

1940.

June DREM. 263 Squadron return from Norway to Drem for reforming with Hurricanes.
10/13.

24. S/Ldr. H. Eeles posted to command the Squadron.

28. GRANGEMOUTH. Squadron move to Grangemouth.

July. During the next six months the operations pilot so the Squadron were frequently called out on scrambles, but no contact was made with the enemy.

F/O T.P. Pugh was posted to the squadron on 1st. On 6th S/Ldr. Eeles brought the first Whirlwind to the squadron. On 13th Sergeant P. Watson-Parker was killed on active service as a result of a flying accident at Biggin Hill: four Hurricanes were delivered to the squadron on the same date. On the 19th the makers (Westlands) delivered two Whirlwinds and a third Flight, "C", under the command of F/Lt. W.O.L. Smith was formed for their development. P/O H. Downer made a crash landing on the 20th, was extricated, but subsequently died as a result of his injuries at the Military Hospital, Edinburgh. On the 22nd a Whirlwind demonstration was given to the C-in-C, Home Fleet, at Fosyth, who congratulated the squadron by telegram. The 23rd saw the first collapse of a Whirlwind tail wheel on landing. P/O C. Bell was killed on active service on the 24th; he was on a Blenheim course at 50 O.T.U. The teething troubles of the Whirlwind were manifest during this month, and most of the training was with Hurricanes.

August. August saw the continuation of training on Hurricanes coupled with the development of the Whirlwind. "C" Flight was discontinued and all pilots received Whirlwind experience. On the 7th S/Ldr Munro was posted to the squadron and his efforts to persuade the cannon to fire without stoppage were attended with success. On the same day P/O I.D. McDermott was forced to bale out North of Sterling. Arrested by the Home Guard he was released on the Squadron Leader's assurances. The Whirlwind concerned was a total loss. On the 18th F/Lt. R.S. Mills, DFC, was posted to command 87 Squadron. On the 25th P/O. D. Stein was forced to bale out of a burning Hurricane. He landed safely but he too was taken into custody and later released. During the night of the big raid on Newcastle the Squadron was called to Readiness. Although the squadron was not called upon, a signal of congratulations was received from the Secretary of State for Air. Towards the end of the month there was considerable and reciprocal hospitality between H.M. submarine "Sunfish" and the Squadron.

Sept. DREM. The Squadron return to Drem. During September "A" Flight, developing Whirlwinds, were non-operational. "B" Flight were operational on Hurricanes. On the 2nd the squadron was honoured by a visit from the Rt. Hon. Sir Archibald Sinclair, PC, MP, Secretary for State for Air. S/Ldr. J.G. Munro and P/O. D.A.C. Crooks demonstrated the Whirlwinds. The 14th was the occasion of a visit to the Station by HRH The Duke of Kent. "A" Flight gave a Whirlwind demonstration. On the 16th F/O. T.P. Pugh was promoted to the rank of F/Lt. During this month S/Ldr. Munro on firing practice in a Whirlwind was identified by the Observer Corps as a Junkers and a Spitfire patrol was sent to intercept. Happily no trial of arms took place.

October. "A" Flight still non-operational. "B" Flight were operational on Hurricanes. On the 22nd Blue Section led by F/Lt. Pugh did an extensive patrol of the Firth of Forth in extremely bad weather. Group send a congratulatory message to the Squadron on this patrol.

November. On the 8th "B" Flight moved to MacMerry but were not operationally engaged there, and on the 12th moved to Prestwick with eight Hurricanes to cover a special target believed to be HMS Formidable.

EXETER. On or about the 28th the squadron was moved to Exeter and were to operate solely with Whirlwinds. During this month the big raid on Coventry took place and all night operational pilots were called to available.

December.

