

**ROYAL AIR FORCE
BOMBER COMMAND**

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SQUADRON PROFILES

NUMBER 124



630 SQUADRON

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

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BOMBER COMMAND
SQUADRON PROFILES**



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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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630 SQUADRON

MOTTO NOCTURNA MORS Death by night.

Code **LE**

Formed in 5 Group on the 15th of November 1943 at East Kirkby, 630 Squadron was an entirely new unit with no past history or tradition. It was one of many squadrons created during the second half of the year as part of the Command's expansion programme, and as was generally the case, it was spawned by an existing operational unit. Its parent was 57 Squadron, whose B Flight, under the command of an American, Squadron Leader Crocker DFC, transferred en-masse across the tarmac to form the nucleus. This was the second time that 57 Squadron had given birth to an offspring, its firstborn having by now become part of Bomber folklore. In March, and while stationed at Scampton, C Flight had become the nucleus of 617 Squadron, which had soon afterwards been feted as the Dambusters following its epic attack on the German Dams on the 16/17th of May. S/L Crocker was promoted to Wing Commander, but as he was approaching the end of his tour, he was to spend only a month in command of 630 Squadron. A complement of sixteen Lancasters with four in reserve, and crews already blooded in battle with 57 Squadron, enabled the fledgling unit to go to war within three days of its formation. Sadly, the domestic arrangements were less well organized, and as often was the case when a new squadron formed, many of the basic comforts and amenities were absent. The squadron adjutant, F/L Cheetham, had to beg, steal or borrow all of the items necessary for the squadron's administration, and until acquiring a typewriter, was forced to record the squadron's activities in long hand. Eventually, a WAAF was posted in to operate the typewriter, and the squadron offices were connected to the electricity supply. Such mundane matters would not, of course, interfere with the business of operations, and 630 Squadron's crews attended their first briefing on the afternoon of the 18th. For new crews beginning their first tour with any squadron at this time, a daunting winter period lay ahead. It was to be dominated by Berlin, and characterized by long, dark nights, inhospitable weather conditions, and the Luftwaffe nightfighter force at its most efficient and lethal.

1943 had, all things considered, been a successful year for the Command thus far, and it is useful to look back over the significant events. The first major campaign of the year against Germany's industrial heartland, the Ruhr, had produced devastating assaults on all of the important towns and cities within it. Begun at Essen on the night of the 5/6th of March, it was a campaign lasting almost five months, and owed its outstanding success to the advent of Oboe. This was the electronic blind bombing device developed to overcome the problems of target location through cloud and industrial haze. The constant presence of one or both of these obstacles had hitherto protected the Ruhr, and prevented the Command from inflicting a telling blow. Installed in the Mosquitos of 109 Squadron of the Pathfinder Force, the device underwent exhaustive trials during the final third of 1942, and by the spring of 1943, was close to being fully effective. Brought to bear against the Ruhr, it enabled the targets to be marked with precision, and the industrial giants of Essen, Duisburg, Dortmund and Düsseldorf, as well as the likes of Bochum, Krefeld, Mülheim, Wuppertal, Oberhausen and Remscheid all wilted under an unprecedented rain of accurately aimed bombs. As was to be expected, the enemy's defence of this vitally important region was fierce, and the highly

organised and efficient flak and nightfighter units exacted a grievously high toll of Bomber Command aircraft and crews. The Ruhr quickly assumed a fearsome reputation, and its "Happy Valley" appellation was justifiably earned. By the middle of July, ACM Harris, the C-in-C of Bomber Command, was able to look back on a highly satisfactory campaign in which Oboe had been the decisive factor. Despite the horrendous losses, the aircraft factories were more than keeping pace with the rate of attrition, and eager new crews were flooding in from the Empire Training Schools around the world.

Having dealt, for the time being at least, with the Ruhr, Harris turned his attention upon Hamburg, Germany's Second City, which he intended to raze to the ground in a short, sharp series of attacks under the apt codename Operation Gomorrah. In each year of the war to date the Command had raided Hamburg during the final week of July, and it was this period in which Harris elected to launch Gomorrah. As Oboe had been introduced to main force operations at the start of the Ruhr offensive, so was another new device made ready for the first raid in the Battle of Hamburg, and it was to prove equally effective in its way. "Window", tinfoil-backed strips of paper, was to be released into the air stream in vast quantities to form giant clouds, which drifted slowly to earth, swamping the enemy nightfighter, searchlight and gun-laying radar with false returns. The device had been available for a year, but its use had been vetoed, in case the enemy copied it for use against Britain. The German scientists had, in fact, already developed their own version called Düppel, which they too had been forced to withhold for the same reason. The efficacy of Window was apparent from the first operation on the night of the 24/25th, when a modest twelve aircraft were lost from the almost eight hundred taking part. Hamburg suffered a heavy blow, in which fifteen hundred of its inhabitants lost their lives, although this was only a prelude to what lay in store three nights later. On the 27/28th, the first recorded example of the meteorological phenomenon known as a "Firestorm" erupted in the densely populated working class residential districts of Hamm, Hammerbrook and Borgfeld, two miles east of the city centre. The individual fires joined together to form a giant conflagration, which sucked in oxygen from surrounding districts to feed its voracious appetite. Such was the power of the resulting hurricane-force wind, that trees were uprooted, and flung bodily into the flames, along with debris and people. Temperatures at the heart of the inferno exceeded a thousand degrees Celcius, and it only subsided when there was nothing left of a combustible nature. At least forty thousand people died on this one night alone, and the following morning brought the first trickle of an exodus, which would see 1.2 million people evacuate the stricken city. Two nights later, a third raid added to the misery, and the Americans also joined in with two daylight attacks. The campaign concluded on the night of the 2/3rd of August, when violent weather conditions saved Hamburg from a further pounding, but the damage had already been done.

Much of the second week of August was devoted to operations against the major cities of Italy, which was now teetering on the brink of capitulation. Bomber Command was invited to help nudge it over the brink, and the less demanding trips across the Alps brought a welcome respite from Germany, where the defenders were beginning to recover from the body blow of Window. The final Bomber Command attack of the war against Italy was delivered on Turin by elements of 3 and 8 Groups on the 16/17th, and this was followed twenty four hours later

by one of the most important raids of the entire war on Germany. The secret weapons research and development establishment at Peenemünde, on the island of Usedom on the Baltic coast, had been under surveillance for some time, and photographic reconnaissance in June had produced pictures of a V-2 rocket. The complex operation was undertaken by 596 aircraft under the control of a Master Bomber, Group Captain John Searby of 83 Squadron, and was sufficiently successful to set back the weapons programme by a number of weeks. Ultimately, it forced the testing of the V-2 to be withdrawn eastwards into Poland, and the manufacturing of secret weapons to continue underground at Nordhausen. 57 Squadron contributed fourteen crews to this momentous operation, one of which, that of F/O Perrers, would be posted as a founder member to 630 Squadron. Harris had long believed that Berlin, as the seat and symbol of Nazi power, held the key to ultimate victory, and that its destruction would herald an uprising by the German populace demanding an end to a war, which had now turned against them. Party propaganda and a tight control would never allow this to happen of course, but Harris embarked on the first phase of his campaign against the Capital on the 23/24th. A moderately effective operation was marred by the loss of a new record of fifty six aircraft, and two further raids on the last night of August and the 3/4th of September also resulted in a bloody nose for a less than satisfactory return. Harris called a halt at this point, and spent the remainder of the late summer and early autumn attacking other German cities, principally Mannheim, Hannover, Munich, Kassel, Frankfurt, Stuttgart and Düsseldorf. The last mentioned was raided on the 3/4th of November, the day on which Harris wrote to Churchill, stating that, "we can wreck Berlin from end to end if the USAAF will come in on it. It will cost between us 400-500 aircraft. It will cost Germany the war." He also mentioned promised USAAF help in this matter, but vowed not to wait indefinitely. Harris still believed that the war could be won by bombing alone, and that this was infinitely preferable to the kind of bloody and protracted land campaigns, which he had personally witnessed during the Great War. The Americans, of course, were committed to victory by land invasion, and there was never the slightest chance of enlisting their support for a campaign against Berlin. Undaunted as always, Harris would go to Germany's Capital alone, and spent the first half of November preparing for the battle.

This, then, was the situation into which 630 Squadron was born, and its operational debut was to pit its crews against the most formidable target of all. Harris resumed his Berlin offensive on the night of the 18/19th, for which over four hundred Pathfinder and main force Lancasters were detailed. A diversionary operation was laid on to the twin cities of Mannheim and Ludwigshafen by almost four hundred Halifaxes, Stirlings and Lancasters drawn from 3, 4, 6 and 8 Groups, in an attempt to split the defences, or at least to confuse the enemy nightfighter controller. Twenty five Lancasters lined up for take-off at East Kirkby at around 17.00 hours, nine of them from 630 Squadron led by W/C Crocker. The crews found Berlin to be completely cloud-covered, and it was impossible to assess the results of the raid. It had, in fact, been only modestly effective, lacking any concentration, and only four of the 173 buildings completely destroyed were industrial. Nine Lancasters failed to return, possibly because of the diversion, from which a further twenty three aircraft were missing, but 630 Squadron negotiated its maiden operation without loss, and prepared for round two. This came on the 22/23rd, when 764 aircraft took off for the Capital, among them ten from 630 Squadron. The crews were again denied a sight of the massive urban sprawl below, as

10/10ths cloud continued to lie across the northern half of Germany. They were only able to speculate about the accuracy of the attack at debriefing, although the consensus was that the marking and bombing had found the mark. What they did not know, was that they had inflicted upon Berlin its most devastating assault of the war, which left three thousand houses in ruins along with twenty three industrial premises, in an area stretching from the city centre westwards. A number of firestorm areas were reported, and a pall of smoke rose over the city to a height of more than eighteen thousand feet. Around two thousand Berliners lost their lives, while a further 170,000 were rendered homeless. The bomber casualties amounted to twenty six aircraft, although 630 Squadron again came through unscathed. On the following night, Harris dispatched an all Lancaster main force, and guided by the glow of fires still burning beneath the clouds, the crews were able to deliver another devastating blow, which destroyed over two thousand more houses, and a handful of industrial premises. The death toll on the ground was around fifteen hundred people, while twenty Lancasters failed to return, and the Grim Reaper paid his first visit to 630 Squadron on this night. Ten of the squadron's aircraft had departed East Kirkby either side of 17.00 hours, but only eight returned, and the sad business began of posting crews missing. JB236 was brought down over Germany, and only the wireless operator and rear gunner from the crew of F/L Perrers survived to fall into enemy hands. The other missing Lancaster was JB135, containing the crew of P/O Howe, and their fate has never been determined.

After a three night break for the Lancaster crews, during which the Halifax brigade carried out a scattered raid on Frankfurt, an all Lancaster heavy force was prepared for the fourth trip to Berlin since the campaign's resumption. Over four hundred aircraft were involved, including ten from 630 Squadron, and they set a course over northern France accompanied by a Halifax diversionary force, which peeled off for Stuttgart as Frankfurt was reached. The skies over Berlin were clear as the Lancasters approached from the south, but the Pathfinders overshot the city centre, and marked an area well to the north-west. Fortunately for the outcome of the raid, below lay industrial districts, and thirty eight war industry factories were completely destroyed. The bomber stream became scattered as it withdrew from the target area, and nightfighters were able to pick up individual Lancasters during the return flight. Twenty eight failed to return home, while a further fourteen were written off in crashes in England, and the 630 Squadron casualty was among the latter. JB597 came down on approach to Holme-on-Spalding-Moor, but F/S Edwards and his crew were able to walk away from the crash.

December began as November had ended, with an all Lancaster main force rejoining the long and rocky road to Berlin on the night of the 2/3rd. 630 Squadron managed its best effort to date, contributing thirteen aircraft to the 440 strong heavy contingent, which was supported by eighteen Pathfinder Mosquitos to lay route markers. Wrongly forecast winds led to a scattering of the bomber stream during the outward flight, and made it difficult for the Pathfinders to pinpoint the planned aiming point. As a result, the marking spread over the southern half of the city, and much of the bombing hit the suburbs or fell into open country, although some useful damage was inflicted on industrial areas in western and eastern districts. It was a bad night for the Command, the worst against Berlin since the opening two raids of the offensive back in August. Forty aircraft were missing, among them 630

Squadron's ED777, which crashed in Germany with no survivors from the crew of P/O Clark. On the following night, over five hundred Lancasters and Halifaxes took off for Leipzig, a city last attacked ineffectively in foul weather conditions back in October. The force headed directly for Berlin to mislead the nightfighter controller, and then, as it turned towards Leipzig, a Mosquito feint continued on to Berlin to maintain the deception. The ploy had the desired effect, and the main operation was relatively unmolested by nightfighters. Accurate marking and bombing led to the most destructive attack of the war on this eastern city, in which housing and industry suffered alike. Had the bomber stream not strayed into the Frankfurt defence zone on the way home, the losses would have been light, but in the event, twenty four aircraft failed to return, including ED920, one of nine participants from 630 Squadron. This Lancaster crashed in Germany, killing the Australian pilot, P/O Syme, and all others on board except for the wireless operator, who was taken into captivity. There were no major operations thereafter until mid month, and it was left to the Mosquitos of 8 Group's Light Night Striking Force to maintain the pressure on Germany, by nightly raiding one or more of the Ruhr towns and cities. It was during this period, on the 12th, that W/C Crocker concluded his tour, and was posted from the squadron for his "rest". He was rewarded for his efforts with a second DFC, to go with the one he had received while with 57 Squadron. He seems to have remained at East Kirkby in a staff job, however, until resuming his operational career at 49 Squadron at Fiskerton on the 1st of May 1944. Like all the best commanding officers, W/C Crocker led from the front, and he was destined to lose his life doing so on a disastrous night for 5 Group less than two months later on the 21/22nd of June. He was replaced at 630 Squadron by W/C Rollinson, an officer whose own period of tenure would be brought to a premature conclusion.

Operations resumed on the night of the 16/17th, when Berlin was selected as the objective for an all Lancaster heavy force numbering over 480 Lancasters. Of these, twenty seven were launched from East Kirkby, twelve of them by 630 Squadron, the new commanding officer flying as second dicky for his first operation since taking over. The enemy nightfighter controller was becoming accustomed to the direct route across Holland adopted by the bombers, and was able to start infiltrating his nightfighters into the stream at the Dutch coast. Combats took place all the way to the target area, and the majority of the twenty five losses occurred during the outward flight. Complete cloud cover over Berlin necessitated the use of skymarking, the least reliable method of target marking, but much of the bombing still fell within the city, although without achieving any significant degree of concentration. The bombers returned via a northerly route over Denmark, and thereby avoided a further confrontation with nightfighters, but many crews, particularly those from 1, 6 and 8 Groups, still faced their sternest test of the night. By the time they arrived in home airspace, their stations were shrouded in a blanket of impenetrable fog, and few, if any, had sufficient reserves of fuel to divert to other areas. The minutes between midnight and 02.00 were filled with frantic searches by exhausted crews to find somewhere to land, and many aircraft came to grief as they stumbled around in the murk. Some flew into the ground, while others collided with obstacles or other aircraft. A few crews opted to take to their parachutes as their fuel ran out, and they were generally the fortunate ones. Twenty nine Lancasters were lost in these cruelest of circumstances, and around 150 airmen lost their lives when so close to home

and safety. 630 Squadron came through without casualty, and the Command remained on the ground for the following three nights.

In the late afternoon of the 20th, almost 650 Lancasters and Halifaxes took off for Frankfurt, accompanied by a small force of 1 and 8 Group Lancasters and Mosquitos bound for Mannheim as a diversion. The enemy nightfighter controller was again able to plot the bomber stream's progress, and many combats took place before the target was reached. Unexpected cloud hampered the Pathfinders' marking, and decoy fires and markers on the ground lured some of the bombing away from the city. The creep-back from this fell onto the city, however, and over four hundred houses were destroyed, while almost two thousand other buildings in Frankfurt and neighbouring towns sustained serious damage. It was a bad night for the bombers, though, and forty one failed to return home, twenty seven of them Halifaxes, which represented a 10.5% loss rate for the type. 630 Squadron put up its best effort to date of fifteen aircraft, and all returned safely home. Three nights later, over 360 Lancasters provided the majority of the effort for yet another assault on Berlin, when a Mosquito feint at Leipzig was partially successful in delaying the arrival of the nightfighters. Technical problems with their H2s equipment prevented the Pathfinders from taking advantage, and the marking was scattered. Most of the bombing fell into the south-eastern corner of the city, where almost three hundred buildings were destroyed, and sixteen Lancasters failed to return home. 630 Squadron contributed twelve aircraft, and for the third operation running, was able to welcome all of its crews home.

The last but one wartime Christmas came and went in relative peace, but business as usual resumed on the 29/30th, when a force of seven hundred aircraft was made ready for the final operation of the year to Berlin. It was also to be the first of three trips to the Capital in the space of five nights spanning the turn of the year, a concentration of effort, which would bear down most heavily on the Lancaster crews. Taking off either side of 17.00 hours, the bombers took a different route on this night, passing south of the Ruhr and approaching Leipzig before swinging towards Berlin. Mosquito diversions over the Ruhr, Magdeburg and Leipzig helped to keep the nightfighter controller guessing, and few nightfighters made it to the target area. Again the main weight of bombs fell into the southern and south-eastern districts, while some was wasted beyond the eastern city limits. Almost four hundred buildings were destroyed in return for the loss of twenty Lancasters, and 630 Squadron's fine record of loss-free operations continued with the return of all fifteen of its participants. Meanwhile during the month, away from the main offensive, 617 Squadron had been conducting operations against flying bomb sites in the Pas-de-Calais under its new commanding officer W/C Cheshire. Although ideal for attacks on cities, Oboe's margin of error of up to five hundred yards made the device impractical for small precision targets, which were to become 617 Squadron's forte. Photographic reconnaissance following raids on the 16/17th and 30/31st, in which an Oboe Mosquito had provided the marking, showed the target indicators to have been plastered by the 617 Squadron heavies, while the flying bomb site some 350 yards away remained untouched. The frustration born out of these failures was to set minds to work within 617 Squadron, and within months, an entirely new system of target marking would be developed, which would effectively turn 5 Group into an independent force within Bomber Command.

