon on the city, as the individual fires joined up to create one giant conflagration, a firestorm. It sucked in oxygen from surrounding areas at hurricane force to feed its voracious appetite, uprooting trees, and flinging them bodily into the seat of the flames, along with debris and people. Temperatures at the heart of the inferno reached one thousand degrees Celcius, and the emergency services were powerless to act. Over forty thousand people died on this one night alone, and during the succeeding days, a mass evacuation began. Two nights later the ordeal continued, and whilst the firestorm area was again hit, other residential districts also suffered widespread damage. As the defences recovered from the effects of Window, the losses began to creep up again, seventeen failing to return from the firestorm raid, and twenty eight on this night, including 61 Squadron's ED782, which fell to a nightfighter over the North Sea, killing P/O Phillips and his crew.

Before Operation Gomorrah concluded, on the 2/3rd of August, over 80% of Remscheid was laid waste by a force of 250 aircraft, and this brought down the final curtain on the Ruhr offensive. The last Hamburg raid was rendered ineffective by violent electrical storms and icing, which persuaded many crews to bomb alternative targets or to jettison their bombs over the sea, and little new damage occurred in exchange for the loss of thirty aircraft, some of

them falling victim of the conditions. 61 Squadron was again represented, and for the first time since September 1942, posted missing two crews from one operation. W5000 was lost without trace with the crew of F/O Lyon, and JA873 was shot down by a nightfighter over Germany, and there were no survivors from the eight man crew of F/L Laing.

Italy was now teetering on the brink of capitulation, and in an attempt to help nudge it over, Bomber Command launched its final raids of the war against its cities during the first half of August. The series began on the 7/8th, when elements from 1, 5 and 8 Groups attacked Genoa, Milan and Turin. Only two aircraft failed to return, and one of them was the squadron's LM339, which crashed on Italian soil, killing Sgt Halkier and his crew. Two successful attacks fell on German targets, Mannheim on the 9/10th and Nuremberg on the 10/11th. The former cost the squadron W4236, which was lost to a nightfighter while outbound over Luxembourg, but at least Sgt Whitley and three of his crew survived, and they ultimately evaded capture. Successive raids to Italy followed on the 12/13th, 14/15th, 15/16th and 16/17th, and they concluded the Command's involvement with this country. The operation of the 15/16th to Milan turned into a bad night for the squadron, which had three empty dispersals to ponder in the cold light of the following dawn. Only twice before had three of its aircraft failed to return from a single operation, in July 1940, and on the last night of January 1942. The errant Lancasters all fell to nightfighters over France, and there were no survivors from Sgt Matthews's W5002 and F/O Steer's DV186, but three men escaped with their lives from Sgt Miller's ED722, and one of them evaded capture. On the 17th, briefings took place for a very important operation, which would have serious consequences for 61 Squadron.

Since the start of hostilities, intelligence had been pointing to German research into rocketry, and by 1943, concern was beginning to mount. Churchill's chief scientific advisor, Lord Cherwell, steadfastly refused to believe in the feasibility of such weapons, even in the face of incontrovertible proof provided by a PRU Mosquito, which captured a V-2 on film at the rocket research establishment at Peenemünde on the Baltic coast in June 1943. Duncan Sandys, aided by the brilliant Dr R V Jones, convinced Churchill of the threat posed by rockets, and it was decided to attack the site at the first available opportunity. This arose on the night of the 17/18th, when 597 aircraft answered the call for a maximum effort. The number was somewhat depleted by the late return to their stations after being diverted of some of 3 Group's Stirling squadrons on return from Italy the night before, and many could not be made ready in time. It was to be a complex operation, carried out in three waves, each assigned to one of the specific targets of the housing estate, the factory and the experimental site, with the Pathfinders responsible for shifting the point of aim accordingly. The whole operation was to be overseen by a Master of Ceremonies, a role pioneered by Gibson at the Dams, and the officer selected was G/C Searby, the commanding officer of 83 Squadron. 5 Group was assigned to the final wave and had as its target the experimental site. The Group had been practicing a time and distance method of bomb aiming, a useful alternative when smoke concealed the markers, and permission was given for crews to adopt this method if they wished.

61 Squadron contributed thirteen aircraft and crews to the operation, led by W/C Penman in ED718. The other aircraft and crews were, F/Ls Stewart and Thomas in W4766 and DV228,

F/Os Hughes and Webb in W4934 and JA874, P/Os Eager and Madgett in DV232 and ED661, F/Ss Docker and Wilson in JA900 and W4198, and Sgts Lowe, Roberts, Strange and Willsher in ED630, ED314, W4729 and W4900, the last named shortly to volunteer for a posting to 617 Squadron. A spoof operation on Berlin was laid on to keep the nightfighters off the scene for as long as possible, and it involved eight Mosquitos of 139 Squadron led by its commanding officer, G/C Slee. The attack got off to a bad start, when the initial marking of the housing estate went awry, and led to the bombing of the forced workers camp at Trassenheide over a mile further south, and many casualties were inflicted upon these friendly foreign nationals, who were trapped inside their wooden barracks. Once rectified, the operation proceeded more or less according to plan, and much damage resulted. It was when predominately 5 and 6 Group aircraft were in the target area, that the nightfighters finally arrived from Berlin, and proceeded to take a heavy toll of bombers, both in the skies above Peenemünde, and on the route home towards Denmark. Forty aircraft failed to return, and 61 Squadron was among those hardest hit, sharing the highest individual losses, at four aircraft each, with 49 Squadron, also of 5 Group. W4766 went down in the target area, and F/L Stewart and one other survived, while six were killed, W4934 crashed into the Baltic with no survivors from the crew of F/O Hughes, and ED661 and JA900 both crashed in the same area of northern Germany, not many miles west of Peenemünde, and again none survived from the eight man crews of P/O Madgett and F/S Docker. The operation was at least sufficiently effective to set back the development programme by a number of weeks, and ultimately to force the withdrawal of testing eastwards into Poland, out of range of Harris's bombers.

There was to be little respite for the crews, as Harris prepared for his next major campaign. He had long believed that Berlin held the key to victory, and that as the seat and symbol of Nazi power, its destruction might loosen the authority's grip on the populace. He had stated, that with the assistance of the American 8th Air Force based in England, he could "wreck Berlin from end to end", and bring a swift conclusion to the war. Having personally experienced the carnage of trench warfare, he wished to avoid the need for a lengthy land campaign, and believed that the war could be won by bombing alone. The Americans, however, were committed to a victory on land, and there was never a chance of enlisting their support. Undaunted, Harris would go to Berlin alone, but first he despatched a force of Lancasters and Halifaxes to Leverkusen on the 22/23rd, but they failed to find the mark, and sprayed bombs liberally around the Ruhr. Just five aircraft failed to return, but one of these continued 61 Squadron's run of losses, DV228 succumbing to a nightfighter over Holland, and just one man survived from the crew of Sgt Spencer.

The Berlin offensive began with a series of three operations, the first mounted on the 23/24th by a force numbering over seven hundred aircraft. It was only partially successful, and although it was the most destructive raid on the Capital to date, a large proportion of the bombs was wasted in open country and outlying communities, something which would be a feature of the campaign, particularly in 1944. The defenders made the Command pay dearly for any success gained, and brought down a new record number of fifty six aircraft. An attack on Nuremberg on the 27/28th produced only scattered bombing, a disappointment which was compounded by the loss of thirty three aircraft, but amends were made at the expense of the twin towns of Mönchengladbach and Rheydt on the 30/31st. Both towns suffered 50%

destruction of their built-up areas for a more modest loss to the Command of twenty five aircraft. The last night of the month took six hundred crews back to Berlin, and the efforts of most of them were wasted outside of the city. The defences again had their say, and claimed forty seven bombers, the Stirling contingent suffering disproportionately heavy casualties. A tragic incident marred an otherwise loss free night for 61 Squadron, when JB132 collided with a Lancaster from a conversion unit on return, and crashed near Newark, killing S/L Wellburn and the other seven occupants. An all Lancaster heavy force concluded the first phase of the Berlin campaign on the 3/4th of September, and a moderate amount of industrial damage rescued the operation from complete failure. Twenty two Lancasters failed to return, but for the third Berlin raid running, 61 Squadron lost none to the defences.

Just two more major operations took place involving 5 Group during the early part of September, and the first of these dealt a devastating blow on the twin cities of Mannheim and Ludwigshafen astride the Rhein on the 5/6th. The operation cost the Command thirty four aircraft, none of which belonged to 61 Squadron, but it did suffer a casualty during the course of the night. Forced to return early with technical difficulties, DV232 crashed ignominiously into the River Trent near Newark, from where the crew of P/O Todd managed to reach dry land without damage to themselves. Hanover had been spared major visitations by the Command for two years when it was selected for a series of four attacks spread over a period of four weeks. It would prove to be a difficult nut to crack, and cost the Command dearly in aircraft and crews. The first operation against it was mounted on the 22/23rd by a force of seven hundred aircraft, most of which placed their bombs outside of the target area. Before the second raid on the 27/28th, Mannheim was subjected to another ferocious attack, on the 23/24th, and this left extensive damage in the districts which had escaped the worst ravages of the month's earlier raid. The Command returned to Hanover on the 27/28th, and produced a good concentration of bombing, but sadly for the efforts of those involved, it was concentrated in an area of open country north of the city. The squadron's ED314 was shot down while outbound, and unusually for a 61 Squadron crew, six of them survived, including the pilot, P/O Buckley.

The October account opened for the 5 Group squadrons at Hagen on the 1/2nd, in company with elements of 1 and 8 Groups. It was a very satisfactory start to the month, and cost just two Lancasters. The same Groups went to Munich on the 2/3rd, and this time, 5 Group's time and distance method led to a wastage of bombs, but the other Groups managed to deposit most of their's within the target area, and a moderate amount of damage resulted. 61 Squadron's ED718 blew up, after a brush with a nightfighter had set it on fire, and miraculously, S/L Cousens and one of his crew were thrown clear, and fell into enemy hands as the only survivors. Misplaced markers, ground haze and decoy markers all conspired to prevent an accurate attack from developing at Kassel on the 3/4th, but some bombs fell into industrial suburbs, where some useful damage occurred. W4279 was among the twenty four missing aircraft, and this contained the crew of the commanding officer, W/C Penman, and there were no survivors. Later on the 4th, W/C Stidolph was installed as the squadron's new commanding officer. It was a hectic first week of the month, and it continued at Frankfurt on the 4/5th, a highly successful operation, and Stuttgart on the 7/8th, where a moderate amount of damage resulted, mostly in residential districts. The third raid in the series on Hanover took

place on the 8/9th, and for the first time, the markers fell over the centre of the city, and the main force exploited the opportunity to deliver a devastating blow, which destroyed almost four thousand buildings. Twenty seven aircraft fell victim to the defences, and this number included the squadron's DV239, which went down in the target area, killing the crew of P/O Coulson. A welcome break for most of the crews kept them at home until the 18/19th, when the final Hanover raid was mounted, this time by an all Lancaster force. It was another failure, costing eighteen aircraft, and it had been a very expensive campaign in return for one highly successful operation. Kassel received its second heavy raid of the month on the 22/23rd, and unlike the earlier one, great accuracy and concentration was achieved, which resulted in a firestorm. Although it was not as extensive as that suffered by Hamburg, the death toll exceeded six thousand people, and over twenty six thousand separate dwelling units were destroyed. It was not a one-sided affair, however, and the defenders claimed forty three bombers, two of them from 61 Squadron. Both Lancasters crashed in Germany, P/O Truscott and crew surviving as POWs from W4357, but just one man prevailed from the crew of F/S Whitecross in ED630.

