

The History of
No. 264 Night Fighter Squadron
Version 3



Of the
Royal Air Force

264 Squadron, Royal Air Force
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Whenever mention is made of No, 264 (N/F) Squadron the talk invariably turns to the Squadron's claim of 37 enemy aircraft destroyed on the afternoon of May 29th. 1940, and though the survivors of this famous action KNOW that the figure is correct there is no corroboration of their claim in the "Royal Air Force 1939/45", Vol.1.

There is nothing strange about this however. For since the end of the war, we have witnessed a continual reduction in the claims of the "Fighter types" until by now, the absolute minimum must have been reached. Any further reduction and, on some days, it could only mean that our chaps shot each other down. And the proof that our figures are up the creek is, we are assured, to be found in German Records.

The Nazis, it seems, never lost any records when they were on the run, except those at Belsen, Dachau, etc. Had none destroyed by bombs, and never stooped so low as to "cook the books" when it suited their purpose. Strange, too, that all those gallant lads who failed to return from Ops. And Bomber escorts across the Channel went down empty handed. However, to get back to the point, if you believe those things then you accept the fact that "264" did not destroy 37 enemy aircraft on May 29th. But do we believe them ?..... Do we hell!

The R.A.F. historians approach the problem from the other end. They quote their own pilots first, and in some cases, add what was witnessed from the ground and then follow up with the enemy records.

The beginnings of history for No.264 Squadron can be traced back to a time when it is admitted that our own record keeping was not too good, to 1918, and, as a result, knowledge of its work is limited, to coastal and sea patrols in the Mediterranean, That it did serve for a few months is well known, but it appears to have been disbanded by the end of the year.

Gone and forgotten, the Squadron remained off the active list until war came again, and towards the end of 1939 it began to re-form at Sutton Bridge — a well known Armament Training Camp before the lights went out.

It was here in December, that Cpl.C.S.Bourne, of Kinestanding, Birmingham joined them, and they were then employed in a training role and had 3 Magisters on strength. "From Sutton Bridge" continues Cpl. Bourne, "we moved to Martlesham Heath to crack on with our training, Battles were added to our strength early in 1940, then Defiants, and it was here that S/Ldr. P.Hunter took over. My promotion to Sgt. came through before we became operational and moved to Duxford to work alongside No.25 Squadron.

The war moved from Norway to the Low Countries and France, and I remember only too well the early hour in the morning, it was around 5.00 hrs. And we were waiting for the dawn patrol to return, when the CO. informed me that I was to be ready to fly to Manston in an hours time with 2 fitters, 2 riggers, some armourers and a few ACH/GD's, to set up an advanced base for the squadron,

Lobbing in at Manston we were soon caught up in the organised chaos and to try and describe just the difficulties caused by the shortage of petrol bowsers would take pages. From here our crews were doing 3 sorties a day and then returning to Duxford at night. Always raring to go, I can well remember the day when they shot down 37 enemy aircraft - and the day when practically the whole of "B" Flight failed to return,

I remained at Manston until the evacuation of Dunkirk was complete, then left the squadron on posting to Kirton Lindsey around September, 1940."

In the short space of time described by Cpl J Bourne the Squadron had made history. When the command passed to 32081 S/Ldr. P. A. Hunter, the men of "264" had no knowledge of the actions

they would be called upon to face, but under his leadership they trained to meet any eventuality. Of Frimley, Hants., S/Ldr. Hunter was considered by those who knew him, to be a keen and efficient officer with a most charming personality, and "264" soon became known as "Hunter's Circus". Respected by all who served under him, to him must go the credit for the plan to mix the Defiant with single seaters during patrols to catch the enemy, as they came in on their line astern attacks. With the power-operated turrets these tactics were not expected to have a long life, but they lived a little longer than many Nazis pilots.

Brought into line when it became obvious that Operation "Dynamo", the evacuation from Dunkirk, could no longer be delayed, the crews of "264" began to join the Hurricane patrols on May 26th, 1940. The first patrols had little to report, and it was not until the next day, May 27th, that they opened their score with a modest claim of 5 e/a destroyed. On the following day they knocked down six, but no mention could be made of the work of Phillip Hunter and L/ACF H King, F/Lt. N.G Cooke and Cpl. A. Lippert, Sgt. E.R.Thorne and L/ACF. J Barker and other crews at this time. On the ground the Army and the Navy complained at the lack of air support, but as Air Vice marshal Park was satisfied that his men had done more than was expected in view of their strength.

