

**ROYAL AIR FORCE
BOMBER COMMAND**

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**SQUADRON PROFILES
NUMBER 121**



625 SQUADRON

We Avenge

**RESEARCHED, COMPILED AND WRITTEN
BY
CHRIS WARD**

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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 However, where there is a blank space following the serial number of a type which has been withdrawn from service with Bomber Command, it signifies that I don't know its ultimate fate.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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625 SQUADRON

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Code **CF**

Formed on the 1st of October 1943 at Waltham, Grimsby, 625 Squadron was the offspring of 100 Squadron, which remarkably would spurn another new unit, 550 Squadron, within a month. On each occasion, 100 Squadron's C Flight was hived off to provide aircraft and crews to form the nucleus of the new squadrons. On the 13th, the crews flew into Kelstern to take up residence at this new station and prepare for operations. Like its parent unit, 625 Squadron was part of 1 Group, and was formed under the command of W/C T Preston DFC. It thus became the 27th operational unit to receive the Lancaster, and JB122 was the first example of the type to be taken on charge.

For those freshman crews, who were joining the squadron during the early weeks of its career, and were about to embark on their first tour of operations, it was perhaps not the most opportune time to be doing so. The Command was about to enter its most critical period, and a few weeks hence, would resume the battle against Germany's capital city, a campaign which was to drag on until the end of March, and come closest of all to inflicting a defeat on ACM Sir Arthur Harris. The characteristics of the winter offensive were unique, and would test the courage and resolve of the crews to the absolute limit. On the credit side, the Command had a largely successful year to date behind it, the only exception coming at the end of August and early September, when Harris launched three operations against Berlin, in what would appear to be the opening phase of the campaign. Only the first could be considered genuinely effective, and the 2,600 buildings destroyed or seriously damaged did represent the best result yet at the Capital. However, a new record loss of fifty six aircraft had been sustained, and many bomb loads were wasted on outlying communities. A further forty seven aircraft failed to return from the second raid on the last night of the month, and twenty two from the all Lancaster force on the 3/4th of September.

The year's opening offensive against the Ruhr, which began in early March, represented the first for which the Command was adequately equipped and prepared. Not only were the majority of the squadrons by then operating four-engined types, but the Oboe navigation and blind bombing device was available to negate the blanket of industrial haze, which hung persistently over the entire region, shielding it from the eyes of the navigators and bomb-aimers. Mosquito-borne Oboe had been pioneered by 109 Squadron under its commanding officer, W/C Hal Bufton, after it became a founder member of the Pathfinder Force in August 1942. The remainder of the year had been spent marrying it to the Mosquito, instead of the originally intended pressurized Mk IV Wellington, and the first Oboe-aimed bombs were delivered on a power station at Lutterade in Holland as a calibration exercise a few days before Christmas. The development programme continued into the New Year, with seven small-scale raids on Essen and one on Duisburg during the first two weeks of January, and most of the problems had been ironed out in time for the Ruhr. At the end of January, Stirlings and Halifaxes of 7 and 35 Squadrons carried the H2s navigation and blind bombing device ahead of the main force for the first time, for a raid on Hamburg. It was not an entirely successful debut, but in time, it would prove its worth at targets beyond the range of Oboe,

even though it could only ever be as good as its operators, who often found it difficult to interpret accurately what they saw on their cathode-ray tubes. Because of this, H2s would never be as reliable as Oboe. Oboe's performance during the Ruhr campaign had been decisive, and the formerly elusive cities of Essen and Duisburg had succumbed to massively destructive raids, as had the likes of Düsseldorf, Dortmund, Bochum, Wuppertal, Oberhausen, Krefeld and Mülheim. Three raids on Cologne between the 28/29th of June and the 8/9th of July reduced eleven thousand of its buildings to rubble, and killed over five thousand people. During the last week of July, Operation Gomorrah was unleashed on Hamburg, and the second raid, on the 27/28th, resulted in history's first recorded firestorm, in which forty thousand people died in one night alone. This series of operations saw the introduction of Window, the tinfoil-backed strips of paper designed to blind the enemy's nightfighter, searchlight and gun-laying radar, by swamping it with false returns. The device had actually been available for a year, but its use had been vetoed, in case the enemy copied it. The enemy, as it turned out, had already devised its own version under the code name Düppel, and had also withheld its use for the same reason.

The advent of the Master of Ceremonies, or Master Bomber, to oversee and control operations, as pioneered by Gibson at the Dams, added another new dimension, and all these developments were coming together at this time in the Command's gradual evolution towards becoming a war-winning weapon. The Command helped to knock Italy out of the war by bombing its major cities during the second week of August, and then carried out one of its most important raids to date. This was against the rocket research and development establishment at Peenemünde, on an island on the Baltic coast, on the 17/18th. The operation caused sufficient damage to set back the development of the V-2 by a number of weeks, and was another demonstration of the burgeoning effectiveness of the Command. After the already mentioned disappointing attempts on Berlin, September brought two highly destructive attacks on the twin cities of Mannheim and Ludwigshafen, astride the Rhine in southern Germany, on the 5/6th and 23/24th, and two expensive failures at Hanover on the 22/23rd and 27/28th. These were the first two in a four raid series spanning a four week period, the last of which would bring the operational debut of 625 Squadron. In-between the formation of the squadron and this first operation, the Command raided Munich with a force of almost three hundred aircraft of 1, 5 and 8 Groups on the 2/3rd, gaining partial success, and delivered a moderately successful attack on Kassel on the following night. The third raid on consecutive nights fell on Frankfurt on the 4/5th, and it left the eastern districts under a sea of flames, and also damaged public buildings in the centre. Stuttgart was subjected to a scattered but reasonably effective assault on the 7/8th, the night on which 101 Squadron's radio jamming ABC Lancasters joined the main force for the first time in numbers, and the third of the series of raids on Hanover followed on the 8/9th. In contrast to the two September attacks on this city, which had ended in failure, the Pathfinders were able to identify the centre, dropping their markers accurately for the main force to exploit, and severe damage was inflicted on all but western districts. Thereafter, nine nights elapsed without any major operations, until, on the 18/19th, an all Lancaster force was briefed for the final raid on Hanover. This night would mark 625 Squadron's entry into the war, and although the majority of its armourers had never before worked on Lancasters, nine aircraft were bombed up and made ready to take part. The participating crews were those who came with experience from

100 Squadron, hence the rapid progression from formation to operational status. Always a difficult target to pinpoint, this night found Hanover under cloud, and most of the bombing fell outside the target area into open country to the north and north-west of the city. Eighteen of the 360 Lancasters involved failed to return, but 625 Squadron came through its baptism unscathed. The inevitable first loss was not long in coming, however, and when 1, 5, 6 and 8 Groups sent 350 Lancasters to carry out the first major assault of the war on Leipzig on the 20/21st, sixteen were shot down. This was in return for an unsuccessful raid, caused largely by the appalling weather conditions encountered over Germany. Among the missing aircraft was JA714, one of the Lancasters transferred from 100 Squadron, and this was hit by flak over the Dutch coast on the way home, before crashing into the sea off the island of Texel, with no survivors from the crew of P/O Cameron. The last major operation of the month took a force of over five hundred aircraft back to Kassel on the 22/23rd, when accurate Pathfinder marking led to a devastating raid and a firestorm. Although this was not as extensive as that visited upon Hamburg in late July, it, never-the-less, killed in excess of six thousand people. The catalogue of damage included almost twenty seven thousand separate dwelling units in over four thousand apartment blocks, and a similar number suffered damage to a varying degree. In excess of 100,000 people lost their homes, and hundreds of industrial and public buildings were also destroyed or badly damaged.

Following ten days of inactivity, the main force was airborne once more on the 3/4th of November, with Düsseldorf in the bomb sights of over five hundred aircraft. Much damage was inflicted upon the residential and industrial districts in the centre and the south of the city, in return for which, eighteen aircraft were lost to the defences. Again 625 Squadron was represented among the missing, ED321 crashing in the target area, killing F/S Blackwood and his crew. Another lull in main force operations for most squadrons preceded the resumption of the Berlin campaign, which, as far as Harris was concerned, was the main business in hand. He had long believed that as the seat and the symbol of the Nazi power, its destruction would so affect the civilian population, that the grip of its leaders might be fatally weakened. Harris had stated in a minute to Churchill on the 3rd of November, that he could "wreck Berlin from end to end" if the Americans were to come in on it, and that it would cost between them four to five hundred aircraft, while costing Germany the war. He held firm to the pre-war theory, that a war could be won by bombing alone, and wished to avoid the kind of protracted and bloody land campaigns, which he had personally witness during the Great War. The Americans, however, were committed to a land invasion, and there was never a chance of enlisting their support. Undaunted, he would go alone, and prepared to set his foot on the long and rocky road to the Capital later in the month. The Ruhr campaign had been tough in the extreme, with frequent trips, often back-to-back, into the teeth of a determined and skillful defence. Losses had been grievously high, but the flights had at least taken place during reasonable weather conditions, and at medium range, when crews might expect to be airborne for five or six hours at a time. What lay before them now, however, was an interminable slog to distant parts of eastern and southern Germany on dark, dirty and intensely cold nights. This would require the crews to spend eight to ten hours in the air, often with a promise of inhospitable weather conditions as they returned tired and aching to home airspace.

It was on the night of the 18/19th that the battle was rejoined, when an all Lancaster force of over four hundred aircraft set off for the Capital in the late afternoon. At the Halifax, Stirling and some Pathfinder stations, meanwhile, 395 aircraft were taking off for a diversionary raid on the twin cities of Mannheim and Ludwigshafen. Berlin, as usual, was covered by a blanket of cloud, and the ensuing bombing was scattered across the city without any identifiable concentration. A modest 169 houses were destroyed, along with four industrial premises, although more than two dozen others sustained damage, and some loss of production. The Mannheim force also produced scattered bombing in the face of cloud, and it was the northern districts which received the majority of the bombs. Over three hundred buildings were destroyed, and the Daimler-Benz car factory suffered a 90% loss of production for a period. The diversion appeared also to be successful in keeping nightfighters away from the Berlin contingent, which registered the loss of a modest nine aircraft, but these had to be added to the twenty three missing from Mannheim, and it was, therefore, another expensive night. The largest force yet sent to Berlin, of 764 aircraft, took off for the Capital on the 22/23rd, timed to arrive overhead shortly before 20.00 hours. In the event, an unusually high number of early returns reduced those crews bombing as briefed to less than seven hundred. These, however, produced a raid of outstanding accuracy, despite the presence again of thick cloud, and massive destruction was inflicted upon central and western districts, where some fires reached almost firestorm proportions. Three thousand houses were destroyed along with numerous industrial buildings, and an equal number suffered damage. The death toll amounted to around two thousand people, and 175,000 others lost their homes for varying lengths of time. It was the most destructive raid of the war on the Capital, and cost an acceptable twenty six aircraft, among which were five Stirlings. This represented 10% of those despatched, and for a long time, it had been recognized, that the Stirling's casualty figures were disproportionately high. From this night on, the Stirling crews would no longer be required to operate over Germany, and would instead focus on mining, resistance work on behalf of the Special Operations Executive, and the bombing of selected targets in France. This effectively removed 3 Group from the order of battle, leaving only its Lancaster II equipped 115 and 514 Squadrons to represent it in the main offensive, until other squadrons could be converted.

On the following night, a predominately Lancaster force of 350 aircraft returned to the "Big City", and delivered another very effective blow, guided to the mark by the glow beneath the clouds of fires still burning from the previous night. A further two thousand houses were reduced to rubble, and around fifteen hundred people were killed, this in exchange for the loss of twenty Lancasters. It demonstrated, that in the absence of the less efficient types, Lancasters were equally vulnerable to the defences. After a three night rest, the Lancasters returned to Berlin, and despite inaccurate marking by the Pathfinders, many bomb loads fell, more by good fortune than judgement, into the industrial districts of Reinickendorf and Siemensstadt, where thirty eight war industry factories were destroyed, and many others sustained damage. Twenty eight aircraft failed to return, and 625 Squadron posted missing the crew of F/O McSorley in ED809, which was shot down by a nightfighter over Holland on the way home, and all on board were killed. It was on this night, that 625 Squadron's sister unit, 550 Squadron, went to war for the first time and registered its first casualty, one of the experienced crews posted in from 100 Squadron.

December opened as November had closed, with a predominately Lancaster force following the now well-trodden path to Berlin on the 2/3rd. Although some useful damage did result from this operation, the bombing was scattered and much of it was wasted in open country, something which would become a feature of the campaign from this point on. The disappointing outcome was compounded by the loss of forty aircraft, and although 625 Squadron was not represented in this figure, W4999 suffered a crash-landing at Kelstern on return and was wrecked, fortunately without injury to W/O Aslett and his crew. Leipzig broke the pattern of continuous Berlin operations on the 3/4th, and underwent its most destructive raid of the war, the attackers aided by a Mosquito diversion on Berlin, which drew away most of the nightfighters. Never-the-less, many bombers found themselves caught in the Frankfurt flak area on the way home, and in all, twenty four aircraft failed to return. 625 Squadron's DV392 exploded in mid air over Germany, throwing out S/L Moody and one of his crew, both of whom survived as guests of the Reich, while the rest of the crew perished.