November opened with a very destructive attack on Düsseldorf on the 3/4th, and it was on this night that the 61 Squadron pilot, Flight Lieutenant William Reid, earned a Victoria Cross. He continued on to the target in LM360, despite the fact that the Lancaster had been severely damaged by two nightfighter attacks, which had killed one member of the crew and wounded others, including himself. Having bombed the target, he and his colleagues brought the aircraft home to a crash-landing at the American base at Shipdham. One of the wounded succumbed to his injuries, but Reid and the others recovered, and went on to join 617 Squadron in 1944. It was while serving with this unit, that their Lancaster fell victim to friendly bombs during a daylight raid on a flying bomb store at Rilly-la-Montagne on the 31st of July, causing it to break up, and only Reid and one other survived as POWs. LM360 was patched up, and eventually found its way across the station to 50 Squadron, in whose hands it was written off in a landing crash at Fiskerton on the 11th of November 1944. Minor operations kept most of the heavy brigade at home from this point, as the decks were cleared for the resumption of the Berlin offensive. The Capital would remain the main focus of attention until the end of January, but the campaign period would drag on until spring, and bring the Command to its lowest ebb of the war. Before the first operation took place, however, the squadron moved from Syerston on the 15th, which it had shared with 106 Squadron, and took up residence at Skellingthorpe on the western outskirts of Lincoln, where it joined 50 Squadron.

It was an all Lancaster heavy force which rejoined the rocky road to Berlin on the 18/19th, while a predominately Halifax and Stirling contingent raided Mannheim and Ludwigshafen as a diversion. The tactic kept losses from the Capital to nine aircraft, none of which was from the 61 Squadron contribution of thirteen, but the operation itself was scattered and only moderately effective. A maximum effort force of over seven hundred aircraft returned to Berlin on the 22/23rd, and delivered what would be the most destructive attack of the war at this target. Over three thousand houses were destroyed, along with numerous industrial premises, two thousand people were killed, and a further 175,000 were bombed out of their homes. Twenty six aircraft failed to return, but 61 Squadron again came through unscathed.

This proved to be the last operation over Germany to include Stirlings, which would now be relegated to secondary, if useful tasks. On the following night, a mainly Lancaster force returned to heap more misery on the Capital, guided by the glow of fires still burning, and two thousand more houses were reduced to rubble. Again, the squadron was not represented among the twenty missing aircraft, but this would be redressed during the next trip to Berlin on the 26/27th. This was by an all Lancaster heavy force, and despite misplaced markers, a proportion of the bombs fell onto an important industrial district, and many factories producing war materials were destroyed. Twenty eight aircraft failed to return, and there were three empty dispersals on the 61 Squadron site at Skellingthorpe, which should have been occupied by W4198, DV297 and DV339. The crews of P/O Eaves, P/O Strange and P/O McAlpine were duly posted missing, and as time would prove, there was not a single survivor among them.

The fifth operation to Berlin since the resumption opened the December account on the 2/3rd, and it was a highly scattered attack, which caused some useful industrial damage, but cost a massive forty aircraft. Leipzig suffered its heaviest raid of the war on the 3/4th, and then the heavy force stayed on the ground until mid month. When the Lancaster squadrons next took to the air, it was again to Berlin on the 16/17th, a night which will forever be remembered for the impossible fogbound conditions which greeted the tired crews on their return. The operation itself was not concentrated, but never-the-less left substantial damage in its wake, and twenty five aircraft failed to return. A further twenty nine Lancasters crashed or were abandoned by their crews while trying to find a landing place, and the total fatalities in England from the night's operations, including substantial SOE activity, exceeded 150 airmen. 61 Squadron escaped the carnage, and once again came through unscathed. Creep-back was responsible for much of the damage visited upon Frankfurt on the 20/21st, after a decoy fire had lured many crews away. The year ended with two more operations to Berlin, the first of which, on the 23/24th, was only moderately effective, and the second, on the 29/30th, the first in a series of three raids in five nights spanning the New Year, likewise produced results which were not commensurate with the huge effort expended. 61 Squadron posted missing its first crew for a month, that of F/L Harvey, and only one man survived when DV399 exploded, after flak caused a fire. It had been a tough and demanding year for the whole Command, and 61 Squadron had acquitted itself well in comparison with many, particularly during the recent spell of Berlin operations. The New Year would bring more of the same fare, and as the winter deepened, the balance would shift in favour of the defenders, and it the Capital in particular, it would seem to be a case of ever diminishing returns for the bomber crews.

1944

No doubt, the citizens of Berlin shared a common hope with the hard-pressed crews of Bomber Command, that their city would cease to be the main focus of attention. Like their counterparts in London during the blitz of 1940, the Berliners were a hardy people, and, bearing their trials with fortitude and humour, they would not buckle under the persistent bombing. Banners in the streets proclaimed, "You may break our walls, but not our hearts", and the most popular song of the period, *Nach jedem Dezember kommt immer ein Mai*, after

every December comes always a May, was played endlessly over the radio, and mooted a change of fortunes for the beleaguered people with the onset of spring. It would be some time yet before either camp realized its wishes, and before New Year's Day was done, four hundred Lancasters were winging their way towards the Capital, arriving overhead as the clock approached 03.00. It was a complete failure, which cost the Command twenty eight aircraft, and it was an unpromising start to the year for 61 Squadron, which posted missing two crews. DV344 and LM377 both crashed in Germany, the latter falling victim to a nightfighter on the way to the target. The Lancasters had been occupied by the crews of F/O Sharpe and F/O Cunningham respectively, and neither produced a single survivor. There was no improvement in performance on the following night, when over three hundred aircraft returned to the Capital to try again. This time twenty seven crews paid the price, and 61 Squadron was represented among them by that of Sgt Tull in DV401, which crashed on Dutch soil, and again all were killed. The force was switched to Stettin on the 5/6th, and this was a highly successful operation by predominately Lancasters, which hit central districts, and sank eight ships in the port.

The heavy squadrons were stood down after this operation, and the crews enjoyed an eight night break, which came to an end on the 14th. At briefings, the crews must have been relieved to see the red tape on the wall maps stop short of Berlin, and point instead to the almost virgin target of Brunswick. This was a city in the same region of Germany as Hanover, which had proved so elusive and costly during the autumn. All but two of the aircraft committed on this night were Lancasters, and as at Hanover, they almost completely missed the target and bombed open country and outlying communities. In return for this scant reward, thirty eight bombers were lost, and it was beginning to seem that there was no escape from the marauding nightfighters. Berlin claimed thirty five aircraft on the 20/21st, in return for a scattered but moderately effective attack, which fell mainly on the hitherto less severely afflicted eastern districts. On the following night, Magdeburg was raided by six hundred aircraft, while a small diversion was carried out at Berlin by 5 Group. The main operation was a disaster, which began when the bomber stream was met by nightfighters before crossing the north German coast. A running battle ensued all the way to the target, and a record fifty seven aircraft were shot down for no discernible results. 61 Squadron's veteran Lancaster R5565 was one of those failing to return, and contained the crew of Sgt Martin, who all died. Ahead lay an unprecedented three Berlin operations in the space of four nights, and although the crews were unaware of the fact, this would be the last concerted effort of the campaign against the Capital. An all Lancaster heavy force took off on the 27/28th and delivered a moderately effective attack on the southern districts, but sprayed bombs onto numerous outlying communities as well. Thirty three aircraft were missing as a result, and this number included the squadron's DV400, in which the crew of F/O West were killed. Another veteran Lancaster, W4315, was damaged by flak over Germany, and was eventually forced to ditch off the Channel Islands on the way home, from where P/O Williams and three of his crew were picked up safely as the only survivors. The squadron operated to Berlin without loss on the 28/29th and 30/31st, and both raids produced extensive damage within the city, as well as again peppering outlying communities. Well in excess of 200,000 people were bombed out of their homes during this series, but whatever success was achieved, was paid for by the Command by a combined total of 112 missing heavy bombers.

On the 1st of February, the squadron moved eastwards across Lincolnshire to Coningsby, where it would enjoy a relatively short stay. Inhospitable weather contributed to a break from operations for most of the heavy squadrons until mid month, and briefings eventually took place on the 15th. That night's operation was to be a record breaking effort to Berlin, the penultimate occasion on which the heavy brigade of Bomber Command would be sent there. The largest non-1,000 force to date of 891 aircraft took off, carrying in their bomb bays over 2,600 tons of bombs, another record, and much of this was put to good use within the built-up area of the city. Outlying communities again suffered heavily, however, and the defences exacted a high price from the attackers, which amounted to forty three aircraft. There were no casualties among the 61 Squadron contingent, but four more major operations before the end of the month would leave their mark. Over eight hundred aircraft set off for Leipzig on the 19/20th, and headed towards the greatest disaster to afflict the Command to date. The bomber stream was picked up by the nightfighters as it crossed the Dutch coast, and the two forces remained in contact all the way into eastern Germany. Wrongly forecast winds led to some crews reaching the target ahead of time, and they were forced to orbit while they awaited the arrival of the Pathfinders, and about twenty of them were shot down by the local flak. The raid itself was scattered, and when all the aircraft which were going to return home had done so, there was a massive shortfall of seventy eight. There were just two survivors from the crew of P/O Willis in HK538, which crashed in Germany, and none from the crew of P/O Golightly in ME591. The Halifax brigade had been suffering disproportionately higher casualties than Lancasters for some time, and did so again on this night, and consequently from this point, the Mk IIs and Vs were withdrawn from operations over Germany to join the similarly relieved Stirlings. A scattered but highly destructive raid hit Stuttgart twenty four hours later, and all of the 61 Squadron aircraft returned.