1944

As the new year dawned, the toll of repeated operations to Berlin, eight since the resumption of the campaign, began to tell on the crews, particularly those of the Lancaster squadrons. They had been involved in every one, while the Halifaxes had been used sparingly, and the Stirlings, after a period of sustained heavy losses, had been withdrawn from operations over Germany altogether following the highly successful raid on the Capital on the 22/23rd of November. The effect of the campaign was also being felt by the inhabitants of Berlin, who had witnessed the destruction of 25% of the city's living accommodation, and seen evidence of the mounting death toll. There is little doubt, that they and the crews of Bomber Command shared a common wish for the New Year, that Berlin would cease to be the main focus of attention. In any event, Harris's belief that he could break the spirit of a people who were Berliners first and Germans second was ill-founded. They were a hardy breed, and just like their counterparts in London during the blitz of 1940, they bore their trials with fortitude and humour, and got on with the business of daily life as best they could. The bombing served only to strengthen their resolve to withstand whatever Bomber Command could throw at them, and they joined together in a common bond of unity. During this, their "winter of discontent", they paraded banners through the shattered streets proclaiming, "you may break our walls but not our hearts". They took solace in the words of the most popular song of the day, *Nach jedem Dezember kommt immer ein Mai*, After every December comes always a May, a sentiment which hinted at a change of fortunes with the onset of spring. As events turned out, this was precisely how long both beleaguered camps would have to wait before their wishes were fulfilled. Before New Year's Day was done, the first Lancasters were taking off, and by the time that the 2nd of January was an hour old, over four hundred of them were heading for the Capital via an almost direct route over Holland. Not all reached their objective, twenty nine turning back for a variety of reasons, and around sixteen others fell victim to nightfighters and flak. The remainder found the city covered by cloud, and the skymarking soon deteriorated in the face of a strong wind. The bombing was spread over seventeen miles from wooded country in the south-west to districts in the east, but nowhere was significant damage inflicted. The failure was compounded by the loss of twenty eight aircraft, many of them carrying highly experienced Pathfinder crews. The year began badly for 630 Squadron, when JB532 failed to arrive back at East Kirkby with the thirteen other squadron participants. It was learned later, that the eight man crew of F/L Macdonald had all lost their lives, when flak brought the Lancaster down over Germany on the way home.

Many of the crews who collapsed wearily into bed at breakfast time on the 2nd found themselves back in the briefing room later in the day, incredulous and angry at the prospect of a back-to-back trip to the "Big City", and the third in five nights. There were twenty one crews present at the East Kirkby briefing, eleven of them from 630 Squadron, and as it snowed outside, they pondered the prospect of another midnight take-off, and the fact that no diversionary measures were planned. The route was again straight-in over Holland, with a dog leg south-east of Bremen to bring the bomber stream to a position north-west of Berlin for the final approach. 362 Lancasters took off, along with nine Halifaxes and a dozen Mosquitos, but the strain and weakening morale manifested itself as crew after crew turned back with problems of some kind. The force was depleted by sixty aircraft returning early, and while

“boomerangs” were a fact of life for very genuine reasons, some of those aborting their sorties on this night would almost certainly have pressed on under different circumstances. The enemy nightfighters failed to make contact with the bomber stream until Berlin was reached, and there they took a heavy toll. Bombs were again scattered over all parts of the city, and damage was only marginally greater than twenty four hours earlier, amounting to around eighty houses destroyed. The cost of this failure was twenty seven Lancasters, ten of them Pathfinders, 156 Squadron alone losing five to add to the four it had posted missing on the previous night, and in less than two weeks time, it would lose five more raiding Brunswick. Such losses were beginning to bleed the Pathfinders dry of quality crews, and sideways postings between the squadrons became common to maintain a leavening of experience. 630 Squadron negotiated the operation without loss, and the crews had two nights off before the next briefing was called on the afternoon of the 5th. The target was Stettin, at the eastern end of Germany’s Baltic coast, and despite its distance from the bomber stations, it always fell victim to accurate and concentrated raids, never once emerging from a Bomber Command assault with minor damage, as did many other German cities from time to time. Ten Pathfinder Halifaxes from 35 Squadron accompanied almost 350 Lancasters, including thirteen from 630 Squadron, in another very late take-off. A mosquito diversion at Berlin played its part in keeping the main operation largely free of nightfighters, and over five hundred houses were completely destroyed, along with twenty industrial premises, while almost twelve hundred other buildings were seriously damaged, and eight ships were sunk in the port. Sixteen aircraft failed to return home, but 630 Squadron was not represented among them.

There now followed a welcome eight night break from operations, which allowed the hard-pressed squadrons an opportunity to recover from the four long range trips in the space of eight nights. When the crews gathered for briefings on the 14th, there must have been a sense of relief as the curtains were drawn back from the wall maps, revealing Brunswick rather than Berlin as the target for the night. Situated about fifty miles beyond Hanover, a city which had proved a difficult and costly nut to crack in a four raid series during the autumn, Brunswick had not hosted a major operation before. 498 aircraft, all but two of them Lancasters, took off either side of 17.00 hours, and headed for a landfall at the German coast near Bremen. There the bomber stream was met by a strong force of enemy nightfighters, which were able to remain in contact all the way to the target and back as far as the Dutch coast. They scored steadily throughout, and by the time the survivors reached home airspace after a dismally disappointing raid, which had mostly afflicted outlying communities, thirty eight of their number had been brought down. All fifteen 630 Squadron aircraft returned, the third operation in a row negotiated without loss, but the Pathfinders had again sustained heavy casualties to the tune of eleven aircraft. Another five night lull prepared the crews for the next operation, a maximum effort to Berlin on the 20/21st, for which 769 aircraft took off. There were fourteen 630 Squadron Lancasters in the bomber stream, which crossed the German coast at the narrow neck of land south of the Danish border and opposite Kiel, where a small Mosquito feint failed to impress the nightfighter controller. Almost immediately, nightfighters made contact and began their deadly work, as the bomber stream pressed on for a north-westerly approach to the target. Berlin was completely cloud covered, and it was impossible to make an assessment of the raid from the air. In fact, most of the bombs had fallen in an

eight mile swathe from north to south across the city's hitherto less severely damaged eastern districts, and there was much damage to housing, industry and railway installations. It was another night of heavy losses, however, and twenty two of the missing thirty five aircraft were Halifaxes. 630 Squadron continued its remarkable run of loss-free operations, and prepared for the following night's effort. Like Brunswick, Magdeburg had never been raided in numbers before, and on this night it would face the remains of a force of 648 aircraft, which departed their stations either side of 20.00 hours. The enemy nightfighter controller plotted the progress of the bomber stream across the North Sea, and had to distinguish between the main raid and a small 5 and 8 Group diversion to Berlin. The first contact was made before the German coast was reached, and a running battle ensued from there to the target, which was reached ahead of time by some aircraft through stronger than forecast winds. Anxious to get away from the target area as quickly as possible, some crews bombed before the Pathfinder markers went down, and the resulting fires combined with decoy markers to draw off a proportion of the main force. The Pathfinders were not able to recover the situation, and the attack lacked accuracy and concentration, falling predominately outside of the city. A massive fifty seven aircraft failed to return, the majority of them victims of nightfighters, and this represented a new record high casualty figure. It was the Halifax squadrons which once more sustained the heavier losses, amounting to thirty five aircraft, while 630 Squadron again escaped the carnage, and all of its thirteen Lancasters on the main raid returned home. Sadly, JB294 had been shot down over Germany, the sole loss from the Berlin diversionary operation, and F/S Homewood was killed along with five of his crew, the bomb-aimer alone surviving to be taken prisoner.

The squadrons were given a five night lull in which to lick their wounds before the next round of operations began, and this was to be a three raid assault on the Capital in an unprecedented space of just four nights. An all Lancaster heavy force of 515 aircraft took off either side of 18.00 hours on the 27th, and flew a south-easterly course across northern Holland and into Germany, before turning north-east to a point west of Berlin. Elaborate diversionary operations pinned down a proportion of the nightfighter force, and activity around the bomber stream was less intense than of late. The city was cloud covered, and a strong tail wind drove the markers across the city along the line of approach. Bombs fell in many parts of Berlin, although more in the southern half, but dozens of outlying communities were also afflicted. The operation was moderately successful, if expensive, thirty three Lancasters falling victim to the defences, most of them to nightfighters arriving on the scene as the raid was in progress. 630 Squadron was not represented among the missing, and had now lost just one crew in the seven major operations to targets deep inside the Reich, and another on a diversion. This fine record could not be sustained of course, and the Reaper would return to the squadron on the very next night, when Berlin was again the objective. The inclusion of Halifaxes allowed a force of 677 aircraft to take off around midnight on the 28/29th, and they were routed over Denmark to approach the target from the north-west. Mosquitos bombed Berlin earlier in the evening, in the hope that this would persuade the nightfighter controller that the main force was heading elsewhere. It was a round trip of less than four hours for a Mosquito, and at least one 627 Squadron crew was back at Oakington in time to wish his heavy-weight 7 Squadron colleagues a good flight. Other extensive diversionary operations were mounted, and although the outward flight was relatively free of nightfighter encounters,

a hot reception awaited the bombers over the target. Single and twin engine fighters accounted for twenty seven aircraft here, but despite this, the marking and bombing was accurate and concentrated, and much damage was caused within the southern half of the city. Around 180,000 people were rendered homeless on this night, and many public and administrative buildings were damaged in south-central districts. The bomber casualties had reached forty six by the time the survivors landed, and there were two absentees from the 630 Squadron site at East Kirkby. W/C Rollinson had been flying his fifty fifth operation, and his third since assuming command of the squadron, and he died with his crew when JB666 crashed in Germany. Also missing was JB654, which was lost without trace with the crew of P/O Story. After a night's rest, 534 aircraft set out again for the Capital, arriving over the city shortly after 20.00 hours. It was a predominately Lancaster force, with eighty two of the new Hercules powered MkIII Halifaxes for company. The nightfighters failed to meet the bomber stream over the North Sea, and only made contact deep into German airspace. From then until well into the return flight south of Brunswick and Hanover, they took a heavy toll of bombers, eventually achieving a score of thirty three, all but one of them Lancasters. On the credit side, however, Berlin had suffered a bruising raid, in which large areas of the centre and south-western quarter were engulfed in flames, and at least a thousand people lost their lives. All ten 630 Squadron participants returned home to complete the month's operations, in which 114 sorties had been flown for the loss of 4 aircraft, a casualty rate of 3.5%.

February began with the appointment of W/C Deas DFC as the new commanding officer. There were to be no operations for him to preside over for the first two weeks of the month, as the moon period and inhospitable weather kept most squadrons on the ground. The series of raids on Berlin at the end of January had undoubtedly hurt the city grievously, while not achieving the level of destruction of the November raids, but nowhere were there signs of imminent collapse, and it remained the seat of power. As events were to prove, this was the last concerted effort of the campaign, and although two further large-scale operations would take place, they would be in isolation and six weeks apart. During the lull, on the 8/9th, 617 Squadron carried out an operation of great significance against the Gnome & Rhone aero-engine factory at Limoges. The marking was carried out by W/C Cheshire in a Lancaster at very low level, after making a number of passes across the site to warn the workers. Eleven other squadron aircraft then bombed the target with great accuracy from medium level, and the operation was an outstanding success, which demonstrated the potential of the low level visual marking method.

There was an early briefing for crews on every main force and Pathfinder station on the 15th, as preparations were put in hand for the penultimate raid of the war by RAF heavy bombers on Berlin. It was to be a mighty effort, involving the largest non-1,000 force to date of 891 aircraft, and it would be the first time, that over five hundred Lancasters and three hundred Halifaxes had operated to a single target. Together with the extensive diversionary operations, which included Mosquito attacks on enemy nightfighter airfields in Holland, mining in Kiel Bay and a small 8 Group Lancaster raid on Frankfurt-an-Oder to the east of Berlin, more than a thousand aircraft were to be in action. The main operation began with a few take-offs before 17.00, but the vast bulk of the giant armada got away between 17.00 and 18.00, swinging north over Denmark, before setting an almost southerly course to the target. The nightfighter

controller observed the progress of the bomber stream, but held his response back until it crossed Denmark's Baltic coast a little north of Flensburg. The now familiar running battle ensued all the way to the target, and around twenty aircraft in the rear half of the stream were brought down. Berlin was, therefore, spared these bomb loads, and those of the seventy five early returns, but even so, almost eight hundred aircraft remained, and they carried in their bomb bays a record 2,640 tons of bombs. Much of this was deposited squarely in the central and south-western districts of the city, causing almost twelve hundred medium and large fires, destroying a thousand houses and hundreds of temporary wooden barracks. Many important war industry factories were also hit, but as happened on all of the Berlin operations, scores of outlying communities found themselves in the firing line, and many bombs were wasted in this way. The bombers withdrew to the south and headed for northern Holland, making their way to the North Sea via the IJsselmeer. 630 Squadron had put up a record twenty one aircraft, and one of these was among the forty three failing to make it home. JB665 crashed in Germany, and there were no survivors from the eight man crew of F/L English. Another of the squadron's Lancasters, ED655, had been borrowed by a 619 Squadron crew, and four of them were injured when it crashed in Lincolnshire.

The survivors were allowed three nights off before the next operation, which was to Leipzig on the 19/20th. It was to be a late take-off, either side of midnight, and seventeen 630 Squadron crews joined twenty from 57 Squadron at briefing. Extensive diversionary operations were again laid on, but the enemy nightfighter controller reserved most of his strength to meet the main raid as it crossed the Dutch coast. The two forces remained in contact all the way into eastern Germany, where some aircraft arrived early through stronger than forecast winds. They were forced to orbit in the target area until the Pathfinder markers went down, and around twenty of them fell victim to the local flak batteries, while four others were lost through collisions. The attack was inconclusive in the face of complete cloud cover and skymarking, but what was not in question was the scale of the mauling inflicted on the Command. When all of the returning aircraft had been accounted for, there was a massive shortfall of seventy eight, by far the heaviest casualty rate to date. The Halifax loss rate was over 13% of those dispatched, and Harris immediately withdrew the MkII and V variants from future operations over Germany. There were two empty dispersals on the 630 Squadron site at East Kirkby next morning, those normally occupied by ND532 and JB710. P/O Yates and four of his crew died in the former, only the flight engineer and bomb-aimer surviving to be captured, while the latter was lost without trace with the crew of F/L Armour.

Despite the horrendous losses, and the withdrawal of the older Halifaxes, almost six hundred aircraft were made ready on the following night for the first of three heavy raids over a three week period on Stuttgart. 630 Squadron detailed fourteen aircraft for departure shortly before midnight, in an operation which began tragically. Australian pilot, F/O Murray, and his crew were starting their very first sortie together, but their Lancaster, ND563, developed a swing as it gathered speed along the runway. It careered through the boundary fence, losing its undercarriage, before slithering across a road, and this caused the bomb load to go up. Miraculously, the rear gunner survived when his turret became detached, but his crew mates all perished. For once, the nightfighter controller was deceived by the diversionary measures, and the bomber stream remained largely unmolested during its time over enemy territory.

Despite cloud cover and scattered bombing, much damage was caused in the city's central districts, and also to areas in the north-west and north-east. A modest nine aircraft failed to return, but among them was 630 Squadron's ND338 containing the crew of P/O Mackintosh. This Lancaster crashed in Germany, and only the wireless operator escaped with his life to be taken prisoner.

A new tactic was introduced for the next two operations in an attempt to reduce the prohibitive losses of recent weeks. It was decided to split the bomber force into two distinct waves, separating them by two hours, in the hope that the enemy nightfighters would be caught on the ground refueling and re-arming as the second wave passed through. The system was tried first during an operation to the ball bearing town of Schweinfurt on the night of the 24/25th. The first wave, comprising 392 aircraft, took off between 18.00 and 19.00 hours, and the second wave of 342 aircraft between 20.00 and 21.00 hours. Both phases of the attack suffered from undershooting, and the operation was a failure in that respect. However, the second wave lost 50% fewer aircraft than the first in an overall casualty figure of thirty three, and this suggested some merit in the system. 630 Squadron sent sixteen aircraft on the raid, and all returned safely. On the following night, the experiment continued at Augsburg, the beautiful and historic city in southern Germany, which had been the scene of the epic daylight raid by 44 and 97 Squadron Lancasters in April 1942, and for which W/C Nettleton had been awarded the Victoria Cross. It was Augsburg's misfortune to be the victim of one of those relatively rare occasions, when all facets of the bombing plan came together in perfect harmony. The unusually concentrated marking and bombing, with scarcely any creep-back, devastated the old centre of the city, obliterating forever centuries of cultural history. Over 2,900 houses were destroyed, five thousand others were damaged to some extent, and up to ninety thousand people were rendered homeless. During the second phase of the attack, however, some of the bombing did eventually spread into the industrial areas in the north and east. Twenty one aircraft failed to return, but again there were no losses from among the fourteen Lancasters dispatched by 630 Squadron.

The dawning of March brought the final month of the long and increasingly bitter winter campaign. Thereafter would come a new offensive to prepare the way for the invasion of Fortress Europe. Matters, though, were already well in hand in this regard, and the first salvoes of Bomber Command's contribution, the Transportation Plan, would be fired before the new month was a week old. In the meantime, the second raid of the series on Stuttgart was mounted on the 1/2nd by a force of 557 aircraft, made up predominately of Lancasters, with 129 MkIII Halifaxes in support. Dense cloud on the route to the target prevented nightfighters from making contact with the bomber stream, but also hampered the Pathfinders in their marking. No assessment of the raid by the crews was possible, but it had been a successful attack, which left further extensive damage in central, western and northern districts, where housing was the main victim, although a number of important war industry factories were also hit. The operation was concluded for the remarkably low loss of just four aircraft, but sadly, one of the three missing Lancasters belonged to 630 Squadron. ND561 was one of fourteen dispatched by the squadron, and it crashed in Germany with no survivors from the crew of P/O Pigin. Most of the main force Lancaster squadrons remained on the ground for the next two weeks, and it was during this period, that Halifaxes of 4 and 6 Groups,

including the MkII and Vs, took the main role in opening the Transportation Plan. This called for the systematic dismantling by bombing of the French and Belgian railway networks, to prevent their use by the Germans to bring up forces to face the invasion. Halifaxes opened the proceedings at Trappes marshalling yards on the 6/7th, after the marking had been carried out by Oboe Mosquitos. A successful operation left track, rolling stock and installations severely damaged, and similar success was gained at Le Mans railway yards on the following night, both operations concluding without loss. On the 10/11th, 5 Group sent a hundred Lancasters to attack four factories in France, East Kirkby providing twenty two of them, eleven from each squadron, to the thirty three assigned to the Michelin works at Clermont-Ferrand. All four attacks were declared successful, and the night's only loss was that of a 207 Squadron flight commander on the Clermont-Ferrand raid. A second attack by 4 and 6 Groups on the Le Mans yards took place on the 13/14th, and this time fifteen locomotives and eight hundred wagons were destroyed, while collateral damage was inflicted upon two nearby factories.