No more main force operations were mounted until the night of the 16/17th, when Berlin was once more the objective, this time for an all Lancaster heavy force numbering, after the early returns, 450 aircraft. Housing was again the principal victim as bombs fell most heavily into central and eastern districts, but the defenders claimed twenty one of the attacking force, and four others were lost as the result of collisions. The major problems, however, were to be encountered by the crews on their return to home airspace, and this operation will forever be remembered for the thick blanket of fog which concealed the airfields in the 1, 6 and 8 Group regions. As the tired crews stumbled around in the murk, with insufficient fuel reserves to reach distant diversionary airfields, accidents were inevitable, and twenty nine Lancasters either crashed or were abandoned in the frantic search for somewhere to land after more than eight hours in the air. 625 Squadron suffered two casualties, the first of which, LM424, fell victim to the defences over Germany, and only the bomb-aimer survived from the crew of W/O Baker. The second involved ED951, which was being brought home by 2Lt Woolley of the USAAF and his crew. The Lancaster struck high ground at Gayton-le-Wold in Lincolnshire, killing the flight engineer and bomb-aimer, and injuring the pilot and the others on board.

In another break from Berlin, 650 aircraft set off for Frankfurt on the 20/21st, while a small 1 and 8 Group diversionary force headed for Mannheim. A decoy site lured away a proportion of the bombs at the main target, but the almost inevitable creep-back, which blighted many of the Command's raids, this time worked in its favour, and moderately heavy damage resulted. The cost, at forty one aircraft, was high, and it was the Halifax brigade which bore the brunt of the nightfighter activity on the way to the target. 625 Squadron negotiated this operation without loss, but not so the next one, which again found Berlin under the bombs of a predominately Lancaster heavy force on the 23/24th. Scattered marking resulted in a disappointing raid, which destroyed less than three hundred buildings, mostly in the south-eastern suburbs. Sixteen Lancasters failed to return, and among them was LM421, which crashed in Germany, killing Sgt Clark and his crew. This was the last 625 Squadron casualty of a year, which ended with another raid on the Capital on the 29/30th. This was the first of three trips to Berlin in the space of an unprecedented five nights spanning the turn of the year, and despite the commitment of over seven hundred aircraft, only a moderate degree of

damage was achieved for the loss of twenty Lancasters and Halifaxes. It had been a testing introduction to the squadron's operational career, but one through which it had come without disaster. Ahead lay a hectic and demanding 1944, a year which would see the Command win some notable victories from the spring onwards, but also suffer its worst defeats during the first quarter.

1944

Whatever discomforts were being endured by the crews of Bomber Command during this period, the inhabitants of Berlin were also experiencing their "winter of discontent". Like their counterparts in London during the blitz of 1940, they were a hardy breed, and they found comfort and resolve in their communal trials. Proud of their status as Berliners first, and Germans second, they would not buckle under the persistent onslaught against their beloved city, and they bore their trials with fortitude and humour. They taunted their tormentors by parading banners through the streets, defiantly proclaiming, "you may break our walls, but not our hearts", and they sang along to the strains of the song, *Nach jedem Dezember kommt immer ein Mai*, after every December comes always a May. This was played endlessly over the radio, and hinted at a change of fortunes with the arrival of spring. Both camps were doubtlessly hoping for a change of policy to emerge from Bomber Command HQ, which would leave the Capital in peace, but it was not to be, and it would be some time yet before the hopes of either side were fulfilled.

Harris allowed little time for revelry, and in fact, New Year's Day was not quite done when over four hundred Lancasters began taking off and headed eastwards towards Germany. They arrived over Berlin in the very early hours of the 2nd of January, and encountered complete cloud cover, which necessitated the use of skymarking. The southern parts of the city received a scattering of bombs, but much of the effort fell into wooded country to the south-west, and only twenty one houses and one industrial building were destroyed. Such poor results were not commensurate with the effort expended and the loss of twenty eight aircraft, in addition to which, the death toll among Bomber Command airmen was more than twice that in Berlin. A follow up twenty four hours later involved an all Lancaster main force, with a handful of 35 Squadron Halifaxes among the Pathfinder element. Sixty aircraft, a massive 15% of those despatched, returned early for various reasons, thus reflecting the crews' sentiments with regard to back-to-back sorties to Berlin. Another highly disappointing raid scattered bombs over all parts of Berlin, but only eighty two houses were destroyed in exchange for the loss of twenty seven Lancasters, most of which fell within the Berlin defence zone. This time, the crew casualties were four times greater than those on the ground, and the Pathfinder squadrons in particular were taking a beating. 625 Squadron managed to negotiate these operations without loss, and continued to do so at Stettin on the 5/6th, when this Baltic port suffered the destruction of over five hundred houses at the hands of a Lancaster main force, and eight ships were sunk in the harbour. It was odd, that most urban targets escaped lightly on occasions, but Stettin, for some reason, never did. Thereafter, the harsh winter conditions contributed to a welcome break from main force operations, and this kept the crews at home until mid month. When briefings eventually took place on the 14th, there must have been an element of relief, when the curtains over the wall maps were drawn aside, and the red tape

could be seen to terminate well short of the dark blotch which represented Berlin. It terminated, in fact, at Brunswick, an historical town in north-central Germany, in the same region as, and a little to the east of Hanover, which some crews may well have remembered for the costly and generally ineffective series of operations during the Autumn.

That night, a force of 496 Lancasters and two Halifaxes began their take-offs between 16.20 and 17.15 hours, and headed towards the enemy coast near Bremen. The German controllers were able to plot the progress of the bomber stream from early on, and nightfighters made contact as the frontier was crossed. The two forces remained in contact all the way to the target and back to the Dutch coast, and the nightfighters scored steadily throughout. The operation was a major disappointment, with only a few bombs falling within the intended target, while the remainder of the effort was wasted in open country and nearby communities. This failure was scant return for the loss of thirty eight Lancasters, more than 7% of those despatched, and the Pathfinders again suffered heavy casualties. The third raid of the year on Berlin, and the eleventh since the resumption of the campaign, took place on the 20/21st, and involved a force of over 760 aircraft. Those arriving over the Capital encountered complete cloud-cover, which prevented an assessment by the crews of the results of their work. It was later learned, that the main weight of bombs had fallen into the hitherto less severely afflicted eastern districts, and that it had been a moderately effective raid. However, over forty outlying communities also reported bombs, demonstrating that yet again, much of the effort had been wasted. Thirty five aircraft failed to return, and the Halifaxes once more represented the majority, by losing twenty two of their number. 625 Squadron continued to lead a charmed life, and came through this operation without loss.

On the following night, over six hundred aircraft were despatched to Magdeburg, and they were picked up by the nightfighters before even crossing the German coast, this despite a diversionary raid by a small force of 5 and 8 Group Lancasters on Berlin. A running battle ensued all the way to the target, which was hit by few of the bombs intended for it, and fifty seven empty dispersals on bomber stations next morning gave testament to the Command's fortunes. This was the Command's heaviest loss to date, and the Halifax casualties amounted to over 15%, on top of which, one further Lancaster was lost from the Berlin diversion. Another welcome rest preceded the next onslaught on Berlin at the end of the month, and it was on the 27th, that over five hundred Lancaster crews were briefed. This night's operation was to be the first of three to the Capital in the space of an unprecedented four nights, and as events turned out, it would be the last concerted effort by Harris to bring Berlin to its knees. On this night, over 7% of the crews returned early, not an inordinately high number for a Berlin operation, and the remainder were unable to assess the damage at the target because of complete cloud cover. In fact, the bombing had been scattered throughout the city, with greater emphasis in the southern districts, but over sixty communities outside Berlin again received bombs intended for the Capital. Damage was sufficient to render twenty thousand people homeless, and some important war industry factories suffered loss of production. Thirty three Lancasters failed to return, and having thus far negotiated the month without loss, while around them many squadrons were suffering grievously, 625 Squadron posted missing the crew of P/O Cook in ND461. Hit by flak in the Leipzig area, and severely damaged, the pilot kept the Lancaster airborne until running out of fuel over France, and five of the crew

were able to bale out to fall into enemy hands. Sadly, P/O Cook and his rear gunner were still on board when the aircraft crashed, and their bodies were found in the wreckage.

On the following night, 240 Halifaxes joined 430 Lancasters for another crack at the "Big City", and this time, sixty six crews, 10% of those despatched, returned early, many of them to face the wrath of their commanding officers for so doing. The nightfighter controller was not able to meet the incoming bomber stream, but concentrated his forces in the target area, where, for once, cloud cover was not total, and some ground marking was possible. Much of the bombing fell into southern and western districts, depriving around 180,000 people of their homes, and many public and administrative buildings also suffered damage. Again, though, over seventy outlying communities found themselves in the firing line, while the defenders enjoyed another successful night, claiming forty six bombers. Among them was 625 Squadron's DV364, which was lost without trace with the crew of the experienced F/L Spark DFC. After one night's rest Berlin was "on" again, when Lancasters made up the bulk of the five hundred strong force, after the Halifaxes had suffered a loss rate of over 10% during the previous raid, compared with 4.6% for the Lancasters. Many parts of the city were hit on this night, but the main weight of the attack fell on central and south-western districts, where fires raged out of control. A thousand people lost their lives on the ground, but thirty three bombers failed to return, and for the third operation running, 625 Squadron registered a missing crew. JB122 crashed in Germany, and took with it to their deaths the crew of F/S Gallop. There is no question that it had been a highly destructive series of raids, and that Berlin had taken a beating, but it had cost the Command 112 aircraft and crews. Despite all the effort, Berlin was still a functioning city, remaining the seat and symbol of government, and nowhere were there signs of imminent collapse.

Harris had intended to follow up these last three operations with another one early in February, but inhospitable weather conditions thwarted his plans, and kept the main force on the ground for the first two weeks. The break brought a much needed rest for the hard-pressed crews, and gave the squadrons an opportunity to replenish. Eighteen inches of snow fell onto Kelstern, and all personnel were kept busy in shifts for forty eight hours to clear the runways. It was not until the night of the 15/16th that the Command was next able to mount a major operation, for which Berlin was the target, for what would be the penultimate time during the campaign, and indeed the war as far as the heavy brigade was concerned. Records were smashed on this night, the total number of aircraft despatched, 891, representing the largest non-1000 force to a single target to date, and it was the first time that over five hundred Lancasters and over three hundred Halifaxes had operated together. The weight of bombs carried in the bomb bays was also unprecedented, although a proportion of that intended for the target was either jettisoned or brought home by the seventy five crews who returned early. Never-the-less, the 2640 tons which reached the Berlin area was still a record, and much of it was put to good use within the built-up area of the city. The presence of cloud doubtless contributed to the now familiar spraying of bombs into open country and surrounding hamlets, but central and south-western districts suffered extensive damage, and over a thousand fires were left burning as the bombers retreated towards the west. The target claimed its fourth squadron crew in succession, and it was just one of forty three failing to return home. The 625 Squadron casualty was the veteran Lancaster R5702, which had been

delivered to 50 Squadron in July 1942, and carried out numerous operations before being damaged by flak. Following repair, she spent time with 106, 460 and 100 Squadrons, before finally arriving at Kelstern. She was captained on her final operation by Sgt Ashurst, who was killed with five of his crew after they were shot down by a nightfighter over Denmark, and the single survivor, the bomb-aimer, fell into enemy hands.

A three night rest preceded the next operation, which was to Leipzig on the 19/20th. Over eight hundred aircraft took off into the night sky around midnight, and headed towards the greatest disaster to afflict the Command thus far in the war. A sizeable mining effort in Kiel Bay, and a diversionary raid on Berlin by Mosquitos, served only to attract a small proportion of the nightfighter force, and the remainder was waiting at the Dutch coast as the bomber stream crossed over. The two forces were in contact all the way to the target, which was reached early by some aircraft through stronger than forecast winds, and while they milled around awaiting the Pathfinders, twenty of them fell victim to the local flak batteries, and four others were lost through collisions. It was not possible to assess the results of the raid because of cloud, but it seems likely that most of the bombs landed in open country. What was not in doubt, however, was the size of the defeat to the Command, and when all the aircraft which were going to return home had done so, there was a shortfall of a massive seventy eight. The Halifax contingent suffered a 15% loss rate, and from this point on, the less efficient Mk II and V variants were withdrawn from operations over Germany, to join the similarly exempted Stirlings. 625 Squadron experienced its worst night since beginning operations, and posted missing three crews. JA862, a Lancaster on its twelfth trip to Berlin, was shot down by a nightfighter over Germany while outbound, killing five members of the crew of S/L Douetil. The pilot and navigator survived to fall into enemy hands, but sadly, the latter, F/S Price, was wounded in an RAF strafing attack while being force-marched in April 1945, and he lost his fight for life eleven days later. (Bomber Command Losses. Vol 5. W R Chorley.) LM384 also came down in Germany, with just the bomb-aimer surviving from the crew of F/S Pearson, and ME588 crashed in Belgium, with no survivors from the crew of the recently commissioned P/O Aspin.