Changes in personnel make this a disastrous and retarding month. The 7th saw Whirlwinds operational for the first time. On the 8th, the Observer Corps being unfamiliar with these aircraft, air raid warnings were sounded in the Exeter district. F/O. A.W.N. Britton was killed on active service on the 12th whilst on firing practice. Neither the pilot's body or the aircraft were recovered from the sea. F/Lt. J.P. Blick was posted to Grangemouth as Station Adjutant. On the 16th S/Ldr. H. Eeles was posted to command the RAF Station at Drem; command of the squadron was assumed by S/Ldr. Munro. On the 29th six aircraft were ordered to fly to St. Eval and from there to act as escort to two Catalina flying boats arriving from Bermuda. F/Lt. W.O.L. Smith and P/O. D.M. Vine were killed on active service. They crashed near Bovey Tracey while flying to St. Eval in extremely bad weather. The escort was subsequently undertaken by six aircraft led by F/Lt. Pugh.

1941.

Jan. EXETER
and
ST. EVAL.

During this month numerous interception patrols were flown and the first combats since June 1940 were chronicled. The squadron maintained a detached Flight at St. Eval. On the 2nd F/O. D. Crooks, DFC, was promoted Acting Flight Lieutenant. On the 9th Sergeant Pilot F. Morton was killed on active service whilst flying the Blenheim. On the 12th P/O. D. Stein engaged a Junkers 88 forty miles South West of the Scillies and was credited with a "probable"; this claim was later stepped up into the "destroyed" category. This was the first Whirlwind engagement with the enemy and the first Whirlwind victory of the war. For 263 Squadron it was the first victory since the close of the Norway campaign. Three Chameleon operations against enemy "E" boats were undertaken, the first being carried out by S/Ldr Munro, F/Lt. Pugh and F/Lt Crooks, but no contact was made with the enemy.

February.

Again the Squadron operated a detachment at St. Eval. On the 8th the squadron had its second confirmed victory against the enemy since the Norway campaign. An Arado 196 was destroyed by P/O. K.A.G. Graham; unhappily P/O Graham was killed in this action. On the 18th S/Ldr. A.H. Donaldson was posted to command 263 Squadron; he is the brother of the late Squadron Leader J.W. Donaldson, DSO, DFC, who commanded the squadron during the Norway Expeditions. The 24th saw the Squadron move to St. Eval. Some new pilots detached to Charny Down for training. S/Ldr. J.G. Munro was posted on armament duties to A.G.M.E.

ST. EVAL

March.

Three combats with the enemy. On the 1st P/O. H.H. Kitchener, DFM, P/O. P.G. Thornton-Brown engaged and damaged a Ju.88 which escaped into cloud. On the 5th P/O. Kitchener engaged and damaged a Ju.88. The 11th saw another encounter, south of the Lizard, between P/O. Kitchener and a Ju.88. The enemy aircraft was damaged but the Whirlwind was also hit and the pilot crashed on landing, sustaining serious injuries. The enemy bombed St. Eval heavily on the 12th, damaging seven Whirlwinds. The visit was repeated on the 14th and four Whirlwinds were damaged. Unhappily on the same day P/O. Thornton-Brown, returning from a convoy patrol, crashed at Portreath and sustained serious injuries.

PORTREATH.

On the 18th the Squadron moved to Portreath, a new aerodrome which could be described as being "without form or voice". Conditions were very uncomfortable. During the month a large number of convoy patrols were carried out, coupled with the usual will 'o the wisp chases after lone, cloud hopping bandits. F/O. B.R. Grant who had been with the squadron as Engineer Officer since its formation was posted to West Malling on the 28th. His place was taken by F/O. J.C. Garland.

April.

A succession of tragedies mark this month. On the 1st S/Ldr. Donaldson and F/Lt. Crooks, DFC, intercepted and damaged a Dornier 215; but F/Lt. Crooks was shot down and he crashed in flames at Helston. On the 6th F/O. B. Howe and P/O. A. Tooth engaged two He.111s, causing some damage to them but no decision was forced. On the 7th P/O. R.F. Ferdinand and Sergeant C.P. King engaged with a Ju.88 which escaped into clouds.

FILTON

Once again the squadron return to Filton which had been the birthplace of the Squadron on October 1st, 1939. The main party arrived on the 10th.

F/O. B. Howe was killed on active service as the result of an accident at Wittering Aerodrome on the 20th and unfortunately a further death on active service occurred on the 30th when P/O. G.S. Milligan was killed in a flying accident at Aldermaston.