A new tactic was employed for the next two operations, Schweinfurt on the 24/25th, and Augsburg on the following night. On each occasion, the force was split into two waves, with two hours between, and although the former operation failed to achieve its intentions, the second wave lost 50% fewer aircraft than the first, in an overall casualty figure of thirty three. 61 Squadron contributed to the first phase attack, during which LM310 was shot down in the target area, killing one of the crew, while F/L Webb and the remainder fell into enemy hands. In contrast, the latter operation was an outstanding success, and an example of the awesome power of the Command when all facets of the plan came together in perfect harmony. The historic old city centre was torn out by fire, and centuries of culture were destroyed forever. Twenty one aircraft failed to return, and 61 Squadron posted missing two crews, again each of them a participant in the first phase. Both Lancasters went down over France, with no survivors from the crew of F/O Nixon in DV294, and just one man escaped with his life from the crew of F/L Einarson in LL775, ultimately to evade capture.

The March account opened at Stuttgart on the 1/2nd, and it was another effective attack on this southern city, which was concluded for the remarkable loss of only four aircraft. There then followed a lull in operations for many of the heavy crews, while the older Halifaxes, with some of the new Hercules powered Mk IIIs for company, opened the pre-invasion campaign against the French railway system at Trappes and Le Mans. The Lancaster and Mk

III Halifax squadrons returned to action on the night of the 15/16th, when Stuttgart was again the objective, but in contrast to the raid at the start of the month, this one deposited most of the bombs in open country, and thirty seven aircraft were shot down. 61 Squadron was untouched by these losses, and in fact, would fare much better than many squadrons in a month famous for its disasters. Two major successes came at Frankfurt on the 18/19th and 22/23rd, both by over eight hundred aircraft, and more than six thousand buildings were destroyed in the first raid alone. Following the second assault, half of the city was left without electricity, gas and water for an extended period. A combined loss of fifty five aircraft could be considered within acceptable limits in view of the scale of success, and in the context of recent losses, and 61 Squadron posted missing just one crew from the first operation, that of P/O Cannon, who were all killed in ND727.

The final raid of the war by RAF heavy bombers on Berlin was launched by over eight hundred aircraft on the 24/25th, and it was attended by the presence of unusually strong, and previously unrecorded winds, which became known as "Jetstreams". They broke the cohesion of the bomber stream, driving the aircraft south of the intended track, and this led to scattered bombing at the Capital, where substantial damage, never-the-less, occurred, but over a hundred outlying communities were again afflicted. Many aircraft were blown over heavily defended areas of the Reich during the homeward flight, and the flak batteries enjoyed their most successful night of the war, by bringing down over two thirds of the seventy two which failed to return. 61 Squadron posted missing the crews of P/O Carbutt and F/O Cox in DV397 and JB129 respectively, and only one man survived from the former. Although the Berlin offensive had now run its course, the winter campaign still had a week to run, and two more major operations for the crews to negotiate. The first of these fell with impressive effect on Essen on the 26/27th, thus continuing the remarkable run of successes against this vitally important centre of war production since the introduction of Oboe to main force operations a year earlier. Only nine aircraft were lost, and the squadron was not represented among them.

On the 30th, almost eight hundred crews were briefed for a standard maximum effort raid on Nuremberg, which would depart from standard practice in only one respect. Rather than an indirect route, incorporating feints and diversions, a 5 Group inspired straight-in route was selected, which would take the bomber stream from Belgium across Germany, to a point about fifty miles north of the target. AVM Bennett, the Pathfinder AOC, was bitterly opposed to the plan, but was overruled in favour of that offered by AVM Cochrane, whose past associations with Harris gave him an advantage. This route, and a combination of almost freak meteorological conditions, which included unusually bright moonlight, crystal clear visibility, an absence of the forecast cloud at cruising altitude, but a backcloth below the bombers to silhouette them like flies on a table cloth, the formation of condensation trails, and the presence again of the jetstream winds which had so adversely effected the Berlin raid a week earlier, all conspired to hand the bomber force on a plate to the waiting nightfighters. These picked up the bomber stream at Charleroi in Belgium, and remained with it all the way to the target, and the route was marked out by the burning wrecks of Lancasters and Halifaxes on the ground. Those crews who failed to register the strength of the wind, or refused to believe the evidence, turned towards Nuremberg from a false position up to fifty miles further north, and many of these bombed Schweinfurt in error. There was little fresh damage at the

birthplace of Nazism, and ninety five missing aircraft represented the Command's heaviest defeat of the war by a clear seventeen aircraft. Only nine of the forty nine participating squadrons reported no losses, and 61 Squadron had two to register. Veteran R5734 was one of the few to be shot down on the homeward flight, and this crashed in Belgium with no survivors from the crew of P/O Haste. DV311 was a nightfighter victim during the long leg across Germany, and S/L Moss died with his entire crew.

Now that the winter campaign was consigned to the past, the entire Command could concentrate on the pre-invasion offensive against the French railway system and enemy defences, which, as already mentioned, had been begun by the Halifaxes and Stirlings in early March. The crews would now face operations which were in marked contrast to those recently endured, and in place of the long slog to Germany on dark, often dirty nights, shorter range hops to France would be the order of the day. These, however, would be equally demanding in their way, and would require of the crews a greater commitment to accuracy, to avoid casualties among friendly civilians. The only fly in the ointment was the flawed thinking of the policy makers on high, who decreed that most such operations should count as just one third of a sortie towards the completion of a tour, and until this edict was rescinded, an air of mutiny pervaded the crew rooms. Remarkably, in view of the prohibitive losses over the winter, the Command was stronger than ever, and in fine fettle to face its new challenge. Harris was in the enviable position of being able to achieve what his predecessor had tried to do but failed, namely to attack multiple targets simultaneously, with forces large enough to make an impact. He could now assign targets to individual Groups, to Groups in tandem, or to the whole bomber force together, as dictated by operational requirements, and provide each force with a sprinkling of Pathfinders.

5 Group opened its April account at Toulouse on the 5/6th, where an aircraft factory was effectively dealt with, and followed this up at railway yards at Tours on the 10/11th, one of five main targets for the night. With Harris at the helm, city-busting would never be totally abandoned in favour of other considerations during the pre and post-invasion period, and Aachen suffered a heavy area raid at the hands of 1, 3, 5 and 8 Groups on the 11/12th. This operation cost 61 Squadron the crew of F/O Williams in JA695, and only one man survived. Officially from the 14th, Bomber Command became subject to the dictates of SHAEF, and would remain thus shackled until the onset of autumn, by which time the ground forces would be sweeping towards the Reich's frontiers. On the 15th, the squadron vacated Coningsby, and returned to Skellingthorpe, from where it would see out the war. The move was to make room for the arrival of 83 and 97 Squadrons, which were posted back to their former Group on permanent detachment from the Pathfinders, along with 627 Squadron with its Mosquitos. The seeds of this latest shuffle had been sown back in December and January, when Oboe Mosquitos had marked a number of flying bomb sites in the pas-de-Calais for 617 Squadron. W/C Cheshire and his crews had plastered the markers with their bombs, only to find frustratingly, that the markers had missed the targets by just a few hundred yards. This would have been fine at an area objective, but not at the precision targets to which 617 Squadron was assigned. S/L "Mickey" Martin practiced dropping markers by diving his Lancaster onto the aiming point at a bombing range, and found it to be a highly precise method, if somewhat hairy, and Cheshire tried it unofficially in a Mosquito, before taking the

idea to the ever receptive AOC, AVM Cochrane. He approached Harris, and 617 Squadron was granted four Mosquitos to use on selected operations, to mark targets both for the squadron and the Group. The method portended such success, that Harris transferred 83 and 97 Squadrons from the distraught Bennett to act as the illuminator force, and designated 627 Squadron as the low level visual markers, ultimately to take over that role from 617 Squadron. The former Pathfinders were fiercely loyal to Bennett, and were not amused at being removed from what they considered to be an elite status, and it placed a further strain on the already cool relationship between Bennett and Cochrane, two brilliant men who simply had diametrically opposed views on target marking. 5 Group, of course, had always considered itself to be the elite of the Command, and probably felt that the newcomers should see the move as a promotion. Whatever the rights and wrongs of the situation, from now on, 8 Group would refer to 5 Group as the Independent Air Force.

61 Squadron operated for the first time after its return to Skellingthorpe on the 18/19th, as part of a 5 Group force attacking railway yards at Juvisy, one of four such targets for the night. The first real test for the 5 Group method came at the marshalling yards at La Chapelle on the 20/21st, when 617 Squadron marked the target, with 627 Squadron in attendance as the Windowing force, and to observe the system in action. The two phase attack was successfully concluded after initial difficulties, but it remained to be seen how the system would cope with a heavily defended German target. On the 22nd, the Australian W/C Doubleday was appointed as the latest commanding officer, and that night, the Group went to Brunswick to try out its marking method over Germany. Despite accurate marking by 617 Squadron, the Lancaster element failed to exploit the opportunity, and Brunswick continued to be an elusive would-be victim. It was at least an inexpensive operation, costing just four aircraft, but among them was the squadron's LM476, which exploded over Germany, throwing clear F/L Bird and one of his crew, and they alone survived as POWs. Two nights later, the 5 Group method was tried again at Munich, and this time it was an outstanding success, largely made possible by W/C Cheshire, who dived into the face of murderous light flak to plant his markers, before screaming away across the roof tops to safety. It was probably this operation which sealed the award to Cheshire of the Victoria Cross at the completion of his tour. LM359 failed to arrive back at Skellingthorpe, having crashed in France, and P/O Newman died with five of his crew, the single survivor managing to evade capture.

May began for the Group with a return to two factories at Toulouse on the 1/2nd, and this was followed by what became a controversial attack on a panzer training camp and transport depot at Mailly-le-Camp on the 3/4th. A 1 and 5 Group operation, it was led by W/C Deane of 83 Squadron, with W/C Cheshire as marker leader, and the two men attended separate briefings, which may have contributed to some of the later confusion. Fourteen 5 Group squadrons were present, with ten from 1 Group, the latter also sending its Special Duties Flight. Interference by a commercial broadcasting station played a part in delaying or blocking instructions to the main force to bomb, after the four 617 Squadron Mosquitos had carried out their marking duties. Nightfighters took advantage of the situation while the Lancasters milled around in the target area, and as burning aircraft were seen to fall all over the sky, a number of crews succumbed to their anxiety and frustration, broadcasting some questionable comments in a rare breakdown in discipline. Once underway, the bombing was

accurate and effective, but forty two aircraft failed to return, and thereafter, many accusations were unjustly directed at Cheshire. 61 Squadron despatched fourteen Lancasters, and was one of only four 5 Group and one 1 Group squadrons to come through unscathed. It was less fortunate on the 11/12th, however, when operating as part of a 5 Group force raiding a military camp at Bourg-Leopold in Belgium. One of its crews failed to return from this prematurely terminated attack, that of P/O Eastwood in LM454, and this fell to a nightfighter over Belgium while outbound, with only one man surviving. LM478 was forced to return early, and crashed on landing at Skellingthorpe, although without injury to F/S Woolnough and his crew.