Despite the prohibitive losses, almost six hundred aircraft took off on the following night, for the first of a series of three operations against Stuttgart over the next three weeks. In the face of complete cloud-cover, they produced a scattered but effective attack, in which considerable damage was inflicted on central and northern districts. The catalogue of damage included some cultural buildings and the important Bosch factory, and it was achieved for the remarkably low loss, in the light of recent experiences, of just nine aircraft. A new tactic was introduced for the next two operations, in an attempt to address the appalling losses of the winter campaign to date. It involved dividing the effort into two distinct phases separated by two hours, in the hope of catching the nightfighters on the ground refuelling and re-arming as the second wave passed through. It was tried first at Schweinfurt, the centre of German ball bearing production, on the 24/25th, when the phase one aircraft took off between 18.00 and 19.00 hours, and the second phase between 20.00 and 21.00 hours. The operation itself was not a success, largely through undershooting by the Pathfinder backers-up and the main force, but the second phase force lost 50% fewer aircraft than the first, in an overall casualty figure of thirty three aircraft. An attack on Augsburg followed twenty four hours later, and in

contrast, this was an outstanding success, and a frightening demonstration of what the Command could achieve when a raid proceeded according to plan. Over five hundred aircraft attacked this beautiful and historic southern city with great accuracy and concentration, and its central districts were torn out by raging fires, which destroyed for ever centuries of irreplaceable culture. Twenty one missing aircraft suggested that there might be some merit in splitting the force, although losses on southern targets tended to be lower than those to the Ruhr and eastern Germany, and it was a tactic which would find favour for the remainder of the war.

March's account opened with the second attack on Stuttgart on the 1/2nd, which again produced some concentrated and accurate bombing in the central, western and northern parts of the city, and was completed for the remarkably low loss of just four aircraft. 625 Squadron despatched ten Lancasters from Kelstern, and after one returned early, the remainder carried on to deliver their attacks as briefed, and came safely home. For most of the main force crews, the next two weeks brought a break from operations, while the Halifax squadrons, including those which had been withdrawn from operations over Germany, fired the opening salvoes of the pre-invasion offensive. Railway installations at Trappes and Le Mans were targeted on the 6/7th and 7/8th respectively, and similar objectives at Le Mans again, Amiens Laon, Aulnoye, Courtrai and Vaires would be attacked later in the month, with the Stirling brigade also participating on occasions. This campaign would gain momentum when the rest of the main force joined in at the conclusion of the winter campaign at the end of March. Mid month brought the final raid of the series against Stuttgart, for which over 860 aircraft took off on the 15/16th. 625 Squadron put up a creditable nineteen Lancasters for the operation, which, in contrast to the successful attack at the start of the month, deposited most of the bombs into open country, and only a few hit the city's central districts. There was also a marked difference in the number of missing aircraft, which amounted to thirty seven, most of them falling victim to the nightfighters, which arrived on the scene as the bomber stream neared the target. 625 Squadron posted missing two crews as a result of enemy action, those of F/S Gigger in W4833, and F/S Hodgkins in DV194. The former crashed into the sea off the French coast without survivors, and the latter exploded in the air after being attacked by a nightfighter over Germany, again with total loss of life. On return, F/S Bulger's ND637 collided with ED606 of 463 Squadron in the crowded skies near Lincoln, and both aircraft plunged to the ground, killing all on board.

Two very heavy blows fell on Frankfurt on the 18/19th and 22/23rd, both delivered by forces numbering around eight hundred aircraft. Over six thousand buildings were destroyed or severely damaged in the first raid alone, and this included some useful industrial scalps. Following the second assault, half of the city was left without gas, electricity and water for an extended period, and little remained in existence of the historical heritage of the ancient city. The two raids cost the Command a combined total of fifty five aircraft, an acceptable and sustainable figure in view of the level of success, and in the context of recent losses. 625 Squadron contributed seventeen Lancasters to each operation, and posted missing the crew of F/O MacMaster in ND596 from the first one. It was later learned that the Lancaster had crashed in southern Germany, and only the flight engineer had survived as a PoW. Two nights later came the final assault of the campaign on Berlin, and this would also be the last time

that the Command sent heavy bombers to the Capital. From this point on, it would be left to the Mosquitos of 8 Group's Light Night Striking Force to harass the citizens, and rob them of their sleep almost to the end of hostilities.

Over eight hundred aircraft began taking off around 18.30 hours, among them, sixteen from Kelstern, and they headed across the North Sea towards Denmark. The 625 Squadron crews were those of F/L Clark in ME684, F/L Ellis in LM427, P/O Beadle in W5009, P/O Blackmore in ND639, P/O Bradshaw in ND407, P/O Mims in ND742, P/O Pengilly in ME594, 1Lt Dowden of the USAAF in ED940, W/O Cosgrove in ED814, W/O Goldman in ND459, W/O Owen in ND641, W/O Price in ND619, F/S Burford in ED938, F/S Jamieson in ED317, F/S McGaw in ND636, and Sgt Marks in ME682. Once at cruising altitude, the crews encountered unusually strong winds from the north, which drove them continually south of their intended track, and broke the cohesion of the bomber stream. Inevitably, this effected the marking and bombing, and the markers were carried beyond the south-western extremities of the city. The creep-back from the resultant bombing hit that corner of the city, and produced sufficient damage to housing to render twenty thousand people homeless, but over 120 outlying communities were afflicted as the wastage of bombs continued. On the return journey, many aircraft were driven by the winds over heavily defended areas of the Reich, and of the seventy two missing aircraft, over two-thirds were claimed by the flak batteries. It was the squadron's worst experience at Berlin of the entire campaign, and there were three empty dispersals to contemplate at Kelstern in the cold light of the following morning. ED317 was shot down by a nightfighter shortly after leaving the target, and F/S Jamieson died with his entire crew. ME684 crashed on Dutch soil, but not before F/L Clark and his crew had managed to take to their parachutes, he and three others falling into enemy hands, while the remaining three ultimately evaded capture. ND641 was also shot down over Holland, and this time only the bomb-aimer from the crew of W/O Owen escaped with his life, and he too evaded capture. 625 Squadron had been present on all sixteen of the main operations to Berlin from the resumption of the campaign in November, and despatched 211 sorties for the loss of ten aircraft. (The Berlin Raids. Martin Middlebrook). Having been in Command of the squadron since its formation, W/C Preston was posted out on the 26th, to be replaced by the twenty eight year old W/C Haig.

Although the Battle of Berlin was now over, the winter campaign still had a week to run, and two more major operations for the crews to negotiate. The first of these was launched against Essen on the 26/27th, and involved over seven hundred aircraft, fourteen of which were from Kelstern. It was an outstanding success, which destroyed over seventeen hundred houses and apartment blocks, and seriously damaged forty eight industrial premises. Thus was continued the remarkable run of successes against this most important industrial city since the introduction of Oboe to main force operations a year earlier. The final operation of the long and bitter winter offensive was to take place at Nuremberg on the night of the 30/31st, and would be a standard maximum effort raid, employing 795 aircraft. It would depart from standard practice in just one respect, however, and this was to prove critical in the post raid analysis. In place of the usual feints, incorporated to confuse the enemy nightfighter controllers as to the precise identity of the target, a 5 Group inspired direct route was chosen. This proposed to take the bomber stream from Belgium across Germany, to a point about fifty

miles north of the target, from where the final run-in would begin. AVM Bennett, the Pathfinder AOC, blew a gasket, and protested vehemently about the route, but after a conference with all the Group commanders had shown those with Lancasters to be in favour of the original plan, he was overruled.

Most of the crews got away between 21.30 and 22.30, despite a question about the weather conditions, which had been thrown into doubt by a Mosquito "pampa" sortie. The Met Flight crew had suggested that the cloud conditions would not be as forecast, but the warning went unheeded. Once the crews had reached cruising altitude, they were struck by a number of almost freakish meteorological characteristics, firstly the uncommon brightness of the moonlight, and secondly, the rare crystal clarity of the visibility, which allowed them to observe the other aircraft in their part of the sky. The crews had been told to expect high cloud on the outward flight, which would give them protection, and clear skies over Nuremberg, but in the event, the cloud formed below the bombers to silhouette them like flies on a tablecloth. The jetstream wind, which had so adversely affected the Berlin raid a week earlier, was also present, although this time from the south, and it was equally effective in breaking the cohesion of the bomber stream. The final act in what appeared to be nature's conspiracy against the Command, was the formation of condensation trails to further advertise the bombers' presence. This cocktail of meteorological conditions and the disputed route conspired to hand the bomber force on a plate to the waiting nightfighters, which were patrolling their control beacons close to its path. They exploited their opportunity with a will from the moment they arrived in contact over Charleroi in Belgium, and they remained with the bomber stream all the way to the target. The route was marked out by the burning wreckage of RAF bombers on the ground, and over eighty fell on the outward flight alone, many to the German Aces who were using their "Schräge Musik" upward firing canons for the first time. Many crews, who were either unaware of the strength of the wind, or refused to believe the evidence, were driven by the wind up to fifty miles north of their intended track, and consequently turned towards Nuremberg from a false position. Over a hundred of these bombed Schweinfurt in error, which, together with the losses, drastically reduced the numbers bombing as briefed, and Nuremberg escaped serious damage.. A massive ninety five heavy bombers failed to return, and a further twenty or so were written off in crashes at home, or with battle damage too severe to repair. 625 Squadron sent thirteen Lancasters on the operation, twelve of which bombed and returned safely, but W5009 was one of the nightfighter victims while outbound, and flight commander S/L Nicholls and his crew were all killed.

As the Command drew breath during the first week of April, only 5 Group's heavy squadrons found employment, attacking an aircraft factory at Toulouse on the 5/6th. This apart, it was the Mosquitos of 8 Group which maintained a presence over Germany, while the on-going business of mining the sea lanes and supporting resistance organisations was conducted alongside. What lay before the crews now was in marked contrast to that which had been endured over the winter period. The new priority was the Transportation Plan, the systematic dismantling by bombing of the French and Belgian railway networks in preparation for the forthcoming invasion. Replacing the long slog to distant German targets on dark, often dirty nights, would be shorter range hops to the near Continent in improving weather conditions.

These operations, however, would prove to be almost equally as demanding in their way, and would require of the crews a greater commitment to accuracy in view of the risk to friendly civilians. The main fly in the ointment was a dictate from on high, which decreed that most such operations were worthy of counting as just one third of a sortie towards the completion of a tour. Until this flawed and despised policy was rescinded, an air of mutiny pervaded the bomber stations, although by then, it was already too late for some crews, who would have survived their tours under the old system. Despite the prohibitive losses over the winter, the Command was in remarkably fine fettle to meet its new challenge, and with his squadrons now almost completely equipped with Lancasters and the much improved Hercules powered Halifaxes, Harris was in an enviable position to achieve that which had eluded his predecessor. This was 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 Command as a whole, as dictated by operational requirements, and although invasion considerations would always take precedence, Harris's favoured policy of city-busting would never be entirely shelved.

The new offensive got into full swing on the night of the 9/10th, when elements of 3, 4, 6 and 8 Groups, amounting to over two hundred aircraft, attacked the Lille-Delivrance goods station. A force of similar size, involving aircraft drawn from all Groups, simultaneously attempted to deal with the railway yards at Villeneuve-St-Georges on the outskirts of Paris. The former, in particular, was highly successful, and destroyed over two thousand items of rolling stock, while also damaging buildings, track and installations. Sadly, there were many stray bombs at both locations, and five thousand houses were destroyed or seriously damaged at Lille, where 456 French civilians lost their lives. The problem of collateral damage would never be satisfactorily addressed, and it was an unavoidable by-product of standard Pathfinder marking. The 5 Group low level visual marking system, which had been under development since the start of the year, and which was about to lead to 5 Group's virtual independence from the rest of the Command, was immeasurably more precise under the right conditions. This could plant a marker onto the roof of an individual building, for the main force crews to plaster, and in the trials to date, they had been able to achieve extreme accuracy. 625 Squadron registered its first casualty of the spring on this night, when ND407 overshot its landing on return from a night training flight in the hands of P/O Winder, and two of the crew sustained injuries. On the following night, the Command was out in strength to raid five railway targets in France and Belgium, four of which were assigned to specific Groups, while elements of 3, 6 and 8 Groups went for the other one. 132 crews of 1 Group were briefed for the railway yards at Aulnoye, and they carried out a successful attack after Oboe Mosquitos provided the marking. Collateral damage was far less extensive on this occasion, and resulted in the deaths of fourteen civilians, while seven Lancasters were lost. Among the missing aircraft was 625 Squadron's ND636, which crashed in France, killing F/S Green and five of his crew, the bomb-aimer alone surviving in enemy hands.

