

A Short History of
**No. 264 (Madras Presidency)
Squadron**

Royal Air Force

October 30th 1939 - August 25th 1945

264

“We Defy”

Enemy Aircraft Score

Destroyed: One hundred and Forty Eight

Probably destroyed: Thirteen

Damaged: Forty plus

Many unrecorded

Low Countries – Dunkirk – Battle of Britain – Bay of Biscay

Normandy Beachhead – North West Europe

Version 2

A Short History of No. 264 (Madras Presidency) Squadron

It must be noted that there appears to be three 'official' Squadron History's. I have already re-typed up one and this is the second version. Maybe it will be possible to bring all three together eventually. (G Faulkner – Editor and Squadron Association Secretary). Because of the poor quality of the original, some words are missing, but I have tried to make sense of all I could.

264 Squadron was formed under Squadron Leader Stephen Hardy at Sutton Bridge on 30th October; 1939. For the first few weeks the only aircraft flown were Magisters and Fairy Battles. Soon after the Squadron moved to Martelsham Heath in December, our official aircraft, the Bolton Paul Defiant began to arrive.

Being the first Squadron to be equipped with these new aircraft, "teething" troubles were numerous, difficulties being experienced with items such as the four gun electro-hydraulic turret and the undercarriage system. Tactics for operating the Defiant, the **only** fighter with a turret and no forward firing guns, took a considerable amount of working out, and the great success of these when employed was largely due to the skill and inspiration of Squadron Leader Hunter who assumed command in March 1940.

The Defiant, being the only aircraft in Squadron service which one had to bring in to land at 100 m.p.h., it came as rather a bombshell when the A.O.C., Air Vice Marshal. Leigh-Mallory, came down to say we were to commence night flying training. It was felt that it would be impracticable to land aircraft with such a high stalling speed at night, but nevertheless in April, practice night flying was successfully carried out by most members of the Squadron, none however thought 264 was destined in the autumn to be a Night Fighter Squadron.

A few convoy patrols were flown in March and April, but partly because the war was still in its 'phoney' stage, the Squadron was not deemed operational until May 8th, when the Allies were being driven back in France. On May 10th, we were suddenly moved to Duxford, when the Low countries were being invaded and two days later did our first genuine operational trip. That was when "A" Flight flew up to Horsham St Faith and took off in company with a flight from 66 Squadron for a swoop over Holland, hoping to catch German Troop carrying aircraft. Unfortunately we were a day late as a large number of Ju 52's had already discharged their cargoes on the beach and also on the airfield at The Hague, which had been captured by paratroopers. All we saw were three bombers of which the Squadron shot down a Ju. 88 and a He. 111, returning to Duxford without further incident.

At dawn the next day, "B" Flight took off from Martlesham Heath again with a flight of Spitfires, with enemy aircraft as their main objective. This time the Hun seemed to have had prior warning of our approach as we were severely outnumbered by Me.109's and Me.110's. In the resultant melee three Me.109's and 4 Ju.89's were destroyed, but P/O.Kay was the only pilot of the six to bring back his aircraft, with a badly damaged machine, he had managed to refuel at Knokke and reached Duxford in the evening. Two further pilots and gunners managed to escape and returned to base a few days later. On May 14th, "A" Flight "having taken off from Martelsham heath for a further show over Holland, were recalled as they crossed the Suffolk coast because the Dutch had capitulated.

The following week was spent in further practice but from 23rd May, we flew each day to Manston for operations along the French coast to support the withdrawal of the British Army. Opposition increased day by day with one Hun being shot down on May the 24th, 5 on the 27th, 6 on the 28th, 37 on the 29th and 9 on the 31st. The score of 37 enemy aircraft destroyed in one day by an RAF squadron, for no loss was an achievement, which remained unequalled throughout the war. The aircraft destroyed during these last few days of May were almost all over or around Dunkirk during the evacuation period. The squadron's score for this first month of being operational was 67 enemy aircraft destroyed with a further unrecorded number damaged, all for the loss of 7 crews and 14 aircraft.

This extraordinary successful month led to the award of the Distinguished Service Order to the Commanding Officer (Sqd./Ldr Hunter) as well as a Distinguished Flying medal for other members of the Squadron.

May saw the first of the Squadron's Night Patrols but it was after we had moved to Kirton Lindsey in July that we had our first night combat. At this time fighters on patrol had to show a coloured downward light for easy recognition by the Observer Corps. It was thanks to this that one aircraft (P/O Whitley and Sgt. Turner), whilst on patrol, suddenly had tracers flashing past. On following the tracers to their source a He. 111 was discovered and promptly shot down.