As events turned out, there were no further 61 Squadron casualties to arise out of operations during the remainder of the month, which took the Group to Amiens on the 19/20th, Duisburg for the first time for a year on the 21/22nd, Brunswick for another failure on the 22/23rd, and a number of small scale forays in the final week. June and July would prove to be horrendously expensive for many squadrons, as the pace of operations increased to enable an ever growing list of targets to be dealt with. Remarkably though, 61 Squadron would seem to almost sail through the months right up to the end of the year, registering losses, but only at an average of about one per week. The lead up to D-Day took small 5 Group forces to a railway junction at Saumur on the 1/2nd, and a German signals station at Ferme-d'Urville on the 3/4th. Coastal batteries were raided on the 4/5th, mostly in the Pas-de-Calais to maintain the invasion deception. The Command was out in force on D-Day Eve with a thousand aircraft covering the landings by again attacking coastal defences, during the course of which a new record of five thousand tons of bombs was delivered. Similar numbers devoted themselves to communications objectives on the following night, and in smaller numbers on the 7/8th and 8/9th. A new oil campaign was opened with great success by 1, 3 and 8 Groups at Gelsenkirchen on the 12/13th, while 5 Group continued the assault on enemy communications with a highly accurate attack on railway installations at Poitiers. The first daylight operations since the departure of 2 Group a year earlier were mounted against E-Boats at Le Havre on the evening of the 14th in a two phase attack. The outstanding success was repeated at Boulogne twenty four hours later, and severely reduced the enemy's capacity to harass Allied shipping supplying the beachhead.

5 Group joined elements from 4 and 8 Groups to attack an ammunition dump at Fouillard and a fuel dump at Chatellerault on the 15/16th. A 61 Squadron contingent was briefed to participate in the latter, from which ME783 failed to return with the crew of P/O Goodyer, who were all killed. The month's second new campaign, this one against flying bomb launching and storage sites, began on the 16/17th, when elements of 1, 4, 5, 6 and 8 Groups bombed four locations. The oil campaign continued at Sterkrade also on this night, but did not include a presence from 5 Group. Its turn came at Wesseling and Scholven in simultaneous attacks on the 21/22nd. Both forces were predominately 5 Group, although there was a sprinkling of ABC Lancasters from 101 Squadron, and a number of Oboe Mosquitos at the latter. Low cloud at both objectives prevented use of the low level visual marking method, and bombing went ahead at Wesseling on H2s alone, and at Scholven by Oboe skymarking. Each operation gained a degree of success, more so at Scholven, but the Wesseling force was mauled by nightfighters, and a massive thirty seven Lancasters were shot down, 28% of those

despatched. Four 5 Group squadrons, 44,49,57 and 619 each lost six aircraft, while all but one of the 61 Squadron contingent returned safely from Scholven. The exception was JB351, which survived a brush with a nightfighter, and made an emergency landing at Woodbridge in the hands of P/O Passant and his crew. Minutes later, the Lancaster was written off by a 214 Squadron Fortress which had also made an emergency landing, but no crew casualties arose from this incident. Two of the squadron's aircraft failed to return from a flying bomb site at Prouville, one of seven such targets on the 24/25th, and both crashed in France. LM518 fell to a nightfighter, with one survivor from the crew of F/L Forrest, and P/O Kramer and all but one of his crew died in ND987.

A flying bomb store in caves at St Leu d'Esserent received a number of attacks at the start of July, the first by 617 Squadron on the evening of the 4th. Shortly afterwards, the Group followed up, and EE186 was shot down over France, delivering P/O North and four of his crew into the hands of the enemy, two others managing to evade a similar fate. The operation was repeated on the 7/8th by a predominately 5 Group force, which ran into fierce nightfighter activity, and twenty nine Lancasters and two Mosquitos were lost. The squadron posted missing two crews, those of the formerly mentioned P/O Passant, who were all killed when the veteran R5856 was blasted from the sky by flak, and F/L Grantham in ND867, from which two men survived, one of them to evade capture. Also disproportionately expensive was an attempt to destroy a railway junction at Revigny. Assigned initially to 1 Group on the 12/13th, the first attack was aborted after only half the force had bombed, and ten Lancasters were lost. The second attack was aborted following difficulties with identification on the 14/15th, and no bombing took place for the loss of seven more Lancasters. It fell to 5 Group to successfully conclude the series on the 18/19th, but at a cost of twenty four aircraft, among which was 61 Squadron's DV304, which was one of many nightfighter victims that night, and the eight man crew of P/O Cooper were killed.

The last week of the month brought a three raid series against Stuttgart beginning on the 24/25th. The operation of the following night was the most destructive, and left massive damage to the central districts, where most of the public buildings were left in ruins, along with those of a cultural nature. The final raid took place on the 28/29th, and bright moonlight enabled the nightfighters to pick up the bomber stream over France on the way to the target, and assist in the destruction of thirty nine Lancasters. LM452 was one of these victims, and just one man survived from the crew of F/S MacPherson. The war against flying bombs dominated the first two weeks of August, and over a thousand aircraft were committed by daylight on the 3rd, to attack three storage sites in France. Elements of 5 Group were assigned to Trossy-St-Maxim, where a successful operation was concluded for the loss of six aircraft, and the squadron posted missing the crew of F/O Gilmore in PA162. One man survived, and he landed in Allied held territory to return home. Two major operations took place on the 12/13th, one to Rüsselsheim, where the Opel motor works was the objective, and an experimental raid on Brunswick, without a Pathfinder presence, in order to gauge the ability of the crews to find and hit a target on the strength of their own individual H2s returns. The latter raid was scattered, while the former failed to inflict more than superficial damage, and both targets would receive a return visit in the future. The disappointing results were compounded by a combined loss of forty seven bombers, and the squadron's ME596 was

among those missing from the Opel works, again with just one survivor, this time from the crew of P/O Taylor. Two daylight operations in mid month brought support for the ground forces in the Falaise area on the 14th, and in preparation for the resumption of the night offensive against Germany, Harris despatched a thousand aircraft on the 15th, to knock out Luftwaffe airfields in Holland and Belgium. With the Allied armies sweeping towards the German frontier, and his duties to SHAEF largely discharged, Harris began the new campaign against Germany at Stettin and Kiel on the 16/17th. 1, 3, 6 and 8 Groups returned to Rüsselsheim on the 25/26th, but failed to make a meaningful impression on production at the Opel works, and while this was in progress, 5 Group raided Darmstadt, and also failed to produce a telling blow. 61 Squadron's PA998 was one of seven failures to return, this with the crew of F/L Church, who died with five of the others on board. Sadly for the 120,000 residents of this town, 5 Group would return in a little over two weeks, and put matters right. Königsberg, a port in what is now Lithuania, was one of those being used by the enemy to supply its eastern front, and was attacked by 5 Group at the limit of its range on the 26/27th. Four Lancasters were lost from the force of 170, and 61 Squadron was represented by PB436, which was shot down by flak over Denmark on the way home, and from which the entire crew of F/S Loneon escaped with their lives, the pilot and one other evading capture. Losses were heavier when the operation was repeated on the following night, but the raid was highly successful, despite the relatively small weight of bombs necessitated by maximum fuel loads. On the previous day, the campaign against flying bomb sites came to an end, although V-2 stores would continue to be targeted.

September was largely devoted to removing the enemy from those French ports which were badly needed by the Allies to land supplies. Six operations were mounted against Le Havre between the 5th and 11th, after which the German garrison surrendered to British forces. 5 Group participated in three of the operations, none of which cost 61 Squadron a crew. Darmstadt suffered its ordeal by firestorm at the hands of 5 Group on the 11/12th, and over twelve thousand people lost their lives. While 1, 3 and 8 Groups carried out the final major RAF raid of the war on Frankfurt on the 12/13th, 1 and 5 Groups decimated the north and west-central districts of Stuttgart for the loss of just four aircraft. PB434 failed to get beyond Skellingthorpe, crashing almost immediately after take-off with engine failure, although without injury to F/O Cooksey and his crew. It required just one attack by over seven hundred aircraft on the 17th to persuade the German garrison to surrender, and this left just Calais to be liberated. Six raids here during the final third of the month were sufficient to produce the desired result, and during the course of this campaign, 5 Group renewed acquaintances with a target with which it had an almost personal association. The Dortmund-Ems Canal was a vital part of the enemy communications system, and had been attacked at regular intervals by 5 Group since the summer of 1940. On the 23/24th, a 5 Group force, which included the Tallboy carrying Lancasters of 617 Squadron, hit a vulnerable section at Ladbergen, while a second force attacked the nearby Münster airfield at Handorf. Two direct hits by Tallboys drained a six mile stretch of the canal, but the defenders brought down fourteen Lancasters, 10% of those despatched, and 61 Squadron suffered a bad night. LM718 and ME732 crashed in Holland, the former with five survivors from the crew of S/L Horsley, he and two others ultimately evading capture, and one of two survivors from the crew of F/L Stone in the latter also managed to do the same. ND988 went down over Germany, and took F/O Campbell and

five of his crew to their deaths. Just one Lancaster was lost from the Handorf force, and this was ED470, which also belonged to the squadron, and F/O Hornibrook was killed with all but one of his crew. The daylight raid on Calais on the 24th also cost the squadron a crew, that of F/O Freeman, who died with four others when NF914 was shot down by flak, and crashed into the sea near the target. On the following day, W/C Pexton became the last but one wartime commander of the squadron.

October brought with it the start of a new Ruhr offensive, but first, 5 Group carried out an inconclusive raid through cloud on Wilhelmshaven on the 5th. While 3, 6 and 8 Groups were engaged at Dortmund as mentioned above, elements of 1 and 5 Groups delivered a massively successful attack on Bremen, which destroyed almost five thousand buildings. Heavy gun emplacements on the island of Walcheren in the Scheldt Estuary were barring the approaches to Antwerp, and operations to flood the terrain by breaching the sea-wall had begun on the 3rd. 5 Group continued the assault on the 7th and the 11th, and would return later in the month. The new Ruhr offensive led inexorably to Operation Hurricane, a series of massive raids as a demonstration to the enemy of the overwhelming superiority of the Allied air forces ranged against it. Duisburg was selected to host the first round, and almost a thousand aircraft poured 4,500 tons of bombs into the hapless city around breakfast time on the 14th, before returning that night in similar numbers to press home the point about superiority. 5 Group took advantage of the activity during the night raid, to finally nail Brunswick, which reeled under a massively accurate and concentrated attack. Only one Lancaster was lost, and this was 61 Squadron's ME595, from which F/O Hoad and five others of the eight men on board parachuted into the arms of their captors. Essen received its visits from the Hurricane force on the 23/24th, and again by daylight on the 25th, after which it ceased to be a main centre of war production. Cologne was raided three times at the end of the month, beginning on the 28th, and that night, 5 Group sent a force to Norway to attack U-Boat pens at Bergen. Cloud cover brought a halt to proceedings after only a proportion of the force had bombed, and three Lancasters failed to return. There were two incidents involving 61 Squadron, which might have had more serious consequences. ED860 crashed on take-off, without injury to F/O Paerse and his crew, and ND902 was declared a write off, after landing at Skellingthorpe in the hands of F/O Miller and his crew with flak damage, and again there were no casualties.