The Command returned to the fray in numbers on the 15/16th, when 863 aircraft, the second largest non-1,000 force to date, including twenty from 630 Squadron, took off to return to Stuttgart. The route along the length of France almost to the Swiss border delayed the inevitable contact with nightfighters, but they caught up shortly before the target was reached, and began to take a heavy toll. Strong winds played a part in a disappointing marking performance, and although some bombs hit central districts, the majority fell short and into open country. Thirty seven aircraft were lost, and for the third Stuttgart operation running, 630 Squadron suffered casualties. ND530 was attacked by a nightfighter over France, killing both gunners, and the remainder of the crew escaped by parachute. P/O Barnes and his flight engineer ultimately evaded capture, but their three colleagues were unable to do so. Also missing was ND583, which likewise crashed in France, killing P/O Rodbourn and his crew. Another massive force, this time of 846 aircraft, set out during the early evening of the 18th for the first of two raids in four nights on Frankfurt. Part of the enemy nightfighter response was drawn to the north to face a mining diversion, but the remainder made contact with the bomber stream as it bore down on the target. Accurate Pathfinder marking preceded a concentrated attack, which fell mainly into central, western and eastern districts, destroying or seriously damaging over six thousand buildings. Although housing accounted for most of this total, industrial, commercial and public buildings also figured prominently. The loss of twenty two aircraft was a relatively modest price to pay for the scale of the success, and among them was 630 Squadron's ND686, one of eighteen aircraft dispatched. The crew of P/O Orchiston was duly posted missing, and it was later learned, that the Lancaster had crashed in Belgium with no survivors. Four nights later, over eight hundred aircraft again took off for Frankfurt, 630 Squadron this time putting up fifteen Lancasters. The results of this attack were even more devastating than the first, and although all parts of the city were afflicted, the western districts received the greatest concentration of bombs. Half of the city was left without water, gas and electricity for an extended period, and the old Frankfurt, which had developed from the Middle Ages, was obliterated. Despite the failure of the bulk of the nightfighter force to make contact, thirty three aircraft failed to return, and one must assume that the flak batteries enjoyed a successful night. 630 Squadron came through unscathed, and along with the rest of the heavy squadrons, girded its loins for the next major operation.

The time had arrived for Harris to launch the final assault of the campaign on Berlin. It would be the nineteenth since he began back in August, and the sixteenth since the resumption. For some 5 and 8 Group squadrons, like 630, which had participated in the diversion to Berlin on the night of the Magdeburg raid, it would be the seventeenth since then. It would also be the final raid of the war by RAF heavy bombers on the Capital, which would then be left to the Mosquitos of 8 Group's Light Night Striking Force to harass right up to the moment that Russian troops arrived in the suburbs. The force of 811 aircraft for this momentous occasion included fifteen from 630 Squadron as follows; ND688 S/L Calvert, ND527 F/L Kellaway, LM537 F/L Roberts, ME664 F/L Weller, ED944 F/O Nall, ND554 F/O Watts, shortly to be posted to 617 Squadron, ND657 P/O Allen, JB556 P/O Bailey, JB288 P/O Johnson, JB546 P/O Kilgour, ND335 P/O Nash, ND531 P/O Rogers, ND685 P/O Wilson, LL886 W/O White and ND788 F/S Perry. Flying as second dickey with F/L Weller was F/S "Blue" Rackley, an Australian who was to survive an eventful tour with the squadron.

The aircraft departed their respective stations either side of 19.00 hours, taking a wide swing over Denmark before crossing Germany's Baltic coast. The main feature of the outward flight was a wind of unprecedented strength from the north, which scattered the bomber stream, and drove aircraft continually south of their intended track. The windfinder system, whereby selected crews assessed the wind strength and direction before transmitting their findings to Group HQs for re-broadcast, was unable to cope with the situation. The loss of cohesion denied the attack any meaningful chance of concentration, and as so frequently happened at Berlin, many bomb loads were wasted on over a hundred outlying communities. Sufficient housing was destroyed to leave twenty thousand people homeless, but industry escaped reasonably lightly. There had been little nightfighter activity before the target was reached, but fourteen bombers were shot down by fighters in the Berlin defence zone. The bomber stream became even more dispersed on the return flight, and instead of passing south of Hanover and north of the Ruhr, many aircraft were driven by the wind into the Leipzig area and over the Ruhr itself. This provided the predicted flak batteries with their biggest bag of the war, and an estimated two thirds of the seventy two shot down bombers were credited to them. It was 630 Squadron's worst night to date, with three empty dispersals to contemplate on the following morning. Remarkably, there were plenty of survivors, seven, in fact, from the eight man crew of W/O White in LL886, the pilot alone losing his life, while his crew mates became PoWs. All seven men escaped with their lives when ND788 was brought down by flak over Germany, F/S Perry and five others joining the growing band of 630 Squadron airmen in captivity, while the flight engineer evaded capture. Sadly, P/O Allen and his crew were less fortunate, and only the navigator was able to leave the stricken aircraft before it crashed in Germany on the way home. It had been an exhausting campaign against Berlin for all concerned, and it had cost 630 Squadron fifteen aircraft and thirteen crews from just over two hundred sorties. Sixty two men had been killed, sixteen were in captivity and one other would eventually make his way home.

The Berlin offensive may now be over, but the winter campaign still had a week to run, and two further major operations for the crews to negotiate. The first of these was directed at Essen on the 26/27th, and probably caught the defenders by surprise. Within range of Oboe, which had proved the decisive factor in the Ruhr offensive a year earlier, Essen wilted under

another highly effective attack, which destroyed over seventeen hundred houses, and seriously damaged almost fifty industrial buildings. A modest nine aircraft failed to return, but all fourteen from 630 Squadron came home. The final operation of the winter offensive was to be against Nuremberg, the birthplace of Nazism, a city, which thus far, had escaped the worst ravages of a Bomber Command assault. At briefings, crews were given a forecast of protective cloud at cruising altitude, but later, a 1409 Met Flight Mosquito crew reported that this was unlikely to materialize. Despite the warning the operation was given the green light, allowing 795 aircraft to take off in the late evening, and head towards the greatest disaster to afflict the Command during the entire war. A conference earlier in the day involving the Group commanders had decided upon a 5 Group inspired route, which would take the bomber stream in a long, straight leg from a point over Belgium to about fifty miles north of the target, from where the final run-in would commence. AVM Bennett, the brilliant Pathfinder AOC, was utterly and violently opposed to the plan, predicting a disaster, but he was overruled.

It was not long before the crews began to note some unusual and alarming features in the conditions, which included uncharacteristically bright moonlight, combined with crystal clear visibility. This enabled them to observe the other aircraft in the stream, something to which they were rarely accustomed. The forecast cloud did, indeed, fail to appear, but formed instead beneath the bomber stream as a white backdrop, silhouetting the aircraft like flies on a tablecloth. If this were not enough, condensation trails began to form in the cold, clear air, further advertising the bombers' presence. The final insult was the reappearance of the jetstream winds, which had so adversely effected the Berlin raid a week earlier. On this night they blew from the south, breaking the cohesion of the bomber force, and driving aircraft well to the north of their intended track. Again, the windfinders were unable to cope with the speed of the wind, and modified the findings transmitted back to HQ. Here, the figures were disbelieved, and were again modified before being sent back to the aircraft. The result was, that many crews, through either failing to detect the effects, or refusing to believe the evidence, wandered up to fifty miles north of track, and consequently, turned towards Nuremberg from a false position.

Perhaps of greater significance, was the fact that the disputed route passed close to two nightfighter holding beacons, and this, together with conditions, handed the bomber force on a plate to the waiting enemy. The carnage began over Charlerois in Belgium, and continued all the way to the target, the burning wreckage on the ground of RAF bombers sign-posting the way. Eighty two aircraft fell during the outward flight and around the target area, and together with the fifty two early returns, this dramatically reduced the numbers available to attack the city. Among the early returns was "Blue" Rackley, one of sixteen 630 Squadron crews involved. It was the crew's second operation as a unit, and it was a problem with the navigator's oxygen supply, which caused them to abandon the sortie. It was not an easy decision to make, and Rackley knew he would have to face an irate commanding officer on the following morning. Other absentees from the target were around 120 crews, most of whom had probably been unaware of their true position when turning towards Nuremberg. At the appointed time, they found themselves over a built-up area, which, on seeing a number of target indicators, they took to be the target. It was, in fact, Schweinfurt, some fifty miles to

the north-west, and it was only on their return, that the majority discovered their error. In the event, Schweinfurt escaped lightly, as did Nuremberg, but the surviving aircraft did at least face a considerably reduced level of opposition on the way home. The damage had been done, however, and ninety five aircraft were lost, while others were written off in crashes at home, or with battle damage too severe to repair. Three 630 Squadron crews were posted missing, each of them having been shot down by nightfighters during the outward flight. ND337 was the first to succumb, taking with it to their deaths F/S Clark and five of his crew, the bomb-aimer alone surviving as a PoW. They had been on their first operation as a crew. Another crew in the most dangerous stage of their tour, the first half dozen sorties, came to grief deeper into Germany while on their third operation. F/O Langlands and three of his crew managed to escape from ME664 before it crashed, but their three colleagues were killed. Finally, P/O Johnson and three others died in JB288, and the three surviving crewmen fell into enemy hands. March had been by far the squadron's worst month since beginning operations in November, and had cost ten aircraft and crews from eight operations.

That which now faced the crews was in marked contrast to what had been endured over the winter. The frequent deep penetration forays into Germany on dark, often dirty nights were to be replaced by mostly shorter range hops to France and Belgium in improving weather conditions. An added bonus, was that these targets, unlike Berlin, Frankfurt, Nuremberg, Schweinfurt, Augsburg, Leipzig and Stuttgart, would fall within the range of Oboe. The main fly in the ointment as far as the crews were concerned, 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 ridiculous policy was rescinded, mutterings of discontent pervaded the bomber stations. The view from the top, that operations against French and Belgian targets would be a "piece of cake" would not be borne out, and they would require of the crews a greater commitment to accuracy, to avoid as far as possible friendly civilian casualties. Now that the entire Command was available to concentrate on the Transportation Plan, it would proceed apace, and despite the prohibitive losses of the winter, the bomber force was in remarkably fine fettle to face its new challenge. Harris was now in the enviable position of being able to achieve that which had eluded his predecessor, namely to attack multiple targets simultaneously, with forces large enough to make an impact. He could assign targets to individual Groups, to Groups in tandem, or to the Command as a whole, as dictated by operational requirements, and whilst pre-invasion considerations dominated, Harris was never going to entirely shelve his favoured policy of city-busting.

The first week of April brought no dramatic events as the main force remained at home. Of great significance, however, was a 5 Group operation on the night of the 5/6th by 144 Lancasters and a single Mosquito against an aircraft factory at Toulouse. The outcome of the raid would confirm the effectiveness or otherwise of low level visual marking. The Mosquito was piloted by W/C Cheshire of 617 Squadron, and it was the first use of the type in this role. The frustrating failures against flying bomb sites mentioned earlier, had led to unofficial experiments by S/L "Mick" Martin, one of the original Dambusters. He tried diving his Lancaster onto the aiming point over a bombing range, and found he could achieve great accuracy, albeit at the risk of tearing off the wings. Ever open to innovation, Cheshire used the system to great effect at the Gnome & Rhone aero-engine factory at Limoges in early

February, then took the idea to the receptive AVM Cochrane, his AOC. Cochrane approached Harris, and it was decided that a fast, maneuverable Mosquito would be less vulnerable at low level than a clumsy Lancaster. 630 Squadron contributed nine Lancasters to the main force element, and the operation was an outstanding success, made more impressive by the fact that the 5 Group main force crews were from squadrons of the line, with no special training. It was the defining moment of the war for 5 Group, which had always considered itself to be the elite of the Command. From this moment on, it would gain an unprecedented degree of autonomy, which it would retain for the rest of the war. Such was the potential of the low level marking system, that Harris awarded 5 Group its own target marking force. Within two weeks he would transfer an entire Mosquito squadron, 627, from 8 Group to dedicate to the role, and return to 5 Group on permanent loan the two heavy squadrons, 83 and 97, which were formerly 5 Group to the core, but currently on Pathfinder strength. This was a bitter blow to AVM Bennett, the 8 Group AOC, who took the removal of three of his finest squadrons as a slight. The already publicized animosity between Bennett and Cochrane, two of the most brilliant men in the Command, was made deeper by the moves, and the ill-feeling would extend even as far as the crews. It was all a matter of opinions about target marking techniques. Bennett was opposed in principle to low level marking because of the risks, while Cochrane accepted the risks, which anyway in a Mosquito proved less than imagined, in order to achieve the pin-point accuracy required at precision targets. 617 Squadron took four Mosquitos on charge to enable it to mark for the Group, as well as for itself against its own precision targets, although 627 Squadron, after training, was to assume the main responsibility for the Group.

The new offensive began in earnest on the night of the 9/10th, when two operations were mounted against railway targets in France. 239 aircraft from 3, 4, 6 and 8 Groups attacked the Lille-Delivrance goods station to excellent effect, destroying in the process over two thousand items of rolling stock, and extensively damaging track and buildings. The success of the operation was marred only by the heavy casualties inflicted on French civilians in adjacent residential districts. Around five thousand houses were destroyed or damaged, and 456 people were killed. This was a problem, which would never satisfactorily be addressed, and the night's other operation at the Villeneuve-St-Georges railway yards in Paris, conducted by elements from all the Groups, also resulted in civilian deaths, although on a much smaller scale. 630 Squadron was not involved in either of the main operations, sending instead ten aircraft to participate in a large mining effort by 1 and 5 Groups in the Baltic. This was the first mining operation by the squadron, and all of its aircraft returned safely. On the following night, four railway yards were targeted in France and one in Belgium, 5 Group taking on those at Tours. The 180 Lancasters included seventeen from 630 Squadron, and they played their part in another successful operation, which left the yards severely damaged. On the 11/12th, Harris sent over 350 Lancasters and Mosquitos from 1, 3, 5 and 8 Groups across the German frontier to attack Aachen. It was the town's worst night of the war, which left massive damage to buildings and communications, and killed over fifteen hundred people. 630 Squadron provided six Lancasters, and they all returned safely.

There were no main force operations during the following week, and it was during this period, on the 14th, that Bomber Command became officially subject to the dictates of

SHAEF for the pre and post-invasion campaigns. It would remain thus shackled until the Allied armies were sweeping towards the German frontier at the end of the summer. On the 15th, 627 Squadron joined 5 Group, and took up residence at Woodhall Spa, the home of 617 Squadron. Also on this day, East Kirkby became 55 Base with responsibility for Spilsby, where 207 Squadron was the resident unit. The base system allowed Groups an efficient way of standing down a part of the force as required, and in the case of 55 Base, it would mean 630, 57 and 207 squadrons generally operating as a unit. Three days later, 83 and 97 Squadrons moved into Coningsby to act as the Group's illuminator and heavy marker force. The manner of their welcome was unfortunate in the extreme, and did nothing to cement relations between 5 Group and crews who were both fiercely proud of their Pathfinder status, and unhappy at being posted on loan to 5 Group. On their arrival at Coningsby, the crews were summoned to the briefing room, where the 54 Base commander, Air Commodore Sharpe, had prepared a lecture. Rather than welcoming these battle-hardened, highly professional men as brothers-in-arms, he proceeded to harangue them over their "bad" 8 Group habits, and told them to knuckle down to learning 5 Group ways. This was an insult to crews used to complex marking procedures, and it would be a long time before the damage was repaired, and a grudging loyalty to 5 Group developed. Of course, as far as 5 Group crews were concerned, the new arrivals should have viewed the move from 8 Group as promotion. From this moment on, 5 Group would be referred to in 8 Group circles somewhat disparagingly as "The Independent Air Force", or "The Lincolnshire Poachers".

The newly arrived marker force was not yet ready to operate, and so three Oboe Mosquitos provided the initial reference at the railway yards at Juvisy on the 18/19th, for Cheshire and three other 617 Squadron Mosquito crews to go in at low level to mark the aiming point. Almost two hundred Lancasters, including seventeen from 630 Squadron, followed up, and the operation was deemed a success. 5 Group operated with its own full marker force for the first time on the 20/21st, in a two phase operation against the railway yards at La Chapelle just north of Paris. Six Oboe Mosquitos again provided the initial reference for 617 Squadron, while twelve 627 Squadron Mosquito crews acted as the Window force, and observed the "masters" at work. Communications difficulties between the various controlling elements of the force were soon overcome, and both phases of the attack, one hour apart, were successful. Fifteen 630 Squadron crews took part, and again they sustained no losses. The real test for the 5 Group marking method would come at a heavily defended target in Germany, and Brunswick was selected for this purpose on the 22/23rd. It had escaped serious damage in its only previous heavy raid back in January, and was to enjoy something of a charmed life until much later in the year. While the rest of the main force attacked Düsseldorf, over two hundred 5 Group Lancasters converged on Brunswick, accompanied by ten from 1 Group's "Jostle"-carrying 101 Squadron to provide radio countermeasures. Seventeen Mosquitos were supplied by 617 and 627 Squadrons, the former still acting in the low level marker role. The marking was accurate, but a thin layer of cloud, communications difficulties and misdirected H2s laid target indicators combined to throw much of the bombing away from the town centre, and damage was not extensive. 630 Squadron's recent run of loss-free operations continued with the return of all fifteen of its participants. The main fare on the following night was mining in the Baltic, for which 630 Squadron put up two aircraft without loss.

Karlsruhe was the main force target on the 24/25th, while the Independent Air Force went to Munich for a second attempt at using its marking method at a heavily defended target in the Reich. The operation began badly for 630 Squadron, when JB556 developed an engine fire on take off, and landed a few minutes later on the perimeter track. As the fire took hold, P/O Bailey and his crew were dragged clear by, among others, the station commander and medical officer, and the only injury was a broken ankle sustained by the flight engineer. Sadly, it would prove to be only a temporary reprieve for five of the crew. The remaining fifteen squadron aircraft pressed on for their part in the operation, which will be remembered for W/C Cheshire's headlong dive into the teeth of light flak to deliver his markers, before screaming across the rooftops to make his escape. It was this operation, perhaps more than any other, which sealed the award to Cheshire of the Victoria Cross at the conclusion of his one hundred sortie operational career in July. One 630 Squadron aircraft failed to return to East Kirkby, ME717, containing the crew of the now commissioned P/O "Blue" Rackley. A nightfighter attack had left an engine on fire, and Rackley intended to make for Switzerland to bale the crew out. Insufficient power to cross the Alps persuaded him to head instead for Corsica, where he attempted a landing at Borgo. Two more engines cut at the last moment, and a heavy landing caused the tail of the Lancaster to swing round into a parked aircraft, killing the rear gunner.