On the 29th, Intelligence were well aware of the fact that an enemy force of 300 bombers with fighter escort was laid on to attack our ships, but clouds limited the ceiling throughout the morning. To counter the enemy the R.A.F. laid on patrols at four-squadron strength, and, as the cloud lifted, No.264, waiting at Manston, was ordered off at mid-day.

In their first encounter with 7 Me.109's they reduced it to 6, and then shook a small force that came in down sun. Hurricanes took care of some He.'s doing a spot of dive bombing and the Defiants mixed it with a strong force of Me.110's and Ju.87's until, with their ammunition exhausted, they were forced to return to re-arm and re-fuel. With a score of 18 to their credit in the first patrol the crews were soon ready for a second "bash", and turning round as quickly as possible, they were soon winging their way back to the battle area. Making contact with a large force of Ju.87's they needed no encouragement to wade right in, and when they left the Luftwaffe were deficient of 18 dive-bombers. To round off a busy and exciting day they destroyed a lone Ju.88 to add to the total of 19 Ju.87's, 15 Me.110's and 2 Me.109's. P/O.D.H.S.Kay, though he missed the thrills and fears of continual combat, was having his own fun and games. With little rudder controls and tail left, his gunner dead in the turret, he pulled off a forced landing on the other side and, having been able to "borrow" some fuel, took off from a small field, and flew back at "0" feet. In this action F/Lt. Cooke, of Cambridge, with No.348039 Opl. Lippert, from Yarmouth, claimed 5 e/a destroyed to bring their total to 8, and Ted. Thorne, with Freddie Barker, again proved their skill as a balanced team.

After a break on the 30th they were back in the air again, but this time the German were wise to the game, and though the men of "264" chalked up another 9 e/a destroyed they also took a beating. F/Lt. Cook and Cpl. Lippert died in the encounter, E.G.Barwell was forced to ditch and "Bull". Whitley collided in mid-air over Dunkirk with Mike Young. Flg/Off. Barwell's A/G, Sgt.B.Williams, climbed clear of the turret before they hit the "drink" and was thrown clear, but the pilot went down with the Defiant, struggled clear, and on reaching the surface found Williams out for the count and supported him until picked up by a naval vessel. On board the ship was M. H. Young, but his A/G had not been as fortunate as Bruce Williams, and Whitley came out with some of the brown jobs (Army) from Dunkirk to re-join his squadron. 7 Defiants were lost on this day. Popular P/O. Samuel R.Thomas, (Tommy), and the Thorne/Barker team had had their moments before the flap died away and they moved back to Duxford to re-build and prepare for the next round.

In June and July came their first awards, S/Ldr. Hunter received the DSO. Flt. Lt. Nicholas, G. Cook and P/O. Desmond, H.S Kay the D.F.C, and Edward.M.Thorne, Frederick.J.Barker, Albert Lippert and Frederick.H.King, the D.FM.

It was early In July that P/O. F.C.Sutton was informed that he was Posted to "Hunters Circus", and with D. Smythe, R. Moore, F. Toombs and W.Ponting, reported at Duxford on July 6th, 1940, for duty as Air Gunners. P/O.Sutton remained with the Squadron, first as A/G then, with the rank of F/Lt., as the Squadron Gunnery Leader, until April 1942, when he was posted to Canada. During quiet hours in Canada he re-lived his days with "264" over again, jotting down many notes under the heading "We Defy", and thus provided a first hand account of days long past.

"Arriving at Duxford we found that only HQ. was based here. The Squadron was operating from a satellite a few miles away, and living conditions were not exactly first class, The Mess, in fact, was on a pig farm, the Nissen huts being three yards from the pig sty's — and it was a nice hot summer!

