

CONTINUANCE OF SQUADRON HISTORY.A SummaryDecember 1<sup>st</sup>, 1941 to December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1942.December, 1941. Charmy Down.

This was the first month in 1941 in which the squadron made no contact with the enemy. In fact, offensive operations were not resumed until April, 1942. On December 6<sup>th</sup> the Servicing Echelon moved from Filton to Charmy Down and so brought to an end the squadron's connection with Filton which had existed on and off, always in the most friendly fashion, since our first formation at Filton on October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1939. December 14<sup>th</sup>, Sergeant D.E. Prior crashed from cloud in a vertical dive near Coleford, he was killed instantly. December 19<sup>th</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup>, Group Practice Camp at Warmwell; weather mainly non-op. Christmas at Charmy Down was a notable affair and even Colerne relaxed into being excellent hosts. The officers were comfortably, even luxuriously, billeted at Cold Ashton Manor House. Sergeants and other ranks found Charmy Down and especially their quarters at Dingle Dell, exceedingly cold and muddy but it was always a cheerful and happy station. And almost everyone in the squadron had "friends in Bath" - indeed the hospitality of the Bathonians to the squadron was the best found anywhere; it is not even yet exhausted.

Squadron Statistics for 1941 were, in brief:-

Enemy Aircraft destroyed in air combat.....	6.
" " damaged " " " .....	5.
" " destroyed or seriously damaged on the ground	24.
Total	35
Shipping, Vessels, sunk or damaged.....	17.
Other targets damaged or destroyed.....	32. 49.
Total number of damaged inflicted on enemy	84

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January, 1942. Charmy Down.

Not much flying was done in this month of fog, ice, and snow. There were several days in which all hands laboured with pick, shovel, brush and snow-plough to clear the runways. Mention should be made of 417 RCAF Squadron, which, under the command of S/Ldr (now W/Cdr) Sam Malfroy, was our neighbour at Charmy down and moved with us to Colerne on January 28<sup>th</sup>. We got on exceedingly well with them. Of the move to Colerne a correspondent writes, "Bullshie Station, very sticky. The officers were billeted in comfortable Ashwick Hall. Sergeant Pilots were in a mess in which it appeared as though straight jackets were needed for 263 and 417 to conform with the rules and regulations." The same writer mentions a visit to the squadron of one form of crustacea, which unfortunately lasted for several weeks. It is probably true that winter brassing reached its highest point at Colerne.

February, 1942.

The squadron moved on February 10<sup>th</sup> to Fairwood Common. Sixteen Whirlwinds, the Hurricane, Oxford and Magister were airborne at the same time and this, no doubt, was a record. Fairwood Common was under the command of Group Captain "Batchy" Atcherley, who had been Wing Commander at Hardufoss during the Second Norwegian Expedition. The squadron was welcomed by a special broadcast and was soon keeping time with the high-pressure swing of Fairwood Common way. This is no the place to expatiate on Fairwood Common under the Atcherleys; it is hoped that this will be done elsewhere. Suffice that all ranks of the Squadron found in Fairwood Common a station in which flying was consistently regarded as of paramount importance, and on in which the sense of belonging to a community was fostered in very many interesting, unorthodox and successful ways. It is generally regarded as the happiest station at which the squadron has been. A scene is preserved by our correspondent: "First day, "Batchy" helped an erk out by swinging the prop of the Tiger Moth; Likewise Jonny Walker for S/Ldr Pugh to crank up the ending of the Oxford for him."

Nevertheless, the Fairwood runways were "Bad Medicine" for Whirlwinds. The aerodrome is constructed on a moory, hilly marsh and despite the daily addition of hundreds of tons of industrial shale, the runways and taxi-tracks slope in all directions and running off them is disastrous. This was the cause of half a dozen accidents, three of them highly spectacular. P/O. J.P. Coyne's aircraft turned on its back, but "Curlie" stepped out uninjured. F/O. P. Harvey's aircraft put a wing down in a 50 mph cross-wind and it simply disintegrated. Tim was levered out upside-down from the remains of his cockpit, with a bruised elbow. Sergt. P.A. Jardine unfortunately fractured his back in a