The 26/27th was a night of heavy activity involving three major operations at widely dispersed targets. Almost five hundred aircraft drawn from all but 5 Group attacked Essen to good effect, while Halifaxes and Mosquitos of 4, 6 and 8 Groups continued the railway campaign with a successful assault on the yards at Villeneuve-St-Georges. First away, however, as they had further to fly, were 206 Lancasters from 5 Group and nine from 101 Squadron, which took off in mid evening for Schweinfurt. This was to be 627 Squadron's debut in the low level marking role, and they departed Woodhall Spa when the Lancaster force was already well on its way. Sadly, on this occasion, the marking was not accurate, and a stronger than forecast head wind delayed the arrival of the heavy illuminator and marker crews from 83 and 97 Squadrons as well as the rest of the main force. An additional distraction was fierce nightfighter activity in the target area, and the result was a disappointing attack, which fell mainly outside of the town. It was during this operation, that Sgt Jackson of 106 Squadron earned the Victoria Cross for climbing out onto the wing of his Lancaster to attempt to quell a fire in a fuel tank. Other members of the crew held on to his parachute rigging, but when the force of the slipstream whipped the fire extinguisher from his hand, and flames began to lick around him and his chute, they allowed him to slip off the trailing edge. This gave the only chance of saving his life, and despite a smouldering parachute, he survived his fall to earth, but suffered serious burns and a broken ankle. He spent many months in a German hospital, and it was only after the war, when he and his crew mates returned from captivity, that his outstanding courage was recognized. 630 Squadron also posted one of its fifteen participating crews missing on this night, that of P/O Kilgour in ND789, which was shot down by a nightfighter over Germany with no survivors. With only one operation remaining in April, this proved to be the sole missing crew of what was the squadron's best month to date. 5 Group remained at home on the following night, while the rest of the Command attacked the highly industrialized town of Friedrichshafen deep in southern Germany, and two railway yards in France. A small 5 Group force attempted to bomb an explosives factory at St-Medard-en-

Jalles on the 28/29th, but haze prevented many crews from seeing the target, and the operation was abandoned part-way through. Twenty four hours later, 5 Group returned to complete the job, while a second small force, including twelve from 630 Squadron, went to Clermont-Ferrand to hit the Michelin tyre factory again, and a nearby airfield.

May began with the Command mounting six small-scale to medium raids on the 1/2nd, against railway installations and factories in France and Belgium. 5 Group was assigned to an aircraft assembly plant and an explosives factory at Toulouse, and an aircraft repair workshop at Tours. 630 Squadron sent twelve aircraft to the former, as part of an overall force of 131 Lancasters and eight Mosquitos, and both targets were hit. This was followed on the 3/4th by a supposedly straight-forward operation against a panzer training camp and motor transport depot at Mailly-le-Camp. The plan of attack called for two Pathfinder Oboe Mosquitos to provide the initial reference for 617 Squadron Mosquito crews under W/C Cheshire, who would deliver spot fires onto the aiming point from low level. 83 and 97 Squadron Lancaster crews were then to back up with additional markers for the main force element provided by 1 and 5 Groups. W/C Cheshire as marker leader, and the main force controller, W/C Deane of 83 Squadron, attended separate briefings, and there is some question as to whether each was fully in the picture, particularly with regard to 1 Group's Special Duties Flight from Binbrook. This was apparently assigned to a specific target of its own, and was operating with a degree of autonomy. The marking by 617 Squadron was accurate, as was the backing-up by the heavy marker squadrons, and Cheshire notified Deane accordingly. Deane, however, was unable to transmit the signal to his main force crews, because of an incorrectly tuned VHF set, and interference from an American forces broadcast. While the Lancasters were milling around in the target area awaiting orders, enemy nightfighters got amongst them, and began to shoot them down in large numbers. As the crews watched burning Lancasters falling all around them, some, in their anxiety and frustration, broke radio silence in a rare display of indiscipline, and a number of choice comments were broadcast. The deputy Master Bomber took control of the situation, and the bombing, once in progress, was highly concentrated and accurate. 161 buildings were hit, and more than a hundred vehicles were destroyed, including thirty seven tanks. On the debit side, forty two Lancasters were shot down, twenty eight of them belonging to 1 Group. 55 Base lost three aircraft, one from 57 Squadron and two from 207, but 630 Squadron somehow avoided the carnage, and welcomed back all thirteen of its own.

55 Base was not on the order of battle again until the night of the 7/8th, when fifty three Lancasters were sent to bomb the airfield at Tours, while a second small 5 Group force attacked an ammunition dump at Salbris. Both operations were successful, and there were no casualties among 630 Squadron's thirteen aircraft. With the invasion fast approaching, and now less than a month away, operations began to be directed against coastal batteries along the French coast. The success of the landings depended upon the enemy's belief, that the main assault would come in the Pas-de-Calais. Consequently, most attacks by the Command on gun emplacements involved targets in this region of the coast to maintain the deception. Only at the last minute were the defences on the Normandy approaches bombed. Seven batteries were targeted by over four hundred aircraft on the 9/10th, while 5 Group sent small forces against two factories in France. 55 Base was assigned to a ball-bearing factory at

Annecy, for which 630 Squadron put up ten Lancasters, and despite very poor weather during the outward flight, the target was hit without loss. On the 11/12th, a force of 190 Lancasters of the Group encountered haze during an attempt to bomb a military camp at Bourg-Leopold in Belgium. Halfway through the attack, the Master Bomber called a halt to proceedings because of the danger to nearby civilians. Two of 630 Squadron's nineteen crews failed to return from the operation, and they were duly posted missing. News eventually came through, that P/O Watt and four of his crew had been killed, when ME737 was shot down by a nightfighter over Belgium, and that his flight engineer and bomb-aimer were in captivity. The fate of P/O Jackson and his crew has never been determined, as no remains of ND580 or its occupants were found. After four operations in nine nights, most of the Command's main force squadrons stayed at home for the following week, and it was left to the Mosquitos of 8 Group to roam far and wide over Germany and the occupied countries.

When heavy operations resumed on the 19/20th, most of the activity centred around railway yards, although two coastal batteries and a radar station were also attacked. 5 Group mounted two operations with 8 Group support, each involving over a hundred Lancasters, one against the railway yards in the centre of Tours and the other at Amiens. 55 Base aircraft were assigned to the latter, for which 630 Squadron put up eighteen Lancasters, but the raid was abandoned because of cloud after only a third of the force had bombed. A year and one week after the last major assault on Duisburg, Bomber Command returned to the Ruhr city on the 21/22nd. Over five hundred Lancasters from 1, 3, 5 and 8 Groups were accompanied by twenty two Mosquitos, and despite cloud cover, Oboe allowed an accurate attack to be delivered. 350 buildings were completely destroyed, and many hundreds of others sustained serious damage. The Ruhr, however, remained fiercely protected, and in an echo of the past, twenty nine Lancasters failed to return. 630 Squadron sent only five aircraft on the main operation, and a further fourteen on mining sorties in the Baltic off Denmark, and each element suffered a loss. JB672 fell victim to a nightfighter over Holland, and there were no survivors from the crew of F/O Smith. LL950 contained the crew of P/O Bailey, who had been dragged clear of the burning wreckage of their aircraft following the crash-landing at East Kirkby just one month earlier. On this occasion, however, P/O Bailey and four members of the original crew, plus two newcomers, were all killed, when they too were dispatched by a nightfighter over Denmark.

On the 22/23rd, Dortmund hosted its first heavy raid since the Ruhr campaign, and sustained heavy damage at the hands of 1, 3, 6 and 8 Groups. 5 Group, meanwhile, returned to Brunswick, and in the face of unexpected cloud and communications difficulties between the Master Bomber and the main force, dropped most of the bombs into the surrounding countryside. It was a bad night for 55 Base, to which belonged eight of the thirteen missing aircraft, three each from 57 and 207 Squadrons, and two from 630. JB546 was shot down by a nightfighter over Germany, killing P/O Champness and three of his crew, and the three survivors were taken into captivity. ND655 was lost without trace, and took with it to unknown graves the crew of P/O Brown. Two nights later, while elements of the other Groups were attacking Aachen to good effect, 5 Group sent two small forces to bomb the Philips factory at Eindhoven and the Ford motor works at Antwerp. The former was abandoned by the Master Bomber because of poor visibility, and the latter, for which the squadron put up

eleven aircraft, failed to find the mark. Over eleven hundred sorties were launched on the 27/28th, the largest force attending to the military camp at Bourg-Leopold, which had escaped serious damage during the abandoned 5 Group assault two weeks earlier. This time it succumbed to accurate bombing by a predominately Halifax force, and severe damage resulted. Aachen was also revisited on this night, while 5 Group plastered a railway junction and workshops at Nantes, and also contributed to attacks on five gun batteries along the French coast. 55 Base was involved in the last mentioned operations, for which 630 Squadron provided fourteen Lancasters for the St-Valery-en-Caux site, and all returned safely.

The first week of June was dominated by preparations for the impending invasion, and was characterized by unsettled weather. Fifty eight 5 Group Lancasters, thirty of them from East Kirkby, were out on the night of the 1/2nd to attack a railway junction at Saumur. Photographic reconnaissance later revealed serious damage to the track. 630 Squadron stayed at home then until the night of the 4/5th, when contributing seventeen aircraft to an attack on the coastal battery at Maisy, one of four similar targets for the night, and the only one in the genuine invasion area. The site was cloud covered, and had to be bombed on Oboe skymarkers, rendering the attack inconclusive. Over a thousand aircraft were aloft on D-Day Eve, the 5/6th, fifteen of them from 630 Squadron bound for the coastal battery at La Pernelle, one of ten similar targets being attacked ahead of the invasion force. There had been no direct reference to the invasion at briefings, but crews were ordered to observe strict flight levels, and were prohibited from jettisoning bombs over the sea. Aircraft were taking off throughout the night, and some of those returning in dawn's early light were rewarded with a sight of the giant invasion armada, as it ploughed its way sedately across the Channel below. Among the many deception and diversionary operations carried out that night was one by 617 Squadron, which involved hours of precision flying and the dropping of Window to simulate an invasion fleet approaching the Pas-de-Calais.

D-Day Night brought another thousand aircraft into action, this time against road and railway communications targets in or near towns on the approaches to the beachhead. A 5 Group force was assigned to Caen, where a delay in the marking exposed the low-flying aircraft to ground fire, and six Lancasters were lost. One of these, ND685, was from among the thirteen dispatched by 630 Squadron, and P/O Wilson died with three of his crew when it crashed in the target area. The following night brought attacks on four railway targets by over three hundred Halifaxes and Lancasters, while elements of 1, 5 and 8 Groups went for a six-way road junction in the Foret de Cerisy between Bayeux and St-Lo. The East Kirkby squadrons contributed twenty four Lancasters, and all returned. The assault on enemy railway communications continued on the 8/9th at five locations, and 617 Squadron successfully delivered the first of the Barnes Wallis designed 12,000lb Tallboy deep penetration bombs onto the Saumur tunnel. The East Kirkby gang stayed at home on this night, but was in action twenty four hours later at Etampes, south of Paris, where a railway junction was the target. The operation did not proceed entirely according to plan, and much of the bombing spilled over into the town itself, destroying hundreds of houses, and killing over 130 civilians. Of 630 Squadron's sixteen participating aircraft, PB121 was the only failure to return, and was one of six Lancasters lost. It was shot down by a nightfighter over France, killing F/S Houghton and

five of his crew, the bomb-aimer, the only commissioned member of the crew, alone surviving to fall into enemy hands.

A new campaign began on the night of the 12/13th, which would be prosecuted right through to the end of the war. With Germany now firmly on the back foot, a concerted effort was to be made by both Bomber Command and the American 8th Air force against its synthetic oil industry. Three hundred Lancasters and Mosquitos of 1, 3 and 8 Groups carried out a stunningly accurate attack on the Nordstern refinery at Gelsenkirchen, hitting it with fifteen hundred bombs, and halting all production for a number of weeks. This deprived the German war effort of a thousand tons of vital aviation fuel for each day of the stoppage. While this was in progress, over six hundred aircraft drawn from 4, 5, 6 and 8 Groups bombed six communications targets leading to the Normandy front. 5 Group was assigned to targets at Poitiers and Caen, 630 Squadron providing fifteen Lancasters for the latter. This turned out to be the most scattered of the night's operations, but no losses were incurred by the East Kirkby units. The first daylight operations by Bomber Command since the departure of 2 Group a year earlier were conducted against Le Havre on the evening of the 14th. The port was home to E-Boats and other fast, light naval craft, which posed a threat to Allied shipping serving the beachhead. The two-phase operation was opened by a 617 Squadron attack on the concrete pens with Tallboys, closely followed by a predominately 1 Group force. 3 Group completed the assault at dusk, and few if any marine craft escaped the carnage unscathed. While this was in progress, elements of 4, 5 and 8 Groups were concentrating their efforts against enemy troop and transport positions at Aunay-sur-Odon and Evrecy. 630 Squadron was involved at the former, which was a highly accurate attack, and no aircraft were lost. The evening of the 15th was devoted to the bombing of Boulogne in a repeat of the previous night's operation against Le Havre. This operation, by elements of 1, 4, 5, 6 and 8 Groups was equally effective, although the town itself suffered its worst experience of the war.

A second new campaign opened on the night of the 16/17th, this one against flying bomb launching and storage sites. 1, 4, 5, 6 and 8 Groups committed four hundred aircraft between them, including nineteen each from the East Kirkby units, to attacks on four targets in the Pas-de-Calais, and each was effectively dealt with without loss. Meanwhile, a second force continued the oil offensive at Sterkrade/Holten, but failed to inflict more than slight damage in the face of complete cloud cover. 5 Group's main force squadrons enjoyed a four night break from operations thereafter, before embarking on their first involvement in the oil campaign. Two targets were selected, Wesseling and Scholven/Buer, and each was to be marked from low level by 627 Squadron Mosquitos. The Wesseling force comprised 133 Lancasters and six Mosquitos, including five ABC Lancasters from 1 Group's 101 Squadron to provide an RCM screen. The bombers were picked up by nightfighters as they made their way across the frontier region of Holland and Belgium, and a bitter battle ensued, which continued all the way to the target and into the homeward leg. The weather forecast had predicted clear skies, but on arrival in the target area the crews encountered a complete covering of low cloud. This was the one flaw in the 5 Group marking method, and the marking had to be carried out on H2s alone. Later photographic reconnaissance suggested little damage to the refinery, and any halt in production was likely to be of short duration. By the time the badly mauled survivors reached home, thirty seven Lancasters had fallen victim

to the defences, mostly to nightfighters. Four 5 Group squadrons, 44, 49, 57 and 619, had each lost six aircraft, although one of the 57 Squadron crews was plucked from the sea off Yarmouth without injury. Among those killed in a 49 Squadron Lancaster was W/C Malcolm Crocker, 630 Squadron's first commanding officer. The casualties amounted to 27.8% of those dispatched, and 630 Squadron did not escape the carnage. Of its nineteen participating aircraft, four were missing, and a fifth had to be abandoned over England on return. ND531 was lost without trace with the crew of flight commander S/L Foster DFC, which included four other decorated men. ME843 was shot down by a nightfighter to crash on the Dutch/Belgian border, killing P/O Hooper and his entire crew, including F/L Nelson, the squadron gunnery leader. LM118 and ME782 also fell victim to nightfighters, the former over Holland and the latter over Belgium, with not a single survivor from among the crews of P/O Smith and P/O Hart respectively. Finally, ME795 staggered across the Suffolk coast displaying a gaping hole in the forward fuselage, a shattered rear turret, a missing H2s blister and severe damage to the tailplane control surfaces, all inflicted by a JU88. When it became clear that a landing was out of the question, by which time they were over Bedfordshire, F/O "Blue" Rackley, now returned from his sojourn in Corsica, ordered his crew to bale out and was last to leave the stricken Lancaster. His eventful tour continued as he hit a moving train on landing, and was quite badly injured. There is an account, that his rear gunner, Sgt Davies, failed to survive his descent. Sgt Davies, it will be recalled, was the sole survivor of P/O Murray's crew, who crashed on take-off for Stuttgart in February on their maiden sortie. Apparently, his parachute had been rendered unusable, and he left the aircraft tied to the bomb-aimer. Sadly, he was jolted free as the parachute jerked open, and fell to his death. (Silksheen and Bomber Squadrons at War, Geoff Copeman.)

The Scholven force was equally effected by the cloud, but a number of Oboe Mosquitos were on hand to carry out skymarking. The attack was inconclusive, and only a modest amount of damage could be identified on post raid photographs for the loss of eight Lancasters. East Kirkby was allowed two free nights to lick its wounds, and none of its crews was consequently involved in the successful 5 Group attack on railway yards at Limoges on the 23/24th. Over seven hundred aircraft took part in operations against seven flying bomb sites on the 24/25th, and all thirteen 630 Squadron Lancasters returned from their target at Pommerval. Three nights later, the squadron sent sixteen aircraft against the V-3 site at Mimoyecques, one of six targets for over seven hundred aircraft, and again they all returned safely to complete the month's operations.

July and August were to be Bomber Command's most hectic months of the year, as the side-by-side campaigns against communications, oil and flying bomb sites all demanded attention. To this was about to be added tactical support for the ground forces as they broke out of the beachhead into Normandy. 5 Group opened its July account on the night of the 4/5th, with a raid on a flying bomb store in caves at Creil, otherwise known as St-Leu-d-Esserent, for which East Kirkby put up a creditable thirty seven aircraft, twenty of them from 630 Squadron. 617 Squadron attacked the main site with Tallboys, while the accompanying main force hit the approach roads with 1,000lb bombs to block access. German fighters arrived on the scene, and they were responsible for most of the thirteen missing Lancasters. P/O Taft and his crew failed to return home after ME867 was shot down over France, and there were no

survivors. 5 Group was not on the order of battle when the first major operations in support of the ground forces took place around Caen on the 7th, but later that night, around two hundred of its crews were briefed for a return to St-Leu-d'Esserent. 57 and 630 Squadrons each contributed seventeen Lancasters, the latter led into battle by W/C Bill Deas. The attack was delivered with great accuracy, and the mouths of the tunnels were blocked by many tons of rubble. Nightfighters made contact with the force over France shortly before 01.30, and over the following thirty five minutes or so, inflicted heavy casualties. Twenty nine Lancasters were lost, 55 Base posting missing five 207 Squadron crews from Spilsby, three from 57 Squadron at East Kirkby, and one from 630 Squadron. The last mentioned crew was that of W/C Deas, who was killed along with five others in NE688, the wireless operator alone escaping with his life to be taken prisoner. The loss of such an experienced officer, on his sixty ninth operation, was a bitter blow to the squadron, but the best commanding officers led from the front, exposing themselves to the same risks as the rank and file crews. Many of the finest squadron and flight commanders were lost to Bomber Command in this way, and rarely a week passed without at least one being posted missing in action.