With the Battle of Britain reaching its climax, the Squadron was sent down to Hornchurch on the 21st August. After one or two inconclusive combats with Me.109's which tried to bounce us during the first few patrols, we were almost caught on the ground on May 24th, refuelling at Manston, when 15 Ju.88's tried to dive bomb the airfield and Ramsgate. Five of these were destroyed together with one escorting fighter, but we lost 3 crews including our Commanding Officer who had led us so magnificently.

Our stay at Hornchurch lasted for eight hectic days and in that time we destroyed 17 Huns for the loss of 6 crews, which at that time, was considered rather a poor proposition.

Soon after our return to Kirton Lindsey on August the 29th under Squadron Leader Garvin, we were given the rather unpopular news that we were to be solely a Night Fighter Squadron. "B" Flight went to Notholt and Luton in September and the Squadron then moved to Rochford (Southend) in November, when Squadron Leader A T D Sanders took over. Debden in December and then via Gravesend to Biggin Hill in January 1941. This meant that during the Luftwaffe's heaviest attacks on London, 264 was in the offing. Unfortunately the ground controls were extremely inaccurate at that time and the Hun very elusive. We all flew patrol after patrol, often over blazing London with bombs exploding directly beneath us, but were only able to claim 6 Huns actually destroyed between September 1940 and April 1941.

We moved to West Malling in April 1941 and did our only bit of intruder work with Defiants on three nights in May, destroying four enemy aircraft. Two more enemy aircraft were destroyed by "A" flight on the night of May 9th/10th., which was the night of the Luftwaffe's heaviest attack on London. Unfortunately "B" flight had been detached to Nutts Corner for a few days after Belfast had had two heavy night raids, otherwise the score may well have been greater.

Squadron Leader P J Sanders DFC assumed command in June 1941 when Wing Commander A T D Sanders DFC was posted to Command 85 Squadron. Unfortunately being a 'cats eye' fighter, the Defiant 1 was not given many opportunities for serious operation work and it was hoped that with the advent of the Defiant 2 in September with its pilot operated AI (Radar) would put Defiants back into the headlines. But this Mk.V1. AI was not very effective and the only combat we had with it was when P/O Stuart and F/O Maggs destroyed a He. 111 on the night of the 17th April 1942.

In May 1942 the Squadron moved to Colerne when squadron leader Cooke DFC, who had commanded the Squadron since December 1941, handed over to Wing commander Hamish-Kerr AFC, on the arrival of the first Mosquitos and the consequent upgrading of the establishment.

On the 30th may, the first Hun was destroyed by a Mosquito, a Junkers 88 by squadron Leader Cooke and another was destroyed during August. September, October and November were absolutely blank months as far as Ops. Were concerned, but December saw the first flight detached to Trebeizue, Cornwall, doing Ranger work.

January and February 1943 were also uneventful, but on the March sorties, several locomotives were shot up and badly damaged together with many railway installations. On the 21st March during the "Bay of Biscay" patrol, 2 Ju.88 's were destroyed, the second of these being the squadrons 100th Enemy aircraft destroyed. On March the 29th, a Heinkel 111 was probably destroyed during an Intruder patrol.

April added nothing to the score of enemy aircraft, but many locomotives were destroyed and ground targets damaged and destroyed. May saw the squadron at Predennock for Bay of Biscay patrols and Day Rangers, with fair success. June was an excellent month over the bay. On the 13th a Fockler Wulf 190 was damaged after an encounter with these 'dreaded' fighters. On the 20th a JU.88 was probably destroyed and on the night of the 20/21st, a real picnic was enjoyed by Wing Commander Allington and three other crews. Biscarosse Seaplane base was visited and a BV.138 was destroyed in the air,

2 BV.222's (six engine types) were destroyed on the sea, with another BV.138 destroyed on the water. Another BV222 was damaged and a minesweeper and hanger left in flames. The Wing Commander was awarded a Bar to his DFC for leading this sortie. July saw no combat.

The first patrols of August included a successful attack on armed Trawlers, one being destroyed. On the 7th the Squadron left for Fairwood Common, where we did Night Rangers and Air Sea rescue cover patrols. On the 18th, the Squadron dropped its first bombs at Laon airfield. Bomber support patrols were carried out from castle camps and during September we were detached there, at Bradwell Bay, and at Ford, but the patrols were not particularly eventful. The bombing of enemy airfields brought good results, when Coltishall, Bradwell Bay and Ford were used.

Liaison with (*I don't quite understand this next bit*) the Navy and Swansea and a move to Exeter for Day Rangers were the features of November. Several trains were very successfully attacked. On the 17th, the Squadron moved again, this time to Coleby Grange in Lincolnshire, and Coltishall was used as the forward base for Bomber patrols.