Clifford Ash, who had dropped from W/Cdr, in the Equipment Branch to become a F/Lt. A/G, was the Squadron Gunnery Leader, and the 'Adj' was John Kimber, an ex-school master, and a grand chap. Teamed up with F/O. Peter Bowen we flew on convoy patrols and night recce's until early August when the squadron moved to Kirton-on-Lindsey to give cover to the East coast convoys, and as we followed events down south it was hard to hide our disappointment. But it was not for long; for without any warning, and just sufficient time to pack our small kit, we were ordered to fly to Hornchurch on August 21st.

Early next day "A" Flight came into readiness and, under Ted Benham, were soon in the air. When they came back Ted Thorne had another victory to add to the score and "Bull" Witley, with a large hole in his tail-plane and his rudder fin just a skeleton, just made it. In the evening Squadron Leader Hunter took the whole squadron off, but we had no luck.

The weather continued to be the deciding factor throughout the 23rd, though on this day "Bull" and his Gunner did not come back and the squadron claimed one in return, but it was a poor bargain. Cloud broke up on the 24th and we were in our aircraft by 05-00 hours, took off for Manston at 05-30 hours to re-fuel, and were caught on the ground when 3 Me.109's came in low to beat-up the place. Off again at 08-00 hours we had to leave Campbell Colquhoun behind with engine trouble, but the fault was soon rectified and, he decided to chase after the squadron. He soon picked up a section, but found, too late it was the wrong section, and spent a hectic few minutes trying to shoo off the 109's". A burst set the Verey cartridges on fire, and Robinson, his gunner, was too busy dodging the balls of fire to worry about the enemy aircraft they managed to return to Manston O.K. We were caught on the deck again the next day, at Hornchurch this time, and though ordered off, lost two aircraft when one ran into the other through a dust cloud from a bursting bomb. Paddy O'Connell, one of the gunners, was badly injured. On the 26th we took a beating, and of the 12 Defiants that took off, only 8 came back. The C.O. went down over the Channel with Freddie King firing his guns to the last. Artie Shaw (F/O.I.G.Shaw) and his gunner followed. Stevenson, his aircraft on fire, gave the order to bale out, but his gunner failed to make it, and "Steve was picked up by the Air Sea Rescue. types, (Headlines for this day being" 47 enemy aircraft downed for loss of 15 aircraft and. 4 pilots)"

The command now passed to S/Ldr. Garvin and we flew over to Southend-on -Sea to operate from there on the 27th. Scrambled at breakfast time on the 28th, we were airborne in 4 minutes, only 11 Defiants formed on the C.O. as the twelfth member, Mike Young, had to return with engine trouble, Near Canterbury we came up against some 40 plus He's with 80-100 Me.109's milling around them. Making a climbing turn to intercept we flew parallel with the enemy force at about 500 yards range, but the Hun did not seem to be keen to close the range. Flying with P/O. Bowen in L.6963 in the tail-end position we could think of many other places we would rather be in, and when the Huns attacked, though we did damage a He.III, it did seem as if all the enemy hate was directed at "L6963", As the attacks seemed to increase "Ponky's" voice penetrated above the din with, "You know, old boy, I think we'll get out. All the others have gone". At this point the pilot of a Me.109 realised, too late, that our aircraft was not a Hurricane, and as he tried to pull out of his dive I was able to get a good burst. Suddenly, there was a mighty thud and I was pushed up tight against the top of the turret. I heard the pilot say, "Hit-Fire-Jump" but it was impossible to get out. "Ponky" realised that I had not been able to get out and, in the face of many difficulties, managed to regain control and we were able to return to base "L.6963" had 3 cannon shell and 120 bullet holes in her.

Once again the squadron had been hard hilt. The C.O., his aircraft on fire, had baled out after Cliff Ash, though badly wounded, had left. But F/Lt. Ash was dead before he reached the ground. The famous pair, Thorne and Barker, had knocked down a "109" even though their engine died on them, and Barker managed to pull off a landing as the e/a crashed nearby. P. Kenner and "Johnny" Johnson died, Gaskell crashed in a field and took over a car to get his wounded A/G to hospital, but it .was too late and F/Lt. J. Banham, with a German pilot, was pulled out of the "drink" and returned to the squadron. Only three Defiants returned to base in a serviceable condition, and these had to be flown

off immediately by T.Welsh, W.Carnaby and J.Bailey, as a raid on the airfield developed. At mid-day what was left of the squadron flew back to Hornchurch, and early the next morning, under F/O.Thomas, took off for Kirton-on-Lindsey,

In the one-week at Hornchurch we had destroyed 16 e/a for the loss of 14 aircrew, all first class, good courageous men and rumours that we had been withdrawn because we could not cope did not improve our tempers, Rumours that were quickly dispelled by a special visit by Air-Vice.Marshall Leigh Mallory to give us the true facts.

