



Squadron History (B) Section. O. L. Dixon.

## REGISTRATION RESEARCH SPECIALIST SECTION

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF No. 115 (B) SQUADRON. R.A.F.

No. 115 Squadron, though originally formed at Catterick on December 1st, 1917, spent many months in anticipation before it assumed any real status. Moving from Catterick to Wetherhaven, then to Castle Bromwich in July, 1918, it began to take on strength the twin engined Handley Page "O/400", and, after a short period spent in building up to war strength, moved over to France under the command of Major W. B. Gardner on August 31st.

By this date the last Allied offensive, launched on August 8th, was well under way, and the heavies were carrying out nightly attacks against lines of communication. No. 115, posted for duty with the I.A.F., moved to Rouville as part of No. 83 Wing which, under the command of Lieut/Col. J. B. Landon D.S.O., operated at five squadron strength.

Commencing "ops" on the night of September 16/17th they sent out eight "O/400's", but two returned with engine trouble and the remaining six dropped four tons on the railways at Metz-Sablon. One failed to return. In this raid they recorded the greatest number of aircraft to bomb the target throughout their first period of active service. In this month they operated again on the nights of 21st/22nd and 26th/27th, bombing objectives at Morhange, Saarbrücken, Thionville and Leiningen, and also sent off six bombers on the last night of the month, but the raid was abandoned.

In October, as the offensive against rail centres continued, they put up a fine show on the night of the 9th/10th when five crews carried out double trips to Metz-Sablons and Thionville and dropped six-and-a-half tons of bombs. It was in this month, on the night of 30th/31st, that they recorded their longest trip when three aircraft bombed Baden, and the aerodromes at Morhange and Haguenau, in spite of poor visibility.

As the war drew to a close they carried out their fifteenth, and last raid, on the night of November 5th/6th. Two "H.P.s" took off and one reached and bombed Frescaty 'drome, the other, unable to "press on", bombed the enemy camp at Dreuze before returning.

Within its short period of service the squadron dropped a total of 26 tons of bombs and lost one aircraft. One aircrew member was wounded and three reported missing.

No. 115, after providing the air escort for the vessel carrying President Wilson from Calais to Dover in December, 1918, came under the "axe" and was disbanded in England in 1919.

Throughout the ebb and flow of international affairs, and men talked of dis-armament as nations still fought the odd war on the side, the Japs marched into Manchuria, Hitler into the Ruhr, and Mussolini, in keeping with the times, decided on Abyssinia as his pitch, before re-armament really became the vogue. By 1936 the Dictators had forced the pace, and soon after the "extension programme" had begun to give back to the R.A.F. that which dis-armament had taken away, the pot began to simmer in Spain.

Under such circumstances many old squadrons were re-formed and No. 115 Squadron came back onto the "active list" on June 28th, 1937, at Warham as part of No. 3 Group, Bomber Command. A twin-engined Handley Page bomber, once again, formed its initial equipment, though this time it was a monoplane, the "Harrow", streamlined, but still sporting a fixed "undercart".

In the shadow of war the new "115" took its place in the peace time structure, and in the short space of time still left, participated in the annual exercises and handed in its "Harrows".

Wellington Mk.I's. Mobilisation for war began towards the end August, 1939, and orders confining airmen to a defined area, the withdrawal of permission to wear "civvies", and the cancellation of leave, silenced even the "duff gen merchants". This was "it".

Within a short time of the declaration of war the Wellingtons were committed to the task of bombing the German Fleet off Heligoland by day. A form of attack which was quickly "scrubbed" as the formations were practically wiped out, and they were switched to "ops" to conform with the policy which handed the initiative to Hitler. A move which suited his purpose, and gave him time to regroup and make good his losses before he turned his attention to Norway and the Low Countries.

The collapse of the "phoney war" period saw the squadron swing into action as the "Wimpy's" attacked a variety of targets during the heavy fighting in May and June, 1940, and throughout the Battle of Britain they operated night after night. Attacks against Hamburg, Kiel, Hamm, Cologne, Berlin in November, were amongst the numerous raids which came their way, and amongst the early entries in the list of "Honours and Awards" were the D.F.C.'s to A.C. Hamman, R.E. Kirkby, A.G. McAfee, C.H. Noble and A.J. Pate, and the D.F.M.'s to R.J. Morson, D.W.H. Cleverley, R.C. Verran and D.G.H. Poole.

Sgts. Morson and Cleverley being mentioned for gallantry during an attack against Berlin when their aircraft was badly damaged by "flak". After extinguishing a fire, and with one engine "u/s", they continued to carry on the return flight to base until forced to ditch. Sgt. Cleverley, on his 23rd trip, managed to send out the "gen" before they hit the drink.