On the 11/12th, elements of 1, 3, 5 and 8 Groups carried out an area attack on Aachen, and it developed into the town's worst experience of the war. The widespread damage in central and southern districts was almost too extensive for the authorities to catalogue, and over fifteen hundred people lost their lives. There was very little activity over the following week, and it

was the 18/19th before the Group was called into action again. This night brought raids on four more railway targets, elements of 1 and 3 Groups operating together against yards at Rouen. The attack was successful, and was concluded without loss to the defences, but 625 Squadron suffered a casualty at home. P/O Cosgrove and his crew arrived back over Lincolnshire in ME734, and were preparing to land, when they were attacked by an intruder and shot down near the station without survivors. The Group participated in a raid on Cologne on the 20/21st, which caused substantial damage to housing, industry and public buildings. Only four Lancasters were lost from the more than three hundred aircraft committed to the attack, but one of these was ME731 of 625 Squadron, which crashed off the French coast, killing F/S Bishop and his crew. Düsseldorf received similar treatment on the 22/23rd at the hands of over five hundred aircraft from all but 5 Group, and two thousand houses and hundreds of industrial premises were included in the catalogue of buildings destroyed or seriously damaged. This success, however, was gained at a cost of twenty nine Halifaxes and Lancasters, although none on this occasion were from Kelstern. The spate of city-busting attacks continued at Karlsruhe in southern Germany on the 24/25th, when strong winds pushed the marking and bombing over the northern districts. Nine hundred houses were destroyed or seriously damaged, but much of the bombing fell into open country, or onto other towns and cities in the region. Essen was the target two nights later, and returning crews claimed an accurate attack, from which a modest seven aircraft failed to return. On the 27/28th, Lancasters of 1, 3, 6 and 8 Groups were sent to the highly industrialized town of Friedrichshafen, deep inside southern Germany, on the northern shore of the Bodensee near the Swiss border. Among the important factories here were some engaged in the manufacture of tank engines and gearboxes, and severe damage was inflicted on these and other war industry concerns. The nightfighters arrived on the scene while the attack was in progress, and eighteen Lancasters were lost, but the raid was an outstanding success, and 67% of the town's built-up area was devastated. On the last night of the month, 116 Lancasters of 1 Group alone went to Maintenon, and destroyed a Luftwaffe bomb and ammunition dump, after the marking had been carried out by the Group's Special Duties Flight from Binbrook. No aircraft were lost, and with this operation, F/L Middlemiss and his crew became the first from 625 Squadron to complete a tour.

May opened for 1 Group with a small scale raid on a motor works at Lyon on the 1st, and then a supposedly straight-forward attack in company with 5 Group on the Panzer training camp and transport depot at Mailly-le-Camp on the 3/4th. Since the night of the 20/21st of April, 5 Group had been operating independently of the main force, and was now dedicated to the low level visual marking method, for which it had been given its own target marking squadrons. 83 and 97 Squadrons had recently been transferred on permanent loan back to 5 Group, from whence they had joined the Pathfinders in August 1942 and April 1943 respectively, along with the Mosquito unit, 627 Squadron, and these would become the 5 Group "Pathfinders". This was in response to successful trials by W/C Cheshire and S/L "Mick" Martin at 617 Squadron, who had been frustrated by the inability of Oboe to pinpoint flying bomb sites in December and January. Initial unofficial trials in a Lancaster had demonstrated the potential of the system, although diving a Lancaster onto an aiming point was a somewhat chastening experience. The idea was taken to the ever-receptive AOC, AVM Sir Ralph Cochrane, who approached Harris to gain approval for the system to be adopted officially. An attack by the

Squadron on the Gnome & Rhone area engine factory at Limoges on the 8/9th of February was a stunning success, after Cheshire carried out the marking in a Lancaster. It was decided that the Mosquito offered a more suitable option for the low level role, and 617 Squadron took a number of the type on charge. Cheshire and three other crews were trained, and so successful were they, that Harris granted the Group independence, and its own marking force. Until the 627 Squadron crews were trained in the role, 617 Squadron continued to provide the Mosquito element. The total efficacy of the system could only be gauged at a heavily defended German target, and this occurred at Brunswick on the 22/23rd, when despite accurate marking, the predominately 5 Group force failed to find the mark. Another attempt was made at Munich two nights later, and this time it was an outstanding success, and this operation probably sealed the award of the Victoria Cross to W/C Cheshire at the conclusion of his tour.

The marking at Mailly-le-Camp remained in the hands of 617 Squadron, with W/C Cheshire as the marker leader, while in overall command of the operation was G/C Deane of 83 Squadron. They attended separate briefings, and this may have contributed in some degree to the confusion which characterized proceedings during the operation, and neither, it seems, was fully aware of the role to be played by 1 Group's Special Duties Flight, which was assigned to a specific target of its own. The marking was carried out accurately, and Cheshire informed Deane that the first element of the main force, 5 Group, could be called in. It was at this stage of the operation that an American forces broadcasting station cut across the radio frequencies in use, and G/C Deane experienced problems with his VHF transmitter. A delay occurred in ordering the main force in to bomb, particularly the 1 Group second element, and while the Lancasters milled around in the target area awaiting instructions, the nightfighters exploited the situation, and began to claim victims in large numbers. As aircraft were seen to fall in flames all around, some crews succumbed to their anxiety and frustration, and a number of uncomplimentary comments were broadcast in a rare breakdown of R/T discipline. Once under way, the bombing was accurate, and extensive damage was inflicted on the target, doubtlessly diminishing the enemy's response on D-Day. Forty two aircraft failed to return, and recriminations abound to this day, with many accusations being unjustly directed at W/C Cheshire. 625 Squadron was hit hard, and lost LM317 to a nightfighter on the bombing run, with no survivors from the crew of P/O Short. LM515 was shot down over France when leaving the target area, killing P/O McGaw and his entire crew, and ME697 was also on the way home over France when it too fell victim, and five men lost their lives. The captain, flight commander S/L Gray, escaped with his life to become a PoW, and the only other survivor, the wireless operator Sgt Evans, ultimately evaded capture.

Another small scale raid by the Group was successfully concluded at Aubigne on the 6/7th, when an ammunition dump was destroyed. A similar target on the following night at Rennes, the squadron's fiftieth operation, escaped most of the bombs intended for it, many of them falling onto a nearby village. As part of the deception to cover the invasion, seven coastal batteries in the Pas-de-Calais were attacked by four hundred aircraft on the 9/10th. The night of the 10/11th was devoted to railway targets at five separate locations, and on the 11/12th, haze forced the abandonment of an attack by elements of 1 and 8 Groups on railway yards at Hasselt, after only a proportion of the force had bombed. Mining operations were a regular

feature of life for most squadrons, and they were very effective both in hampering enemy shipping and providing useful experience for freshman crews. These generally low level sorties exposed crews to the dangers of light flak from coastal batteries and flak ships, and the squadron's LL894 failed to return from such an operation in Kiel Bay on the 15/16th. This was, in fact, the squadron's first mining operation, and the Lancaster was presumed to have been lost over the North Sea, taking with it the crew of P/O Beadle. On the 19/20th, most of the night's effort was directed at five railway targets, and over a hundred Lancasters from 1 Group dealt effectively with the yards at Orleans. The first major attack for a year on Duisburg was delivered by five hundred aircraft of 1, 3, 5 and 8 Groups on the 21/22nd, for which 625 Squadron detailed twenty Lancasters. Although moderately successful, the operation cost twenty nine aircraft, a figure which included the squadron's LM513. This Lancaster contained the crew of 1st Lt Max Dowden of the USAAF, who had joined the squadron from a heavy conversion unit on the 11th of March. Most of the crew had actually been posted to 166 Squadron at Kirmington towards the end of 1943, but before any operations were undertaken, two landing crashes during training saw their pilot "sacked". Dowden was adopted as the crew's new driver and they were well into their tour by the time they took off for Duisburg on this fateful night. A navigation error prevented them from reaching Duisburg, which they could see being attacked over to port, and the bomb load was jettisoned over open country. As they approached Antwerp on the way home, they were attacked without warning by a nightfighter at 23,000 feet, and both port engines erupted in flames. As the aircraft fell earthwards, five of the crew managed to extricate themselves, and were ultimately taken into captivity, but Dowden and his flight engineer were unable to save themselves, and died in the ensuing crash. (For a detailed account of this crew's experiences, read Boys at War, by the mid-upper gunner, Russell Margerison).

1 Group also contributed aircraft to the first raid for a year on Dortmund on the following night, and a highly accurate and concentrated attack left over eight hundred houses in ruins. Railway yards at either end of Aachen provided the objectives for over four hundred aircraft from all but 5 Group on the 24/25th, and heavy collateral damage to the town and nearby villages bombed out almost fifteen thousand people. Elements of 1, 3 and 8 Groups returned three nights later for another crack at the Rothe Erde yards at the eastern end of the town, as a by-product of which, the suburb of Forst was gutted by fire. On the last night of the month the Groups were again occupied with railway targets, 1 Group successfully dealing with the yards at Tergnier after marking by Oboe Mosquitos. Only two Lancasters failed to return as a result of this operation, and one of them was LM427 of 625 Squadron. This crashed in France, killing P/O Tanner and three of his crew, while the bomb-aimer and both gunners survived to become PoWs.

The first week of June was the lead up to the long awaited D-Day, and the Group contributed to three raids on the 2/3rd, against railway yards at Trappes in company with 4 Group, a radar jamming station at Berneval, and coastal batteries in the Pas-de-Calais. Coastal batteries were the priority targets, however, and 1, 3 and 8 Groups continued the deception by bombing sites at Calais and Wimereux on the 3/4th. A further four emplacements were attacked by 1, 4, 5, 6 and 8 Groups on the 4/5th, just one of which was in the planned invasion area. Over a thousand aircraft were aloft on D-Day Eve, the 5/6th, to attack ten coastal batteries, and the

625 Squadron element was assigned to that at St-Martin-de-Varreville. Although no specific reference was made concerning the invasion, crews were given strict flight levels, and all were forbidden to jettison bombs over the sea. Aircraft were taking off throughout the night, and those crews returning in dawn's early light were rewarded with a sight of the armada ploughing its way sedately across the Channel below. On D-Day night, another thousand aircraft raided communications targets on the approaches to the beachheads, while an element from 625 Squadron attacked enemy troop positions at Vire. Similar operations against communications targets were mounted by smaller numbers on the succeeding two nights. 1, 4, and 6 Groups provided the main forces for attacks on four airfields south of the battle area on the 9/10th, to prevent their use for bringing up reinforcements. It was back to railways on the 10/11th, when 1 Group contributed to a force of over four hundred aircraft, whose crews had been briefed for four targets. 1 Group was assigned to Acheres, and 625 Squadron suffered a bruising time, losing three aircraft among the fifteen Lancasters and three Halifaxes missing from the night's operations. LL897 fell to a nightfighter over France, with no survivors from the crew of F/O Malin, and ND742 likewise crashed on French soil, again with total loss of life among the crew of P/O Dudman. There were at least survivors from the third Lancaster, LM139, which contained the crew of F/O Geeson. He and five others parachuted into the French countryside, all but one of them to evade capture, but the rear gunner was killed. It was similar fare on the following night, when four railway yards were successfully attacked, and then 1 Group girded its loins for the start of a new campaign.

Germany's oil industry had always featured prominently in the plans of the War Cabinet and the Air Ministry, and an offensive had been mounted in early 1941, in an attempt to incapacitate its principal refineries. However, the types and numbers of aircraft available at the time, and the lack of navigation and bombing aids, had rendered it an impossible dream. Harris viewed oil as one of a number of "panacea" targets, which were offered from time to time as a means of ending the war quickly, something which he believed only the area offensive could deliver. At least now, though, he had the means at his disposal, and under pressure from the Chief-of-the-Air-Staff, Sir Charles Portal, he began an assault on the synthetic oil industry, which would continue into the final month of the bombing war. The first target was the Nordstern plant at Gelsenkirchen, for which three hundred aircraft of 1, 3 and 8 Groups took off late on the 12th. An improved version of Oboe was now available, and accurate marking led to a highly concentrated attack, which halted all production of vital aviation fuel for a number of weeks, at a cost to the German war effort of a thousand tons per day. Among the seventeen missing Lancasters was 625 Squadron's ED938, which was shot down over Holland on the way home, killing P/O Scott and four of his crew, while the wireless operator and rear gunner fell into enemy hands. The first daylight operation since the departure of 2 Group a year earlier, took place on the 14th, when elements of 1, 3, 5 and 8 Groups carried out a two phase attack on Le Havre. The targets were E-Boats and other fast, light marine craft, which were posing a threat to Allied shipping supporting the beachheads. The first phase was a predominately 1 Group affair during the evening, and the second phase was delivered at dusk by 3 Group, and both were conducted under the umbrella of a strong fighter escort. A similar operation was mounted against Boulogne twenty four hours later, and few craft remained serviceable at either location. A second new campaign began on the 16/17th, against flying bomb launching and storage sites in the Pas-de Calais, and this would

dominate proceedings for the Command until well into August. Four sites were attacked on this night, including Domlegger, for which the 625 Squadron crews were briefed, and 1 Group also provided support for a simultaneous operation against the Holten oil refinery at Sterkrade. The latter was hampered by cloud, the bombing quickly became scattered, and thirty one aircraft were shot down. Two thirds of these were despatched by nightfighters, which had been orbiting a control beacon close to the bombers' route, and all but nine of the casualties were Halifaxes.