For the time being, however, 264's flash of action was over. Switched to meet the attacks by night, they also covered convoys by day. Early in their role of night-fighter, they claimed an e/a destroyed. "B" Flight, under F/Lt. Thomas, was detached to Luton in September, and "A", under F/Lt. Smith, remained at Kirton and used Caistor as a satellite for night ops.

F/Lt. Sutton and F/O. Bowen were posted to "B" Flight at Luton, which was a bad airfield and often visited, by the enemy bombers. Here he continues," on about the. 14th, we suffered our first loss by combat night. Goodall, the pilot, announced that they had picked up a Hun and were going in to attack, and the next news we received of the crew was that they had crashed near Marlow. A night or two later F/O. Hughes, with Sgt. F.Gash destroyed, a He.111, and at the end of the month the whole squadron moved to Southend, Here, gallantry of the finest order was displayed in an effort .to prevent death reaching out to take away a good comrade, but it was all in vain. In November Knocker's engine caught fire soon after take-off, and to avoid crashing in the town he tried to return to the airfield. Pushed for time he had no option but to land down wind, overshot, and crashed on an old golf course. Knocker, half standing in the cockpit, was thrown clear, but Frank Toombs was trapped in the blazing wreckage. F/O K.L.G.Nobbs the squadron Medical Officer, hastened to the scene of the crash and although the aircraft was burning fiercely and bullets flying in all directions, he went straight in and pulled Toombs clear. In the meantime we had been detailed to take over their patrol and had also crashed when we hit an old bomb crater. Unhurt, and given another aircraft, we eventually got off O.K. Frank Toombs died four days later, and, the award of the George Medal to F/O.Nobbs for his gallantry was announced in March, 1941. On the night that we lost another crew in a prang. F/O.Hughes, with Freddie Gash as his A/G, made contact with an e/a but found that their guns would neither elevate nor depress. "Des" waggled his wings in an effort to spray the fire, but the Hun got away".

Awarded the DFC for this effort, and Sgt. Gash the DFM, F/O. F.D.Hughes later saw service in North Africa with No.600 Squadron, was awarded two Bars to his DFC for his skill and gallantry as a night fighter. With a total of 16 e/a destroyed, 13 by night, he took over command of No.604 Squadron to lead it throughout the busy period following "D—day", was awarded the DSO, and later took command of his first love — "264".

Moving to Debden the command passed from S/Ldr. Garvin to S/Ldr. A.T.D.Sanders, No.33095, who, after service at No.11 F.T.S., Wittering, as an Instructor, had taken part in the Egypt-Australia record flight by Wellesleys in 1938. On Blenheims at the outbreak of war, he joined "264" when casualties were due to prangs, not e/a. With them too, according to F/Lt. Sutton, was F/O.S. Carlin, MC, DFC. and DCM. , better known to all as "Timber-toes", Born at Lissett, a small village near Bridlington, and the site of one of Bomber Commands airfields, his people later moved to Hull, and Sidney Carlin, a farmer by profession, joined the local Company of R.E's before the first war. In the Retreat from Mans his gallantry earned for him the DCM, and. a little later the M.C. before he was badly wounded end lost a leg. Though fitted with a wooden leg he learned to fly at his own expense, and his determination and hatred of the Hun helped him during his efforts to transfer to the R.F.C. Joining No.74 Squadron, he was nicknamed "'Timber-Toes" by the great Mannock, he knocked down 4 e/a and 5 balloons before being taken prisoner on September 21st 1918. After the war he went back to farming, working for a German firm in Kenya at one period, but when war became obvious, age proved no bar to this gallant fighter. A member of the RAFVR, he was killed during an air attack on Wittering in May 1941.