In Mid-December the Squadron moved to Church Fenton, to re-equip with Mk.V111 AI equipment, which was retained until after the end of the war.

January 1944 was dull and uneventful but saw the move of the Squadron into 85 Group, as part of the Allied Expeditionary Air Force, 141 Wing became our parent. February was busy but we kept ourselves busy training on our new equipment.

In March our luck changed and F/O Barbour and F/O Paine destroyed a Dornier 217 near Alford, Lincs. A detachment was sent to West Malling for experience and in April we moved under canvas. On April 20th, F/O Corre and F/O Bines shot down the Squadrons first Heinkel 177.

May brought the expected and hoped for move on the 6th to Hartford Bridge, and the Squadron lost no time in commemorating its lucky month. A Ju188 on the 14th (F/Lt. Ramsey and F/O Edgar but they had to abandon the aircraft and F/O Edgar was killed).

June 1944 which brought us D-Day became another historic month for 264 Squadron, with 16 enemy aircraft destroyed, 1 probable and 3 damaged, all in the vicinity of the Beachheads at night - for the loss of one crew unaccountably. This was the top score at the time(script lost)

July opened well, and six more enemy aircraft were destroyed by the 14th with a probable and a couple damaged. On the 14th we had a visit from the King and Queen who held an investiture and talked to the Squadron at dispersal afterwards. That night we changed over from beachhead patrols to defensive patrols against the flying Bombs (V1's). A very busy fortnight followed, during which we destroyed 19, no mean feat, with lack of speed superiority of the Mosquito, F/O Brooke distinguished himself by getting six!

On the 26th the squadron was moved to Hunsdon, while 142 Wing, who had recently taken us over from 141 Wing, went on ahead to France. A Ju.88 was destroyed on the 29th (Squadron leader Chase and F/O Watson) and on the 30th we had our first diversion to a French airfield, Maupertus.

August started well with six and a probable by the 10th of the Month, Flt. Lt. Beverley and F/O Sturley had to bail out after being well shot up by our own flak during their successful chase and the former was injured. Flt. Lt. Davidson and F/O Wilmott had to fly through the explosion of the Ju.88. Which damaged the Mosquito and burnt off all the rudder fabric, but it landed safely on the airstrip behind the beachhead. * Squadron Ldr. Chase and F/O Watson got their fifth enemy aircraft.

(Please note that this comment is inaccurate, as the damaged aircraft of Davidson and Wilmott landed with no electrics, radio and lights U/S and a following mosquito landed and ran into Davidson's Mosquito, killing Wilmott and both aircraft bursting into flames This comment is substantiated by eye witnesses).*

On the 11th we moved to France, to Picauville on the Cherbourg Peninsula, having been beaten to it by 604 Squadron by a few days. There we operated against an enemy who was fast finding it too difficult to attack the beaches and just had no more combats in that campaign. A move was made to Caen/Carpicquet and patrols flown first over Paris area and later over Brussels. The only real excitement was when Flt. Lt. Moncour and F/O Woodruff did not return from a low flying exercise in the afternoon of the 19th, they came back a week later having been shot down in the St Nazaire area.

On the 14th we flew back to Predannock, ostensibly to re-equip, but anyway the war by then, had got too far out of sight.

The squadron then gave away most of its aircraft, and completed fourteen major inspections on old aircraft given to us by 604 and 409 Squadrons, so very little flying was done. We moved to again to Colerne and on November the 29th, but mid-December brought a change of plans and no new aeroplanes, and so we were moved to Odiham and back under the control of 85 Group. 147 Wing were in charge of us there and we started patrols to cover the Scheldt Estuary on December 23rd no enemy could be found there however, although other squadrons nearer to the enemy Ardennes offensive were doing well.

The New Year brought a move back to France, to 148 Wing at Lille/Vendeville. We moved in on the 7th in a snowstorm and had to endure bitter weather with very little heating or comfort for everybody, until snow clearing early in February. Both January and February were complete operational blanks as the enemy was not keen to show himself at night at all. Towards the end of February, four pilots left for Gilse/Rijen to carry out Operation Blackmail. This was intensely secret at the time, but it can now be disclosed that it entailed carrying Dutchmen, Airforce and Army and one woman over occupied Holland by day and night to maintain wireless communications with agents of the Underground movement. As a matter of interest, this task was found to be particularly useful, but had been turned down by two Groups, who considered it too dangerous.