MAY. Eighty-one shipping convoys involving 162 aircraft were flown over the Bristol Channel during this month. In addition 22 other patrols involving 48 aircraft were carried out. The enemy was not contacted. On the 1st, F/O. J.C. Hughes was promoted F/Lt, Flight Commander of "A" Flight. Sergeant Pilots Mason and Rudland were granted commissions as P/Os on the 8th. On the 16th P/O. H.J. Coghlan was posted to the squadron. The Station and Squadron were honoured on the 19th by a visit from Air Marshal Sir Sholto Douglas, Air Officer Commanding in Chief, Fighter Command.

JUNE. This month is notable as being the first in which Whirlwinds took the offensive. There were also 67 convoy patrols and 7 interceptor patrols involving in all 152 sorties. On the 7th P/O. Coghlan was promoted to F/O. The 11th saw an unfortunately crash landing which resulted in Sgt/Pilot R. Pascoe being killed on active service, and on 12th P/O. R.F. Ferdinand crashed while making an approach and was killed on active service. Operations against enemy aerodromes took place on the 14th and were known as Warhead 1. S/Ldr. Donaldson and P/O. Rudland approached Querqueville aerodrome at first light. A low level attack was made from 1300-100 feet and the shells hit and exploded in dispersal pens. These were, however, covered over so that the extent of damage is unknown. S/Ldr. Donaldson also put a burst into a barrack block, and on the way back to base attacked and hit a glass topped structure which he saw in the Baie de Nacqueville. Intense light flak had been met with over the target and S/Ldr. Donaldson's machine was found to have been struck in the port engine nacelle. F/Lt. Pugh and P/O. Mason who were to attack the other target, Maupertus aerodrome, found it completely covered by a thick morning mist. They cruised around for fifteen minutes hoping for a rent in the veil but were forced to return without firing their guns.

JULY. During July the squadron led a peripatetic existence, making excursions in the Group to relieve other squadron who were taking part in offensive operations over France. In addition 47 convoy patrols and 7 interception patrols were made, but the enemy was not contacted.

H.M. The King was graciously pleased to confer the Air Force Cross upon the Squadron's Commanding Officer, S/Ldr. A.H. Donaldson, in recognition of his work in Training Command. On the 16th six aircraft flew to Warmwell to experiment with cannon against tanks.

AUGUST. The month of justification for the Whirlwind. Many operations against the enemy proved it to be both admirable for ground strafing and a match for the ME.109. On August 2nd, Warhead 2 was carried out by S/Ldr. Donaldson and F/Lt. Hughes against Querqueville aerodrome. Enemy personnel, oil tanks, and a dinghy were hit. On landing both machines were found to have a 7.9mm shell hole. In Patrol 2 F/Lt. Pugh and P/O Mason attacked an E boat about a quarter of a mile from the French coast; it was left sinking. On the 5th Warhead 3 was carried out. Patrol 1, S/Ldr. Donaldson AFC and Sgt. Pilot Holmes attacked Maupertus aerodrome destroying one Ju.87 and probably destroying two Ju.87s and damaging two ME.109s. Two lorries were shot up, one laden with soldiers. Patrol 2, (F/Lt. Hughes and Sgt. Pilot Jowett) attacked and damaged a wireless installation at Nacqueville. In Warhead 4 on the 6th the first patrol, (P/O. Mason, F/O Coghlan, P/O. Rudland and F/Sgt. Brackley) did not reach its target but an E boat and a wireless station were severely damaged. The second attack, Warhead 5, (S/Ldr Donaldson AFC, P/O Rudland, F/O Coghlan and F/Sgt. Albertini) reached Maupertus aerodrome and destroyed or damaged four Ju.87s and two ME.109. P/O. Rudland attacked and destroyed one ME.109 about to take off and was credited with a "destroyed" in air combat. Machine and Bofors gun posts were silenced. Two tankers were also shot at and hit. When the presence of these and two more tankers was reported, Warhead 6 was put into effect with the same pilots as for Warhead 5. On reaching the four tankers the Whirlwinds were engaged by about twenty ME.109. A terrific dog fight took place between 1500 feet and sea-level. Although

outnumbered by five to one the Whirlwinds more than held their own. P/O. Rudland and F/Sgt. Brackley both shot down an ME.109; this was P/O. Rudland's second victory on that day. Another ME.109 was damaged by S/Ldr. Donaldson. F/Sgt. Brackley's machine developed an internal glycol leak and he had to bring his machine across sixty miles of water on one engine.