During a four night break from bombing operations, 57 and 630 Squadrons sent three crews each mining around the Frisians on the 10/11th, and W/C Blome-Jones assumed command of the 630 Squadron on the 12th. He presided over his first operation that night, when sending eleven crews as part of a 5 Group force briefed to attack a railway target at Culmont-Chalindry. Elements of 1 and 8 Groups were assigned to similar targets, the former at Revigny, where cloud caused the raid to be abandoned halfway through. Ten Lancasters were lost on the operation, which was rescheduled for two nights later. The second attempt, on the 14/15th also failed, when haze prevented identification of the target, and the Master Bomber sent the crews home without bombing. This was to have great significance for 5 Group, to which the task of completing the operation would be handed a few days hence. In the meantime, however, nine 630 Squadron aircraft contributed to a simultaneous 5 Group raid on the railway yards at Villeneuve-St-Georges, where much of the bombing fell beyond the target. Better results were obtained on the following night, when 5 Group attacked the railway yards at Nevers for the loss of two aircraft, neither of which was from East Kirkby. Even before dawn on the 18th, the first of over nine hundred aircraft began taking off for the Caen area, where the British Second Army was about to launch Operation Goodwood. American bombers also participated, but 5,000 of the 6,800 tons of bombs delivered onto the five aiming points were carried by RAF aircraft. The operations were a stunning success, and in the absence of enemy fighters, only six aircraft were lost to flak. 630 Squadron dispatched seventeen aircraft, and many of these crews would find themselves operating again before the day was out. That night, 1, 6 and 8 Groups attacked the oil refineries at Wesseling and Scholven/Buer, the scene of the 5 Group disaster a month earlier, and both raids were accurate. Meanwhile, predominately 3 and 5 Group forces were active over France attending to railway junctions at Aulnoye and Revigny respectively, while a small 4 Group contingent attacked a flying bomb site at Acquet.

This was to be the third raid in a week on the Revigny target, 1 Group, as already mentioned, having twice failed to complete an attack in conditions of poor visibility. The first of the 109 5 Group Lancasters to take off was ND797 of 630 Squadron, which climbed away from East

Kirkby into a darkening sky at around 22.40. F/L Joblin was followed into the air by nine more 630 Squadron crews and a similar number from 57 Squadron, and the force set course for the enemy coast, passing east of London to cross the south coast near Hastings. By the time that the French coast was reached, the 3 Group force had already passed through some twenty five minutes earlier, and the enemy nightfighter controller was on top of the developing situation. The head of the Revigny-bound force reached French airspace at 00.40, just a few minutes before the 4 Group Halifaxes departed it on their way home, and ahead lay still another hour's flight to the target. The 3 Group raid at Aulnoye was concluded about twenty minutes later, and once these aircraft had cleared the enemy coast, 5 Group would be on its own over a very hostile land. The first casualty was a 619 Squadron Lancaster, shot down by a nightfighter shortly after 01.00 hours, and this was followed immediately by others. Within twenty minutes, 630 Squadron suffered its first casualty, when PB236 was hacked from the sky to crash onto French soil, taking with it to their deaths P/O Sargent and his crew. Less than fifteen minutes later, LM537 was brought down by flak, the first of the, by now, sixteen fallen 5 Group aircraft to succumb to this form of defence, and F/O Dennett died with two of his crew. By the time the target was reached seventeen Lancasters had been lost, and the survivors would still have to fight their way home. Last to take off for the operation was the Master Bomber, W/C Jeudwine, a former commanding officer of 619 Squadron, whose casualties for the night thus far had already reached four Lancasters. Jeudwine was flying in a P38 Lightning, and had been able to rendezvous with the 627 Squadron Mosquitos and 83 Squadron illuminator Lancasters at the target ahead of the main force.

Difficulties with the marking, and confusion caused in part by a number of main force crews bombing ahead of time, delayed the official opening of the attack by five minutes. Nightfighter activity over the target added to the distractions, as did the burning wreckage of four bombers on the ground in the target area. While awaiting the order to bomb, 630 Squadron's ME796 was attacked by a nightfighter and set on fire, and the wireless operator and gunners baled out. F/O Maxwell and the other three members of his crew remained on board as the aircraft lost height, although they apparently also had time to save themselves. It seems that Maxwell was trying to find open ground for a crash-landing to avoid possible civilian casualties in the nearby villages, and actually jettisoned the bombs from low level, while held in searchlight beams. No sooner had the bombs gone, than a flak shell took off a wing, and the Lancaster crashed between two villages and burned, killing all four occupants. Shortly afterwards, LM117 became 630 Squadron's fourth casualty, when it was shot down by flak as it departed the target area. F/O Brittain and all of his crew abandoned the aircraft, but on the ground, the wireless operator soon succumbed to his wounds. A total of twenty four aircraft failed to return home, another disaster for the Group so soon after the Wesseling debacle in June. On the credit side, however, the operation had at least achieved its aims, and the lines to the front had been effectively cut. It would be some time before news of the fate of the 630 Squadron crews filtered through to East Kirkby, and all they knew for certain, was that four of their aircraft were missing, each with seven men on board. In fact, thirteen crew members had survived, and a goodly number of them would manage to evade the enemy net. F/O Brittain and two of his crew, along with the three from Maxwell's crew who had baled out after the nightfighter attack and three from F/O Dennett's LM537 were all, or soon would be, in French hands, while the remaining four were captured. *(The definitive account of the three*

operations against Revigny is that written by Oliver Clutton-Brock under the title Massacre over the Marne. This superb book is highly recommended.)

Long before the residents of East Kirkby had any inkling of what was befalling the four 630 Squadron crews, and one from 57 Squadron, another drama was unfolding over Scotland. Having taken off for a navigation exercise a few minutes before the operating crews got away, 630 Squadron's ME729 began to experience engine problems, and was abandoned near Ayr at 00.59 by the pilot, F/O Sparkes. Whether the other three occupants also abandoned the aircraft is uncertain, but unlikely, as none survived. Despite the losses, the squadron put up nine Lancasters later in the day for an operation against a flying bomb site at Thiverny in the St-Leu-d'Esserent area, and this time there were no losses. It seems that W/C Guy Gibson VC wangled himself a seat for this operation in N-Nan, the Lancaster of one of 630 Squadron's flight commanders, S/L Miller. On the 20/21st, elements of 1, 5 and 8 Groups joined forces to bomb railway yards and a junction at Courtrai, Bomber Command later stating that both targets were devastated. 630 Squadron contributed eleven aircraft, and all returned safely. There had been no major operations against a German city target since Dortmund in May, while the Normandy landings and consolidation of the Allied foothold had been the overriding considerations. Now, on the night of the 23/24th, Harris launched an attack on Kiel by over six hundred aircraft, all but 110 of them Lancasters. The force, which included just six 630 Squadron participants, appeared suddenly and with complete surprise from behind a Mandrel RCM screen laid on by 100 Group, and inflicted heavy damage on the town and the port area, where all of the U-Boat yards were hit. Three Lancasters each from 57 and 630 Squadrons had, meanwhile, been sent to the same area to lay mines in Kiel Bay, but one of these, 630 Squadron's PB211, was forced to ditch in the North Sea while outbound. F/O Hayes and four of his crew failed to survive, and the navigator and rear gunner were eventually rescued from their dinghy seven hours later.

The first of three major raids on Stuttgart over a five night period began on the 24/25th, and involved a force of over six hundred aircraft. This number included eight from 630 Squadron, which also sent seven aircraft to St Nazaire, presumably to lay mines. Stuttgart had always proved a difficult target to hit because of its location in a series of valleys, although extensive damage had been inflicted upon it during the three raid series in February and March. The central districts became heavily damaged on this night, but twenty one aircraft failed to return, one of them belonging to 630 Squadron. PA992 was outbound over France when the end came, and not many minutes away from the target area. F/O Adams, on detachment from the USAAF, and four of his crew survived the crash, but both gunners were killed, one of them also an American. Of the survivors, the wireless operator fell into enemy hands, while the others ultimately evaded capture. 550 aircraft set out to return to Stuttgart on the following night, and delivered what would prove to be the most devastating of the three attacks. Losses were lower this time, amounting to twelve aircraft, and all twelve Lancasters from 630 Squadron got home. On the 26/27th, 5 Group went to Givors in France to carry out an accurate attack on the railway yards, and again 630 Squadron was able to welcome its eight participating crews home. The heavy brigade stayed at home on the following night, before an all Lancaster force from 1, 3, 5 and 8 Groups returned to Stuttgart on the 28/29th, and elements of 1, 6 and 8 Groups targeted Hamburg. The night soon degenerated into a disaster for the Command, as nightfighters intercepted the Stuttgart bound bomber stream

over France in bright moonlight, and others caught the Hamburg force on the way home. Thirty nine and twenty two aircraft respectively were the numbers brought down, and 630 Squadron had to post missing one of its most experienced crews. ND797 fell victim to a nightfighter over Germany, and although three members of F/L Joblin's crew managed to escape from the Lancaster, only the bomb-aimer lived to tell the tale, and he became a PoW.

In the early morning of the 30th, almost seven hundred aircraft took off to attack six German positions facing predominately American ground forces in the Villers Bocage - Caumont area. 5 Group's target was at Cahagnes, and may have been one of the aiming points partly obscured by cloud. The Master Bombers allowed less than half of the crews to bomb, and only two targets were considered effectively dealt with. 630 Squadron's twelve participating crews returned home safely, and prepared for the following evening, when two 5 Group operations took place over France. One was against railway yards at Joigny-la-Roche, and the other, in which 617 Squadron took part, was at Rilly-la-Montagnes, where a railway tunnel was in use as a flying bomb store. 617 Squadron's Tallboys collapsed both ends of the tunnel, and the main force contingent blocked the approaches to complete a successful operation. 630 Squadron's nine crews operated against the target at Joigny, and contributed to an effective attack there. It had been a hectic and generally rewarding month, but it had also been expensive. 630 Squadron had operated on seventeen days/nights, and had lost eleven aircraft and crews, and the coming month was to see no let-up in the pace of activity. As daylight operations were becoming more frequent, squadrons began to apply identity markings to their aircraft, and in the case of 630 and 57 Squadrons, this was achieved by painting the outer fin surfaces red.

The first week of August was dominated by the campaign against flying bomb sites, and over seven hundred and fifty aircraft were involved in daylight operations on the 1st. In the event, weather conditions over the numerous aiming points appear to have been unsuitable for accurate bombing, and less than eighty crews bombed before the Master Bombers called a halt. 630 Squadron put up a modest four aircraft for the site at La Breteque, and all returned safely. Conditions were clear on the following day, and four sites were attacked by almost four hundred aircraft. 5 Group was involved at Bois de Cassan and Trossy-St-Maxim, 630 Squadron putting up twelve aircraft for the latter without loss. Over eleven hundred aircraft were involved in attacks on the same two targets and another in the Foret de Nieppe in the early afternoon of the 3rd, ten 630 Squadron crews again assigned to Trossy. All three sites were effectively bombed in clear conditions, and there were no casualties among the East Kirkby contingent. After a day's break, more than seven hundred aircraft pounded the storage sites in the Foret de Nieppe and at St-Leu-d'Esserent, and 630 Squadron's excellent start to the month continued with the return of all twelve of its participating crews. On the 6th, 57 and 630 Squadrons attacked separate targets at Foret de Nieppe and Bois de Cassan respectively, but the bombing was scattered at both sites, and many crews brought their bombs home from the latter after communications between the Master Bomber and the main force broke down.

From mid evening on the 7th, aircraft began taking off to attack five aiming points ahead of Allied ground forces in the Normandy battle area. East Kirkby dispatched twenty seven Lancasters, fourteen from 630 Squadron, as part of a force totaling over a thousand heavy

bombers. Because of the close proximity of Allied troops, the attacks were carefully controlled by experienced Master Bombers, and only two thirds of the aircraft actually bombed. Briefed for an aiming point at Secqueville, 630 Squadron sustained its first casualty of the month, when LM262 crashed in France. F/S Patterson and three of his crew lost their lives, but the flight engineer, navigator and wireless operator managed to save themselves, the last mentioned ultimately evading capture. After undertaking six operations in seven days, the East Kirkby crews were given the luxury of two nights off, before returning to the fray at Chatellerault on the 9/10th, where the objective was an oil storage dump. The operation was successful, and 630 Squadron welcomed home all fifteen of its crews. On the 11th, 5 Group sent fifty three Lancasters and three Mosquitos to Bordeaux and La Pallice to attack the U-Boat pens with 2,000lb armour-piercing bombs. Five aircraft each from 57 and 630 Squadrons took part, but the concrete roofs proved too strong for the ordnance employed, and the pens survived. That night, 630 Squadron contributed ten aircraft to an assault on the railway yards at Givors, and all returned safely from a highly successful operation.

The time was now fast approaching, when Harris could turn his attention once more upon industrial Germany. Throughout the summer, the Pathfinders had been under extreme pressure through having to provide aircraft for numerous simultaneous operations day after day and night after night. Only 5 Group was capable of complete autonomy, but even so, occasionally called on 8 Group to provide Oboe Mosquitos. On the night of the 12/13th, Harris sent 379 Lancasters and Halifaxes to Brunswick without the presence of a single Pathfinder, to assess the ability of main force crews to identify and hit an urban target on their own, using only H2s to guide them to the mark. The experiment was not overwhelmingly encouraging, for, although the centre of the town was hit, so were other towns up to twenty miles distant. To compound the disappointment, twenty seven aircraft failed to return, 7% of the force, and this occurred despite the fact, that almost three hundred aircraft had acted as a diversion to split the enemy defences by raiding the Opel motor works at Rüsselsheim. This force also lost twenty aircraft, and together with two missing Mosquitos from support operations, this brought the night's casualty figure to forty nine. 630 Squadron put up eight Lancasters for Brunswick and a further three for an attack on enemy troop positions and a road junction north of Falaise, and they all returned. The afternoon of the 14th was devoted to large scale support for the ground forces in the Falaise area. Eight hundred aircraft were involved in the bombing of seven aiming points ahead of the 3rd Canadian Division, each controlled by a Master Bomber and deputy. Most of the bombing was accurate, but some fell amongst Canadian troops in a quarry, killing thirteen and injuring over fifty. In the early evening, 5 Group dispatched 155 Lancasters and four Mosquitos to sink the French warships Clemenceau and Gueydon in Brest harbour. 630 Squadron's contribution to the successful operation was four Lancasters, and they returned safely.

In preparation for his new night offensive against Germany, Harris launched a thousand aircraft on the morning of the 15th to attack nine fighter airfields in Holland and Belgium. The 55 Base crews were assigned to Deelen, 630 Squadron putting up eleven Lancasters, and in fine weather conditions, this and the other eight targets were effectively dealt with. There were no losses from East Kirkby, but 55 Base registered a casualty in the form of a 207 Squadron Lancaster from Spilsby. On the night of the 16/17th, over eight hundred aircraft set

out for northern Germany, 348 of their crews briefed to attack the port of Kiel. The remainder, all Lancasters, and including thirteen from 630 Squadron, carried on eastwards to the distant Baltic port of Stettin, where a highly accurate raid ensued, in which over fifteen hundred houses and twenty nine industrial premises were destroyed, and five ships were sunk in the harbour. This was typical for Stettin, which never seemed to escape severe damage when attacked by the Command, unlike most other urban targets. A modest five Lancasters were lost, among them LL972 from 630 Squadron, which crashed in the target area, killing F/L Henriquez and the other seven men on board. In the late morning of the 18th, a 5 Group force of over 150 Lancasters and eleven Mosquitos set out to bomb a German supply depot at L'Isle-Adam near Paris. Five 630 Squadron aircraft took part, and one of them, PB244 failed to return. The mostly Canadian crew was captained by F/O Kemp, who, together with three others, managed to evade capture, while the wireless operator fell into enemy hands, and the navigator and mid-upper gunner were killed. Later in the afternoon, the Group sent a small force to attack an oil storage depot at Bordeaux, and this also resulted in the loss of a 630 Squadron crew. LM269 was hit by flak, but most of the crew managed to get out before it broke up in the air. P/O Bolton and the other four survivors evaded capture, but the navigator and bomb-aimer lost their lives.

Although 5 Group carried out a number of small-scale operations over the ensuing days, 630 Squadron was not called into action, and its crews enjoyed a week's break after sixteen raids in eighteen days/nights thus far during the month. The renewed assault on Germany began again on the night of the 25/26th, when a record number of 1,311 sorties were flown on major and support operations. The main effort was by over four hundred Lancasters of 1, 3, 6 and 8 Groups, whose crews were briefed to attack the Opel motor works at Rüsselsheim, which had escaped a telling blow two weeks earlier. Although the factory was quite severely damaged on this night, production of lorries was barely effected, and fifteen Lancasters were lost. Meanwhile, 5 Group was also active over southern Germany, attempting to carry out the first major raid of the war on Darmstadt. The operation was beset with problems, which included the early return of the Master Bomber and the shooting down of his deputies, and this led to a widely scattered attack and little significant damage. It would prove, however, to be only a temporary reprieve for the city. All fifteen 630 Squadron Lancasters returned in the early hours of the 26th, and many of their crews would find themselves back on the order of battle that night for a very long range operation. The port of Königsberg, through which the enemy was supplying its eastern front, lay at the limit of a Lancaster's effective operational range. The nineteen hundred mile round trip would mean a reduced bomb load in favour of maximum fuel, and the petrol bowsers at East Kirkby were in constant demand during the afternoon to supply the needs of twenty nine Lancasters, fourteen of them from 630 Squadron.

The mid evening take-off of the 5 Group contingent of 174 Lancasters coincided with the departure of a further 372 aircraft from 1, 3 and 8 Groups bound for Kiel by a similar route. The latter operation was highly destructive, and was over by the time that Königsberg was reached. The main weight of bombs fell into the eastern half of the town, and the operation was concluded for the very modest loss of just four Lancasters. One of these was ME650 from 630 Squadron, which crashed in Denmark, killing F/O Bowers and his entire crew. Three nights later, 5 Group returned with a force of 180 Lancasters, whose approach was masked by

a simultaneous assault on Stettin by almost four hundred Lancasters of 1, 3, 6 and 8 Groups. The latter operation destroyed over fifteen hundred houses and thirty two industrial premises, while damaging over thirty thousand tons of shipping in the port and killing a thousand people. Meanwhile, 5 Group was delivering its modest tonnage of bombs with great accuracy onto four aiming points, having experienced a twenty minute delay in the opening of the attack because of low cloud. Nightfighters were active over the target, and they probably claimed the lion's share of the fifteen aircraft failing to return. 630 Squadron had sixteen aircraft operating on this night, twelve at Königsberg and four mining in the Baltic in one of the support operations. ND982 was missing from the main operation, and was ultimately declared lost without trace with the crew of the New Zealander, F/O Twidle. The previous day had brought the final operations in the flying bomb campaign, as twelve sites in the Pas-de-Calais were each attacked by small numbers of aircraft. Within a matter of days the region would be in Allied hands, and the V-1 threat nullified, although the V-2's reign of terror was about to begin, and its mobile launching sites would make it an elusive target for bombers. This being the case, attacks on its storage sites offered the best chance of eliminating the weapon, and nine such locations in northern France were targeted on the afternoon of the 31st. 630 Squadron put fifteen Lancasters into the air for a 5 Group raid on the Bergueneuse site, and all returned safely.