From Debden they moved to Gravesend to serve alongside No. 141, and a few days later left for Biggin Hill. In February the awards of the DFC to F/O's Young and Barwell, and P/O. T.D.Welsh, were announced, and B.Thorne and F.Barker added a Bar to their DFM's when their score reached 12 e/a destroyed. The former, commissioned in the squadron, eventually left to take command of No.32

Squadron and lead it into action at Dieppe. Promoted to W/Cdr he was in action over the beaches on "D" day and, after surviving many actions, died in an accident after the war. Barker from Bow is still with us.

After attending a course at C.G.S., Warmwell, Fl. Lt. Sutton came back to continue the nightly search for e/a and, flying with the C.O., scored a victory on the night of April 8th. "Flying in N~3377 we were vectored onto an e/a and had to go flat out through a box barrage, which threw us about a bit, before we obtained a visual and identified a "He". After killing the Hun gunner the pilot tried to ram us, but this we avoided, and when we picked up the Heinkel again the pilot, his gunner dead and one engine u/s, was still heading for Coventry. Attacking again we got it in flames and it crashed near St. Albans. Visiting the scene of the crash we came away with a trophy for the squadron in the shape of the gun and pan. Moving to West Mailing I had to take over the post of Gunnery Leader when Roy Moore was posted, and "B" Flight was detached to Nutt's Corner, N. Ireland. Intruders began to produce results and in 3 nights "A" Flight claimed 3 destroyed and 2 probables. Guy Curtis and "Bob" Martin got a Heinkel over Lille and Mike Young, following the same track the next night, knocked off a "Me110" on the flare path. The Thorne/Barker team added one by night to their list of daylight victories. In the moonlight of the night of May 10/11th the whole Flight was off to try and spoil the Huns aim, and in N3313 with S/Ldr. Sanders we picked up a Heinkel over the Thames. The e/a immediately went into a steep dive, but we remained with it until our shots took effect and it went down in flames. This was "264's" third victory for the night; Curtis had got one again near Lille and "Steve", with Harry Maggs, shot another down",

"Bob" Martin had left India and returned home to see what he could do. Though clocking on for 50 he managed to make the grade and after service in "264" was posted to Bomber Command and was killed in a Stirling. F/Lt. Mervyn Henry Maggs had served in the RAF in 1918 and with No.605, was awarded the DFC in March, 1943, for his destruction of 2 e/a.

The success of the night-fighters had gradually increased with the introduction of GCI, and skill improved with experience. Kills had increased from 3 in January to 22 in March, in April, 48 were claimed, and in May 96, but "Trade" now declined and very few "Intruders" were flown by Defiants.

On May 18th "B" Flight returned from its short stay in Ireland, and S/Ldr. Sanders, awarded the DFC, moved off on promotion to "Winco" and S/Ldr. Sanders took his place. "Scruffy" being replaced by "Sandy". Patrols continued but there was "no joy", and though F/Lt. Sutton, with the new C.O. in T3944, was vectored on to an e/a on June 19th they lost it in the low haze prevailing at the time. Patrols continued throughout July and August, with a daily routine following more on the lines of a training Programme. Thorne, now a S/Ldr., was posted in August, and they began to re-equip with Defiant Mk.II's, but there was little to report, Air Sea, Rescue duties took on a more personal note in November when they took off to assist in the search for their old C.O., W/Cdr. Sanders who had sent a message saying they were baling out after their Havoc had been set on fire in combat with a Ju.88. Taking over from No.29 Squadron aircraft they continued the search, but it was all in vain, "Scruffy" had crossed the line to join many other gallant souls. In December, on the 19th, in the absence of the C.O. F/Lt. Thomas took a party of men down to Boulton & Paul to be presented with a silver salver by Lord Gorell to commemorate the destruction of its 100th e/a, and the honours awarded in the same period included a DSO, six DFC's and 8 DFM's and two Bars.