It was back to railways on the 17/18th, but the 1 Group attack at Aulnoye was one of two to be abandoned very early on because of cloud. 5 Group entered the oil offensive on the 21/22nd with simultaneous raids on refineries at Wesseling and Scholven-Buer, but the conditions were not favourable, and the Wesseling force was mauled by nightfighters, to the extent that thirty seven aircraft were lost. 1 Group attacked the V-3 site at Mimoyecques by daylight on the 22nd, and railway yards at Rheims that night. On the 23/24th, the Group carried out an accurate raid on railway installations at Saintes, and hit a flying bomb site in daylight on the 24th. Flying bomb sites were the principal targets for the remainder of the month, and 1 Group was involved on the 24/25th, 25th, 27/28th, 29th and 30th. In between, elements of 1 and 5 Groups bombed railway yards at Vitry on the 27/28th, and a similar target at Vierzon on the last night of the month was an entirely 1 Group affair, marked with great accuracy by the Special Duties Flight. The cost, however, was high, and amounted to fourteen of the 118 Lancasters despatched, a massive 12% of the force. 625 Squadron suffered its worst night of the war, and had three empty dispersals to contemplate on the following morning, along with four missing crews. All four aircraft crashed onto French soil, JB743 the victim of flak, killing P/O Hale and his crew, and ND459 and ND975 likewise produced no survivors from the crews of F/O Wright and P/O Knowles respectively. The latter was in fact a 100 Squadron aircraft on the strength of the Special Duties Flight, and had been borrowed for the occasion by the 625 Squadron crew, who may also have been attached to Binbrook. Finally, PB126 crashed with both gunners still on board, F/L Elmhurst-Baxter and four others having managed to escape by parachute, and they were all able to evade capture by the enemy. This sad end to June turned it into the squadron's most expensive month since operations began.

July would be a kinder month for the squadron, and one in which flying bomb sites, oil and railways continued to keep the Command active, while support would also be lent to the ground forces in Normandy. The need for precision bombing led to an increase in daylight operations, but city-busting would still take place by night until later in the year. 1 Group opened its account at one of three flying bomb sites on the 2nd, and then switched to railway yards at Orleans on the night of the 4/5th. A similar target at Dijon followed twenty four hours later, while the 6th was devoted entirely to attacks on V-Weapon sites by over five hundred aircraft. On the evening of the 7th, over four hundred aircraft from 1, 4, 6 and 8 Groups bombed an area of open ground north of Caen, and the northern part of the town itself, in an attempt to hit enemy troop positions. Although the aiming points were well plastered, the operation did not succeed in its aims. That night, 123 Lancasters from 1 Group were sent to the railway yards at Vaires on the outskirts of Paris, and an accurate attack ensued without loss. Cloud led to a scattered raid on a flying bomb storage site at Nucourt on the 10th, but the Group again suffered no losses. Briefings took place for three railway targets for the 12/13th,

those at Revigny and Tours involving a 1 Group main force, with the Special Duties Flight marking at the former, and 8 Group at the latter. 625 Squadron provided nineteen of the one hundred Lancasters for Tours, and the attack was concluded accurately without loss. Matters proceeded less favourably at Revigny, where the raid was abandoned halfway through, and ten aircraft failed to return. This operation was remounted on the 14/15th, and this time, 625 Squadron participated. Haze in the target area prevented identification of the aiming point, and the Master Bomber was forced to abandon the raid before any bombing took place. Seven Lancasters were lost on this occasion, but none of them were from Kelstern. This concluded 1 Group's interest in Revigny, and it would be left to 5 Group to complete the job on the 18/19th, although at the great expense of twenty four Lancasters.

During the early hours of the 18th, over nine hundred aircraft took off for the Caen area, to attack five fortified villages to the east of the town, ahead of the British Second Army's armoured assault under Operation Goodwood. American aircraft also took part in the operations, which dropped 6,800 tons of bombs onto enemy positions from medium level, five thousand tons of which was delivered by the RAF. While 5 Group was undergoing the already mentioned mauling during its attack on Revigny on the 18/19th, 1 Group contributed to successful raids on oil refineries at Wesseling and Scholven-Buer. The 20/21st was a busy night, which brought raids on oil targets at Homberg and Bottrop, while 1 and 5 Groups successfully bombed railway installations at Courtrai. The month was proceeding well for the squadron in terms of loss free operations, but the run of good fortune came to an end at Kiel on the 23/24th. This was the first raid on a German urban target for two months, and involved a force of over six hundred aircraft. These appeared suddenly and with complete surprise from behind a 100 Group RCM screen, and all parts of the town were hit, with particular emphasis on the port area, where U-Boat yards and naval facilities were severely damaged. 625 Squadron's LM714 failed to return to Kelstern, and no trace of it or the crew of F/L Harrison has ever been found. On the following night, a force of over four hundred aircraft carried out the first of three raids on Stuttgart in the space of five nights, a series which left the central districts in ruins, and destroyed most of its public and cultural buildings. The final raid, on the 28/29th, was conducted in bright moonlight, and ran into heavy nightfighter activity, which cost the 450 strong force thirty nine Lancasters in an echo of the scale of former losses. Two 625 Squadron aircraft were among the missing, LL962 having crashed in France, and LM546 in Germany. The former was captained by P/O Tuck DFC, who was killed along with his navigator and rear gunner, while the flight engineer later succumbed to his injuries, and the survivors fell into enemy hands. In contrast, all survived from the crew of F/O Collett in the latter, and they were marched off for a spell of extended leave in a PoW camp. Further support was provided for the ground forces on the 30th, when six enemy troop positions in the Villers-Bocage/Caumont area were targeted by almost seven hundred aircraft. Cloud obscured some of the Oboe markers, and less than four hundred aircraft were able to carry out an attack, which meant that just two of the aiming points were effectively hit. A small-scale daylight raid by the Group took place against enemy troop concentrations at Le Havre on the evening of the 31st, for which, each of the squadron's Lancasters carried a load of twenty 500lb bombs for the first time.

The pounding of flying bomb sites continued at the start of August, and daylight operations took place on the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th. Over eleven hundred aircraft were involved on the 3rd, when three stores were targeted at Bois de Cassan, Foret de Nieppe and Trossy-St Maxim. 625 Squadron sent its contingent to the last mentioned, and lost LM163 in return for a successful operation. It was later learned that F/O Jobson and four of his crew were alive in enemy hands, but that his wireless operator and rear gunner had been killed in the crash in France. On the 4th and 5th, the squadron was involved in attacks on oil storage depots at Paulliac on the River Gironde, and both were claimed as destroyed. Over a thousand aircraft took part in attacks on German strong points at five locations ahead of Allied ground forces on the 7/8th. Under the strict control of Master Bombers, two thirds of the force attacked as briefed, and the bombing appeared to be accurate. The Group participated in the bombing of oil storage dumps on the 8/9th and 9/10th, flying bomb sites on the 9/10th and 10th, railway installations on the 11th and 11/12th and U-Boat pens at Brest, La Pallice and Bordeaux on the 12th. An experimental operation took place on the 12/13th, to see if crews could identify and bomb a target on the strength of their own H2S returns, without the presence of Pathfinder aircraft. Brunswick was the target selected, a town which had already been raided three times during the year, and had thus far escaped serious damage after the bombing fell into outlying communities. *A friend of mine, who was born on D-Day, lived in the village of Geitelde, where his father was the parish minister, a few kilometres to the south-west of Brunswick. He grew up with the belief, instilled in him by the residents of the surrounding hamlets, that Bomber Command intended to hit the villages first, to drive the inhabitants into Brunswick, before delivering the coup-de-grace there. In view of the four unsuccessful operations before that which devastated the town in October, it is easy to understand how this belief arose.* History repeated itself to some extent on this night, and although the local authorities reported a heavy raid, there was no concentration, and bombs fell up to twenty miles away. It was certainly not a telling blow, and a heavy loss of twenty seven aircraft was incurred by the attackers. 625 Squadron was represented among them by ME733, in which W/O Percy and his crew were all killed. While this raid was in progress, elements of 3, 4, 5 and 8 Groups targeted the Opel motor works at Rüsselsheim, and caused only minor damage, which would necessitate a return later in the month.

Eight hundred aircraft took off in the early afternoon of the 14th to bomb seven enemy troop positions ahead of Canadian forces advancing on Falaise. Each aiming point was controlled by a Master Bomber, and the marking was carried out by Oboe Mosquitos, but despite this, a "friendly fire" incident killed thirteen Canadian soldiers and wounded over fifty others. In preparation for his new night offensive against Germany, Harris despatched a thousand aircraft by daylight on the 15th, to bomb nine nightfighter airfields in Holland and Belgium. 625 Squadron was assigned to the one at Volkell in Holland, and this operation brought up the squadron's century. On the 16/17th, Stettin and Kiel were the objectives for forces numbering 461 and 348 aircraft respectively. The former, by 1, 5, 6 and 8 Groups, was an outstandingly accurate and concentrated attack, which left fifteen hundred houses in ruins, and sank or damaged thirteen ships in the harbour. Only five aircraft were lost, but among them was LM674 from Kelstern, which crashed into the Baltic with no survivors from the crew of P/O Charlick. The Kiel raid was less rewarding in some respects, but serious damage was inflicted on the docks area and its ship building yards, and it would be visited again later in the month. Bremen suffered its most destructive raid of the war on the 18/19th, in which over 8,600 apartment blocks were reduced to shells by a modest 274 aircraft. On the 25/26th, 1, 3, 6 and 8

Groups carried out the second raid of the month on the Opel works at Rüsselsheim, and although quite severe damage was inflicted on some sections, lorry production was not seriously compromised. The return to Kiel by 1, 3 and 8 Groups took place on the 26/27th, and following accurate marking, they deposited their bombs into the centre of the town, creating many fires and destroying public buildings. It was not a one-sided contest, however, and seventeen Lancasters did not make it back, among them LM168 of 625 Squadron, which was lost without trace with the crew of P/O Curless. The final operations against flying bomb sites took place on the 28th, and Allied ground forces captured the Pas-de-Calais shortly afterwards. Stettin was another target to receive its second visit of the month, this time at the hands of 1, 3, 6 and 8 Groups. Over fifteen hundred houses and thirty two industrial premises were destroyed, and a ship was sunk in the harbour. Even though the V-1 menace had been effectively removed from France, V-2 related targets would continue to attract the Command's attention, and it was such an objective, which brought the month to an end. Six hundred heavy bombers carried out raids on suspected V-2 storage sites in France by daylight on the 31st, 625 Squadron crews briefed for the one at Raimbert. All the Kelstern Lancasters returned to home airspace, but ME676 suffered engine failure, forcing the crew of F/O Reynolds to abandon it to its fate near Friston on the Suffolk coast, and all arrived safely on the ground.

September was devoted largely to the liberating of the three major French ports still in enemy hands, but first, over six hundred aircraft carried out attacks on six airfields in southern Holland on the 3rd. Le Havre was the first of the French ports to receive attention, and enemy positions around it were attacked by 1, 3 and 8 Groups on the 5th without loss. Further operations were mounted on the 6th, 8th, 9th, 10th and 11th, four of them involving 1 Group, and a few hours after the final assault, the German garrison surrendered to the advancing British forces. The last major raid of the war on Frankfurt was delivered by 1, 3 and 8 Groups on the 12/13th, causing considerable residential and industrial damage in the western districts, and fires that raged for two days. 625 Squadron lost its only two crews during the month on this night, one of them to enemy action, and the other to a tragic accident. LM103 was brought down over Germany, with no survivors from the crew of F/L Banks, and LM512 was involved in a mid-air collision with Lancaster NF965 of 622 Squadron, while approaching the German border with Belgium on the way home. Both aircraft plunged to the ground before any of the crew had time to get out, and there were no survivors. Particularly sad was the fact, that the 625 Squadron aircraft, captained by F/O Cornish, had contained eight men, and their names were added to the growing squadron Roll of Honour. Kiel came in for more punishment on the 15/16th at the hands of 1, 4, 6 and 8 Groups, and most of the damage occurred in the central and port areas. On the 16th, a C Flight was added to the squadron, and it was at about this time, that W/C Haig departed the squadron at the conclusion of his tour, and W/C Mackay was installed as his successor. It required just one day's operations on the 17th, and three thousand tons of bombs to persuade the German garrison to surrender Boulogne to Allied forces, and this left only Calais under enemy control.

Operations to rectify this situation would begin on the 20th, but in the meantime, 1 and 5 Groups joined forces to attack the twin towns of Mönchengladbach and Rheydt on the 19/20th. The officer selected to act as Master Bomber was W/C Guy Gibson VC, who was serving as

an operations officer at 54 Base Coningsby. Since being removed from the operational scene after the Dams raid, Gibson had lost his direction, and become listless and frustrated. He was a warrior, and was eager to get back into the war before it ended, and had not lost the arrogance, which had made him the obvious choice to lead Operation Chastise. He was not, however, qualified as a Master Bomber, and his acquaintance with the Mosquito was only fleeting. The plan for the night's operation was quite complex, involving a number of aiming points, and it would have taxed someone experienced in the role. As the home of 5 Group's Master Bomber fraternity, Coningsby boasted plenty of officers to provide advice, and this was certainly offered, only for it to be brushed aside. Unaccountably, Gibson also rejected the 627 Squadron Mosquito prepared for him, and insisted on a replacement, which he was given. After initial difficulties with the marking, the operation proceeded more or less according to plan, although a number of crews bombed target markers not assigned to them. Gibson was heard to send the crews home at the end of the attack, but did not arrive home himself. It was later established that his Mosquito had crashed on the outskirts of the Dutch town of Steenberg, where he and his navigator, S/L Warwick, are buried in the Catholic cemetery.

