

A HISTORY OF No.255 SQUADRON

ROYAL AIR FORCE

Original text (1992) by Peter L Croft *et al.*

Revisions made and footnotes added (2017, 2018) by Chris Eley

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Acknowledgements

The following assisted in making the original edition of this history possible:

Chas Bowyer – Author of *Beaufighter at War* (1976, London : Ian Allen)

John Cameron Cox – Squadron aircrew

Roger Kirkman – Squadron aircrew

Freddie Lammer – Squadron aircrew (Senior Navigator)

Tony and Diana Mooney (Diana being Ernie Shaw's daughter)

John Rawlings – Author of various reference works

Timmy Reynolds – Squadron aircrew

Ernie Shaw – Squadron ground crew

and The Public Record Office (now The National Archives).

Editor's note:

This edition is an amalgam of several sources. In October 2016 a proof-reading draft of the original edition was recovered by Tony Mooney from a damaged Word computer file dated 1992. This has been manually checked against a printed copy found at the Research Library of the RAF Museum, Hendon, and shelved there as "Object No. B3788". It became clear during the checking process that the RAF Museum's copy had a slightly later date and so, where substantive differences emerged, the text of the Museum's copy was used to compile the 2017 edition.

People's names have been amended only when a different spelling is known to appear in the *London Gazette*, the *Air Force List*, the *Probate Calendar*, the *1939 Register*, the *1911 Census*, the records of the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages or the individual's own autobiography.

Place names are those that existed at the time, annotated with known changes since. The source of data regarding such changes in Africa is the French *Institut National de L'Information Géographique et Forestière*. Their willing assistance is gratefully acknowledged.

In numerous cases, stated places of burial of casualties killed overseas differ from those given in the GWGC database. This is because of "Grave Concentration", a widespread policy of exhumation and reburial in larger, more easily managed War Cemeteries.

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ROYAL AIR FORCE

The first period of operations by 255 Squadron was but brief. It was formed in 1918 for coastal defence, but was disbanded on 14th January 1919.

The Squadron was reformed on 23rd November 1940 at Kirton-in-Lindsey, Lincolnshire, and became operational on 5th January 1941. It was active as a night-fighter squadron until the end of the war, then continued until disbandment at Gianacis in Egypt on 30th April 1946.

In 1940, 255 Squadron was first equipped with Defiant Is. The establishment was 18 aeroplanes, the squadron letters were YD, and the first Commanding Officer was S/Ldr R L Smith. At Kirton the Squadron operated in the defence of the East Coast ports such as Hull, and the inland Yorkshire manufacturing towns. It also supplied cover for North Sea convoys and returning aircraft of Bomber Command. Much night flying was attempted with the Defiants, but serviceability was not good and the accident rate was high. However, on 10th February 1941 came the first success when F/Lt Trousdale-Sgt Chunn claimed a He 111 probably destroyed off Grimsby. There were several claims of probables and damaged enemy aircraft during the next three months, but 255 just could not meet its commitments with the Defiants, and they were supplemented with Hurricanes. On 5th May 1941 came the first confirmed victory when S/Ldr Smith-P/O Farnes destroyed a Ju 88, then on the 8th/9th May, during raids on Hull, the Squadron destroyed seven enemy aircraft and claimed two damaged. Two He 111s were shot down by F/Lt Trousdale-Sgt Chunn, one He 111 each by Sgt Johnson-Sgt Aitchison, P/O Wyrill-Sgt Maul, P/O Wynne-Willson-Sgt Plant and S/Ldr Smith who was flying a Hurricane, P/O Wright-Sgt McChesney shot down a Ju 88. In late June Sgt Kendall-Sgt Emeny shot down another He 111. During this first period of operations, flying Defiants and Hurricanes, the Squadron destroyed a total of nine enemy aircraft, and claimed three probably destroyed and eight damaged.