Amidst a spate of rumours from the "Duff gen" merchants regarding the future of the squadron a change of command was recorded in January, 1942, with the arrival of S/Ldr. C.A.Cook. In March rumour ran true to form when they moved to Colerne and on arrival, found Mosquitoes awaiting them, For many of the old A/G's in the squadron, this was the parting of the ways, from now on it was Nav.Rad/Ops and postings in an out became the order of the day. F/Lt. Sutton left them at this point and S/Ldr. Cooke reverted to Flight Commander with the arrival of W/Cdr.Kerr. Training and Conversion kept them busy for a time, but the lack of action was hard to combat. In May official recognition of the good, work carried out by F/Lt. S. R.Thomas was at last recognised with a well earned D.F.C and, though "trade" was hard to find S/Ldr. Cooke managed to find and destroy a Ju.88 in July. Intruders and Rangers were laid on in the search for action as the year passed by, and the winter weather reduced activity. Attacks against the enemy lines of communications, trains and rail centres, power houses, etc., added a new category of targets to the score board, and in October S/Ldr. Cooke, with many e/a to his credit, was awarded a DFC.

1943 brought a change in routine for many of the crews, when they here called upon to give support to Coastal Command aircraft in the Bay of Biscay area. Repeated attacks on aircraft detailed for anti-U Boat patrols by packs of Ju.88's were met by patrols from the Mosquito squadrons employed on "Insteps", and a detachment from "264" operated on this task under the command of S/Ldr. M.H.Constable-Maxwell from Portreath. Working in support of the Sunderlands, Wellingtons and Whitleys, they did, a good job, and Air Commodore Basil Embry at Group H.Q. flew many "Insteps" at this time. In March, 1943, a flight from No.456 Squadron, R.A.A.F., moved into Colerne, and on March 21st the command of "264" passed to W/Cdr.W.J.Alington. On the following day W/O. D.McKenzie knocked down Ju.88 over the Bay to add another e/a to the detachments score.

W/Cdr. William J. Alington, A.F.C., D.F.C., R.A.F.O. now living at Rosetta, Natal, had carried out a tour with No.25 Squadron during which he had destroyed two e/a at night for which he was awarded the DFC, and had left them for a spell at Wingfield before being posted in to command No.264. Speaking of this period W/Cdr.Alington states:

"The Flight Commanders at this time were M.H.Constable-Maxwell (later to command No.604 Squadron, destroy its 100th e/a, and working along side "604" during the defence of the bridge-head in Normandy) and S/Ldr. L.T.Bryant-Fenn, and the morale of the detached flight was as high as it was low in the rest of the squadron rotting at Colerne. In view of this I appealed, to Air/Cdr. Embrey, who was then at our Group H.Q., for a move to a more active spot than Colerne, and as a result we moved to Predannack on April 30th, 1943, to work in support of Coastal Command on sweeps with not less than three aircraft. "Rangers", of which the primary targets were aircraft, were to be carried out in suitable weather. Gradually, our aircraft were fitted with long-range tanks, and patrols lengthened to something around the 5-hour mark. A decision was then made that the effort should be stepped up and, our establishment was increased with the addition of four aircraft from three other squadrons.(12 in all). Some of these boys had a bit of luck, and one of the pilots attached, I think it was F/Lt Joe Singleton — managed to bag a Condor, but I'm not sure of it. It was only natural that some of the section leaders, being unaccustomed to flying over the sea, got a bit lost on these five hour patrols and would call up for homing vectors. The wily Hun listening on our frequency gave them courses to bring them into the arms of the fighters off Tishant. We lost a complete section one day due to this little ruse.

My first "Ranger" was on May 11th, target being the power station at Vitres, but I was intercepted by FW.190's before I could reach the low cloud forecast over France and the battle ended in a draw. Not being fully conversant with the Mosquito I feel sure that I missed being the first Mossie pilot to destroy a "190" by a few days. The work carried out by the fighters over the Bay soon knocked a lot of enthusiasm out of the "88 boys", and soon the ambitious ones amongst us were laying on "Rangers" down amongst the Pyrenees - quite a long way away. One of these, Porter, was killed when they had to ditch, and his observer, F/O.Clarke, who had been with me on May 11th, became a POW.