5 Group opened its November account by daylight at Homberg, where the Meerbeck oil plant was the objective. It was one of the rare failures for the period, but cost only one aircraft. Düsseldorf received its last major raid of the war on the 2/3rd at the hands of almost a thousand aircraft, and massive destruction resulted for the loss of nineteen aircraft. PD199 crashed behind Allied lines, killing F/O McGillivray and one other, but the remainder of the crew landed safely by parachute. The repair of the recently breached Dortmund-Ems Canal at Ladbergen was an open invitation to 5 Group to return, which they did on the 4/5th, leaving the waterway unnavigable. On the 6/7th, it was the turn of the Mittelland Canal at its junction with the Dortmund-Ems at Gravenhorst, but difficulties with the marking led to the raid being abandoned, and PB725 was one of ten Lancasters which failed to return, F/O Goodbrand and three of his crew surviving as POWs. Oil targets were the overriding priority during the month, and 5 Group was assigned to Harburg on the 11/12th, most of the bombs falling north of the river onto Hamburg. Support for the American ground forces resulted in the small

German towns of Düren, Jülich and Heinsberg being all but erased from the map on the 16th. 5 Group participated in the destruction of the first mentioned, and lost just three Lancasters in the process. The earlier failure by the Group at the Mittelland Canal was rectified on the 21/22nd, while a second 5 Group force re-drained a repaired section of the Dortmund-Ems Canal. The pilot of a 49 Squadron Lancaster on the former operation was W/C Weir, who had commanded 61 Squadron earlier in the war. He was not on the strength of 49 Squadron, having presumably borrowed the aircraft for the occasion, and he was the lone survivor of his crew when their Lancaster was shot down. An attempt to smash the U-Boat pens at Trondheim in Norway was thwarted by a smoke screen, and the raid was abandoned. NG179 failed to return to Skellingthorpe with the crew of F/O James, and no trace of the aircraft and crew was found.

As worthwhile targets became increasingly difficult to find in a country so effectively levelled by persistent heavy bombing, smaller, seemingly insignificant towns began to find themselves the object of attention, particularly if they lay in the path of the enemy retreat. 5 Group erased Heilbronn from the map on the 4/5th, and then plastered the railway yards at Giessen on the 6/7th. LL777 was attacked by a nightfighter during the course of this operation, and a crash-landing was made on an Allied airfield in Belgium. One of the crew was killed in the engagement, four baled out and were captured, but F/O Byers and the remaining member of his crew emerged from the wreckage of their Lancaster unscathed. ME725 was shot down, killing two of the crew, and F/O Donnelly and four others were marched off to prison camp. Only one more operation during the month was to cost the squadron a crew, and this came during a 5 Group raid on Munich on the 17/18th. It seems to have been a successful operation, from which four aircraft failed to return, and among them was LM729, which fell victim to flak over Germany, with just one survivor from the crew of F/O Newland. It had been a relatively good year for 61 Squadron, always in the thick of the action, but failing to suffer the kind of disaster which afflicted most of the 5 Group units at least once. The year drew to a close with the unmistakable scent of victory in the air, despite the German break-out in the Ardennes, and it was now a question of when, not whether the tenacious and resourceful enemy would lay down his arms.

1945

Any thoughts that the enemy defences were spent, were badly misplaced, and although the Luftwaffe was stretched beyond its capacity to defend every corner of the Reich, it could and would still inflict grievous losses on Bomber Command. Its own actions on New Year's Day did much to seal its fate, when the ill-conceived and ultimately ill-fated Operation Bodenplatte was launched against Allied airfields in France, Holland and Belgium at first light. Around 250 of its fighters were sacrificed on that morning, a large proportion of the pilots losing their lives or falling into Allied hands. Whilst the materiel damage in Allied aircraft on the ground, which amounted to around two hundred aircraft, could be made good immediately, Germany's lost pilots could not be replaced. 5 Group spent part of New Year's Day at the Dortmund-Ems Canal, and again left it breached, returning that night to do the same to the Mittelland Canal at Gravenhorst. The Group participated in the controversial raid on the French town of Royan in the early hours of the 5th, which was prompted by requests

from Free French forces which were laying siege. Many of the inhabitants declined the German garrison commander's offer of free passage out of the area, and suffered the consequences under the 1, 5 and 8 Group bombardment. In the event, the town was not taken, and it was mid April before the garrison surrendered. 5 Group went alone to attack the German supply line at Houffalize in the Ardennes on the 5/6th, from which the crew of F/O Sears in PA165 was posted missing. The Lancaster crashed in the target area, and the sole survivor fell into enemy hands. Only one other casualty afflicted the squadron during January, and that was when LM720 struck an obstacle and crashed in Norfolk on return from an oil refinery at Leuna near Merseburg on the 14/15th, and there were no survivors from the crew of F/O Corewyn. On the previous night, the Group had attacked the oil plant at Pölitz near Stettin, following up an earlier raid in December, and photographic reconnaissance suggested a successful operation. A similar target at Brůx in Czechoslovakia was assigned to 1 and 5 Groups on the 16/17th, and this also resulted in a major loss of vital production. Oil targets at Duisburg and Gelsenkirchen were bombed on the 22/23rd, the latter with a 5 Group presence, and this was the Group's last major outing of the month.

February would bring some grim reminders of the past, and it got off to an inauspicious start on the 1/2nd, when NF912 suffered engine failure on take-off when bound for Siegen, and crashed on the airfield after completing a circuit. The impact caused an explosion and fire, and the sole survivor of S/L Horsley's crew sustained injuries. The raid itself fell mainly into open country, and was one of a number of failures in the face of poor weather conditions at the start of the month. It was a similar story when Karlsruhe was attacked on the 2/3rd, and hardly any bombs found the target. NG241 was one of fourteen missing Lancasters, and was abandoned over France while outbound following an engine fire. The crew of F/L Lipton survived intact thanks to the unsung heroes in the parachute packing section, and reported a few minor injuries. After that there was little for the Group to do until the 7/8th, when a rare failure occurred at the Dortmund-Ems Canal. On the following night, the Group joined elements of 1 and 8 Groups to attack for the third time the synthetic oil plant at Pölitz, and this time all production was ended for the remainder of the war. Twelve Lancasters failed to return, and three of them were from 61 Squadron, including LL911, which crashed in eastern Germany while on its 99th operation, and F/O Collins and five of his crew survived to fall into enemy hands. The other missing aircraft were PB737, which crashed in Germany, killing the pilot, F/L Bartlett, and delivering five of his crew into captivity, and PB759 with the crew of F/O Tasker, who also died in eastern Germany with three of his crew.

The first of the Churchill inspired series of operations against Germany's eastern cities under Operation Thunderclap was unleashed in all its fury on Dresden on the 13/14th, in a two pronged attack led by 5 Group, using its low level visual marking method. Eight hundred tons of bombs were dropped on the city in this partially successful opening phase, and the fires acted as a beacon for the second all Lancaster force from 1, 3, 6 and 8 Groups following three hours behind. A further 1,800 tons of bombs cascaded into the beautiful and historic city, setting off the same chain of events which had created the firestorm at Hamburg in July 1943. The population had been swelled by refugees pouring in from the eastern front, and an estimated fifty thousand people perished in the inferno, although some believe a more accurate figure to be in excess of a hundred thousand. Chemnitz was earmarked for similar

destruction on the following night, but bad weather intervened, and the operation was not successful. 5 Group did not take part, going instead to an oil refinery at Rösitz, where it left a moderate degree of damage. Another oil refinery at Böhlen was the Group's objective on the 19/20th, but success eluded the force of 250 Lancasters after the Master Bomber's Mosquito was shot down by flak in the target area. An attack on the Mittelland Canal at Gravenhorst was abandoned because of cloud cover on the 20/21st, but it was rescheduled for the following night, after which, the Command claimed that it had been rendered unnavigable. Another abandonment in the face of cloud cover saved the Dortmund-Ems Canal on the 24th, and that evening, RF137 blew up at Skellingthorpe, having taken part, probably while bombs were being removed. A number of armourers were killed, and SW277 was destroyed by the blast. On the previous day, W/C Scott had been installed as the squadron's last wartime commanding officer, and there was little activity for him to preside over until March.

The final RAF raid on Cologne hit the city on the 2nd of March, and it fell to American forces four days later. 5 Group carried out its last attack on the Dortmund-Ems Canal on the 3/4th, breaching the Ladbergen aqueduct in two places and sealing its fate. Chemnitz suffered the destruction intended for it in February, when attacked on the 5/6th, and its central and southern districts became a sea of flame. 5 Group returned to Böhlen on that night, and caused further damage to the refinery, and attacked a similar target at Harburg on the 7/8th. This operation cost fourteen Lancasters, three of which belonged to 61 Squadron, but it was the last time that it would lose more than two aircraft from one operation. F/O Farren and his crew were all killed when ME474 crashed into the North Sea, one man survived from the eight man crew of F/L Miller in NF988, and F/O Pearce and one other survived the destruction of NG182 over Germany to fall into enemy hands. Essen was visited for the last time on the 11th, for which a new record force of 1079 aircraft took off in the late morning, after which it ceased to be a functioning city. The record lasted a fraction over twenty four hours, and was surpassed when 1,108 aircraft departed their stations for Dortmund in the early afternoon of the 12th. This, however, was a milestone which would stand until the end of hostilities. 5 Group was assigned to the distant town of Lützkendorf on the 14/15th, where the Wintershall synthetic oil refinery was the objective for a raid of moderate success, and on the 16/17th, the Group wiped out Würzburg in a seventeen minute orgy of fiery destruction, losing six Lancasters in the process. RF176 failed to return to Skellingthorpe, and the crew of F/L Gryniewicz was duly posted missing. It was later learned that the Lancaster had crashed in Germany, and that there had been no survivors. The squadron's final losses of this penultimate month in the bombing war came at Böhlen on the 20/21st, when F/O Ainsworth's NG386 was lost without trace, and RA560 crashed in Germany, killing F/O Swales and his entire crew. The operation at least was highly successful, and ended all production at the oil plant. The Deutsche Erdölwerke refinery at Hamburg received similar treatment on the 21/22nd, and also produced no further oil for the German war effort. A hundred Lancasters from the Group targeted bridges at Bremen and Bad Oeynhausen on the 23rd, and carried out the last of five raids on Wesel that night.