Over six hundred aircraft began the assault on enemy positions around Calais on the 20th. Before the second one took place, over five hundred aircraft from 1, 3, 4 and 8 Groups raided Neuss on the 23/24th, and destroyed or seriously damaged six hundred houses and fourteen public buildings. Less than two hundred aircraft were employed against enemy positions around Calais on the 24th, but this was increased to over eight hundred on the following day, seven hundred on the 26th and three hundred on the 27th. Only sixty eight aircraft bombed on the 28th in the face of cloudy conditions, but shortly afterwards, the German garrison surrendered to Canadian forces. While this series was in progress, elements of 1 and 5 Groups carried out a concentrated assault on Karlsruhe on the 26/27th, and followed it up with equal success at Kaiserslautern twenty four hours later.

A number of operations during September had been directed at heavy gun emplacements on the island of Walcheren in the mouth of the Scheldt, the presence of which was barring the approaches to the much needed port of Antwerp. They had proved to be difficult targets to hit, and it was decided instead to attack the sea walls, to inundate the batteries, and render the terrain difficult to defend against an impending assault by ground forces. Operations against the sea walls began at Westkapelle on the 3rd of October, when eight waves of thirty aircraft each bombed on Oboe markers. The fifth wave caused a breach, which was widened by those following behind. This mini offensive against the sea defences would be prosecuted throughout the month, largely at the hands of 5 Group, and the only contribution by 1 Group would come against gun batteries on the banks of the Scheldt. 1 Group teamed up with 3 and 8 Groups on the 5/6th, to deliver a crushing blow on Saarbrücken at the behest of American forces, which were advancing in that direction. A new Ruhr campaign opened at Dortmund on the 6/7th, when 3, 6 and 8 Groups took part in a highly destructive raid, while 1 and 5 Groups went to Bremen. The predominately incendiary bomb load performed as intended, and an enormous area of fire developed, which left almost five thousand buildings destroyed or seriously damaged. Later on the afternoon of the 7th, two forces were despatched to bomb the frontier towns of Cleves and Emmerich, which gave access to a vulnerable section of the Allied line, after the recent failure of Operation Market Garden at Arnhem. 1 Group crews

were briefed to attack the latter, along with elements of 3 and 8 Groups, and over 2,400 buildings were destroyed. An area raid on Bochum by 1, 4, 6 and 8 Groups on the 9/10th was badly effected by cloud, and on the 11th, 1 Group tried to hit the Fort Frederik Hendrik battery at Breskens on the south bank of the Scheldt. This time it was smoke which obscured the area after only half the force had bombed, and the raid had to be abandoned.

This second Ruhr offensive led inexorably to Operation Hurricane, a demonstration to the enemy of the overwhelming superiority of the Allied air forces ranged against it. At first light on the 14th, over a thousand aircraft departed their stations and headed for Duisburg, arriving there shortly after breakfast time to deliver more than 4,500 tons of bombs under the umbrella of a strong fighter escort. 625 Squadron despatched its own record of thirty one Lancasters on the operation, but LL956 experienced an engine fire shortly after leaving Kelstern, and the pilot, F/O Hannah, ordered his seven man crew to abandon the aircraft. Six did so safely, but the bomb-aimer failed to survive, and F/O Hannah was killed in the ensuing crash. That night, the force returned in similar numbers to press home the point about superiority, this time with a 625 Squadron presence of twenty nine aircraft. The total weight of bombs deposited on the target over the twenty four hour period was a new 625 Squadron record of 375 tons. A remarkable feature of these two operations was, that the 2,018 sorties despatched in less than twenty four hours had been achieved without a contribution from 5 Group, which took advantage of the nighttime activity over the Ruhr to finally deliver a really crushing blow on Brunswick. On the 15th, the squadron parted company with its recently acquired C Flight, which went across the tarmac to form the nucleus of 170 Squadron. This unit would move to Dunholme Lodge on the 22nd, and make way for a new C Flight to be formed at Kelstern on the 23rd. On the night of the 15/16th, all except 5 Group contributed to what turned out to be the last major raid of the war on Wilhelmshaven, and the Command claimed to have inflicted serious damage. A scattered attack by 1, 3, 6 and 8 Groups fell on Stuttgart and its surrounds on the 19/20th, but central and eastern districts, never-the-less, sustained further heavy damage, and an important Bosch factory was one of the industrial concerns hit. The Hurricane force moved on to Essen on the early evening of the 23rd, when a record 1055 aircraft set off to deliver 4,500 tons of bombs onto the already rubble-strewn city. The sheer size of the force available to Harris at this stage of the war is evident from the fact, that the Lancasters of 5 Group were again not included in the figure. Only eight aircraft failed to return from this operation, which was not a happy one for 625 Squadron. LM691 collided with Halifax LL599 of 462 Squadron over France, and exploded before falling to earth. Only the pilot, S/L Hamilton, survived, along with one member of the other crew, and both landed safely in Allied held territory to return to their respective squadrons within days. PB531 failed to return home, and was lost without trace with the crew of F/O Morshead, and PA174 crashed in Essex on return, with no survivors from the crew of P/O Tweter. Essen was raided again by more than seven hundred aircraft on the afternoon of the 25th, destroying a further eleven hundred buildings, by which time anyway, it had ceased to be a major centre of war production. Cologne's turn at the hands of the Hurricane force came on the afternoon of the 28th, and again on the evenings of the 30th and 31st, and 625 Squadron was not represented among the minimal losses.

Düsseldorf received its last major raid of the war on the 2/3rd of November, an attack by the Hurricane force, which destroyed or badly damaged a further five thousand houses and twenty five industrial premises. Bochum also saw the heavy brigade for the last time on the 4/5th, when four thousand buildings were hit, but this time the nightfighters were active, and twenty eight aircraft, mostly Halifaxes of 4 Group, were lost. 625 Squadron's PB154 was one of only five Lancasters to fail to return, and this crashed in Germany, killing F/O Twynam and his entire crew. Gelsenkirchen and its Nordstern synthetic oil plant were the objectives for seven hundred aircraft on the 6th, and although concentration was not achieved, it was the town's most damaging raid of the war to date. A night training exercise on the 8/9th cost the squadron PB556, which was lost without trace, and presumably went down into the sea, taking with it the crew of P/O Harris. The oil campaign continued with a daylight raid on Wanne-Eickel on the 9th, but thick cloud hampered the marking, and results were inconclusive. Two Lancasters were missing from this operation, and both of them were from 625 Squadron. LM731 was brought down in the target area, and NG239 also crashed in Germany, and neither produced a survivor from among the crews of F/L Wilson and F/O Bruce respectively. On the 16th, nearly twelve hundred heavy bombers operated in support of the American advance towards the Rhine, by bombing the towns of Düren, Jülich and Heinsberg behind enemy lines. 1 and 5 Groups provided the main force for the first mentioned, and as they retreated homewards towards the setting sun, they left behind a town which had been all but erased from the map, with a death toll of over three thousand people. 625 Squadron lost NG238, one of only three Lancasters to fail to return, and F/O Copland and his crew lost their lives. The two other targets were also severely damaged, but to no avail, as the American advance bogged down in soggy ground, and was badly effected by supply problems. The 18th brought another change of leadership, when W/C Barker assumed command in place of W/C Mackay, who departed on a posting. The Group continued to pound oil targets, when providing the main force at Wanne-Eickel on the 18/19th, and Castrop-Rauxel on the 21/22nd in company with 6 Group. While the latter was in progress, a large element from the Group attacked railway yards at Aschaffenburg, south-east of Frankfurt, and aside from damaging the installations and workshops, five hundred houses were destroyed in the town. The Group finished the month with a number of area attacks, beginning at Freiburg on the 27/28th. This was a virgin target of no significance, apart from representing a minor link in the railway network. In a twenty five minute orgy of destruction, nineteen hundred tons of bombs rained down, destroying two thousand houses, and killing a similar number of people. Dortmund followed on the 29th, and despite the scattered nature of the attack, fresh damage was inflicted. On the last night of the month, 1, 4, 6 and 8 Groups sent five hundred aircraft to Duisburg, where cloud hampered the bombing. Concentration was not achieved, but over five hundred houses were destroyed, and 625 Squadron came through these operations unscathed.

The Group attempted to open its December account on the 3rd, with a daylight attack on the Urft Dam, and the nearby small town of Heimbach in the Eifel region of Germany, south-east of Aachen. 183 Lancasters and four Oboe Mosquitos were involved, but these were all sent home with their bombs when the target could not be identified. On return, NN699 overshot the landing at Kelstern and crashed, although without injury to F/O Naylor and his crew. Karlsruhe wilted under a ferocious assault by 1, 6 and 8 Groups on the 4/5th, and 4 Group joined them to attack the small town of Soest to good effect on the following night, this just a

few kilometres to the north of the now famous and rebuilt Möhne Dam. Although an area raid, in which a thousand houses were destroyed, the railway installations were an important consideration, and it was that half of the town which received most of the bombs. 1 and 8 Groups were joined by 3 Group for an attack on an oil refinery at distant Leuna near Merseburg on the 6/7th, and extensive damage was inflicted for the loss of five Lancasters from the force of over 450 aircraft. The last heavy night raid on Essen was successfully concluded on the 12/13th by a force of over five hundred aircraft from 1, 4 and 8 Groups. In the early evening of the 15th, over three hundred aircraft of 1, 6 and 8 Groups caused extensive damage to the important I.G. Farben chemical factories at Ludwigshafen and nearby Oppau. Both were engaged in the production of synthetic oil, and all production ceased at the latter plant. Collateral damage resulted to other industrial premises and housing, and the only Lancaster lost from the operation was 625 Squadron's NG294, in which P/O Fletcher and his crew were all killed.

Three major operations took place on the 17/18th, the main one involving over five hundred aircraft with Duisburg as their destination, while 5 Group went to Munich. 1 Group, meanwhile, provided the main force for the first and only raid of the war on Ulm, deep in southern Germany, to the west of Augsburg. Over three hundred aircraft took part in the operation, including the Pathfinder element, and almost fifteen hundred tons of bombs rained down onto the old city, beginning in the centre and creeping westwards into open country. The attack lasted twenty five minutes, a large area of fire developed, and over 80% of the city's buildings, including many of an important industrial nature, were either destroyed or damaged to some extent. Thankfully, an evacuation of the population had begun earlier in the day, and the number of deaths, although exceeding six hundred people, did not compare with those inflicted in other recent attacks on the virgin targets of Freiburg and Heilbronn. A predominately 1 Group raid on the Mosel railway yards at Koblenz on the 22/23rd was only partially successful, and many bombs fell onto farmland and nearby villages. Ninety seven Lancasters and five Oboe Mosquitos of 1 and 8 Groups took off on Christmas Eve afternoon to attack the Nippes railway yards at Cologne. The railway tracks were left severely damaged, but the Group lost five Lancasters to the defences, with just one survivor between them. It was an unhappy way to begin the last Christmas of the war, and although no operations took place on Christmas Day itself, some crews from each Group were roused into action on Boxing Day. These were required to attack enemy troop positions at St Vith, following the German breakout in the Ardennes ten days earlier, and it fell to 625 Squadron to mount the Group's largest effort on this occasion. The Group contributed to two operations on the 28/29th, both of them ostensibly against railway installations at Mönchengladbach and Bonn. Neither operation was entirely successful, and most of the damage was to housing and public buildings. The last major operation of the year came on the 29/30th, when over three hundred aircraft from 1, 6 and 8 Groups delivered a very accurate and concentrated attack on the oil refinery at Scholven-Buer. Much of the bombing fell on the plant, and that which didn't, hit the town area, destroying housing and industrial buildings. Only four Lancasters were missing from this operation, one of them, PD206, a Lancaster recently transferred from 625 to 170 Squadron. On the afternoon of New Year's Eve, Lancasters and Mosquitos of 1 and 8 Groups took off to attack the railway yards at Osterfeld, and returning crews claimed a moderately successful outcome. It had been a hectic year, which had seen the Command rise phoenix-like

from the ashes of the winter campaign, to pave the way for the invasion. Side-by-side offensives during the summer had made enormous demands on the crews, before the year ended with an unprecedented assault on Germany's cities, oil production and communications systems. This would continue almost to the end, and many of the heaviest raids of the war were yet to come. The unmistakable scent of victory was wafting across from the Continent, but much remained to be done before the proud, resourceful and tenacious enemy finally laid down his arms.