These early "ops" were generally feats of endurance, and, though they received Mk. I's in 1941, the attacks were pressed home on the "trial and error" basis. This in no way reflected on the crews who, night after night, gave of their best in an effort to carry out their task. Many months had yet to pass before new tactics and navigational aids achieved the accuracy demanded by the C-in-C Bomber Command.

Bremen, Hamburg, Dusseldorf, Duisberg, Stuttgart, Berlin, Kiel, were amongst the targets which appeared with monotonous frequency throughout 1941. Not forgetting the "Daddy" of them all - Brest.

Operating mainly under the command of A.G. Mulholland and I.O. Freeman, especially when the moon was in the right quarter, the airmen experienced German efficiency in the continual build up of the night fighter defences, a section of the Luftwaffe once considered NOT necessary by Goering. W/C. Freeman was one of the original members of the New Zealand War Flight, the nucleus of No. 75 Squadron R.N.Z.A.F., in which he completed a tour and received the D.F.C. He was awarded the D.S.O. and Bar to the D.F.C. in No. 115, and on the completion of his period of command returned to New Zealand and was killed over Guadalcanal. A.G. Mulholland, also from "down-under", continued on "ops" until killed on February 16th, 1942.

Many acts of gallantry were recorded in 1941, and another New Zealander, Sgt. R.B. Berney, displayed initiative and courage when returning from a raid. Having seen a "Wimpy" go down into "the Drink" he dropped food to the unfortunates, then remained in the area for five hours, even after he had lost sight of the dinghy, until shortage of fuel forced his return. The D.F.M. was also awarded to Sgt. A. Nobigeorge who, during an attack against Duisberg, had the alarming experience of loss of power in both engines. Undaunted, he continued his attack, and, taking a chance, set course for base and eventually "lobbed" down safely.

Clashes between bomber and fighter became more numerous and the squadron had its fair share of combats. P/O J.A.J. Bailey, on his way to attack Hamburg in the second week of May, was intercepted by a Ju. 88 which his rear gunner disposed of. A little later in the year Sgt. R.H. Nuttall operated his turret by hand to drive off a "110". These are but a few of the many in the squadron who fought it out in the skies over Germany during 1941 and won through. Many others fought a battle which they lost, but they were prepared to

take that chance.

No.3 Group introduced a new bombing technique early in 1942, during an attack against Essen on the night of March 8th/9th, and sent in a "flare force" to illuminate the target. An effort which gave added incentive to those who had volunteered to do the job. The beginnings of the F.F.F. which, with the introduction of radar as a navigational aid, eventually produced the answer in the search for accuracy.

Though the road along which they traversed was dangerous and hard, they did not fail in their efforts throughout 1942. A fact which is indicated in the number of awards made for gallantry during attacks against Stettin, Wilhelmshaven, Munster, the Westphalia factory at Poissy in April, when F/Lt. J.A. Sword made five photo runs over the target after bombing Bremen on the night of June 3rd, and the 29th, and again on July 2nd, Kiel, Berlin, etc., as they continued to repeat the punishment in the "give and take" of bomb warfare.

By the end of 1942 over eighty decorations had been entered in "115's" list of "Honours and Awards" and, of these, nineteen D.F.C.'s and nine D.F.M.'s had been announced in 1942. Remember A. George, who had received the D.F.M. back in 1941, D.M. Keery, R.C. Murphy, D.A. Major, R. Rawlings and H.G.A. Court amongst the D.F.C.'s, and B. Bullock, J.A. Thomas, later to receive the D.F.C. in "139" J.B. Williams, R.A. Gray and J.F. Jenkins ? The latter being killed on June 13th, 1943.

1943 brought many changes, except in their nightly excursions over enemy territory, though they experienced a short break in the programme when they moved to Wichford and during conversion to the four-engined "jobs", Stirling III's. The "Battle of the Ruhr" and the "Battle of Hamburg" was fought out in spite of heavy losses, and the route to the "Happy Valley" became more familiar than before. The enemy defences, "Flak" and in the air, were continually increased until they were stronger than on any other front, though their efficiency was "rocked" for a short period after the dropping of "window" over Hamburg on the night of July 24th/25th.

It was for gallantry over Cologne in June, 1943, that the squadron recorded the award of the C.G.M. to Sgt. A.I.G. Hall, "mid-upper" to Sgt. W.F. Jolly. Picked up by two fighters soon after bombing, the "Stirling" was hit and set on fire in spite of evasion action by the pilot, and, as one of the fighters which had hung on came in for the "kill", it was met by a burst from Sgt. Hall's position and driven off damaged. Sgt. Hall then joined Sgt. R.A. Crowther, the W/Op., and between them they managed to extinguish the flames though both were exhausted through lack of oxygen before they completed their task. By this time the rear turret had fallen off, but Sgt. Jolly, assisted by his crew, made the return journey and effected a safe landing. Both the pilot and the W/Op. received the D.F.M. for their part in this action.