As the Allied ground forces advanced, the need for port facilities became pressing to maintain a steady supply line. Much of September would be devoted to the liberation of the major French ports still in enemy hands, principally Le Havre, Boulogne and Calais, but 5 Group opened the new month's account with a small-scale raid on shipping at Brest. Half of the aircraft were provided by 55 Base, including eleven from 630 Squadron, and there were no losses to enemy action, although a 57 Squadron Lancaster crashed in Northamptonshire on the way out, and its crew was killed. On the afternoon of the 3rd, over six hundred aircraft were sent to bomb six airfields in southern Holland, and East Kirkby dispatched seventeen aircraft from each of its squadrons. They were bound for Deelen, and all returned safely from a successful operation. After a very heavy schedule of operations in July and August, during which, 630 Squadron operated on main and support operations on nineteen and twenty one occasions respectively, September would bring a reduction in activity. East Kirkby remained off the order of battle until the night of the 9/10th, and it was during this period, that other elements of the Command began the assault on enemy strong points around Le Havre. The series of operations began on the 5th, and continued on the 6th, 8th and 9th without a 5 Group contribution, although the last two mentioned attacks were hampered by cloud, and were partially or completely abandoned. An indication of the destructive power of the Command came with a 5 and 8 Group raid on Mönchengladbach on the 9/10th, in which a modest force of a hundred Lancasters devastated the town centre. This operation brought the return to action of the East Kirkby units, 630 Squadron providing sixteen Lancasters. Almost a thousand aircraft took part in attacks on eight enemy positions around Le Havre on the 10th, and the series was concluded on the following day by two hundred aircraft, including a 630 Squadron contingent of eleven. Within hours, the German garrison surrendered to British forces. Later that night, a 5 Group force of 224 Lancasters and fourteen Mosquitos returned to Darmstadt in southern Germany, the scene of a failure a little over two weeks previously. On this night, in clear conditions, the 5 Group marking method worked perfectly, and the central

districts of this virtually virgin target became engulfed in an inferno. A genuine firestorm erupted, which claimed the lives of over twelve thousand people, and over half of the 120,000 population was rendered homeless. It was a horrific and devastating blow, which would be repeated at small to medium sized towns across Germany with increasing frequency, as worthwhile urban targets became harder to find. Twelve Lancasters failed to return, and among them was 630 Squadron's PD283, which crashed in Germany without survivors from the crew of F/O Faulkner. This would prove to be the squadron's last operational loss for ten weeks, the longest loss-free period during its wartime career.

On the night of the 12/13th, a two-pronged attack was mounted against southern Germany. 378 Lancasters of 1, 3 and 8 Groups returned to Frankfurt for the first time since the devastating raids in March, while a predominately 5 Group force of two hundred Lancasters targeted Stuttgart. The former resulted in severe damage to the city's western districts, at a time when a large part of its fire brigade was absent, helping to quell the fires at nearby Darmstadt. For Frankfurt, this would prove to be the last raid of the war by RAF heavy bombers. It was a similar story of destruction at Stuttgart, where the north and west-central districts were ravaged by a firestorm, and over eleven hundred people were killed. A modest four Lancasters were missing from this operation, and all thirteen 630 Squadron crews returned safely to East Kirkby. The ill-fated Operation Market Garden began on the morning of the 17th, in the wake of attacks on enemy airfields and gun positions by elements of 1, 3 and 8 Groups during the night. By breakfast time, the first of over seven hundred aircraft had taken off for Boulogne to deliver a total of three thousand tons of bombs onto enemy positions around the port. 57 and 630 Squadrons each put up seventeen Lancasters and sustained no losses. Shortly afterwards Allied ground forces began their advance on Boulogne, and captured it within a week. Bremerhaven wilted under its first heavy raid of the war on the 18/19th, at the hands of a 5 Group force of two hundred Lancasters. Accurate low level marking by the Mosquito element led to the destruction of over 2,600 buildings, as the central and port areas in particular were razed by fire, and it would not be deemed necessary for the heavy bombers to pay a second visit. 630 Squadron's sixteen participants all returned safely, but 57 Squadron was the owner of the only Lancaster missing from the operation.

On the following night, the 19/20th, elements of 1 and 5 Groups were briefed for an operation against the twin towns of Mönchengladbach and Rheydt, just a few miles from the frontier with Holland. The attack required a complex plan involving the marking of three aiming points, one at Rheydt and two at Mönchengladbach, each with a different colour of marker, to which crews were assigned accordingly. The role of Master Bomber was inexplicably handed to W/C Guy Gibson VC, who was currently serving as base operations officer at 54 Base, Coningsby, the home of 83 and 97 Squadrons. Perhaps more significantly, it was where 5 Group's complement of Master Bombers was stationed, men of great experience, and, crucially, recent experience, like Owen, who had controlled the recent raid on the same target, and Woodroffe. Even for such men, controlling a complicated operation would have been challenging, but for Gibson, who was not trained as a Master Bomber, had little up-to-date operational experience, and had only a fleeting acquaintance with the Mosquito, it was asking a great deal. Gibson's arrogance and determination to get back into the war before it ended led him to dismiss the advice freely given, and for some reason, to reject the 627

Squadron Mosquito prepared for him at Woodhall Spa. The illumination and marking of the aiming points at Mönchengladbach went according to plan, but at Rheydt, the primary target, unforeseen problems arose, which Gibson was not able to correct. This caused a delay, during which nightfighters appeared on the scene, and three Lancasters were shot down in the target area. Some of the crews assigned to Rheydt joined in the bombing of the other aiming points, but the operation was generally successful. On the way home, Gibson's Mosquito crashed on the outskirts of Steenbergen in Holland, and he and his navigator were killed. 57 and 630 Squadrons each put up seventeen Lancasters and sustained no losses.

The first operations in the campaign to liberate Calais took place on the 20th and involved over six hundred aircraft. German positions were accurately bombed in clear visibility, but further attacks would be required before the port was surrendered. 55 Base did not take part, and it was the night of the 23/24th before it was next called upon to provide aircraft for operations. The night's main course was an attack on Neuss in the Ruhr by over five hundred aircraft drawn from 1, 3, 4 and 8 Groups, while 5 Group attended to two targets, one of which had an almost personal association. A vital part of Germany's communications system was its network of waterways linking the industrial Ruhr with other regions of Germany, through which passed vast quantities of raw materials inbound and finished war products outbound. 5 Group had first become involved with the Ladbergen section of the Dortmund-Ems Canal back in the summer of 1940, as Britain stood alone against the might of Germany following the fall of France. Later, on the 12/13th of August of that year, 49 Squadron's F/L Learoyd earned the Command's first Victoria Cross for his low level attack on the canal in the face of withering anti-aircraft fire. In September 1943, it had been the target for 617 Squadron's second operation over Germany after its successful, if costly, assault on the Dams. One of the original Dambuster crews was lost during an abortive first attempt, and five failed to return when the operation was relaunched on the following night. Now it would become a focus of attention for 5 Group once more, and would remain so for the next five months. 136 Lancasters and five Mosquitos were detailed for the operation, while 113 Lancasters and five Mosquitos were to raid the nearby Hansdorf nightfighter airfield at Münster in support. It was to the latter that 55 Base crews were assigned, 630 Squadron putting up a record-equaling twenty one Lancasters. Over eight hundred aircraft departed their stations either side of 19.00 hours for their respective targets, and the bombing of Neuss, close by Düsseldorf, was concluded successfully for the loss of seven aircraft. A year after its disastrous experience at the Dortmund-Ems Canal, 617 Squadron was returning with Tallboys as the main element of this night's assault. The Ladbergen section consisted of two parallel branches, which carried the waterway above the level of the surrounding countryside, making it particularly vulnerable, although difficult to hit. The earthquake effect of the Tallboy made it the ideal weapon against such targets, and both branches were breached, causing the canal to drain over a six mile stretch. The support operation at Hansdorf was inconclusive, and did not prevent the loss of fourteen Lancasters from the Dortmund-Ems contingent. 55 Base registered the loss of just one 207 Squadron Lancaster from Spilsby, which crashed in Holland.

Later on the 24th, operations continued against enemy positions around Calais, but were hampered by low cloud. It was a similar story on the 25th, when only a third of more than

eight hundred aircraft were able to bomb through breaks in the cloud. Conditions improved on the 26th, and over seven hundred aircraft concentrated their bombing on three aiming points near Calais and four gun emplacements at Cap Gris Nez. The East Kirkby squadrons sat out these operations, but formed part of a 5 Group force briefed for an area attack on Karlsruhe that night. Twenty 630 Squadron crews took part in a destructive raid, which hit all parts of the city. The 27th brought yet another tilt at German positions around Calais, and attacks on oil refineries at Bottrop and Sterkrade by 6 and 8 Groups. That night, 5 Group carried out the only heavy raid of the war on Kaiserslautern, and destroyed an estimated 36% of its built-up area. This was the final operation of the month for 630 Squadron, and all nineteen of its participating crews returned safely. The last assault on Calais took place on the 28th, and the port was captured by Canadian ground forces shortly afterwards. During the course of September, W/C Blome-Jones concluded his tour as commanding officer, and would ultimately be awarded the DFC, the citation reading as follows. "Wing Commander Blome-Jones has successfully completed his second tour of operations. As squadron commander, he has always elected to fly on most dangerous and difficult missions. When on a sortie to Bourg-Leopold in Belgium, he was unable to locate the target. Despite fighter opposition and very bad weather, he circled the area until the target was located. His skill and determination as a pilot and captain, and his cool handling of his aircraft in the face of opposition have earned for him the absolute confidence of his crew. In the face of heavy anti-aircraft fire he has bombed warships in Brest harbour, and circled over Givors for 32 minutes in bad weather in order to identify and eventually attack it. His skill, courage and devotion to duty are worthy of the highest praise." The new commanding officer was W/C John Grindon, and he would see the squadron through to the end of the strategic bombing war.

October was to be characterized by an unprecedented concentration of bombing on German cities, and a second Ruhr campaign would begin at the end of the first week. Ports were still a pressing priority, however, as the need for supplies increased to keep the Allied advance mobile, and Bomber Command was to play its part in weakening enemy resistance. During the course of September, a number of operations had been mounted against heavy gun emplacements on the island of Walcheren in the mouth of the Scheldt, which guarded the approaches to Antwerp. Such precision targets proved difficult to hit, and it was decided instead to breach the sea walls, thereby to inundate the gun positions, and also to create difficult terrain for the defenders when the land offensive began. During daylight on the 3rd, eight waves of thirty Lancasters each attacked the sea defences at Westkapelle, and the fifth wave created a breach, which was widened by those following. 617 Squadron aircraft were on hand with Tallboys, but in the event, they were not needed. 630 Squadron's October account was opened on the 5th, when twenty one of its crews joined a 5 Group force briefed to attack Wilhelmshaven. Complete cloud cover rendered the operation inconclusive, but only one aircraft was lost, and the East Kirkby squadrons came home intact. That night, Saarbrücken was raided for the first time in numbers for two years, and almost six thousand houses were destroyed for the loss of just three Lancasters. This high return-low loss outcome would be repeated throughout the month and on to the end of the war, with only isolated occasions on which the defences gained the upper hand. The new Ruhr offensive opened at Dortmund on the 6/7th, when over five hundred aircraft from 3, 6 and 8 Groups pounded the city, causing extensive damage to housing, industry and communications for the loss of five

aircraft. 5 Group, meanwhile, was over north-western Germany, carrying out the final raid of the war on Bremen. Eighteen Lancasters each from the East Kirkby squadrons all returned from what was a devastating attack, which left almost five thousand buildings either destroyed or seriously damaged. 630 Squadron also sent three crews on mining sorties, and these too returned safely. Following the failure of Operation Market Garden, the Allied right flank had become exposed to a possible danger from enemy forces approaching through the frontier towns of Cleves and Emmerich. On the afternoon of the 7th, both towns were left extensively damaged by forces of over three hundred aircraft. 5 Group did not participate, but carried out a successful attack on the sea walls at Flushing on Walcheren, for which 630 Squadron put up sixteen Lancasters. No losses were incurred, but 617 Squadron had two aircraft shot down that day during an attack on the Kembs barrage near Germany's frontier with Switzerland.

There was to be no further action for 630 Squadron until mid month, when a new phase in Bomber Command operations began under Operation Hurricane. This was intended to act as a demonstration to the enemy of the overwhelming superiority of the Allied air forces ranged against it. Before first light on the 14th, over one thousand aircraft took off for Duisburg, arriving overhead shortly after breakfast time to deliver around 4,400 tons of high explosives and incendiaries. To be over the Ruhr in daylight was still a dangerous practice, and the flak defences claimed fourteen aircraft before being overwhelmed. That night, similar numbers returned to press home the point about superiority, and thus 2,018 aircraft had been dispatched against the city in less than twenty four hours, and around nine thousand tons of bombs had been dropped for the loss of twenty one aircraft. A remarkable fact was, that 5 Group was not involved in the devastation of Duisburg, but took advantage of the nighttime activity over the Ruhr to finally nail Brunswick, which had escaped relatively lightly during four previous attacks in 1944. 233 Lancasters, including twenty from 630 Squadron, destroyed the historic town centre by fire, and left a trail of destruction throughout the built-up area for the loss of a solitary Lancaster. *(I have a very good friend, who was born on D-Day in the village of Geitelde, about four miles south-west of Brunswick, and one of many small communities on the outskirts of the town. Years after the war, he learned from the locals, that they believed Bomber Command had intentionally bombed the surrounding villages, to force the populations into the town before the "big" raid took place. In view of the four previous attacks, which had fallen predominately outside of the town, it is easy to see how this belief occurred).*

On the night of the 15/16th, two 630 Squadron crews went mining off Denmark, as part of the support and diversionary effort for the last heavy raid of the war on Wilhelmshaven, and both returned safely. Elements from 55 Base took part in a small-scale raid on the sea wall at Westkapelle on the 17th, but the outcome was inconclusive. There were no operations for the heavy squadrons that night, but night flying training went on as usual, and this was to inflict 630 Squadron's first fatalities since Darmstadt five weeks earlier. NF961 came down in north Yorkshire, possibly as the result of icing, and there were no survivors from among the crew of F/O Brammer. Switching temporarily from the Ruhr, Harris focused his attention on southern Germany on the 19/20th, and sent over five hundred aircraft from 1, 3, 6 and 8 Groups to attack Stuttgart in two phases four and a half hours apart. Over a hundred miles away, meanwhile, 250 Lancasters of 5 Group were raiding Nuremberg using the Mosquito low level marking method. Heavy cloud in the area hampered the marking effort, and most of the

bombs fell into the southern half of the city, where much of the industry was situated. Forty industrial buildings were destroyed, along with four hundred houses, and only two Lancasters failed to return. 55 Base was well represented in the operation, East Kirkby alone dispatching forty one aircraft, and all but one from 57 Squadron made it home. Over a hundred 5 Group Lancasters attempted to knock out gun batteries at Flushing on Walcheren on the 23rd, but poor visibility led to a scattered attack. 630 Squadron's six participants all returned, and the Group set out a record operation later that night.

The largest Bomber Command force of the war, 1,055 aircraft, took off between 16.00 and 17.00 to deliver Operation Hurricane's message to Essen. In view of the destruction already inflicted upon the city, and the likelihood that there was little left to burn, the bulk of the 4,500 tons of bombs was high explosive. Six hundred buildings were destroyed, while a further eight hundred sustained serious damage, and the city's status as a major centre of war production was about to end. Only minor operations took place on the following night, and these included mining off Norway, for which 630 Squadron contributed four Lancasters. On the afternoon of the 25th, the Hurricane force returned to Essen with over seven hundred aircraft, and destroyed a further eleven hundred buildings. The Krupp complex was among the industrial concerns badly damaged, and parts of it would remain out of action for the remainder of the war. Most of the city's surviving industry was dispersed to other parts of Germany from this point, but this would not be known in Britain, and Essen would have to endure further before the end came. Cologne's turn to face the Hurricane force came first in the late afternoon of the 28th at the hands of over seven hundred aircraft. More than 2,200 apartment blocks were destroyed in districts north-east and south-west of the city centre, and much damage was inflicted upon power, railway and dockland installations. That night, 5 Group sent 237 Lancasters and seven Mosquitos to attack the U-Boat pens at Bergen in Norway. Unanticipated cloud forced the raid to be halted after a fifth of the force had bombed, and the pens escaped all but minor damage. 630 Squadron's fine record continued with the return of all nineteen of its crews. The assault on Walcheren had been ongoing throughout the month, and 5 Group carried out the final attacks on the 30th, 630 Squadron contributing twelve aircraft to a heavy force of 102. Gun batteries were successfully targeted, and the land forces arrived on the following day to clear enemy resistance. After a week of heavy fighting the island was taken, but it would be a further three weeks before the approaches to Antwerp had been sufficiently cleared of mines to allow access to shipping. Later on the 30th, nine hundred aircraft returned to Cologne and dropped four thousand tons of mostly high explosive bombs. Massive destruction resulted, and this was followed up twenty four hours later by almost five hundred aircraft from 1, 3, 4 and 8 Groups.

November began for 5 Group with a raid on the Meerbeck oil refinery at Homberg during the afternoon of the 1st. Nineteen 630 Squadron Lancasters joined twenty from 57 Squadron as part of a force of 226 Lancasters and two Mosquitos, with a further fourteen Pathfinder Mosquitos in support. The marking was scattered, and the operation degenerated to the point that a third of the crews brought their bombs home. An attack by 3 Group on the following day using its G-H system was more successful, and large fires were reported. The Hurricane force moved on to Düsseldorf on the evening of the 2nd, and unusually, 5 Group took part. 630 Squadron provided fourteen Lancasters to a force of almost a thousand aircraft, and they

pounded the northern half of the city, leaving over five thousand houses destroyed or seriously damaged. As events were to prove, this was the final heavy raid of the war on Düsseldorf. Bochum was the target for over seven hundred aircraft from 1, 4, 6 and 8 Groups on the 4/5th, and here too damage was immense, amounting to more than four thousand buildings destroyed or severely afflicted, with almost a thousand people killed. German nightfighters made contact with the bomber stream, and twenty eight aircraft, most of them Halifaxes, were shot down. This possibly helped 5 Group to avoid nightfighter opposition as it made its way to and from the Dortmund-Ems Canal at Ladbergen, which had been partly repaired since being breached by the Group in September. The repair work was undone, and the section was again drained, leaving the vital waterway unnavigable. Three Lancasters were lost, but all fourteen 630 Squadron aircraft returned. Gelsenkirchen became the next Ruhr town to face a heavy Bomber Command assault, its ordeal coming by daylight on the 6th. The Nordstern synthetic oil refinery was the aiming point, and over five hundred aircraft bombed in its general area, while almost two hundred others attacked the town.

5 Group was again absent from this major raid, as its crews prepared for an operation that evening to confirm their status as the Command's Canal-Busters. The Mittelland Canal joined the Dortmund-Ems at Gravenhorst, some miles to the north-west of Ladbergen and west of Osnabrück. 235 Lancasters and seven Mosquitos took off in the late afternoon, with, it seems, 57 Squadron alone representing East Kirkby. The low level marking was highly accurate, to the extent that the markers fell into the canal and were extinguished. Most of the main force crews were consequently unable to identify the aiming point, and the Master Bomber called a halt to proceedings after only thirty one crews had bombed. It was a temporary setback, although one which cost ten Lancasters, including one of the 57 Squadron contingent. 5 Group remained off the order of battle for the next few days and nights, during which, elements of other Groups maintained the pressure on Germany's oil industry. 5 Group would be in the vanguard of this campaign right up to the end of hostilities, and late on the afternoon of the 11th, 237 of its Lancasters and eight Mosquitos took off for Harburg. This town, on one of the branches of the Elbe, and to all intents and purposes a southern suburb of Hamburg, was home to the Rhenania-Ossag oil refinery and other oil related installations. Whether or not these were hit is unclear, but the town sustained extensive damage in both residential and industrial areas. Seventeen crews took part from 630 Squadron, and they all returned safely, as did two others sent on mining sorties in northern waters.