similar accident. February 12<sup>th</sup>, S/Ldr T.P.(Puff) Pugh was posted to S/Ldr Tactics 82 Group and S/Ldr R.S. Woodward, ex 601 Squadron, took over command of the squadron. Convoy patrols now began and at first everyone was excited by them (Old but True). They continued (on and off, but mainly on) for six months and three days, during which time the squadron became THE WORLD'S NO.1 CONVOY JOBS> Pilots averaged 100 hours on them. Altogether about 1600 convoy hours were flown and about one and a half million tons of shipping were safely escorted between Aberystwyth and Porthcawl and Lundy and Ilfracombe. The enemy was not seen once although there is no doubt that JU.88s of G.A.F. 1/121 and 3/121 sniffing around the Western Approaches, often saw the Whirlwinds and sheared off.

These JU.88s and two ME.110s (unpopular with the GAF pilots, so they say) appeared like rather irregular clockwork every day between Lands End, Carnsore Point (W.E. Eire) and Holyhead. And every day the squadron and other squadrons in the Fairwood Common Sector would scramble after them from one to five times. Enormous trouble was taken to catch the enemy aircraft, plots were recoded, tabulated and analysed and, later in the summer, in addition to the normal patrols, an operation called "Pigstick" was devised. This involved sweeping large areas of the Western Approaches in very wide echelon and in R/T silence. The last was important because the plots showed that the enemy aircraft picked up, or had relayed to them, our vectors and took suitable action. Our correspondent mentions "Scrambles after drift-wood and electric clouds and damned elusive shadows" and indeed the local RDF gremlins seemed impertinently clever. But it should be understood that the Hun did not approach the coast unless he had cloud cover and normally flew at zero feet, only pulling up for a minute or two to get a wider view (it was then that he was plotted) and that interception was attempted over considerable distances - thirty to eighty miles from the coast of Wales. However that may be, during those six months and three days spent at Fairwood Common and Angle, pilots of the squadron while on defensive patrol, did not so much as obtain a visual of an enemy aircraft. It should equally be remembered that during that time only two of our ships were sunk in the Western Approaches. These were attacked at twilight on March 15<sup>th</sup> and March 20<sup>th</sup>.

The last paragraph has described the defensive operations of the Spring and Summer of 1942. To revert, now, to a more detailed chronology. Fairwood Common, February 19<sup>th</sup>, during convoy patrol the starboard engine of P.7110 piloted by P/O. J. Holmes, disintegrated and caught fire 25 miles south of St. Cowan's Head. The fire extinguisher worked well and by using full flap Joe managed to keep out of the sea and even to surmount the cliff. He landed safely at Carew Cheriton. When the cowlings were taken off two buckets-full of engine parts fell out, still smoking. The Peregrines had scored again by being twins. Between 19<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> February, six Whirlwinds developed serious engine trouble. The defect was traced in five cases to the three-way union which supplies oil to the camshaft and supercharger bearings. While a new series of unions was being constructed by Rolls Royce the squadron was at first grounded except for scrambles and later grounded absolutely until March 3/4<sup>th</sup>.

March 1<sup>st</sup>, Fairwood Common. Air Vice Marshall Orlebar, A-O-C, 10 Group, presented the squadron crest - the Lion of Scotland Rampant holding in the forepaws the Blue Cross of Norway with the motto EX UNGUE LEONEM - "The Lion if known by his claw". The squadron paraded from 1415 hours until 1515. It was an interesting occasion but extremely cold.

March 15<sup>th</sup>. Operational flying in thick weather. Congratulations from Group on being the only squadron able to take off.

March 23<sup>rd</sup>. Five Saltee Patrols. Those who flew them will remember a hundred like them.

March 28<sup>th</sup>. Our correspondent writes, "Secret Whirlwind fighters opened to photographers and press-men. Lines were shot by all and sundry. Convoy patrols began to tell on the nerves of the perpetual drunks in 263. Boys got to know Swansea, Mumbles and Langland Bay Hotel. Both flights became fanatical gardeners." In fact, the squadron left the purlieus of both flights extensively gardened and fenced. It was a bad moment when a bandit sheep ate the "A" Flight wallflowers.

During the month congratulations were received on the high standard of maintenance and serviceability and on the number of air-firing and other operational training hours.