On May 22nd, with my observer F/Lt. Georgeson, we laid on a special Ranger with a view to getting amongst the training aircraft, which were reputed to operate from airfields in the Bordeaux area. We planned to cross the coast south of Bordeaux, but when we got there we found no cloud cover so had to go in between Bordeaux and the Gironde estuary. There was a decent size ship moored in the river, but we had no bombs so we proceeded in search of aircraft. None were seen, but we attacked and badly damaged 7 locomotives, and in the smart manner in which the French disembarked had to be seen to be believed. Time of flight for the trip was 5h.20m."

Attacks against targets on shore and at sea were pressed home on every sortie, and the award of the DFC to S/Ldr. Constable-Maxwell was announced, soon after leaving "264". During the return of H.M.the late King George VIth, from N. Africa the squadron was ordered to provide an escort for York LV.633. W/Cdr. Alington took off with two other pilots to pick up, what they had been told, was a civil version of the Lancaster. Unaware that it was a York, or that the York had three rudders, it was probably fortunate that W/Cdr.Collins had "warmed the bell" and the Mosquitoes failed to make contact.

The squadron's most successful "Ranger", and one that merited, a B.B.C. recording, was the attack on Biscaross on June 20th, 1943, Continuing the story at this point W/Cdr. Alington states:-"Taking four aircraft I led Red. Section with F/O.Pudsey (killed at a later date) as my No.2, and S/Ldr.L.T.Bryant-Fenn led Blue section with F/O. Mason as his No.2.Turning in 60 miles west of Biscaross we met an unsuspecting BV.138 and, though I reckon he had had his chips when I broke

away, all the other had a bash at him just to make sure. Flying on to Biscaross we sighted four BV, 138's moored in pairs on the water and in my attack I set two on fire, One of the others did the same. Another aircraft, a BV.222, on the slipways was attacked without conclusive results. As it was almost dark at the time I claimed my two as 138's, although they looked like haystacks, but a subsequent P.O.W. Interrogation revealed that they were, in fact, 222's. On the way home Mason attacked an armed minesweeper, Flak had holed one of my elevators and Bryant-Fenn, his aircraft damaged during the attack on the airborne "138", had an engine failure on the return trip. He pranged the kite on landing at Predannack. (W/Cdr.Alington was awarded a Bar to his DFO towards the end of the month). In July we were allowed to carry Mk.IV radar over enemy territory, and a new job, "Distill", was passed to us. The idea of the latter was for us to go out to the localities where Bomber Command had been "Gardening", (Mine laying) and try to meet up e/a carrying gear to detonate these magnetic mines.

On July 2nd I led the first "Distill" to the Girondo Estuary. It was a cloudless day at the appointed spot and I think we were all biting holes in the seats because there were some enemy fighters based very near by. However, we did our patrol and saw nothing as we turned away for home it clouded over and started to rain. In the murk I saw two armed trawlers, and though my radio had packed up I made an attack on one and the rest of the chaps twigged the form. When we left' one was listing and settling, the other had a fairly decent fire going.

Moving to Fairwood Common on August 12th we were fitted with bomb racks in place of long-range tanks and told to get cracking with dive-bombing without any form of sights. Considerable accuracy was achieved in a very short time and we were then allowed to use the new weapon in addition to cannon, on "Rangers". Attacks were now pressed home against railway viaducts around the beach-head area, and soon we were carrying out all sorts of odd tasks by day or night. Morale was at its zenith now. We were then fitted with wing tip bombs for night intruder, and also were employed on Bomber support. In November I learnt that we had been picked, with "604", to defend the bridge-head on and after D-day, and to this end we moved to Coleby Grange on the 17th for training and await the availability of Church Fenton. (By this time S/Ldr. Bryant-Fenn and F/Lt. J.L.Mason had been awarded the DFC). In December, we moved to Church Fenton to complete our training and convert to Mk.V111 radar, and throughout the winter of 1944 worked with radar controlled searchlights on some new scheme, and also had a spell under canvas. Mention must be made at this point of the Engineer Officer, F/Lt. Lines, and I certainly hand it to him for efficiency. On April 25th, 1944, I was relieved by W/Cdr. Smith".