Another lull in operations took the Group through to the 16th, and involvement in a massive assault on the three small Rhineland towns of Heinsberg, Jülich and Düren, which lay in an arc from north to east respectively of Aachen. The attacks were to help an American advance towards enemy lines between Aachen and the Rhine, by cutting communications to the front. 1,188 Bomber Command aircraft were committed to the destruction of the towns, 1 and 5 Groups forming the largest force of almost five hundred aircraft with Pathfinder support to attack Düren. The assault took place in mid afternoon in good bombing conditions, and over three thousand people were killed as the built-up area was leveled. 630 Squadron put up nineteen Lancasters, and again, all of them returned. The general decrease in operations during November kept 5 Group on the ground from then until the evening of the 20th, when over thirteen hundred aircraft from the Command were committed to five main targets and

numerous support and minor operations. While railway and oil installations occupied the other Groups, the "Independent Air Force" returned to canal-busting, targeting the Mittelland at Gravenhorst and the Dortmund-Ems at Ladbergen, the latter having been repaired yet again. 55 Base crews were assigned to the former, 630 Squadron contributing twenty one of the forty one Lancasters dispatched from East Kirkby. Both operations were successful, and the Mittelland Canal was left drained over a thirty mile stretch. In the late afternoon of the 22nd, 5 Group dispatched 171 Lancasters and seven Mosquitos to attack the U-Boat pens at Trondheim in Norway, one of the few remaining havens for the craft since the capture of the French ports. As the force approached, the target became enveloped in an efficient smoke screen, and the Master Bomber was forced to abandon the attempt. 630 Squadron suffered its first operational casualty since Darmstadt in September, when LL949 crashed onto a sandbank on the northern shore of the Humber. F/O Flood and five of his crew died at the scene, and the flight engineer succumbed to his injuries a week later. Although there would be plenty of activity for the Command during the final week of the month, November held just one more major operation for 5 Group. It was approaching midnight on the 26th, when a maximum effort by the Group saw 270 Lancasters take off for Munich, to be joined in the target area by eight Mosquitos. Conditions over southern Germany were good, and returning crews claimed an accurate attack for the loss of three aircraft, two of which crashed in England shortly after take-off, while the third ran out of fuel over France on the way home. The month ended on a happy note for 630 Squadron, as it welcomed home all twenty of its participants.

As American forces advanced into the Eifel region of Germany, attention turned upon the small town of Heimbach, south-east of Aachen, and the nearby Urftsee and its dam. Elements of 1 and 8 Groups tried to bomb the town on the 3rd of December, but abandoned the attempt after the Pathfinders failed to make a firm identification. On the following day, a small 8 Group force made the first of four attacks on the dam, to prevent its use by the enemy to disrupt the American advance by selective flooding. The results were inconclusive, and the job would ultimately be handed to 5 Group. In the meantime, on the evening of the 4th, the Group sent a massive 282 Lancasters and ten Mosquitos to carry out the first and only raid of the war on Heilbronn in southern Germany. It was one of a number of seemingly insignificant, non-industrial towns to find themselves in the bomb sites during the final six months of hostilities, like Freiburg in Germany's south-western corner, which only a week earlier had been devastated by 1 and 8 Groups. That had resulted in the deaths of around three thousand people, but it was much worse at Heilbronn, where seven thousand died, and an estimated 82% of the town's built-up area was reduced to rubble in a few minutes of concentrated bombing. The defenders had to cope with a simultaneous heavy raid on nearby Karlsruhe by 1, 6 and 8 Groups, but they managed to bring down twelve 5 Group Lancasters, although none from the twenty belonging to 630 Squadron. On the 6th, the town and railway yards at Giessen in central Germany were assigned to 5 Group, for which operation 255 Lancasters took off either side of 17.00 hours. Sixteen crews took part from 630 Squadron, and the attack left severe damage around both aiming points, on a night when the defences were again split by other raids in the east and west. Eight Lancasters were lost, two of them from East Kirkby, but the 630 Squadron contingent returned intact.

On the morning of the 8th, two hundred of the Group's Lancasters carried out the second attack on the Urft dam in conditions of almost complete cloud cover, and no immediate assessment of the results was possible. The single missing Lancaster was 630 Squadron's LM637, which collided with another aircraft over the target and crashed. F/L Lewis was killed along with all but the rear gunner, who got out in time and fell into enemy hands. The operation was remounted on the 10th, but it seems likely that a recall signal brought the crews home before they reached the target area. They went back on the afternoon of the 11th scoring a number of direct hits, and although the parapet of the dam was damaged, no breach occurred, and no further operations were mounted against it. A single 57 Squadron Lancaster was lost, while all fifteen from 630 Squadron returned safely. The squadron sent two crews mining in the Kattegat on the 14th, having missed out on a small 5 Group raid on shipping in Oslo Fjord on the previous day. A hectic night of activity on the 17/18th brought heavy raids on Duisburg and the semi-industrial town of Ulm, the latter suffering an 80% destruction of its built-up area, while 5 Group returned to Munich with 280 Lancasters and eight Mosquitos. Twenty four hours later the Group undertook the long slog to Gdynia at the eastern end of Germany's Baltic coast, and damaged shipping, housing and installations around the port. 630 Squadron sent thirteen aircraft, and three more for mining duties in Danzig Bay, and all returned. The oil offensive was continued by the Group at Pölitz, north of Stettin, on the 21/22nd, but foggy conditions at home caused five aircraft to crash on return. One of these was 630 Squadron's NG258, in which F/O Stockhill and five of his crew were killed, while the rear gunner survived with injuries.

The final wartime Christmas Day was celebrated peacefully on the stations, but the Boxing day festivities were curtailed for some crews from each Group, when the Command called for attacks on troop positions around St Vith, following the German break-out in the Ardennes on the 16th. Just two crews each from the East Kirkby squadrons were involved, and there were no losses. As the year drew to a close, 630 Squadron provided three crews for mining duties off Oslo on the 28/29th, while a small 5 Group force attacked shipping in the same area. On New Year's Eve, a similar small-scale operation was mounted by the Group against elements of the Kriegsmarine at the same location, and this was supported by mining in the Kattegat. The year ended on a sad note for 630 Squadron, when one of its two "gardeners" failed to return. PB894 went missing without trace, and took with it the crew of W/O Thomas. It had been a relatively good year for the squadron once the winter campaign was over, and the loss of fifty seven aircraft during the past twelve months was roughly the norm for a 5 Group squadron of the line in 1944. As the German Ardennes offensive faltered, it was clear that the coming year would bring victory, but much remained to be done before the tenacious and courageous enemy forces finally laid down their arms.

1945

The repair of the Ladbergen section of the Dortmund-Ems Canal was an open invitation for 5 Group to pay another visit, and more than a hundred crews, including ten each from the East Kirkby squadrons, were up early on New Year's Day to attend briefings for an attack that morning. Over on the continent, however, 1945 had already started with a bang, as the Luftwaffe launched its ill-conceived and ultimately ill-fated Operation Bodenplatte. The

intention to destroy Allied aircraft on the ground at the recently liberated airfields in France, Holland and Belgium was only modestly achieved, but at an unacceptably high price. The entire day fighter strength was committed to low level bombing and strafing attacks into the teeth of the airfield flak defences, and those which survived then had to run the gauntlet of Allied fighters to make their escape. Around 250 aircraft failed to get home, with approximately 150 of their pilots being killed, wounded or taken prisoner, and this was a setback from which the Luftwaffe would never recover. The operation also produced some very jittery American anti-aircraft gunners, who, for the remainder of the day and night, fired at anything that flew, and a number of Bomber Command aircraft would fall victim to "friendly fire" incidents. The 5 Group crews took off either side of 08.00 hours, and delivered an accurate attack on the canal, creating a further breach for the loss of two aircraft. In the late afternoon, 152 Lancasters from the Group set off for Gravenhorst to attack the Mittelland Canal, and this too was a successful operation, concluded this time without loss. The major priorities for the Command in these final months of the bombing war were the continued dislocation of Germany's railway network, and the assault on her oil production. Both had been ongoing for some time, but the offensives would now gain momentum. Any city with a functioning railway or an oil-related production site was to be area bombed, and 5 Group would find itself assigned to the most distant targets. While 5 Group stayed at home on the night of the 2/3rd, 1, 3, 6 and 8 Groups went to Nuremberg, and for the first time at this target, delivered an accurate and concentrated attack. Over 4,600 houses, most of them apartment blocks, were destroyed, along with two thousand medieval houses and four hundred industrial buildings, and more than eighteen hundred people were killed. At the same time, further to the west, a predominately Halifax force was pounding Ludwigshafen on the west bank of the Rhine, where two of the synthetic oil producing I G Farben chemicals works were severely damaged, as were a number of railway installations.

There was a very late start for 5 Group crews when they next went to war on the 4/5th. They climbed into their aircraft at midnight for a take-off time of around 01.00 for what would be a controversial operation. The target was the French town of Royan in the Gironde Estuary, where a German garrison was holding out against a siege by Free French forces making for Bordeaux. A French request for assistance found its way to SHAEF, which handed the task to Bomber Command on the basis that the town was occupied only by German soldiers and French collaborators. The two-phase attack was to be opened by 5 Group, with 1 Group following an hour behind, and almost 350 Lancasters were detailed to take part, including eighteen from 630 Squadron. It transpired, that two thousand civilians, not collaborators, were still resident in the town, despite an offer from the garrison commander to evacuate them, and they were about to suffer the consequences of their decision to stay. More than fifteen hundred tons of high explosive bombs rained down around them, and many hundreds died as their town was leveled. A supply bottleneck at Houffalize in the Ardennes was the next objective to occupy the Group, a target which it had last attacked on New Year's Eve. The raid was delivered with great accuracy in the early hours of the 6th, and followed on the heels of the last large-scale area raid of the war on Hanover, delivered earlier in the night by six hundred aircraft from 1, 4, 6 and 8 Groups. The same Groups pounded Hanau and its railway yards on the 6/7th, as elements of 1 and 3 Groups did likewise at Neuss, and 5 Group stayed at home. On the following evening, a 5 Group contingent, including fourteen from 630

Squadron, joined forces with 1, 3, 6 and 8 Groups to bomb Munich for the last time. The operation was a success at a cost of eleven missing aircraft, and 630 Squadron suffered its first casualty of the year. PD317 lost its port-inner engine on take-off, but managed to gain sufficient height to stagger round the circuit and allow the bomb load to be jettisoned. F/O Billings brought the Lancaster in for a landing, but as it touched down it, bounced back into the air. The pilot opened the throttles in an attempt to abort the landing and go round again, but the port wing caught the ground, and sent the aircraft into a cartwheel. Two of the crew died at the scene, while the remainder sustained injuries from which they would recover, although the pilot ultimately lost an arm.

There was little activity for the heavy squadrons thereafter until the 13th, when two operations were mounted against the railway yards at Saarbrücken, firstly by 3 Group, and later by 4, 6 and 8 Groups. As the latter force was over France outbound, over two hundred 5 Group Lancasters took off for Pölitz to attack the oil refinery. 630 Squadron's contribution was fifteen Lancasters, plus three more mining in northern waters. Unexpectedly good visibility in the target area allowed the aiming point to be marked from low level, and the subsequent bombing was highly accurate. One of the 630 Squadron contingent was absent from the raid, after an engine fire developed during the outward flight over Denmark. All attempts to quell the flames were in vain, so F/O Langley steered PB880 into Swedish air space and prepared the crew to abandon it. Sadly, one of the gunners struck the tailplane as he left the aircraft, and he died of his injuries on the following day. The others enjoyed the legendary hospitality of the Swedes under internment, before returning to the UK. On the following night, 5 Group joined 1, 6 and 8 Groups for a two-phase raid on the oil refinery at Leuna near Merseburg. As usual, 5 Group opened the attack, and was almost home by the time the second wave went in three hours later. The operation was a major success, and one of the most effective carried out against an oil target. Four of the ten missing aircraft were from 5 Group, but all thirteen from 630 Squadron returned. On the 16/17th, 5 Group was entrusted with a very long-range operation, which would take it across Germany's eastern frontier into Czechoslovakia. The target was the synthetic oil refinery at Brüx, for which 231 Lancasters were detailed, including a handful from 1 Group's 101 Squadron to provide an RCM capability. 630 Squadron was present with fifteen Lancasters, and they all returned from another highly satisfying night's work, which delivered a further setback to Germany's oil production. This proved to be the Group's final large-scale operation of the month, and the only significant raids mounted by other Groups as activity declined were against Duisburg on the 22/23rd and the Stuttgart area on the 28/29th.

The weather was not helpful during the first week of February, as large areas of Germany were concealed by cloud. This certainly effected the accuracy of a 5 Group raid on Siegen on the 1/2nd, when much of the bombing fell into open country. Losses amounted to three Lancasters and a Mosquito, but 630 Squadron's nineteen aircraft all got back. It was a similar story on the following night, when Karlsruhe was the target for 250 Lancasters from the Group. The 627 Squadron Mosquito crews were unable to establish their position after diving through the cloud, and the operation failed completely. It was an expensive failure, which cost fourteen Lancasters, four of them from 189 Squadron, but again, 630 Squadron's sixteen aircraft came through. In preparation for an advance into Germany by the British XXX Corps

in the Reichswald region, the Command was ordered to bomb the frontier towns of Goch and Cleves, which formed part of the enemy defences. 4, 6 and 8 Groups attacked the former, and 1 and 8 Groups the latter, and both were left heavily damaged. 5 Group took advantage of this activity to take another swipe at the Dortmund-Ems Canal at Ladbergen, but the operation was not successful, and this completed a disappointing first week of the month. On the following night, the Group returned to Pölitz to open a two-phase attack on the oil refinery. 1 Group followed up two hours later with Pathfinder support, and no further production was possible at the plant for the remainder of the war. Of the eleven missing Lancasters, ten were from 5 Group, and they included ND554, one of nineteen dispatched by 630 Squadron, which was lost without trace with the crew of F/O Knight.

The night of the 13/14th brought the first of the Churchill inspired heavy raids on Germany's eastern cities under Operation Thunderclap. The target was the beautiful and historic city of Dresden, which had not been attacked by the Command before. The now familiar two-phase assault was opened by 5 Group, employing its low level marking method. A layer of cloud stretched across the target area, and this interfered to an extent with the precision of the raid, in which 244 Lancasters delivered more than eight hundred tons of bombs. Fires gained a hold, however, and they acted as a beacon to the 529 Lancasters of 1, 3, 6 and 8 Groups following three hours behind. By the time of their arrival, the skies had cleared, and a further eighteen hundred tons of bombs rained down onto the hapless city. The result was a firestorm of gigantic proportions, certainly equaling that at Hamburg eighteen months earlier, and there was no escape for the population, which had been massively swelled by an influx of refugees from the eastern front. At least fifty thousand people are thought to have died, although some commentators believe the figure to be substantially higher. Six Lancasters were shot down, but there were no casualties from East Kirkby, which had dispatched a creditable thirty five aircraft. The following night was devoted largely to Chemnitz, but heavy cloud helped to spare the city from a similar fate, and much of the bombing found open country. 5 Group did not take part, but was also over eastern Germany at the time, attacking the oil refinery at Rositz near Leipzig. The operation was only partially effective, and cost four aircraft, one of them from 630 Squadron. LL966 came down somewhere deep inside Germany, and five of the crew have no known graves. The rear gunner lies in the 1939-1945 Berlin War Cemetery, while his pilot, Lt Lacey, an American, is buried in Belgium, his remains having presumably been transferred there after the war.

A few nights of rest for the 5 Group crews preceded yet another assault on Germany's oil industry on the 19/20th. The attack on Böhlen did not go according to plan, after the Master Bomber's Mosquito was shot down by flak over the target. The subsequent bombing was scattered, and little damage was inflicted on the plant, although on the credit side, there were no other losses. Fifteen 630 Squadron crews operated that night, and many of them were on the order of battle twenty four hours later for another shot at the Mittelland Canal at Gravenhorst. The crews encountered complete cloud cover, and the Master Bomber was forced to send them home with their bombs still on board. The operation was rescheduled for the following night, and 630 Squadron detailed thirteen crews for an overall force of 165 Lancasters and twelve Mosquitos. This time the skies were clear, the canal was rendered unnavigable, and it would not be necessary for the bombers to return. Although 630 Squadron

came through unscathed, thirteen Lancasters were shot down, and among those killed were G/C "Tiny" Evans-Evans, the station commander at Coningsby, in an 83 Squadron aircraft, and G/C Forbes, the commanding officer of 463 Squadron. On the 23/24th, 1, 6 and 8 Groups carried out the only area bombing raid of the war on Pforzheim, and in twenty two minutes, inflicted a catastrophe upon the town and its inhabitants. A large part of the built-up area was engulfed by fire, and seventeen thousand people lost their lives, the third highest death toll at a German urban target. The 24th brought 5 Group's last operation in February, but in keeping with the month's generally disappointing results, this attempt on the Dortmund-Ems Canal at Ladbergen was abandoned in the face of cloud before any bombing took place.

March opened with the final raid of the war by RAF heavy bombers on Mannheim on the 1st, carried out by 1, 6 and 8 Groups. As usually happened at this target, the bombing spilled across the Rhine into Ludwigshafen, and heavy damage was caused here also. On the following morning, two forces set out to bomb Cologne for the last time, the first numbering seven hundred aircraft, which inflicted massive damage to the already shattered city. The second attack by 3 Group had to be abandoned after only fifteen aircraft had bombed, because of a fault with the G-H station in England. It hardly mattered, and the city fell to American forces four days later. 630 Squadron was not called into action until the evening of the 3rd, for what would prove to be the final operation by 5 Group against the Dortmund-Ems Canal at Ladbergen. The squadron put up thirteen Lancasters in an overall heavy force of 212, and the aqueduct section was breached in two places, remaining out of commission for the remainder of the war. Having escaped serious damage on the night after Dresden, Chemnitz succumbed to a highly destructive raid by over seven hundred aircraft on the 5/6th, while 5 Group revisited the oil refinery at Böhlen. The attack had to be conducted through cloud, and was only partially successful for the loss of four Lancasters, but all seventeen from 630 Squadron came home. On the following night, 5 Group went to the Baltic to attack the port of Sassnitz on the island of Rügen, a little to the north of Peenemünde, leaving the northern part of the town severely damaged, and sinking three ships. 630 Squadron sent eleven aircraft on the main raid, and a further three to lay mines off the island, and all returned safely. The oil refinery at Harburg was the Group's next target on the 7/8th, and it was successfully dealt with at the high cost of fourteen Lancasters. For the second time in a few weeks, 189 Squadron posted missing four crews, while 630 Squadron again operated without loss.