April 8<sup>th</sup>. 66 hours 20 minutes flying. A record for the squadron with Gladiators or Whirlwinds. 55 boxes of ammunition were fired.

April 19<sup>th</sup>. The squadron moved to ANGLE. Just the same work was done as at Fairwood, but the convoys were nearer home. Angle is ten miles from the nearest town, Pembroke, an enlarged but uninteresting village. Our correspondent; "Desolation and lack of "popsies". Things became frightful." A sailing club was got going. "The Intelligence Officer's masterly handling of one of the boats resulted in the C.O. and his wife swimming for the shore. Sun bathing on the beach and swimming. Great Fun; better fun when the WAAFS arrived.

April 30<sup>th</sup>. 10 Group "Ramrod" from Predannack to attack Morlaix and Lannion. Bad Ops courses resulted in neither target being found.

May. 818 hours 35 minutes without an accident of any kind. A double record.

May 25<sup>th</sup>. Lavish hospitality aboard H.M. Destroyer "Brocklesby".  
 May 26<sup>th</sup>. Rhubarb from Predannack. No cloud cover.  
 June 5<sup>th</sup>. A successful attack from Predannack on Lannion aerodrome. Blister hangers, flak-posts and a JU.88 were thoroughly shot-up, also, unfortunately, a line of dummy aircraft.  
 June 23<sup>rd</sup>. The first accident, (tail wheel, due to hydraulics failure) after 1263 hours 50 minutes.  
 June 26<sup>th</sup>. S/Ldr Woodward spent three days aboard HMS "Tynwald", a ship which had been extremely hospitable to the squadron.  
 July 23<sup>rd</sup>. Twelve Whirlwinds flew a combined Rhubarb of the Landivisieu area. Considerable damage was done to railway and road transport, and to huts, personnel, and a distillery, but it was difficult to reconcile this with the loss of two of our most experienced pilots, P/O Les Currie and P/O Johnny Walker. They were jumped by ME.109s on the way back. They were in different ways extremely competent and most popular members of the squadron.  
 July 1<sup>st</sup>-8<sup>th</sup>. "A" Flight was detached to Portreath, meanwhile "B" Flight held down virtually unaided, the whole operational commitment of Fairwood Common Sector. "A" Flight very much enjoyed the change of being at Portreath\* but had to work hard all day at more convoy patrols. The cause of the move was, no doubt, the preliminary try-out of the Dieppe dispositions.

#### AUGUST - THE WHIRLIBOMBER

*\* And so did the writer. A pleasant station.*

The fitting of bombs to Whirlwind aircraft was first suggested by S/Ldr T.P. Pugh, DFC, in September, 1941, and the suggestion was formally rejected later on in that year. However, on 21<sup>st</sup> July, 1942, a letter was received from 10 Group ordering that the squadron's Whirlwinds be modified to take two 250-lb bombs. The letter and the technical correspondence which accompanied it was couched in terms which were unmistakeably the same as those used by S/Ldr. Pugh and in Westland's correspondence with him on the subject.

On August 15<sup>th</sup> the squadron moved with very few regrets from Angle to Colerne. August 23<sup>rd</sup>, F/Lt Cliff Rudland, DFC, flew and landed the first Whirlwind fitted with 2 x 500-lb bombs. The flight was uneventful and without snags. However, it was later found that 500-lb bombs were too heavy for the metal of the wings, and 250-lb bombs became standard. In general it has been found that the performance of the Whirlibomber differed chiefly from that of the Whirlwind in the reduction of maximum speed from about 312 mph at sea-level to about 280 mph. This latter speed is hardly affected by the presence or absence of bombs in the racks.

There was little flying at Colerne although Whirlwinds struggled up to 25,000 feet after JU.88s attacking Bristol from 45,000 feet. The Flights each in turn took a week's leave. Meanwhile Maintenance worked extremely hard and the fitting of racks was virtually completed by September 1<sup>st</sup>.