April brought an end to proceedings for the bomber squadrons, but there was still time for the defenders to claim more aircraft and crews. 5 Group's first operation was against what was believed to be a military barracks at Nordhausen on the 4th, following up a 1 Group raid on

the previous day. It was, in fact, a camp for forced workers at the underground secret weapons factory, and many casualties were inflicted on these friendly foreign nationals. An oil refinery at Molbis near Leipzig occupied an element from the Group on the 7/8th, and all production was halted. On the following night, a similar outcome attended an attack on the refinery at Lützkendorf, and the squadron's ME385 was one of six aircraft missing as a result. This Lancaster, captained by F/O MacFarlane, was shot down by flak in the target area, and crashed into a quarry, killing the pilot and four others, but one of the two survivors managed to evade capture. The squadron's final loss of the conflict came at Hamburg by daylight on the 9th, when a small 5 Group force attacked oil storage tanks, and two aircraft were lost, one of them RF121. This contained the crew of F/L Greenfield DFC, who was one of five killed, while the two survivors were taken prisoner. The next three operations involved the Group in long range attacks on railway targets at Pilsen on the 16/17th, Cham on the border with Czechoslovakia on the 17/18th and Komotau, actually in Czechoslovakia on the 18/19th, and all three were successfully undertaken. The squadron and the Group operated for the final time on the 25th, when participating in a raid with 1 and 8 Groups on the SS barracks at Hitler's Eaglesnest retreat at Berchtesgaden during the morning, and a 5 group attack that night against an oil refinery at Tonsberg in Norway.

Three 61 Squadron Lancasters achieved a century of operations, ED860 reaching the magic figure during an operation to Vitry-la-Francois on the 27/28.6.44 in the hands of F/L Turner and crew. She eventually completed 130 operations before coming to grief as mentioned earlier. EE176, "Mickey the Moocher", survived the war after completing 122 or 128 operations, and JB138 notched up a total of 113 or 123. The wartime record of 61 Squadron bears comparison with any in the Command. It operated throughout the war, and it was one of the mainstays of 5 Group and Bomber Command. Its achievements stand as a testimony to the courage, dedication and skill of its members, whether serving in the air or on the ground, and to the quality of those who had the honour to be its commanding officers.

STATIONS

HEMSWELL	08.03.37. to 17.07.41.
NORTH LUFFENHAM	17.07.41. to 16.10.41.
WOOLFOX LODGE	16.10.41. to 05.05.42.
SYERSTON	05.05.42. to 15.11.43.
St EVAL (Detachment)	16.07.42. to 22.08.42.
SKELLINGTHORPE	15.11.43. to 01.02.44.
CONINGSBY	01.02.44. to 15.04.44.
SKELLINGTHORPE	15.04.44. to 16.06.45.

COMMANDING OFFICERS.

SQUADRON LEADER C H BRILL	22.03.37. to 26.09.39
WING COMMANDER C M De CRESPIGNY	26.09.39. to 12.02.40.
WING COMMANDER F M DENNY	12.02.40. to 19.05.40.
WING COMMANDER G H SHEEN DSO	19.05.40. to 12.11.40.
WING COMMANDER G E VALENTINE DSO	12.11.40. to 03.09.41.
WING COMMANDER C T WEIR DFC	05.09.41. to 19.06.42.
WING COMMANDER C M COAD AFC	19.06.42. to 11.02.43.
WING COMMANDER W M PENMAN DFC AFC	11.02.43. to 04.10.43.
WING COMMANDER R N STIDOLPH DFC	04.10.43. to 22.04.44.
WING COMMANDER A W DOUBLEDAY DSO DFC	22.04.44. to 25.09.44.
WING COMMANDER W D PEXTON DFC AFC	25.09.44. to 23.02.45.
WING COMMANDER C W SCOTT AFC	23.02.45. to 12.06.45.

AIRCRAFT

HAMPDEN	02.39. to 10.41.
MANCHESTER	07.41. to 06.42.
LANCASTER I/III	06.42. to 05.46.
LANCASTER II	10.42. to 03.43.

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SECTION 2



OPERATIONAL RECORD

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OPERATIONAL RECORD

OPERATIONS	SORTIES	AIRCRAFT LOSSES	% LOSSES
704	6082	156	2.6

CATEGORY OF OPERATIONS

BOMBING	MINING	OTHER
613	85	6

HAMPDEN

OPERATIONS	SORTIES	AIRCRAFT LOSSES	% LOSSES
283	1339	28	2.1

CATEGORY OF OPERATIONS

BOMBING	MINING	OTHER
229	49	5

MANCHESTER

OPERATIONS	SORTIES	AIRCRAFT LOSSES	% LOSSES
44	197	12	6.1

CATEGORY OF OPERATIONS

BOMBING	MINING
33	11

LANCASTER

OPERATIONS	SORTIES	AIRCRAFT LOSSES	% LOSSES
377	4546	116	2.6

CATEGORY OF OPERATIONS

BOMBING	MINING	OTHER
351	25	1

TABLE OF STATISTICS

(heavy squadrons)

5th highest number of overall operations in Bomber Command.
11th highest number of sorties in Bomber Command.
19th equal (with 10Sqn) highest number of aircraft operational losses in Bomber Command.
2nd highest number of bombing operations in Bomber Command.
3rd highest number of overall Lancaster operations in Bomber Command.
5th highest number of Lancaster sorties in Bomber Command.
5th highest number of Lancaster operational losses in Bomber Command.

Out of 22 squadrons in 5 Group.

2nd highest number of overall operations in 5 Group.
4th highest number of sorties in 5 Group.
5th highest number of aircraft operational losses in 5 Group.

Out of 12 Hampden squadrons in 5 Group.

5th highest number of Hampden operations in 5 Group.
6th highest number of Hampden sorties in 5 Group.
8th highest number of Hampden operational losses in 5 Group.

Out of 8 Manchester squadrons in 5 Group.

2nd highest number of Manchester operations in 5 Group.
2nd highest number of Manchester sorties in 5 Group.
2nd highest number of Manchester operational losses in 5 Group.

Out of 17 Lancaster squadrons in 5 Group.

2nd highest number of Lancaster overall operations in 5 Group.
2nd highest number of Lancaster sorties in 5 Group.
3rd highest number of Lancaster operational losses in 5 Group.

SECTION 3



AIRCRAFT LISTING

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61 SQUADRON.

HAMPDEN. To October 1941.

L4103 To 106Sqn.
L4104 To 83Sqn.
L4105 To 16 OTU.
L4106 To 83Sqn.
L4108 To 144Sqn.
L4109 To 14 OTU.
L4110 To 14 OTU.
L4111 Crashed on approach to Digby on return from patrol 8.3.40.
L4112 FTR from mining sortie 27/28.6.40.
L4113 FTR from mining sortie 14/15.4.40.
L4115 To 44Sqn.
L4116 Crashed on landing at Hemswell while training 17.4.40.
L4117 To 14 OTU.
L4119 Crashed in Leicestershire on return from Aalborg 1.5.40
L4120 To 106Sqn.
L4146 QR-R From 76Sqn. FTR from rail targets in Germany 23/24.5.40.
P1170 Crashed on landing at Doncaster while training 14.10.39.
P1171 To 83Sqn.
P1253 From 106Sqn. Crashed in Suffolk on return from Cologne 2.3.41.
P1323 To 49Sqn.
P2082 FTR from mining sortie 5/6.11.40.
P2088 To 14 OTU.
P2089 Crash-landed in Dorset on return from Bordeaux 19/20.8.40.
P2090 QR-R FTR Kiel 26/27.9.40.
P2144 Force-landed on approach to Bircham Newton on return from Düsseldorf 3.6.41.
P4298 To 25 OTU.
P4324 QR-P FTR Merseburg 26/27.8.40.
P4335 FTR Salzbergen 12/13.8.40.
P4336 FTR from rail targets in the Ruhr 9/10.6.40.
P4337 To 5 OTU.
P4338 To 144Sqn.
P4339 QR-H Collided with Hampden L4138 (16 OTU) seconds after take-off from Cottesmore 13.6.40.
P4341 FTR Geestacht 29/30.6.40.
P4342 To 25 OTU.
P4343 FTR from mining sortie 20/21.7.40.
P4344 FTR from mining sortie 20/21.7.40.
P4346 FTR Schwerte 21/22.6.40.
P4349 Crash-landed in Norfolk on return from Hanover 7/8.6.40.

P4355 FTR from rail targets in Germany 20/21.6.40.
P4356 FTR Geestacht 29/30.6.40.
P4357 Ditched off Yorkshire coast during training 5.8.40.
P4358 FTR from mining sortie 20/21.7.40.
P4379 FTR Salzbergen 12/13.8.40.
P4390 FTR Dortmund-Ems Canal 7/8.7.40.
P4396 FTR Hamburg 13/14.11.40.
P4397 Damaged at Hemswell in collision with X2911 (61Sqn) during take-off for Calais 24.9.40.

P4398 To 83Sqn.
P4399 Crashed in Kent on return from Cologne 31.7.41.
P4400 To 25 OTU.
P4401 Converted for use as torpedo bomber.
P4405 Crashed in Norfolk on return from Wilhelmshaven 10.2.41.
P4418 To 14 OTU.
X2893 To A&AEE.
X2894 Crashed in Norfolk on return from Stettin 5/6.9.40.
X2906 To 25 OTU.
X2911 Collided with P4397 (61Sqn) on take-off from Hemswell en-route to Calais 24.9.40.

X2912 To 49Sqn.
X2920 Crashed in Yorkshire on return from mining sortie 5/6.10.40.
X2922 FTR Boulogne 13/14.9.40.
X2967 FTR Berlin 14/15.11.40.
X2971 FTR Kiel 25/26.10.40.
X2975 FTR Düsseldorf 8/9.12.40.
X2979 Crashed in Norfolk on return from Merseburg 17.10.40.
X2980 To 16 OTU.
X2981 Exploded in the air during trials of Imp Mine 20.12.40.
X2987 Crashed while landing at Hemswell on return from Duisburg 22.11.40.
X2989 To 408Sqn.
X3005 Abandoned over Yorkshire on return from Kiel 24.3.41.
X3006 Crashed on take-off from Hemswell en-route to Hamburg 14.11.40.
X3058 To 106Sqn.
X3064 Crashed in Lincolnshire on return from Kiel 26.11.40.
X3120 FTR Düsseldorf 2/3.6.41.
X3126 Crashed on approach to Hemswell on return from abortive operation to Bremen 3.1.41.