(From previous articles the pilots that we have found who flew these missions were. Peter de Leighton-Brooke, "Mossie" Moss, and John Bentley. The Agents were Hilda Bergsma, Jaap Ludolph and Leo Fleskins)

March saw plenty of patrols flown both from Lille and Gilse, but it was not until the 25th that any success was achieved. A Ju.88 was destroyed (Sqdn. Ldr. Ramsey and Flt. Lt. Donnet), the first combat since August 10th. On the 30th (after the Rhine crossing), a FW.190 was destroyed.

April proved to be a magnificent month, after a slow start, a Ju.88 at roof top height just west of Berlin was destroyed on the 20th and on the 21st we got three and a probable. Two of them were Junkers 290's (F/O Daber and W/O Heathcote) and we hope that they were carrying a large number of high-ranking Nazis. The enemy continued to try and escape at night from doomed Berlin and we destroyed a Ju.88 on the 22nd, a He.111 on the 23rd, a FW.190 on the 24th and another FW.190 on the 25th. (Which was the last one we got, although difficult targets like the Me.108's and the Feiseler Storchs were seen later). On the 26th the advanced party moved into Germany to Rheine. The air party moved to Gilse/Rijen where we watched the war peter out. We moved the air party to Germany on May 6th twelve months to the day, since flying away from Church Fenton to prepare to cover the Invasion, and two days before the official VE Day was declared.

But that is not the end of our fighting History. Our chief task at Rheine was to help transport and marshal returning prisoners of war, many of whom were aircrew members. Amongst them were Flt. Lt. Greenhouse and Sgt. Greenhalch who were overjoyed to put it mildly, when they saw the Squadron markings "PS" on the Mosquitos based there. They were shot down on the 13th May 1940 in the Breda area and had been prisoners ever since. Before they had been shot down, they had themselves destroyed two Me. 109's, so a combat report was taken by the Intelligence Officer and they were dispatched back to the United Kingdom in an Oxford marked "PS" (?), They made the Squadron score 148 enemy aircraft destroyed – a fitting conclusion to a magnificent European record.

264 Squadron remained on in Holland, this time at Twente/Enschede, and at the time that this was written, is still part of the Occupying forces, being one of the only two Night fighter squadrons so to do....and still awaiting news of re-equipment.

Author unknown
Dated July 1945

Re-written; July 2004
Geoff Faulkner
Secretary of the 264 Squadron Association

Aircraft	Commanding Officer	Station	Date	
Battle Defiant	Squadron Leader S H Hunter	Sutton Bridge	30-10-39	
		Martlesham Heath	7-12-39	
	Squadron Leader P A Hunter DSO			24-03-40
		Duxford	10-05-40	
		Kirton in Lindsey	23-07-40	
		Hornchurch	31-08-40	
	Squadron Leader Garvin	Kirton in Lindsey		29-08-40
			Northolt	12-09-40
		Luton (B Flight)	19-09-40	
		Martlesham Heath (A Flight)	21-10-40	
		Rochford (Southend)	29-10-40	
		Debden	8-12-40	
	Squadron Leader A T D Sanders DFC	Gravesend	1-01-41	
		Biggin Hill	1-01-41	
		West Malling	14-04-41	
Mosquito	Squadron Leader P J Sanders DFC		16-06-41	
	Squadron Leader Cooke DFC		18-12-41	
	Wing Comm. Hamish Kerr AFC	Colerne	1-05-42	
			14-05-42	
	Wing Comm. W J Alington DFC, AFC	Trebulzue (Detach)	31-12-42	
			24-06-43	
	Wing Comm. E S Smith AFC	Predannock	30-04-43	
		Fairwood Common	7-07-43	
		Coleby Grange	16-04-43	
		Church Fenton	19-12-43	
			24-04-43	
		Hartford Bridge	6-05-44	
		Hunsdon	27-07-44	
		Picauville (Normandy)	11-08-44	
		Caen/Carpique	5-09-44	
Predannock		25-09-44		
Colerne	22-12-44			
Odiham	22-12-44			
Lille/Vandeville France	6-01-45			
Gilse/Rijen Holland	15-05-45			
Rhine Germany	6-05-45			
Gilse/Rijen	15-05-45			
Twente/Enschede	6-06-45			
Wing Comm. E G Barwell DFC *		26-06-45		
Wing Comm. V R Snell		Nov 45		
Squadron Leader R D Doleman DSO DFC		Jan 45		
Squadron Leader A J H Roberts DFC		Jul. 46		
Squadron Leader W Stewart		Jan 48		
Meteor Mk. 11	Squadron Leader W F Thomas		Jan 50	
	Squadron Leader J Lomas DFC, AFC		Jan 50	
Meteor Mk 14	Squadron Leader H M Tudor DFC, AFC,		July 53	
	Wing Comm. J C Forbes DFM		Dec 55	