1945

Although 1945 would see victory finally achieved, the German defences would continue to exact a heavy toll of Bomber Command crews, and 625 Squadron would share in the grievous losses. The New Year got off with a bang, when the Luftwaffe launched its ill-conceived and ultimately ill-fated Operation Bodenplatte at first light on New Year's Morning. The intention to destroy elements of the Allied air forces on the ground at the recently liberated airfields in France, Holland and Belgium was only modestly realized, and such losses could be made good literally within hours from the enormous stock piles. It was a different matter for the Luftwaffe, however, which committed just about its entire day fighter strength to low level bombing and strafing attacks into the teeth of the airfield flak batteries. Many of those surviving this experience were pounced upon by Allied fighters as they withdrew, and in all, around 250 BF109s and FW190s were shot down. Serious though this was, it was the loss of 150 pilots killed, wounded or captured which was the major body blow, and it was a setback from which the Luftwaffe would never fully recover. 1 Group's first offensive action of the year took it with 3, 6 and 8 Groups to Nuremberg on the 2/3rd, where, for once at this target, nothing went awry, and the city centre was destroyed along with its public and cultural buildings. The city's industry also received a pounding, and only four aircraft succumbed to the defences. Thereafter, the Group participated in the tragic and controversial raid on Royan in the early hours of the 4th. The operation was mounted in response to a request from Free French Forces, which were laying siege on their way through to Bordeaux. The German garrison commander had earlier offered to allow the civilian population to evacuate the town, but many had declined, and suffered the most severe consequences under the 1, 5 and 8 Group bombs. In the event, the French did not take Royan, and the garrison remained in place until surrendering in mid April. On the 5/6th, 1, 4, 6 and 8 Groups delivered the first heavy raid on Hanover since the autumn of 1943, and over 3,600 apartment units were destroyed. 1 Group contributed to attacks on Hanau and Neuss on the following night, both of which were important railway centres. These areas were hit, but the former suffered the destruction of approximately 40% of its built-up area, while the latter was left with almost eighteen hundred buildings either destroyed or seriously damaged. The last major raid of the war on Munich was carried out on the 7/8th by all except 4 Group, and this concluded a hectic first week of the year. Heavy snow falls curtailed operations at this point, and Kelstern was cut off by snow drifts for the next three days.

It was a week later before 1 Group was in action again, when joining 5, 6 and 8 Groups for a two-phase attack on the synthetic oil refinery at Leuna in eastern Germany on the 14/15th. 5 Group, known in 8 Group circles somewhat disparagingly as "The Independent Air Force",

opened the assault, and the others followed on three hours later to complete the destruction. It was one of a series of major blows against the oil industry, and only one further attack would be mounted against this particular target. It was during this operation, that 625 Squadron suffered its only loss of the month, when PD388 failed to return with the crew of F/O Hazell DFC, who was killed with four others, while the wireless operator and rear gunner fell into enemy hands. The body of the flight engineer was found in the Eifel region of Germany, suggesting that the Lancaster had been partially abandoned, before possibly crashing into the sea. (Bomber Command Losses. Vol 6. W R Chorley.) The Braunkohle Benzin plant at Zeitz near Leipzig was the Group's next target, on the 16/17th, in company with 6 and 8 Groups, and part of it was left badly damaged. A benzol plant at Duisburg was the intended target for elements of 1, 3 and 8 Groups on the 22/23rd, when the Thyssen steelworks also received a large proportion of the bombs, and suffered extensive damage. The month's final operation was another two phase attack, this time against Stuttgart on the 28/29th, and it proved to be the last of fifty three major raids against this city during the war. It was aimed at a railway target in the town of Kornwestheim, just to the north, and an aero-engine factory in a north-western suburb, and while both were extensively hit, the cloudy conditions led to a scattering of bombs across the northern and western districts.

The weather at the start of February brought difficult marking and bombing conditions through heavy cloud over most targets. It was necessary to employ skymarkers at Ludwigshafen on the night of the 1/2nd, but even so, bombs from the 1 and 6 Group main force fell all over the city, destroying nine hundred houses, and severely damaging railway yards. It was a similar story at Wiesbaden on the following night, when 1, 3, 6 and 8 Groups delivered the only heavy raid of the war on this town, and 550 buildings were destroyed, while around a thousand people lost their lives. The busy first few nights of the month took 1 Group to Bottrop on the 3/4th, to successfully attack the town's Prosper benzol plant, and this was followed by a period of minor operations. As the British XXX Corps prepared to cross the German frontier near the Reichswald, the border towns of Goch and Cleves were heavily bombed on the 7/8th. The latter was the target for a 1 Group main force, which delivered an all high explosive attack, and left the town in ruins, something which became more of a hindrance than a help to the advancing ground forces. A two phase operation against the oil refinery at Pölitz was opened by 5 Group on the 8/9th, before 1 Group completed the destruction after marking by the Pathfinders, and the plant remained inactive for the remainder of the war.

The Churchill inspired series of raids on Germany's eastern cities under Operation Thunderclap began at Dresden on the 13/14th. This was another two-phase assault, for which 5 Group again led the way with its low level visual marking technique. A layer of cloud interfered to some extent with the marking and bombing, and this opening phase was only partially successful. 244 Lancasters delivered eight hundred tons of bombs, and having taken hold, the resultant fires acted as a beacon to the all Lancaster force from 1, 3, 6 and 8 Groups following three hours behind. By the time of their arrival over the target, the skies were clear, and a further eighteen hundred tons of bombs rained down onto the beautiful and historic city. This set off the same chain of events which had devastated parts of Hamburg in July 1943, and a firestorm developed of massive proportions. The population had been swelled by a huge

influx of refugees fleeing from the advancing Russian armies in the east, and the death toll became the highest of the entire European war. A figure of fifty thousand deaths has been settled upon, although some believe the true number to be substantially higher. On the following morning, an American raid took place, during which, escort fighters are alleged to have strafed the streets and open spaces where the survivors were sheltering. This, more than anything, angered the people of Dresden, and it was at Harris that they directed their hatred.

Thunderclap moved on to Chemnitz on the following night, for a raid conducted along identical lines, although without a 5 Group presence. In the event, poor weather took a hand, and although bombing was scattered across the city, there was no point of concentration, and most of the effort found open country. 625 Squadron registered the loss of NF996 among the thirteen missing aircraft on this night, and the crew of F/L Cunliffe was duly posted missing. It was later established that the Lancaster had crashed in Germany, and that there were no survivors. Dortmund received its penultimate large-scale raid of the war on the 20/21st, at the hands of an all Lancaster force drawn from 1, 3, 6 and 8 Groups. The intention to destroy the city's southern half appears to have been successful, but it was achieved at a cost of fourteen aircraft. One of these was 625 Squadron's NG267, which was approaching the aiming point from due south. Hit, presumably by a flak shell, over Hagen, the Lancaster exploded in the air, and there were no survivors from the crew of F/O Maloney. The final major raid of the war on Duisburg took place in the mid evening of the 21st, and was successfully delivered by over three hundred aircraft of 1, 6 and 8 Groups. In contrast, Pforzheim hosted its only area bombing operation of the war on the 23/24th, at the hands of 360 Lancasters from 1, 6 and 8 Groups. It took twenty two minutes to deliver the attack, in which eighteen hundred tons of bombs went down, and destroyed 83% of the town's built-up area. A large section of the town was engulfed in flames, and 17,600 people lost their lives, the third highest death toll of the war in Europe. 625 Squadron's PB815 was one of twelve aircraft lost, and was struck by incendiaries from above shortly after bombing. F/O Paige and his crew managed to nurse their chariot as far as France before they were forced to part company with it, and all arrived safely on the ground with one minor injury between them.

Just when it seemed that operations were becoming less hazardous, March produced a jolt, which would banish any suggestion that the enemy defences were spent. Four 625 Squadron aircraft went missing in the first week, beginning on the morning of the 2nd, when over seven hundred aircraft raided Cologne for the final time. The vast majority of those attacking were in the first wave, and massive destruction left the city paralyzed. A 3 Group contingent following behind had to abandon its attack after just fifteen aircraft had bombed, when problems arose with a G-H transmitting station in England. 625 Squadron's PB158 exploded in the air in the target area, killing F/O Downes and four of his crew, while the flight engineer and bomb-aimer landed safely by parachute. Whether they were captured, or came down behind Allied lines, is unclear, but Cologne anyway fell to American forces four days later. Operation Thunderclap returned to Chemnitz on the 5/6th, when central and southern districts suffered severe fire damage. It was a comparatively expensive success, from which twenty two aircraft failed to return, and among them were two from Kelstern. NG240 crashed onto the island of Rügen, just to the north of Peenemünde, but F/O Alexander and his crew parachuted into the arms of their captors. The rear gunner, Sgt Williams, apparently escaped

while being force-marched, and made his way to Allied lines to return home on the 22nd of April. (Bomber Command Losses. Vol 6. W R Chorley.) PD375 crashed in mainland Germany, killing both gunners, but F/L Cook and the other four men survived to fall into enemy hands. The virgin target of Dessau was devastated by a force of five hundred Lancasters from 1, 3, 6 and 8 Groups on the 7/8th, at the relatively high cost of eighteen aircraft. One of these was the squadron's NG324, which contained the crew of F/L Chapman. He died with three others in the crash in Germany, while the flight engineer and both gunners were taken prisoner.

Kassel had been left in peace by the heavy brigade since the night of the firestorm in October 1943, and it was bombed for the last time on the 8/9th by a main force of over two hundred 1 Group Lancasters. The Command set an all time record on the 11th, when 1,079 aircraft took off in the late morning to attack Essen for the final time. Over 4,600 tons of bombs were delivered through complete cloud cover on Oboe skymarkers, and the city was still paralyzed when American troops entered some time later. The record lasted for a little over twenty four hours, and was surpassed early on the following afternoon, when 1,108 aircraft departed their stations to raid Dortmund for the last time. The 4,851 tons of bombs dropped onto the city also represented a new high for a single target, and all production at the war industry factories came to a complete halt. Benzol plants at Herne and Gelsenkirchen were the Group's objectives on the 13/14th, and the latter was claimed as successful. Two nights later, it was the Deurag oil refinery at Misburg near Hanover, but much of the bombing from the 1 Group main force missed the target altogether. The war's final raid on Nuremberg took place on the 16/17th, at the hands of over 250 Lancasters from 1 and 8 Groups. One district became a sea of flames, while heavy damage was inflicted elsewhere, but this old adversary had its final say, and claimed twenty four Lancasters, all from 1 Group. 625 Squadron's NG169 crashed in southern Germany, killing the entire crew of P/O Seear, and F/O Rolls died with all but one of his crew in RF145. The sole survivor was the bomb-aimer, and he was taken into captivity. The heavier than ever pounding of Germany continued at Hanau on the 18/19th, when 1 and 8 Groups destroyed over 2,200 houses, and killed two thousand people. Oil related targets followed for the Group at Hemmingstedt on the 20/21st, Bremen on the 21st, Bochum on the 21/22nd and Dortmund on the 24th. Before the last mentioned, 1 and 8 Groups carried out the one and only major raid of the war on Hildesheim on the afternoon of the 22nd, ostensibly to put the railway yards out of action. It developed into an area raid, however, and 3,300 apartment blocks were destroyed or seriously damaged along with many public buildings, and sixteen hundred people lost their lives. On the 25th, the highly popular station commander, G/C Donkin, was posted to Andover, and the squadron commander, W/C Barker, stepped into his shoes to combine the two jobs. Also on this day, 1 and 6 Groups provided the main force for an area raid on Hanover. On the 31st, the same Groups carried out an attack on the Blohm & Voss U-Boat yards at Hamburg, where the new Type XXI vessels were under construction. The target area was completely cloud-covered, and most of the bombs fell into the city's southern districts and Harburg. The Luftwaffe Tagjagd put in an appearance, and eleven aircraft failed to return, the last double figure loss from a single city target.

April would bring the conclusion of the bombing war for the heavy brigade, but there was still time for losses before the end finally came. 1 Group's first foray of the month took it to

Nordhausen, to what was thought to be a military camp. It was, in fact, a camp for forced workers at the underground secret weapons factory, which had been established after the Peenemünde raid in August 1943. Inevitably, heavy casualties were inflicted on these friendly foreign nationals, and their ordeal would continue at the hands of 5 Group on the following day. The squadron's NG237 was one of only two missing Lancasters, and crashed in Belgium with the loss of F/S Collier and his entire crew. On the credit side, this would prove to be the squadron's penultimate casualty of the war. The squadron was reduced to a two flight unit now that the end was in sight, C Flight moving to Fiskerton. Following the squadron's last operation from Kelstern, a 1 and 5 Group attack on the oil refinery at Lützkendorf on the 4/5th, A and B Flights began the upheaval of moving to Scampton. This was the famous former 5 Group station and first home of 617 Squadron, and had been out of commission for a considerable time while concrete runways were put down. Thereafter, it had remained a non-operational station, until being passed to 1 Group, and 625 Squadron officially took up residence there on the 6th. The first operation from its new home was to Kiel on the 9/10th, in company with the rest of 1 and 3 Groups and an element from the Pathfinders. The aiming points were in the harbour area, and severe damage was inflicted on the Deutsche Werke U-Boat yards, while the pocket battleship Admiral Scheer was left capsized, and the Admiral Hipper and Emden seriously damaged. On the following night, a predominately 1 Group force of almost three hundred aircraft attacked the northern half of Plauen, wherein lay the railway yards. The bombing was accurate, and half of the town's built-up area was reduced to rubble. 625 Squadron's PD204 was hit by flak shortly after bombing, and suffered the failure of three engines. Once over Belgium, the eight man crew, captained by F/O Mooney, took to their parachutes, and all arrived safely on the ground near Liege. The final area raid of the war on an urban target took place on the 14/15th at Potsdam, just to the south-west of Berlin, and it was the first time since March 1944, that the heavy brigade had entered the Capital's defence zone. Heavy damage was inflicted by the 1, 3 and 8 Group force of almost five hundred aircraft, and some bombs actually fell into Berlin itself. On the 18th, the island of Heligoland was pounded by over nine hundred aircraft, which left it heavily cratered. In preparation for an assault on Bremen by the British XXX Corps, the city's south-eastern suburbs were to be bombed by over seven hundred aircraft from 1, 3, 6 and 8 Groups on the late afternoon of the 22nd. In the event, cloud hampered the attack, and the Master Bomber was forced to call proceedings to a halt after less than two hundred aircraft had released their bombs, 1 and 4 Groups returning with theirs still on board.