September 4<sup>th</sup>. Four pilots flew to Warmwell to drop the first practice bombs. On the 7<sup>th</sup> the pilots and about 90 of the ground staff were detached to Warmwell for Group Practice Camp. However, it was found that the Whirlibombers were then the only operations fighter-bombers in 10 Group. And so, when shipping was reported in the Channel Islands are during the first afternoon at the Practice Camp, four Whirlibombers moved to Bolt Head. They went of two "Roadstead" operations from there but found no target.  
 September 10<sup>th</sup> was a day of high triumph for the squadron. Two boxes of four Whirlibombers led by S/Ldr R.S. Woodward, DFC and F/Lt G.B. Warnes with F/Lt H.J. Blackshaw flying as Red Two, and escorted by 118 and 66 Squadrons and W/Commander. Boyd, DSO, DFC, the Station Commander of Warmwell, found four large armed trawlers between Alderney and Cap de la Hague. Briefly, they bombed and sank two of them.  
 September 11<sup>th</sup> was a day of congratulation from all and sundry. Also F/Sgt, (now P/O) Rex King was honoured, and the squadron with him, by the award of the Distinguished Flying Medal.

September 13<sup>th</sup>. The rest of the squadron moved on squadron move from Colerne to Warmwell, together with 3055 Servicing Echelon. The dispersal was at this period in a marquee to the South of the aerodrome. Fortunately the weather was fine and warm. The marquee blew down on the 20<sup>th</sup>. After that the squadron gradually established itself in the Knighton Wood headquarters and Dispersals as these were gradually evacuated by 175 Squadron, which was till on the station though non-operational. This set-up has proved most comfortable and commodious working home which the squadron has yet enjoyed in its three years history. No. 3055 Servicing Echelon is two hundred yards away from the Dispersal, which stand on either side of Squadron headquarters.

Warmwell brought interesting operation flights other than bombing. Standby cockpit readiness is sometimes assumed to relieve another squadron, or if Zeals is non-operational, and Air/Sea Rescue searches off Cherbourg are found more adventurous than those off the Saltees. Moreover, armed shipping reccos of the Channel Island-Barfleur became of day-to-day occurrence.

September 21<sup>st</sup>. Sergeant P.A. Jardine crashed fatally. He was seen to dive out of low cloud between Wool and Wareham. He was buried in Warmwell Village Church on

September 26<sup>th</sup>, with full R.A.F. honours.

The squadron was extremely sorry to lose F/Lt Cliff Rudland to No. 19 Squadron on September 1<sup>st</sup>. F/O H.J. Blackshaw took over the command of "A" Flight. It was an equal blow which took F/O Joe Holmes to be Flight Commander in our daughter squadron, No. 137. October 3<sup>rd</sup>. Four whirlwinds returned battered but more or less serviceable after passing through extremely intense flak from shore and ships in Alderney Harbour. A large ship is believed to have been damaged by their bombs.

October 9<sup>th</sup>. "Famous Pilots" of the R.A.F. attended and very much enjoyed a part at Westlance, Chard.

October 25<sup>th</sup>. The Bellows Club, Buenos Aires sent £100 as a gift to its adopted Whirlbomber squadron. £40 of this was spent on an excellent beer-up, social and dance.

October 31<sup>st</sup>. Two sections led by F.O E. Brearley and F/O P. Harvey destroyed "An important railway junction"\* near la Haye du Puits. *\*BBC News Bulletin*

Sir Archibald Sinclair visited the squadron and his Flamingo was escorted back to Andover.

November 4<sup>th</sup>. Two British Movietone News men arrived to photograph the squadron for South-American consumption. A few ground photographs were made, but, on the whole, their visits, (for they kept coming back) were thoroughly cocked-up by the authorities other than British Movietone News and this squadron. At any rate, no air-to-air filming was ever possible.

November 7<sup>th</sup>. P/O Don Gill led four Whirlwind bombers on a Rhubarb operation. Over the Cotentin the weather was extremely thick and Don Gill disappeared after bombing a railway line. No more has been heard of him.

November 16<sup>th</sup>. A most successful Rhubarb operation by F/O E. Brearley and Sgt J.I. Yates. The main railway tracks were thoroughly disintegrated and Sgt. Yates also scored strikes on an "E" Boat.

There were a number of other Roadstead operations, Shipping reccos and Rhubarbs during the month, but either targets were not located or the weather proved too good. The squadron also flew a number of convoy patrols, one of a large floating-dock from the Isle of Wight to West of Portland.