X3127 FTR Kiel 8/9.8.41.
X3128 FTR Mannheim 16/17.12.40.
X3138 To 5 AOS.
X3140 To 408Sqn.
X3147 Crashed in Norfolk on return from Cologne 2.3.41.
AD723 Crashed in Lincolnshire on return from Cologne 2.3.41.
AD725 Crashed on landing at Hemswell during training 1.2.41.

AD727 From 44Sqn. FTR from mining sortie 11/12.6.41.
AD732 FTR Cherbourg 18.4.41.
AD752 To 144Sqn.
AD754 From 144Sqn. To 408Sqn.
AD804 To 144Sqn.
AD806 FTR Osnabrück 5/6.7.41.
AD825 Abandoned near Swindon on return from Brest 18.4.41.
AD826 To 455Sqn.
AD827 FTR Kiel 8/9.4.41.
AD868 To 44Sqn.
AD937 FTR Mönchengladbach 7/8.7.41.
AD963 To 408Sqn.
AD974 To 49Sqn.
AE135 To 455Sqn.
AE186 From 207Sqn. To 44Sqn.
AE189 QR-G FTR Kiel 24/25.7.41.
AE200 To 144Sqn.
AE202 To 44Sqn.
AE219 From 207Sqn. To 408Sqn.
AE235 To 144Sqn.
AE247 From 207Sqn. FTR Frankfurt 29/30.8.41.
AE256 To 455Sqn.
AE259 Crashed in Lincolnshire on return from Kiel 9.8.41.
AE263 FTR Kiel 8/9.8.41.
AE266 Crashed on landing at Upwood on return from Cologne 31.7.41.
AE286 To 408Sqn.
AE288 To 408Sqn.
AE289 To 408Sqn.
AE290 To 44Sqn.
AE308 To 455Sqn.
AE352 To 455Sqn.

MANCHESTER. From June 1941 to June 1942.

L7276 From A&AEE. No operations. To 25 OTU.
L7284 From 207Sqn. No operations. To 39MU.
L7288 From 97Sqn. No operations. To 1654CU.
L7292 From 97Sqn. No operations. To TDU.
L7293 From 49Sqn. To 207Sqn.
L7304 From 207Sqn. FTR Kiel 26/27.6.41.
L7307 No operations. To 97Sqn.
L7315 From 97Sqn. Crashed in Lincolnshire while training 29.6.41.
L7388 FTR Berlin 2/3.9.41.
L7395 Abandoned near Wittering following abortive sortie to Cologne 13/14.3.42.

L7396 FTR Brest 31.1/1.2.42.
L7401 From 44Sqn. To 50Sqn.
L7415 From 44Sqn. To 50Sqn.
L7419 From 207Sqn. To 50Sqn.
L7422 From 207Sqn. Ultimate fate unknown.
L7425 From 44Sqn. To 1661CU.
L7426 To 83Sqn.
L7433 FTR from mining sortie 16/17.2.42.
L7453 From 44Sqn. To 49Sqn.
L7454 From 207Sqn. FTR from mining sortie 29/30.3.42
L7458 QR-A To 1660CU.
L7464 To 50Sqn.
L7470 FTR Essen 6/7.4.42.
L7471 To 50Sqn.
L7472 FTR Brest 31.1/1.2.42.
L7473 From 97Sqn. To 1485 Flt.
L7475 QR-D From 97Sqn. To 50Sqn.
L7477 QR-N From 44Sqn. To 1661CU.
L7486 From 207Sqn. Returned to 207Sqn.
L7494 FTR Boulogne 7/8.12.41.
L7495 Abandoned over Lincolnshire on return from Hamburg 16.1.42.
L7496 To 207Sqn.
L7497 FTR Essen 25/26.3.42.
L7516 QR-F To 50Sqn.
L7518 QR-O FTR Essen 25/26.3.42.
L7519 To 50Sqn.
L7520 No operations. Crashed in Bedfordshire during training 2.11.41.
L7521 To 50Sqn.
R5784 To 50Sqn.
R5785 QR-M FTR Le Havre 10/11.4.42.
R5786 To 50Sqn.
R5787 QR-M FTR Brest 31.1/1.2.42.
R5789 Crashed in Wiltshire following aborted sortie to Cherbourg 9.1.42.
R5796 To 207Sqn.
R5832 To 1660CU.
R5834 Force-landed in Norfolk on return from Brest 10.2.42.

LANCASTER. From April 1942.

L7532 From 97CF. To 50Sqn via 61CF.
L7539 From 44Sqn. Training only. To 50CF.
L7571 QR-S From 97Sqn. To 207Sqn.
R5488 QR-F From 97Sqn. FTR from mining sortie 3/4.7.42.
R5491 From 44Sqn. To 1656CU via 61CF.
R5505 From 207Sqn. Training only. To ECFS.

R5511 Completed 21 operations. To 1654CU.
R5517 FTR Emden 22/23.6.42.
R5540 To 1661CU via 44CF.
R5541 From 207Sqn. To 97Sqn.
R5543 FTR from Atlantic Patrol 20.8.42.
R5544 FTR Essen 1/2.6.42.
R5545 No operations. Crashed while landing at North Luffenham during training 1.5.42.
R5560 To 1654CU.
R5561 FTR Cologne 30/31.5.42. (Operation Millennium).
R5562 FTR Essen 2/3.6.42.
R5563 FTR from attack on SS Corunna off the Spanish coast 19.8.42.
R5565 QR-S From 83Sqn via NTU. FTR Magdeburg 21/22.1.44.
R5605 FTR from attack on SS Corunna off the Spanish coast 19.8.42.
R5613 QR-B FTR Essen 2/3.6.42.
R5615 QR-H FTR Bremen 27/28.6.42.
R5618 QR-H To 1654CU.
R5627 FTR Bremen 3/4.6.42.
R5660 From A&AEE. To 1654CU via 50CF.
R5661 FTR from attack on SS Corunna off the Spanish coast 19.8.42.
R5662 QR-A FTR Frankfurt 24/25.8.42.
R5663 QR-B FTR from mining sortie 3/4.7.42.
R5679 QR-O FTR from mining sortie 24/25.9.42.
R5682 QR-R FTR Bremen 4/5.9.42.
R5699 QR-H Completed 34 operations. Crashed while landing at Syerston following early return from Munich 21.12.42.
R5703 QR-D Crashed soon after take-off from Syerston through dinghy inflating when bound for Wismar 1.10.42.
R5724 QR-F Crash-landed at Wittering on return from mining sortie 25.9.42.
R5734 QR-V From 1654CU. FTR Nuremberg 30/31.3.44.
R5737 FTR Saarbrücken 29/30.7.42.
R5742 From 106Sqn. FTR Nuremberg 28/29.8.42.
R5757 From 156Sqn. To 1661CU.
R5759 FTR Wismar 1/2.10.42.
R5842 From A.V.Roe. To 44Sqn 3.42.
R5843 To 1654CU via 50CF.
R5844 To 106Sqn via 50CF.
R5845 To 1660CU via 97CF.
R5846 To 44Sqn.
R5853 From 97Sqn. To 576Sqn via 1660CU.
R5856 QR-Q/U From 83Sqn via 1660CU. FTR St Leu d'Esserent 7/8.7.44.
R5859 QR-G To 61CF. Crash-landed on approach to Bodney on return from Mannheim 7.12.42.
R5864 QR-X From 106Sqn and back. Returned to 61Sqn. Destroyed at Syerston when bomb load detonated 8.12.42.

R5866 To 1654CU.
R5888 FTR Düsseldorf 10/11.9.42.
R5910 From 106Sqn. Returned to 106Sqn.
W4111 FTR Düsseldorf 10/11.9.42.
W4136 From 44CF. FTR Karlsruhe 2/3.9.42.
W4166 FTR Munich 19/20.9.42.
W4168 Completed 21 operations. Crashed on landing at Swinderby on return from Turin 10.12.42.
W4173 FTR Essen 16/17.9.42.
W4192 QR-E FTR Essen 12/13.1.43.
W4198 QR-L/H FTR Berlin 26/27.11.43.
W4233 Crashed in Yorkshire on return from Kiel 14.10.42.
W4236 QR-K FTR Mannheim 9/10.8.43.
W4244 QR-F Crashed on approach to Exeter on return from mining sortie 10/11.11.42.
W4257 FTR St Nazaire 2/3.4.43.
W4269 QR-G FTR Duisburg 12/13.5.43.
W4270 Crashed in Bottesford circuit while training 18.2.43.
W4272 Conversion Flt only. To 15Sqn via 1654CU.
W4279 QR-S/Z FTR Kassel 3/4.10.43.
W4301 To 460Sqn.
W4315 QR-Q From 50Sqn. Ditched on return from Berlin 27/28.1.44.
W4317 QR-R FTR Pilsen 16/17.4.43.
W4357 QR-A FTR Kassel 22/23.10.43.
W4381 From 106Sqn. To 1661CU.
W4762 To 50Sqn.
W4763 To 106Sqn.
W4766 QR-J From 57Sqn. FTR Peenemünde 17/18.8.43.
W4767 QR-J FTR Berlin 17/18.1.43.
W4769 QR-V Completed 18 operations. FTR Essen 3/4.1.43.
W4774 FTR Montchanin 17.10.42.
W4789 From 12Sqn. FTR Cologne 16/17.6.43.
W4795 From 207Sqn. FTR Stettin 20/21.4.43.
W4798 From 207Sqn. Ultimate fate unclear in records.
W4830 QR-E Abandoned over Lincolnshire on return from Gelsenkirchen 26.6.43.
W4884 From 5LFS.
W4898 FTR from mining sortie 28/29.4.43.
W4899 To 1668CU.
W4900 QR-Q To 1669CU.
W4903 QR-P FTR Nuremberg 8/9.3.43.
W4920 QR-O FTR Berlin 1/2.3.43.
W4929 To 617Sqn.
W4934 QR-S FTR Peenemünde 17/18.8.43.
W4950 QR-L From 156Sqn. To 6LFS.
W4957 From 83Sqn via NTU. To 46MU.