The final acts of aggression by the main force and Pathfinder heavy squadrons took place on the 25th, when an all Lancaster force from 1, 5 and 8 Groups fittingly carried out an attack on the SS barracks at Hitler's Eaglesnest retreat at Berchtesgaden in the morning. That afternoon, 4, 6 and 8 Groups bombed heavy gun emplacements on the Frisian island of Wangerooge, to clear the approaches to the north-western ports of Germany, and 5 Group raided an oil refinery at Tonsberg in Norway during the night. With the bombing war over, the squadron's aircraft were given over to humanitarian employment under Operation Manna, and on the 29th, sixteen of them delivered thirty one tons of food to the starving Dutch people still under German occupation in the Hague area. On the following day, a further thirty tons were dropped, and these flights continued on the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 7th and 8th of May, the day on which the war in Europe officially ended, during which seventy nine sorties delivered an

additional 216 tons. It was during this period at the end of April, that Lancaster PB150 notched up its 100th operation. W/C Barker volunteered for duty in the Far East, and he was posted from the squadron on the 5th of May. Having served its Group and the Command magnificently, and made a valuable contribution to the victory in Europe over a period of 18½ months of operations, 625 Squadron was disbanded at Scampton on the 7th of October 1945, two years to the week after its formation.

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STATIONS

| | |
|-----------------|------------------------|
| WALTHAM | 01.10.43. to 13.10.43. |
| KELSTERN | 13.10.43. to 06.04.45. |
| SCAMPTON | 06.04.45. to 07.10.45. |

COMMANDING OFFICERS

| | |
|---|------------------------|
| WING COMMANDER T PRESTON DFC | 01.10.43. to 26.03.44. |
| WING COMMANDER D D HAIG DSO DFC* | 26.03.44. to 16.09.44. |
| WING COMMANDER MACKAY | 16.09.44. to 18.11.44. |
| WING COMMANDER J BARKER | 18.11.44. to 05.05.45. |

AIRCRAFT

| | |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| LANCASTER I/III | 13.10.43. to 07.10.45. |
|------------------------|------------------------|

SECTION 2



OPERATIONAL RECORD

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OPERATIONAL RECORD

| OPERATIONS | SORTIES | AIRCRAFT LOSSES | % LOSSES |
|------------|---------|-----------------|----------|
| 193 | 3385 | 66 | 1.9 |

CATEGORY OF OPERATIONS

BOMBING

191

MINING

2

8 Lancasters were destroyed in crashes.

TABLE OF STATISTICS

Out of 59 Lancaster squadrons.

30th highest number of Lancaster overall operations in Bomber Command.

22nd highest number of Lancaster sorties in Bomber Command.

23rd highest number of Lancaster operational losses in Bomber Command.

Out of 19 squadrons in 1 Group.

12th highest number of overall operations in 1 Group.

9th highest number of sorties in 1 Group.

8th equal (with 576Sqn) highest number of operational losses in 1 Group.

Out of 14 Lancaster squadrons in 1 Group.

8th highest number of Lancaster overall operations in 1 Group.

8th highest number of Lancaster sorties in 1 Group.

7th equal (with 576Sqn) highest number of Lancaster operational losses in 1 Group.

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SECTION 3



AIRCRAFT LISTING

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625 SQUADRON

LANCASTER.

From October 1943.

R5702 CF-B/Y From 100Sqn. FTR Berlin 15/16.2.44.
W4263 CF-M From 460Sqn. To 1LFS.
W4833 CF-J From 101Sqn. FTR Stuttgart 15/16.3.44.
W4993 CF-J From 101Sqn. To BDU.
W4995 CF-L From 101Sqn. To 1LFS.
W4999 CF-G From 100Sqn. Wrecked on landing at Kelstern on return from Berlin 2.12.43.
W5009 CF-Z From 101Sqn. FTR Nuremberg 30/31.3.44.
DV194 CF-F From 101Sqn. FTR Stuttgart 15/16.3.44.
DV242 From 100Sqn. To 3LFS.
DV278 CF-V To 300Sqn.
DV362 CF-B To 5LFS.
DV364 CF-D From 100Sqn. FTR Berlin on its 12th Berlin operation 28/29.1.44.
DV392 CF-Q FTR Leipzig 3/4.12.43.
ED317 CF-W From 100Sqn. FTR Berlin 24/25.3.44.
ED321 CF-U/V From 101Sqn. FTR Düsseldorf 3/4.11.43.
ED382 From 101Sqn. To 300Sqn.
ED809 CF-T From 101Sqn. FTR Berlin 26/27.11.43.
ED814 CF-K From 100Sqn. To 300Sqn.
ED938 CF-C From 100Sqn. Completed 13 Berlin operations. FTR Gelsenkirchen 12/13.6.44.
ED940 CF-P From 97Sqn. To 5LFS.
ED951 CF-A From 101Sqn. Crashed in Lincolnshire on return from Berlin 16.12.43.
HK797 From 195Sqn. No operations.
JA714 CF-R From 100Sqn. FTR Leipzig 20/21.10.43.
JA862 CF-T From 460Sqn. FTR Leipzig 19/20.2.44. Flew 11 Berlin operations.
JB122 CF-H From 100Sqn. FTR Berlin 30/31.1.44.
JB613 From 460Sqn. To 150Sqn.
JB743 CF-C From 460Sqn. FTR Vierzon 30.6/1.7.44.
LL894 CF-T FTR from mining sortie 15/16.5.44.
LL897 CF-P FTR Acheres 10/11.6.44.
LL918 From 626Sqn. To 460Sqn.
LL956 CF-Q/S Crashed soon after take-off from Kelstern when bound for Duisburg 14.10.44.
LL962 CF-U FTR Stuttgart 28/29.7.44.
LM103 CF-N FTR Frankfurt 12/13.9.44.
LM139 CF-G FTR Acheres 10/11.6.44.
LM163 CF-J FTR Trossy-St-Maximin 3.8.44.
LM168 CF-K/R FTR Kiel 26/27.8.44.
LM174 CF-P FTR Kiel 23/24.7.44.

LM317 CF-U From 100Sqn. FTR Maily-Le-Camp 3/4.5.44.
LM384 CF-X FTR Leipzig 19/20.2.44.
LM421 CF-Q FTR Berlin 23/24.12.43.
LM424 CF-B FTR Berlin 16/17.12.43.
LM427 CF-G FTR Tergnier 31.5/1.6.44.
LM512 CF-H/M Collided with Lancaster NF965 of 622Sqn over Belgium on return from Frankfurt 12/13.9.44.

LM513 CF-Y FTR Duisburg 21/22.5.44.
LM515 CF-W From 626Sqn. FTR Maily-le-Camp 3/4.5.44.
LM546 CF-O FTR Stuttgart 28/29.7.44.
LM674 CF-U FTR Stettin 16/17.8.44.
LM691 CF-O Collided with Halifax LL599 of 462Sqn over France on return from Essen 23.10.44.

LM714 CF-P From 12Sqn. FTR Kiel 23/24.7.44.
LM731 CF-G²/N FTR Wanne-Eickel 9.11.44.
LM732 To 170Sqn.
LM747 CF-L To GH Flt Methwold and back.
LM749 CF-K² To 170Sqn.

ME332
ME502
ME524
ME588 CF-A FTR Leipzig 19/20.2.44.
ME594 CF-B To 300Sqn.
ME676 CF-F From 460Sqn. Abandoned over Sussex on return from Raimbert 31.8.44.

ME682 CF-E To 75Sqn.
ME684 CF-V FTR Berlin 24/25.3.44.
ME697 CF-A FTR Maily-Le-Camp 3/4.5.44.
ME731 CF-S FTR Cologne 20/21.4.44.
ME733 CF-Z FTR Brunswick 12/13.8.44.
ME734 CF-J Shot down by intruder near Kelstern on return from Rouen 19.4.44.
ME780 CF-A From 300Sqn.
ME862 From 90Sqn. To 576Sqn.
ND356 To 100Sqn.
ND403 To 550Sqn.
ND407 Crashed while landing at Kelstern during training 10.4.44.
ND452 From 97Sqn. To 170Sqn.
ND459 CF-M FTR Vierzon 30.6/1.7.44.
ND461 CF-W FTR Berlin 27/28.1.44.
ND596 CF-K/H FTR Frankfurt 18/19.3.44.
ND613 CF-R To 103Sqn.
ND619 CF-D/E² To 1662CU.
ND636 CF-B²/O FTR Aulnoye 10/11.4.44.
ND637 CF-L Collided with ED606 (463Sqn) over Lincolnshire on return from Stuttgart 15/16.3.44.

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| ND639 CF-X | To 100Sqn. |
| ND641 CF-T | FTR Berlin 24/25.3.44. |
| ND742 CF-F | FTR Acheres 10/11.6.44. |
| ND863 CF-L/O ² | From 300Sqn. To 170Sqn. |
| ND975 | From 100Sqn via Special Duties Flight on loan. FTR Vierzon 30.6/1.7.44. |
| ND992 CF-A | To 170Sqn. |
| ND995 CF-W | To 100Sqn. |
| NE137 CF-L/B ² | To 1667CU. |
| NF993 CF-T | From 626Sqn. |
| NF996 CF-J ² | FTR Chemnitz 14/15.2.45. |
| NG164 | To 153Sqn |
| NG169 CF-B ² | FTR Nuremberg 16/17.3.45. |
| NG237 CF-S | FTR Nordhausen 3.4.45. |
| NG238 CF-E ² | FTR Düren 16.11.44. |
| NG239 CF-A | FTR Wanne-Eickel 9.11.44. |
| NG240 CF-F ² | FTR Chemnitz 5/6.3.45. |
| NG253 | |
| NG267 CF-Y | FTR Dortmund 20/21.2.45. |
| NG294 CF-H | FTR Ludwigshafen 15/16.12.44. |
| NG324 CF-L ² | FTR Dessau 7/8.3.45. |
| NG334 | |
| NG337 | |
| NG411 | |
| NG412 | |
| NG418 | |
| NN699 CF-C | Crashed on landing at Kelstern on return from Urft Dam at Heimbach 3.12.44. |
| NN748 CF-P/P ² | From 300Sqn. |
| NN757 CF-C ² | |
| NN798 CF-K ² | |
| PA174 CF-G | From 626Sqn. Crashed in Essex on return from Essen 23.10.44. |
| PA175 CF-K ² | To 576Sqn. |
| PA176 CF-H ² | To 576Sqn. |
| PA229 | |
| PB126 CF-T | FTR Vierzon 30.6/1.7.44. |
| PB150 CF-G/V/V ² | Completed 100 operations (including Operation Manna). |
| PB154 CF-Y | FTR Bochum 4/5.11.44. |
| PB158 CF-G/G ² | FTR Cologne 2.3.45. |
| PB464 CF-U/W | |
| PB480 CF-J | To 170Sqn. |
| PB531 CF-H | FTR Essen 23.10.44. |
| PB536 CF-F | |
| PB556 | FTR from training flight 8/9.11.44. |
| PB574 CF-A ² | To 576Sqn. |

| | | |
|--------------|---------------------|--|
| PB580 | CF-U | |
| PB581 | CF-A | To 170Sqn. |
| PB595 | | To 170Sqn. |
| PB648 | | To 166Sqn. |
| PB703 | | To 195Sqn. |
| PB708 | CF-K | To 1660CU. |
| PB735 | CF-D | To 1660CU. |
| PB736 | CF-C/G | To 1660CU. |
| PB815 | CF-O | FTR Pforzheim 23/24.2.45. |
| PB850 | | To 1660CU. |
| PD200 | CF-B | To 97Sqn. |
| PD204 | CF-P ² | To 300Sqn and back. FTR Plauen 10/11.4.45. |
| PD206 | CF-M/B ² | To 170Sqn. |
| PD375 | CF-R | FTR Chemnitz 5/6.3.45. |
| PD376 | CF-C ² | To 576Sqn. |
| PD388 | CF-Z | FTR Merseburg (Leuna) 14/15.1.45. |
| RF145 | CF-Z | FTR Nuremberg 16/17.3.45. |
| RF146 | CF-G ² | |
| RF189 | | |
| RF197 | | To 576Sqn. |
| RF213 | | To 576Sqn. |

HEAVIEST SINGLE LOSS.

30.6/1.7.44. Vierzon 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



SOURCES OF INFORMATION

www.bombaycommandmuseumarchives.ca

www.bombercommandmuseumarchives.ca

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SECTION 6



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