Spezia, Sulheim, Hamburg, Mannheim and Hanover, formed entries in many log-books before participation in the onslaught launched against Berlin towards the end of 1943 was recorded.

It was over Mannheim towards the end of the year that S/Ldr. J.B. Starkey's gunners, Sgts. A.J. Tugwell and H.J. Willis, sent down in flames an attacking fighter which intercepted their badly damaged aircraft. Two members of the crew had been wounded in the first attack, and the bomber sent down out of control, but the pilot had been able to check the fall and, as his A.G.'s attended to the injured, F/O B.A. Beer, after plotting a course, moved up and assisted S/Ldr. Starkey on the return flight. The award of the D.S.O. to the pilot, and the D.F.C. and D.F.M.'s to the "nav" and "A.G.'s", was announced a little later. A similar experience also befell W/O. B.H. Boutilier, of the R.C.A.F., over Hanover. Attacked by an enemy fighter over the target he had two engines set on fire, the tail gunner killed, and other members of the crew wounded. After feathering one engine he extinguished the other in a violent dive, and, ably assisted by his wounded W/Op., Sgt. W.B. Rogers, he managed to

No. 115 Squadron.

- 4 -

make the return trip home.

These acts of gallantry were recorded and officially recognised, but for many who repeatedly penetrated the strong defences there came the trip from which there was no return. These included T.R. Wood, H.J. Willis, H.H. Rogers, D.O. Rohde, A.J.S. Oiler and I.C.B. Slade, to mention just a few, but they are all remembered by those who knew them.

As the "Battle of Berlin" spread out into the early months of 1944 Lancaster II's replaced the "Stirlings", then "Lanc II's", as, backed by those who could only "stand and wait", they trundled down the runways when the "green" flashed and were soon on their way to the old familiar target.

The "D"-day targets followed and the attacks switched to lines of communication, marshalling yards, military camps, then, with the launching of "Overlord", coastal areas and "V" sites, and daylight raids came back on to the programme. Giving full support to the operations in hand they worked the clock round, and the award of the D.S.O. to S/Ldr. G.Y. Mackie and R.H. Annan, was followed by the Bar to the D.F.C. held by S/Ldr. C.D. Rush on the completion of his second tour.

As the land fighting went ahead they returned to the attack against German targets, laid their mines, and, though weather reduced "ops" in January and, to a certain extent, in February, 1945, they were away whenever the weather was suitable until, towards the end of April, they recorded their last "ops". With the cessation of hostilities in Europe they took part in the repatriation of P.O.W.'s, then moved to Gravelly in preparation for the Far East as part of "Tiger Force", but the end to it all came in August, 1945, and allowed many of the "boys" to return to their proper jobs.

Many, many pages, could be devoted to the history of "115" which, under the command of experienced officers, including F.F. Rainsford, H.G. Dwyer and R.H. Shaw, battled on until the end, but in a brief account such as this, space has to be considered. A brief mention must be made of the squadron's list of "Honours and Awards" which, on completion, included 6 D.S.O.'s, over 170 D.F.C.'s and 3 Bars, and 74 D.F.M.'s.

The actions of its men justified No. 115 Squadron's motto -  
"Despite the elements."

The following CODES & SERIALS have been supplied by R. STURDIVANT.

Barrow. A.6849.	A.6962.M.	A.6967.	
Wellington. B.3.	AO-Q X.3946.	KO-V Z.8848.	
Lancaster B.2.	AO-G LL646.	AO-L DS.669.	AO-K LL.510.
	AO-W DS.761.	A4-D DS.927.	
Lancaster B.3.	LL-A PB756.	LL-B AB803.	LL-C PB376.
	LL-E PB757.	LL-F RM754.	LL-G PB798.
	LL-K FP666.	AO-A PB439.	AO-E PA310.
	AO-G PB975.	AO-H RM798.	AO-J AG236.
	AO-K HA580.	AO-L PA441.	KO-L RM583.
	AO-M LL935.	AO-S PB529.	KO-P HA541.
	AO-N RM691.	KO-R NF960.	KO-S AB836.
	KO-T LM693.	KO-T PB767.	KO-U LM594.
	KO-V RM700.	KO-V PD333.	KO-W PF666.
	KO-X PD270.	KO-Z ND977/G.	
			LL-D206.
			LL-J LM754
			KO-C RM439
			AO-J PA412.
			KO-L PA433.
			AO-Q HA589
			KO-S ND900
			KO-U LM594
			KO-X PB818

# Please Note

Any information which the reader of this squadron history may be able to supply would be greatly appreciated. Names of its C.O.'s and dates of command, when and where it moved, its "ops", etc., are important. We are indebted to many "Air Mail" readers who have loaned us log-books, photo's, and souvenir histories of the various squadrons in which they served, and, if you can add to the above, the information would be welcome.  
(J.L.D.)