W/Cdr.E.S.Smith, and his Nav. F/Lt. O'Neil-Dunne, left No.488 (NZ) Squadron to lead "264" during a busy period, and. joining "604" it was the second night/fighter unit to be based in the Cherbourg Peninsular. Forming part of No.85 Group, it was, with No's 29, 409(RC), 410(RC), 488 (NZ) and 604. Squadron, responsible for defence of the overseas base on ops. by day and night.

. In June 1944,the squadron was employed on night defence work only, adding 22 e/a to their score in a very short time, and during this phase operated from A9.Cherbourg, Carpiquet. Attacks against lines of communications, and. a visit from H.M. the late King George VI th. and the Queen were recorded before they were returned to England to assist in the defeat of the flying bombs. The good work carried out by the Flight Commanders, S/Ldr's Paul Ellwell and. F.J.A Chase, and F/Lts.J.H.Corire, I H Cosby and E.R.Murphy, and F/O's C.A.Bines, R.L.J.Barbour, G.Paine and P.de L.Brooke, was rewarded with the award of the DFC

The Mosquitoes, operating by night in front of the ack-ack defences, but were not fast enough to catch the flying bomb except in a dive, but in spite of this the squadron destroyed 19 in 9 days, Based at Predannock, then Colerne, the men of "264" did a good job of work before returning to Vendeville to rejoin No.142 Wing. Additional awards of the DFC to F/Lt.D.J.Donnet and F/O.A.F.Watson were promulgated before 1945 brought the last few months of the war. Enemy aircraft were hard to come by in the last few months, but the search never ceased, as they moved up through Gilze-Rijen and Rheine, etc. to keep up the pressure until Victory in Europe was assured - at least for the time being.

Moving up to Twente in June the squadron, having operated as far east as Berlin during the closing stages of the war, now flew in peace over areas it had so often disputed. Closing its list of "Honours and Awards" with the Promulgation of the D.F.C. to W/Cdr.Smith. F/Lts. R.L.Beverloy, J.Daber and P.C.Sturley and W/O.J.Heathcote, and its list of successes with a total of 148 e/a destroyed, 13 probables and 40 damaged, a claim has been made that it had the second highest

score (night) in Fighter Command. So many claims have been made that it is difficult to make a firm statement without a full check on Official records. No.604, for instance claims 134 e/a destroyed, and No.410 (Cougar) Squadron, RCAF claims the distinction of being the top-scoring night fighter squadron in 2nd TAF with 75 – 2 - 8, 488 (NZ) Squadron claims to have destroyed the 100th e/a destroyed by squadrons of NO.149 Wing, thus creating a new record in 2nd TAF. And so the claims go on with various shades of distinction.

Disbanded in July, 1945, it was re-formed at Church Fenton from No.125 Squadron in the following November and equipped with Mosquito NF/30's, Moving to Wittering it received Mosquito Mk.36, then joined No.141 at Coltishall in 1947, to Church Fenton in 1949, moved around to Acklington, Coltishall again in 1950, then to Linton-on-Ouse to settle down, except for detachments, for a few years. Re-equipped with Meteor NF11's in 1951, it eventually received NF/14's and, under Squadron Leader H.M.H.Tudor DFC won the Ingpen Trophy (most proficient all-weather Squadron) in 1954.

Thus, briefly is the history of a fine Squadron, at a re-union in 1946 were many of the old hands, W/Cdrs. Hughes, Barwell, "Sandy" Sanders, Sqdn. Ldr. Thomas, Flt. Lt. Sutton and Smythe, Jack Candy, Terry Welsh, Freddie Gash, Harry Maggs, being amongst those present. They returned again in 1947 and many attended a dinner held last year to celebrate the 15th anniversary of the squadron becoming operational.

This history was re-typed from a history issued in June 1956
It is attributed to F.C. (Dude) Sutton
And compiled by J L Dixon

However the story didn't quite end there! Because in the year 2000, one of the ex-264 ground crew, a National Service airman, who had been an Aeronautical Engineer at the time of joining the squadron, back in 1954. Was prompted to help an ex 264 member, search for a friend, also from the Squadron. An advert was put into the RAF Association magazine, 'Air Mail'. From the replies received, the Association was reborn and now has about 70 members and has an annual reunion and a quarterly newsletter.

Geoff Faulkner
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