December 7<sup>th</sup>. Roadstead No. 45 proved an operation of triumph and tragedy for the squadron. A convoy was located off the South-west coast of Jersey and four ships were sunk or seriously damaged by the squadron's bombs. But W/O Don McPhail was seen to fly through a heavy flak burst and to dive straight into the sea. He is Missing, Presumed Killed in Action. And S/Ldr R.S. Woodward, DFC, was seen to be hit by flak and make what looked like a prepared "ditching" it is hoped that he may have become a prisoner-of-war.

December 8<sup>th</sup>. F/Lt G.B. Warnes, who has been fifteen months with the squadron, was promoted Squadron Leader and posted to the command of the squadron. This event, coupled with his forthcoming marriage, was celebrated in a very fine party at Stafford House.

December 14<sup>th</sup>. The squadron stood in for fighter readiness while our neighbouring 266 Typhoon squadron was released. F/O J.P. Coyne and Sgt. M.T. Cotton flew the usual evening anti-Rhubarb patrol and after many vectors up and down the coast they were sent to within a few miles of Cherbourg. Returning from there they met two F.W.190s and had a dogfight with them from zero to 4000 feet. The Whirlwind pilots damaged one of them before turning for home. They landed, short of petrol, at Hurn. This was the first Whirlwind combat with F.W.190s and the first interception from defensive patrol since March, 1941.

On December 15<sup>th</sup> the weather, which had been for six weeks extraordinarily fine and mild, turned to gales and pouring rain. As a result the aerodrome was unserviceable for several days.

Christmas was celebrated with traditional unstinted festivity and good cheer. It was perhaps lucky that the weather too was non-operational on Boxing Day.

The month and the year ended quietly with three mild, sunny days in which a good deal of practice flying, shooting and bombing was done.

December was the second month in succession and the third in the year to be FREE FROM ACCIDENTS.

A statistical summary for 1942 will be found on the next page.

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No. 263 SQUADRON.

Statistics for 1942.

Whirlwind Fighters January-August.  
Whirlwind Fighter-Bombers - September-December.

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Operational Flying Hours	2366 hours 50 mins.
Non-Operational Flying Hours	<u>2746 hours 35 mins.</u>
Total Flying Hours	<u>5313 hours 25 mins.</u>

Offensive Operations.

(1) Effective Operations.

Ramrod	1.
Roadsteads	3.
Rhubarbs	5.

(2) Shipping Reccos 11.

(3) Abortive Operations, (Target not found, No cloud cover, etc.)

Ramrod	1.
Roadsteads	5.
Rhubarbs	<u>5.</u>

Offensive Operations	Total	<u>31.</u>
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Convoy Patrols	About	800.
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Shipping Escorted without loss. About a million tons.

Damaged Inflicted on the Enemy.

Enemy Aircraft.

Damaged in Air Combat.	1 FW.190
Damaged on Lannion Aerodrome	1 JU.88.

Enemy Ships.

Category 1.	2.
Category 2.	1.
Category 3.	2.
Category 4.	<u>6.</u>
Total	<u>11.</u>

Railway Objectives.

Railway Tracks Disintegrated	6.
Locomotive Damaged	1.
Goods Trucks Damaged (Successful attacks)	4.
Other Railway Objectives.	3.

Military Huts damaged	5.
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Other Targets Damaged or Destroyed.

(Military and GAF personnel, Lorries, Blister Hangers, Flkaposts, Harbour Installations, Distilleries, etc.) 17.

Total No. of Times damage inflicted on Enemy	<u>49.</u>
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ROLL OF HONOUR.

Killed in Action against the Enemy.

Pilot Officer Les CURRIE,	Pilot Officer Johnny WALKER,
Flying Officer Don GILL, RCAF.	Warant Officer Don McPHAIL, RCAF.

Killed on Active Service.

Sergeant Pilot P.A. JARDINE.

Missing from Operations against the Enemy.

Squadron Leader R.S. WOODWARD, DFC.

Decoration.

F/Sgt. (now P/O) C.P. King awarded the Distinguished Flying Medal.

(see back)

Squadron Totals from October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1939 to December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1942.

Enemy Aircraft Destroyed or Damaged.....87.

Total Number of Times Damage Inflicted on the Enemy (excluding Ground  
straffing Damage during the Norwegian Expedition.....183.

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