W5000 QR-B FTR Hamburg 2/3.8.43.
W5002 QR-L FTR Milan 15/16.8.43.
DS603 No operations. To 115Sqn.
DS604 QR-W No operations. To 115Sqn.
DS605 QR-X No operations. To 115Sqn.
DS607 QR-N To 115Sqn.
DS608 QR-O To 115Sqn.
DS609 QR-R To 115Sqn.
DS610 QR-S To 115Sqn.
DS612 To 115Sqn.
DS613 To 115Sqn.
DS621 To 115Sqn.
DV186 FTR Milan 15/16.8.43.
DV228 FTR Leverkusen 22/23.8.43.
DV232 QR-K Crashed near Nottingham on return from Mannheim 6.9.43.
DV239 QR-V FTR Hanover 8/9.10.43.
DV294 QR-K FTR Augsburg 25/26.2.44.
DV297 QR-O From 106Sqn. FTR Berlin 26/27.11.43.
DV304 QR-V From 101Sqn. FTR Revigny 18/19.7.44.
DV311 QR-P FTR Nuremberg 30/31.3.44.
DV312 QR-Z To 207Sqn.
DV339 QR-W From 106Sqn. FTR Berlin 26/27.11.43.
DV344 QR-Z/V From 106Sqn. FTR Berlin 1/2.1.44.
DV397 QR-N/W FTR Berlin 24/25.3.44.
DV399 QR-R FTR Berlin 29/30.12.43.
DV400 QR-Y FTR Berlin 27/28.1.44.
DV401 QR-Z FTR Berlin 2/3.1.44.
ED314 QR-Y From 44Sqn. FTR Hanover 27/28.9.43.
ED332 QR-D FTR Berlin 16/17.1.43.
ED359 QR-F FTR Lorient 7/8.2.43.
ED470 QR-W From 50Sqn. FTR Münster 24.9.44.
ED613 FTR Essen 25/26.7.43.
ED630 QR-C- FTR Kassel 22/23.10.43.
ED661 From Vickers Armstrong. FTR Peenemünde 17/18.8.43.
ED703 FTR Munich 9/10.3.43.
ED717 QR-S Ditched off Isles of Scilly on return from La Spezia 14.4.43.
ED718 QR-P FTR Munich 2/3.10.43.
ED722 QR-B FTR Milan 15/16.8.43.
ED782 FTR Hamburg 29/30.7.43.
ED826 From 1654CU. To 15Sqn via 1654CU.
ED860 QR-N From 156Sqn. Crashed on take-off from Skellingthorpe when bound for Cologne 28.10.44.
EE176 QR-M From 97Sqn. To 1653CU. Completed 122 operations
EE186 QR-D From 106Sqn. FTR St Leu d'Esserent 4/5.7.44.
EE190 QR-M Crash-landed in North Africa following a raid on Italy 16.7.43.

HK538 QR-F FTR Leipzig 19/20.2.44.
JA695 QR-W From 57Sqn via 5MU. FTR Aachen 11/12.4.44.
JA872 QR-K From 630Sqn. To 46MU.
JA873 FTR Hamburg 2/3.8.43.
JA874 QR-E To 617Sqn.
JA900 FTR Peenemünde 17/18.8.43.
JB116 QR-R To 9Sqn.
JB129 QR-G FTR Berlin 24/25.3.44.
JB132 Crashed in Nottinghamshire after collision with Lancaster R5698 (1654CU) on return from Berlin 1.9.43.
JB137 To 5LFS.
JB138 QR-J Completed 113 operations. To 5LFS.
JB351 From 83Sqn. Damaged beyond repair during operation to Scholven 22.6.44.
JB532 QR-A To 630Sqn.
JB534 To 106Sqn.
JB546 To 57Sqn.
JB561 To 630Sqn.
JB565 To 57Sqn.
JB597 To 630Sqn.
LL775 QR-O FTR Augsburg 25/26.2.44.
LL777 QR-S Crash-landed in Belgium on return from Giessen 6/7.12.44.
LL843 From 467Sqn. To 1659CU.
LL911 QR-X FTR Pölitz (99th operation) 8/9.2.45.
LL918 From 460Sqn.
LM274 QR-F Completed 69 operations.
LM310 QR-E From 106Sqn. FTR Schweinfurt 24/25.2.44.
LM339 FTR Milan 7/8.8.43.
LM359 QR-B FTR Munich 24/25.4.44.
LM360 QR-O Aircraft in which Bill Reid won a VC during an operation to Düsseldorf 3/4.11.43. To 50Sqn.
LM377 QR-F From 106Sqn. FTR Berlin 1/2.1.44.
LM452 QR-T FTR Stuttgart 28/29.7.44.
LM454 QR-Z FTR Bourg Leopold 11/12.5.44.
LM476 QR-E FTR Brunswick 22/23.4.44.
LM478 Crashed on landing at Skellingthorpe on return from Bourg-Leopold 12.5.44.
LM481 To 1653CU.
LM483 QR-Y SOC 17.3.45.
LM518 QR-C FTR Prouville 24/25.6.44.
LM590 To 1669CU 12.44.
LM718 QR-K FTR Dortmund Ems Canal at Ladbergen 23/24.9.44.
LM720 Crashed in Norfolk on return from Leuna 14/15.1.45.
LM729 QR-V FTR Munich 17/18.12.44.

ME373
ME385 QR-O FTR Lützkendorf 8/9.4.45.
ME430
ME439
ME443 QR-N FTR Pölitze 8/9.2.45.
ME474 QR-V FTR Harburg 7/8.3.45.
ME481
ME493
ME591 QR-C FTR Leipzig 19/20.2.44.
ME595 QR-R/Y FTR Brunswick 14/15.10.44.
ME596 QR-H FTR Rüsselsheim 12/13.8.44.
ME719 To 1661CU.
ME725 QR-G FTR Giessen 6/7.12.44.
ME732 QR-P FTR Dortmund Ems Canal at Ladbergen 23/24.9.44.
ME783 QR-E FTR Chatellerault 15/16.6.44.
ND509 From 57Sqn.
ND727 QR-C FTR Frankfurt 18/19.3.44.
ND865 From 83Sqn. To 5LFS.
ND867 QR-V FTR St Leu d'Esserent 7/8.7.44.
ND896 To 5LFS.
ND902 QR-R Damaged beyond repair during operation to Bergen 28/29.10.44.
ND987 QR-B FTR Prouville 24/25.6.44.
ND988 QR-E FTR Dortmund Ems Canal at Ladbergen 23/24.9.44.
NF912 Crashed at Skellingthorpe soon after take-off for Siegen 1.2.45.
NF914 QR-T FTR Calais 24.9.44.
NF988 QR-T FTR Harburg 7/8.3.45.
NF997
NG178
NG179 QR-C FTR Trondheim 22/23.11.44.
NG182 QR-K FTR Harburg 7/8.3.45.
NG220
NG231
NG241 QR-Y FTR Karlsruhe 2/3.2.45.
NG367
NG380
NG386 QR-P From 1669CU. FTR Böhlen 20/21.3.45.
NG490
PA162 QR-L FTR Trossy-St-Maximin 3.8.44.
PA165 QR-V FTR Houffalize 5/6.1.45.
PA329 QR-R
PA998 QR-O FTR Darmstadt 27/28.8.44.
PB342 QR-B To 617Sqn.
PB434 QR-R Crashed on landing at Skellingthorpe on return from the Mittelland Canal at Gravenhorst 6/7.11.44.
PB436 QR-D FTR Königsburg 29/30.8.44.

PB596 From 9Sqn.
PB649 To 227Sqn.
PB666 To 227Sqn.
PB725 QR-E FTR Mittelland Canal at Gravenhorst 6/7.11.44.
PB727
PB737 QR-E FTR Pölitz 8/9.2.45.
PB759 QR-N FTR Pölitz 8/9.2.45.
PD199 QR-C FTR Düsseldorf 2/3.11.44.
PD266
RA560 QR-K FTR Böhlen. 20/21.3.45.
RA561
RA593
RF121 QR-J FTR Hamburg 9.4.45.
RF123
RF137 QR-E Blew up on the ground at Skellingthorpe 24.2.45.
RF160
RF176 QR-T FTR Würzburg 16/17.3.45.
RF201 QR-C
SW277 From 9Sqn. Destroyed when RF137 blew up at Skellingthorpe 24.2.45.

HEAVIEST SINGLE LOSS

17/18.08.43. Peenemünde. 4 Lancasters FTR.

SECTION 4



KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

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KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

A&AEE	Aeroplane and Armaments Experimental Establishment.
AA	Anti-Aircraft fire.
AACU	Anti-Aircraft Cooperation Unit.
AAS	Air Armament School.
AASF	Advance Air Striking Force.
AAU	Aircraft Assembly Unit.
ACM	Air Chief Marshal.
ACSEA	Air Command South-East Asia.
AFDU	Air Fighting Development Unit.
AFEE	Airborne Forces Experimental Unit.
AFTDU	Airborne Forces Tactical Development Unit.
AGS	Air Gunners School.
AMDP	Air Members for Development and Production.
AOC	Air Officer Commanding.
AOS	Air Observers School.
ASRTU	Air-Sea Rescue Training Unit.
ATTDU	Air Transport Tactical Development Unit.
AVM	Air Vice-Marshal.
BAT	Beam Approach Training.
BCBS	Bomber Command Bombing School.
BCDU	Bomber Command Development Unit.
BCFU	Bomber Command Film Unit.
BCIS	Bomber Command Instructors School.
BDU	Bombing Development Unit.
BSTU	Bomber Support Training Unit.
CF	Conversion Flight.
CFS	Central Flying School.
CGS	Central Gunnery School.
C-in-C	Commander in Chief.
CNS	Central Navigation School.
CO	Commanding Officer.
CRD	Controller of Research and Development.
CU	Conversion Unit.
DGRD	Director General for Research and Development.
EAAS	Empire Air Armament School.
EANS	Empire Air Navigation School.
ECDU	Electronic Countermeasures Development Unit.
ECFS	Empire Central Flying School.
ETPS	Empire Test Pilots School.

F/L	Flight Lieutenant.
Flt	Flight.
F/O	Flying Officer.
FPP	Ferry Pilots School.
F/S	Flight Sergeant.
FTR	Failed to Return.
FTU	Ferry Training Unit.
G/C	Group Captain.
Gp	Group.
HCU	Heavy Conversion Unit.
HGCU	Heavy Glider Conversion Unit.
LFS	Lancaster Finishing School.
MAC	Mediterranean Air Command.
MTU	Mosquito Training Unit.
MU	Maintenance Unit.
NTU	Navigation Training Unit.
OADU	Overseas Aircraft Delivery Unit.
OAPU	Overseas Aircraft Preparation Unit.
OTU	Operational Training Unit.
P/O	Pilot Officer.
PTS	Parachute Training School.
RAE	Royal Aircraft Establishment.
SGR	School of General Reconnaissance.
Sgt	Sergeant.
SHAEF	Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force.
SIU	Signals Intelligence Unit.
SOC	Struck off Charge.
SOE	Special Operations Executive.
Sqn	Squadron.
TF	Training Flight.
TFU	Telecommunications Flying Unit.
W/C	Wing Commander.
Wg	Wing.
WIDU	Wireless Intelligence Development Unit.
W/O	Warrant Officer.



SECTION 5



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www.bombardiercommandmuseumarchives.ca

www.bombercommandmuseumarchives.ca

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