A new record was set in the late morning of the 11th, when 1,079 aircraft took off for the final raid of the war on Essen. East Kirkby dispatched twenty six Lancasters, fifteen of them belonging to 630 Squadron, and they contributed to another punishing assault on this much bombed city. The bombers' battle with Essen had spanned almost five years, and it was only during the last two that the bomber had prevailed. Many gallant crews had fallen during the various campaigns, but Essen now lay totally ruined, and seven thousand of its inhabitants had lost their lives in air raids. The record was short-lived, and was surpassed a little over twenty four hours later, when 1,108 aircraft departed their stations in the early afternoon of the 12th, to deliver the final raid of the war on Dortmund. This time East Kirkby dispatched thirty three Lancasters, and they all returned from an operation which effectively finished Dortmund as a functioning city. There was still to be no let-up in the bombing of Germany, however, and a large 5 Group contingent was prepared for a raid on the Wintershall oil

refinery at Lutzkendorf during the evening of the 14th. It was another very long round trip for the crews, and nightfighters were active. A moderate amount of damage was inflicted upon the target, and eighteen Lancasters were lost, one of them from 57 Squadron, but 630 Squadron's fine record continued for yet another night. It came to an end two nights later, however, when over two hundred 5 Group Lancasters were sent to attack the historic and minimally industrial city of Würzburg in central-southern Germany. In seventeen horrifying minutes, over eleven hundred tons of bombs were dropped with great accuracy, destroying 89% of the built-up area, and killing between four and five thousand people. Six Lancasters failed to return, and 630 Squadron registered its first loss for a month, and its first in 179 sorties. LM260 crashed in Germany, and there were no survivors from the crew of W/O Plumb. This would be the squadron's only loss during March, even though its crews would have to negotiate three more operations. The first of these was a return to the oil refinery at Böhlen on the night of the 20/21st, for which nineteen 630 Squadron crews were briefed. They made up a total force of 224 Lancasters and eleven Mosquitos, the former taking off shortly before midnight. At a cost of nine Lancasters, the refinery was put out of commission, and remained inactive for the remainder of the war. On the following night, 151 Lancasters from the Group attacked the Deutsche Erdölwerke refinery at Hamburg, and put a stop to all further production here. A more modest four Lancasters were missing, but the 630 Squadron contingent of sixteen returned intact. The small town of Wesel had the misfortune to lie close to the area of fighting, and was believed to contain enemy troop units. Consequently, it had been a focus of the Command's attention since mid February, most of the attacks having been delivered by 3 or 8 Groups. The last one was undertaken by 5 Group, with a little 8 Group support, in the late evening of the 23rd. The 195 Lancasters involved included seventeen from 630 Squadron, and the operation was concluded without loss. The eight attacks of varying sizes on the town had produced a pile of rubble, and it was estimated that 97% of the buildings in the main town area had been destroyed. It was during March, that His Majesty King George VI awarded the squadron its badge and motto.

April, the final month of the bombing war, began for 5 Group with an early start for the crews on the 4th. The target was the town of Nordhausen, north-east of Kassel in central Germany, which contained barracks, believed to be housing military units. The barracks had already been bombed on the previous day by 1 Group, and many casualties inflicted. Sadly, it was later learned that the buildings were accommodation for forced workers at the underground secret weapons factory, which had been established at Nordhausen after the Peenemünde raid in August 1943. The 5 Group bombing was also accurate, and the town was left severely damaged. 630 Squadron enjoyed a good start to the month, with no losses from its seventeen participants. 5 Group's war against the German oil industry continued on the evening of the 7th, with a raid on the oil refinery at Molbis near Leipzig. Accurate bombing in clear conditions left the plant in disarray, and no more oil was produced thereafter. Another good night for 630 Squadron saw all of its eleven aircraft return. On the following night, the Group went back to Lutzkendorf, where the oil refinery had escaped serious damage at the hands of 1 and 8 Groups four nights earlier. This time there were no mistakes, and the Wintershall plant was added to the growing list of defunct oil refineries. All seventeen 630 Squadron Lancasters arrived back over England in the early hours of the 9th, but poor weather over East Kirkby resulted in diversion signals. Possibly bound for Bottesford or Langar, ND949 crashed

in Leicestershire, and the entire crew of F/O Richardson was killed. In a break from oil-related targets, a modest force of 5 and 8 Group aircraft was assigned to the Wahren railway yards in Leipzig. 55 Base was well represented among the seventy six Lancasters, with eighteen from 57 Squadron, eleven from 630, and others from 207. It was late evening by the time they reached the target area, and the attack destroyed the eastern half of the yards for the comparatively high loss of six Lancasters. Not since the raid on the railway junction at Revigny in July had 630 Squadron posted missing more than one crew from a single operation, but two failed to return on this night. ME739 was abandoned over Germany by F/O Cameron and his crew, and the pilot and three others were taken prisoner. The mid-upper gunner sadly fell to his death as his parachute burned away, but the bomb-aimer and rear gunner managed to evade capture. RF122 also went down over Germany, killing F/O Sassoon and four of his crew, while the bomb-aimer and rear gunner joined their squadron colleagues in captivity. These were the final losses to be sustained by the squadron.

Four crews were sent mining in Kiel Bay on the 13/14th, and three nights later, fourteen took part in a successful 5 Group raid on the railway yards at Pilsen in Czechoslovakia. The East Kirkby squadrons were on the order of battle for the night of the 17/18th, to take part in an attack on railway yards at Cham, close to the Czech border in south-eastern Germany. Approaching 18.00 hours, the bombing-up process was almost completed, when a fire erupted underneath the bomb bay of a 57 Squadron aircraft. Two 1,000lb bombs detonated, flinging burning debris in all directions, and soon other 57 Squadron Lancasters were on fire. The 630 Squadron ground crews abandoned their charges to take cover in the face of what was obviously a major incident, and the station's contribution to the operation was scrubbed. By the following morning, East Kirkby was a shambles, bearing the shattered remains of six 57 Squadron aircraft, and fourteen others displaying various degrees of damage. 630 Squadron escaped lightly, but the airfield would remain unusable for days. As a result, none of its aircraft participated in the massive assault by all Groups on the island of Heligoland on the 18th, or the successful final 5 Group operation of the long-running railway campaign at Komotau in Czechoslovakia on the 18/19th. It was not until the 23rd that the two squadrons could operate again, when twelve Lancasters from each joined a planned 5 Group effort against railway yards and the port at Flensburg. As the 140 Lancasters approached the target they encountered cloud, and the Master Bomber sent them home with their war loads still on board. The final operations by the Command's heavy squadrons took place on the 25th, and fittingly included a morning attack by Lancasters of 1, 5 and 8 Groups against the SS barracks at Hitler's Eaglesnest retreat at Berchtesgaden. The East Kirkby squadrons put up five aircraft each, and later that night, sent four each on mining sorties in Oslo Fjord, while other elements of the Group attacked an oil refinery at Tonsberg in Norway. At 02.53 on the 26th, F/O Jacobs touched down at East Kirkby at the end of the final offensive sortie by 630 Squadron, and then it was all over.

On the 28th, and as testimony to his calibre as 630 Squadron's commanding officer, W/C Grindon was posted to Woodhall Spa to take Command of 617 Squadron. Later in the year he would be awarded the DSO in recognition of his wartime service, his citation reading; "In the course of numerous operational sorties, W/C Grindon has established an excellent reputation for leadership, energy and courage. The worst weather or the heaviest opposition have never

deterred him from the accurate completion of his allotted tasks. Over such heavily defended targets as Königsberg, Bremen and Bergen he has braved intense anti-aircraft fire, and despite damage to his aircraft on more than one occasion, has always fulfilled his mission. On one occasion, during a daylight attack on Homberg severe damage was sustained and his aircraft became difficult to control, but, in spite of the danger, W/C Grindon continued to lead his formation with skill and determination. He has at all times set an outstanding example." W/C Wild took over from W/C Grindon to become the squadron's final wartime commander. During its sixteen months of operations, 630 Squadron dropped 10,347 tons of bombs, and having completed its task in the finest traditions of the Command, thereafter undertook a humanitarian role, helping to repatriate Allied prisoners of war. By the end of May, 57 and 630 Squadrons had ferried a magnificent eighteen hundred former prisoners back to the UK. The Squadron was finally disbanded on the 18th of July 1945.

The wartime home of 630 Squadron, East Kirkby, is now the Lincolnshire Aviation Heritage Centre, established by the Panton brothers in memory of their brother Christopher, who was killed while flying with 433 Squadron on the Nuremberg operation at the end of March 1944. Lancaster NX611 has been lovingly restored as the main attraction, and is frequently taxied for spectators. The museum displays information on all of the wartime 5 Group squadrons, and there are many exhibits depicting this and later periods of the station's operational life. The control tower is very much as it was during 630 Squadron's residency, and the entire site stands as a memorial to the crews of Bomber Command in general, and those of 5 Group in particular.

www.bombercommandarchive.co.uk

STATION

EAST KIRKBY

15.11.43. to 18.07.45.

COMMANDING OFFICERS

WING COMMANDER M CROCKER DFC

15.11.43. to 12.12.43.

WING COMMANDER J D ROLLINSON DFC

12.12.43. to 28.01.44.

WING COMMANDER W DEAS DFC

01.02.44. to 07.07.44.

WING COMMANDER L M BLOME-JONES DFC

12.07.44. to 09.44.

WING COMMANDER J E GRINDON DFC

09.44. to 28.04.45.

WING COMMANDER F W L WILD DFC

28.04.45. to 18.07.45.

AIRCRAFT

LANCASTER I/III

15.11.43. to 18.07.45.

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SECTION 2



OPERATIONAL RECORD

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OPERATIONAL RECORD

OPERATIONS	SORTIES	AIRCRAFT LOSSES	% LOSSES
202	2453	59	2.4

CATEGORY OF OPERATIONS

BOMBING

180

MINING

22

11 further Lancasters were destroyed in crashes.

TABLE OF STATISTICS

Out of 58 Lancaster squadrons.

28th equal (with 35Sqn) highest number of Lancaster overall operations in Bomber Command.

33rd highest number of Lancaster sorties in Bomber Command.

26th equal (with 550Sqn) highest number of Lancaster operational losses in Bomber Command.

Out of 22 squadrons in 5 Group.

14th highest number of overall operations in 5 Group.

14th highest number of sorties in 5 Group.

14th highest number of aircraft operational losses in 5 Group.

Out of 17 Lancaster squadrons in 5 Group.

12th highest number of Lancaster overall operations in 5 Group.

12th highest number of Lancaster sorties in 5 Group.

12th highest number of Lancaster operational losses in 5 Group.

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SECTION 3



AIRCRAFT LISTING

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630 SQUADRON.

LANCASTER.

From November 1943.

ED308 From 57Sqn. To 1661CU.
ED413 LE-T From 57Sqn. To 207Sqn.
ED655 LE-J From 57Sqn. Crashed in Lincolnshire during operation to Berlin (619Sqn crew) 15/16.2.44.
ED698 From 57Sqn. To 207Sqn.
ED758 From 57Sqn. To 207Sqn.
ED777 LE-Q From 57Sqn. FTR Berlin 2/3.12.43.
ED920 LE-D From 57Sqn. FTR Leipzig 3/4.12.43.
ED944 LE-Z From 57Sqn. To 5LFS.
JA872 LE-N From 57Sqn. To 61Sqn.
JB135 LE-L From 57Sqn. FTR Berlin 23/24.11.43.
JB236 LE-O From 57Sqn. FTR Berlin 23/24.11.43.
JB288 LE-H From 1660CU. FTR Nuremberg 30/31.3.44.
JB290 LE-C/D From 1660CU.
JB294 From 1660CU. FTR Berlin 21/22.1.44.
JB532 LE-X From 61Sqn. FTR Berlin 1/2.1.44.
JB546 LE-A From 57Sqn. FTR Brunswick 22/23.5.44.
JB556 LE-Y Crashed on take-off from East Kirkby when bound for Munich 24.4.44.
JB561 From 61Sqn. To 12Sqn.
JB597 From 61Sqn. Crashed while landing at Holme-on-Spalding-Moor on return from Berlin 27.11.43.
JB654 LE-C FTR Berlin 28/29.1.44.
JB665 LE-B FTR Berlin 15/16.2.44.
JB666 FTR Berlin 28/29.1.44.
JB672 LE-U/F FTR Duisburg 21/22.5.44.
JB710 LE-W From 49Sqn. FTR Leipzig 19/20.2.44.
LL886 LE-I FTR Berlin 24/25.3.44.
LL949 LE-E Crashed in the Humber Estuary on return from Trondheim 22/23.11.44.
LL950 LE-Y FTR from mining sortie 21/22.5.44.
LL966 LE-P FTR Rositz 14/15.2.45.
LL972 LE-T FTR Stettin 16/17.8.44.
LM117 LE-J FTR Revigny 18/19.7.44.
LM118 LE-V FTR Wesseling 21/22.6.44.
LM216 LE-K To 186Sqn.
LM259 LE-F To 227Sqn.
LM260 LE-S FTR Würzburg 16/17.3.45.
LM262 LE-G FTR Secqueville 7/8.8.44.
LM269 LE-I FTR Bordeaux 18.8.44.
LM287 LE-O To 1651CU.
LM537 LE-X FTR Revigny 18/19.7.44.

LM637 LE-V	FTR Urft Dam 8.12.44.
LM649	From 49Sqn.
LM673	From 57Sqn. Returned to 57Sqn.
LM680 LE-Z	From 50Sqn.
ME312 LE-A	To 1661CU.
ME532	To 207Sqn.
ME650 LE-B	FTR Königsburg 26/27.8.44.
ME664 LE-T	FTR Nuremberg 30/31.3.44.
ME717 LE-G	Crash-landed in Corsica following operation to Munich 24/25.4.44.
ME729	Crashed in Scotland while training 18.7.44.
ME737 LE-E/S	FTR Bourg Leopold 11/12.5.44.
ME739 LE-F/T	FTR Leipzig 10/11.4.44.
ME782 LE-N	FTR Wesseling 21/22.6.44.
ME795 LE-G	Abandoned over Henlow on return from Wesseling 21/22.6.44.
ME796 LE-S	FTR Revigny 18/19.7.44.
ME843 LE-U	FTR Wesseling 21/22.6.44.
ME845 LE-Q	To 57Sqn.
ME867 LE-N	FTR St Leu d'Esserent 4/5.7.44.
ND335 LE-L	To 1668CU.
ND337 LE-S	FTR Nuremberg 30/31.3.44.
ND338 LE-T/Q	FTR Stuttgart 20/21.2.44.
ND412 LE-H	From 405Sqn.
ND527 LE-O	FTR Givors 26/27.7.44.
ND530 LE-P	From 207Sqn. FTR Stuttgart 15/16.3.44.
ND531 LE-K	FTR Wesseling 21/22.6.44.
ND532 LE-N	FTR Leipzig 19/20.2.44.
ND554 LE-A	From 617Sqn. FTR Politz 8/9.2.45.
ND561 LE-R	FTR Stuttgart 1/2.3.44.
ND563	Crashed on take-off from East Kirkby when bound for Stuttgart 20.2.44.
ND580 LE-G	FTR Bourg Leopold 11/12.5.44.
ND583 LE-V	FTR Stuttgart 15/16.3.44.
ND655 LE-J	FTR Brunswick 22/23.5.44.
ND657 LE-W	FTR Berlin 24/25.3.44.
ND685 LE-Q	FTR Caen 6/7.6.44.
ND686 LE-M	FTR Frankfurt 18/19.3.44.
ND688 LE-R	FTR St Leu d'Esserent 7/8.7.44.
ND788 LE-U	FTR Berlin 24/25.3.44.
ND789 LE-I	FTR Schweinfurt 26/27.4.44.
ND793	To Flight Refuelling Ltd.
ND797 LE-W	FTR Stuttgart 28/29.7.44.
ND949 LE-Z	Crashed in Leicestershire on return from Lützkendorf 9.4.45.
ND982 LE-Y	From 405Sqn. FTR Königsburg 29/30.8.44.
NF961 LE-L	Crashed in Yorkshire while night-flying training 18.10.44.
NG123 LE-U	

NG125 LE-F/N
NG145 To 57Sqn.
NG258 Crashed in Lincolnshire on return from Politz 22.12.44.
NG259 LE-N
NG413 LE-M From 1661CU.
NN702 LE-J To 617Sqn.
NN703
NN774 LE-L
PA322 LE-V
PA992 LE-Y FTR Stuttgart 24/25.7.44.
PB121 LE-F FTR Etampes 9/10.6.44.
PB211 LE-H From 9Sqn. Crashed in North Sea during mining sortie 23/24.7.44.
PB236 LE-F FTR Revigny 18/19.7.44.
PB244 LE-N FTR L'Isle Adam 18.8.44.
PB344 LE-R
PB742 To 189Sqn.
PB865 To 1661CU.
PB880 LE-B FTR Politz 13/14.1.45.
PB894 From 57Sqn. FTR from mining sortie 31.12/1.1.45
PD253 LE-D
PD254 LE-W
PD283 LE-G FTR Darmstadt 11/12.9.44.
PD317 LE-G Crashed on landing at East Kirkby following early return from Munich 7.1.45.
PD327 LE-E/Y To 75(NZ)Sqn.
RA520 LE-E
RF122 LE-S FTR Leipzig 10/11.4.45.
RF124 LE-S From 57Sqn.
RF194 From 207Sqn.
RF266

HEAVIEST LOSS

21/22.6.44. Wesseling 4 Lancasters FTR, 1 abandoned on return.

18/19.7.44. Revigny 4 Lancasters FTR.

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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.
S/L	Squadron Leader.
SOC	Struck off Charge.
SOE	Special Operations Executive.
Sqn	Squadron.
TF	Training Flight.
TFU	Telecommunications Flying Unit.
W/C	Wing Commander.
Wg	Wing.
WIDU	Wireless Intelligence Development Unit.
W/O	Warrant Officer.



SECTION 5



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SECTION 6



STOCK LIST

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SQUADRON PROFILES CURRENTLY AVAILABLE

**7 9 10 12 XV 35 40 44 49 50 51 57 61
75(NZ) 77 78 83 90 97 100 101 102 103
105 106 115 139 144 149 150 153 156 189
207 214 218 405 408 419 460 467 550 578
617 619 622 625 626 627 630**

AVAILABLE SOON

138

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

**MOSQUITO SQUADRONS
OF THE PATH FINDER FORCE
and
OPERATIONAL STATISTICS
OF
BOMBER COMMAND AND ITS
SQUADRONS**

www.bombercommandmuseumarchives.ca

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Commissions for original work welcomed
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