CHARMY.
DOWN.

The Squadron move to Charmy Down on the 7th and on the 12th twelve Whirlwinds provided outward escort as far as Antwerp for the Blenheims which carried out the brilliantly successful daylight raid on two power stations at Cologne. At Walcheren six flak barges were attacked, one sunk and two more damaged. F/Lt. Pugh also attacked and damaged another barge two miles N.E. of Walcheren. The following message was received from AOC, 2 Group, "Many thanks for your courageous support to-day. You will be glad to hear that the two great power stations of the Ruhr, Knapsack and Quadrath, with an output of nearly 1000,000 kwatts were completely destroyed Would be glad if you would convey the thanks of the leaders and crews of No. 2 Group to S/Ldr. Donaldson and 263.....Well done, Orlebar." An offensive operation took place on the 17th in which four Whirlwinds were to fly over Maupertus aerodrome lure German fighters into the air to be dealt with by our following Hurricanes and Spitfires. The Hun would not play. However, F/Lt. Pugh dived on a large armed trawler outside Cherbourg and shot it up. On the 21st S/Ldr. Donaldson, AFC, was awarded the D.F.C. and posted as Wing Commander Flying, R.A.F. Station, Portreath, with the rank of Wing Commander. On the 22nd F/Lt. Pugh was promoted to S/Ldr. and posted from the command of "B" Flight to command 263 Squadron. On the 24th two sections led by Wing Commander Donaldson did not locate Lannion aerodrome but damaged an RDF station and a navigational beacon. On the 26th an offensive operation against Lannion aerodrome was led by S/Ldr. Pugh in which, during a three minute raid, five JU.88 were destroyed. Meanwhile four more Whirlwinds attacked Maupertus. Led by P/O. Rudland, a series of low level attacks destroyed five JU.87s. An RDF station and gun post were also attacked. P/O. Rudland's machine had a cannon shell through a starboard aileron. A Mandolin 3 operation was attempted by F/Lt. Hughes and Sgt. Holmes on the 29th but conditions were not suitable for the attack on Lannion aerodrome. As secondary targets, an RDF station and a Blockhouse were attacked and damaged. On the 31st the Squadron led by S/Ldr. Pugh led a Wing to provide cover for Blenheims returning from an attack on Lannion Aerodrome. No enemy fighters.

Sept.

The claims made by the Squadron after the operations against Lannion on the 26th of August were fully conformed by G.A.F. prisoners of war. Again the squadron saw considerable offensive activity. F/Lt. C.P. Rudland, then flight commander "A" Flight, received the D.F.C. on the 8th. He was promoted F/Lt on the 9th. On the 4th, in Gudgeon 6, full squadron escort led by S/Ldr. Pugh, was provided for six Blenheims in an attack on an oilship in Cherbourg Harbour. Numerous dog fights with ME.109s F and E occurred during which Sergeant Pilot Buckwell was forced to bale out. He is now a prisoner-of-war. Another full squadron escort was provided for ~~14~~ twelve Blenheims on the 8th. The target was a convoy in the Race of Alderney and the Whirlwind's task was to silence any escort flak ships. Two convoys were sighted and attacked with considerable success. The squadron left a 400 ton vessel on fire, sunk a tug and severely damaged to more tugs and three barges. An E boat was attacked by results were not observed. On the 10th a Mandolin Operation was undertaken by P/Os Stein and Mason with the Gestapo Headquarters at Quineville as target. Unable to locate their target they attacked a machine and Bofors gun position. Unhappily P/O. Mason was killed in action, his machine diving straight into the ground. Then P/O Stein circled and in four separate attacks silenced these ~~XXXXXX~~ posts. The 19th saw another Manolin Operation against Morlaix. The aerodrome was not located and an inconclusive attack was made on a pill box.

On the 28th two sections led by S/Ldr. Pugh with Wing Commander Donaldson as No. 2 Section Leader were detailed to attack JU.88s said to be at Morlaix. But the target was barren except for one ME.109 which was attacked and probably destroyed. The Whirlwinds were met with an intense barrage from all around the aerodrome. Both S/Ldr. Pugh's and W/Commander Donaldson's machines were badly holes and W/Commander Donaldson was wounded in both arms and his flying helmet was wrenched from his head. But he managed

to regain control of his aircraft and to land at Predannack where he was detained in hospital with concussion. On his recovery he was posted to be Wing Commander Flying, Colerne Section, so that he was still intimately connected with the squadron.

Mandolin 7 was not heard of at Charmy Down until four o'clock in the evening of the 29th. F/O. Coghlan led two sections to Predannack - this use of a forward aerodrome was, of course, an unvaried feature of all offensive operations - and they took off in the dusk to attack Lannion. Again the target was virtually barren but for a single JU.88 which was destroyed. The pilots lost touch with each other in the murk. Sgt. Hunter was forced to bale out over the sea South of Plymouth and was killed while engaged in operations against the enemy and F/O Coghlan ran out of petrol at 400 feet and crash landed just off the aerodrome. He was uninjured except for bruises, but his aircraft was a total wreck.

October.

The formation of a second Whirlwind squadron, No. 137, led to many of the more experienced pilots of 263 Squadron being posted that squadron. Operationally the month was quiet. On the 8th H.M. The King was graciously pleased to honour S/Ldr. Pugh and F/Lt Coghlan with the D.F.C. for their many and varied exploits against the enemy. Unfortunately the 9th saw P/O. O.H.J. Hoskins killed on active service during formation flying. His machine collided with another aircraft in the air; F/Lt Coghlan baled out successfully. On the 25th Sgt. Pilot Holmes was granted his commission as P/O. On the 29th Rhubarb Operation 33 took place against Morlaix aerodrome. F/Sgt. Brackley damaged one JU.88 on the ground. Sgt. Pilot King came in to attack so low that his port wing coolant tank was damaged by a high white mast. He recrossed the Channel on one engine and made base. On the 30th the same target was covered by Rhubarb 35. Heavy flak was met over Morlaix aerodrome and F/O. D. Stein's plane was hit in the starboard engine, which was set on fire. He was last seen climbing as though to bale out. This is the last information we have of P/O Stein but it is hoped that he is a prisoner-of-war. The other pilot, Sgt. K. Ridley made Predannack on one engine but overshot and landed in the barbed wire, doing little further damage to his aircraft.

November.

This month was notable for an increase in offensive operations. On the 2nd S/Ldr. Coghlan was posted to command 137 squadron. It was hoped that the 6th would see the end of a run of bad luck. On that day F/Sgt. Albertini was shot through the eye by a stray pellet discharged in clay pigeon shooting, and probably lost the sight of his right eye. On the same day Rhubarb 56 was operated to attack the road and railway West of Maupertus. No targets were found and the patrol returned but unhappily Sgt. Pilot J.J. Robinson was killed while in operations against the enemy. He seems that he dipped his port wing into the sea, and went into it at high speed. On the 7th a Rhubarb reconnaissance took place during which Sgt. Pilot King destroyed an ME.109, one of two pairs by which he was attacked. F/Lt. Warnes was attacked by another pair of Me.109s but evaded them by steep turns at sea level. A Rodeo Fighter Sweep (Rodeo 5) of four squadrons led by P/O Warnes, "B" Flight commander, was made on the 8th. Two Whirlwinds were slightly damaged by flak encountered over Alderney but formation was maintained. On the 9th, P/O. Warnes was promoted F/Lt. Rhubarb 61 against distillery targets was operated on the 15th. S/Ldr. Pugh, DFC, led the attack on Cerences which was probably destroyed by himself and Sgt. Blackshaw. A locomotive was also hit. Hyenville was attacked by F/Lt. Warnes who damaged a building and a railway engine. Yellow section did not locate their target. Green section also failed to contact target but attacked and silenced two flak posts. On the 17th three sections took off from Warmwell for the final destruction of the distillery targets allocated to the squadron. There were gusts of seventy m.p.h. at Warmwell and visibility of one mile in torrential rain, but lack of cloud cover over the Cherbourg Peninsula caused the operation to be abandoned.