On 15th May the Squadron moved to Hibaldstow. S/Ldr Smith was replaced by S/Ldr Bartlett DFC, soon to be W/Cdr, and the new Engineer Officer was P/O P C Wright. In July the Squadron began to convert to Beaufighter IIs and for a month was non-operational; during this time those air-gunners thought to be suitable, a mixed bag of New Zealanders, Poles, Czechs and British, were re-mustered as Radio Observers, and as well, six trained air radar operators were posted in. The A.I. used was Mark IV.

Under a new CO, W/Cdr C M Windsor, the Squadron moved again, this time to Coltishall in Norfolk. Coltishall, only completed in 1939 as a permanent station, was akin to paradise compared to the rough living on the Squadron's two previous stations, but the Autumn and Winter of 1941/42 was a very bad time for the Squadron in terms of flying accidents, two COs and one Flight Commander were amongst those killed, it became obvious that Merlin engines

were unsuitable for Beaufighter aeroplanes. There was little enemy activity on the East Coast at this time, and a detachment from 255 was sent to West Malling in Kent to help out in the defence of London. From West Malling the first 255 Beaufighter victory was scored on 14th January 1942, when P/O Cox-Sgt Croft shot down a Do 217.

W/Cdr D P Kelly was now CO of 255, and in February F/O A Lammer arrived as Senior RO. On 12th February 1942 the 'Scharnhorst' and two other German warships made their successful escape dash from Brest, 255 flew many patrols over the North Sea by way of dinghy searches for shot down aircrew.

On 8th March 1942 the Squadron moved to High Ercall, swapping stations with 68 Squadron. There, to the pilots' great relief, they began converting to Beaufighter VI's with Bristol engines. During the move the Squadron mascot, a bull mastiff named P/O Bruce, went AWOL, but he was found five days later. The Squadron's three months at High Ercall have been described as "desultory ops" but a great deal of flying was accomplished which was mainly night practice in conjunction with GCI Comberton. However, in April F/O Wyrill-Sgt Willins did shoot down a Ju 88.

On 6th June 255 moved once again, this time to Honiley, and for the first three months they were operational in the defence of Birmingham and Coventry. During this period four enemy aircraft were claimed as damaged in combats, three by F/O Wyrill-F/Sgt Willins. On 19th September 1942 the entry in the Squadron records reads "P/O Phillips was married today at Balsall; the Squadron ceased to keep an operational state of any kind from today". Since reforming, the total number of 255 Squadron successes to this date were 11 enemy aircraft destroyed, and claims for three probably destroyed and 13 damaged.

No sooner was the Squadron taken off operations when preparation and training began for overseas service, the first shock being the issue of khaki battledress. Then P/O Bruce was posted to 488 Squadron and numerous changes in personnel were made. It was said that W/Cdr Kelly did his utmost to exchange all the airmen over 30 years of age for younger men, and was quite put out when a replacement F/Sgt cook aged 50 arrived at the very last moment when it was too late to exchange him. Soon all hands were engaged in cleaning, stripping and rubbing down the aeroplanes preparatory to camouflage, and all the air and ground crews were involved in toughening up exercises, route marches and ground firing, and some took the Army battle course. From the 1st to the 12th November came the final preparation of kit and aircraft, and from the 11th the Squadron knew that its destination was the North African landings, 'Operation Torch'.

On 13th November 1942, 18 Beaufighters of 255 Squadron flew to Portreath, waved off from Honiley by the remaining aircrew, the ground crew, and the Station staff. At Portreath sheaves of charts (nautical miles of course) were handed out to the bewildered aircrew, many of whom had very little navigational experience and just hoped someone amongst them knew the way to Gibraltar. (See Appendix A for details of the crews who flew out, and also those remaining who followed by sea.) Happily all crews made it to the Rock with the

weather perfect all the way; after crossing the Bay the Squadron, flying in threes¹, cruised down the West Coasts of Portugal and Spain. At least three crews, slightly worried about petrol consumption, illegally cut across neutral South West Spain². At Gibraltar, after five hours flying time from the UK, circling the Rock for two hours with wheels and flaps down awaiting landing instructions, was not pleasant. Salt water showers there, without salt water soap, was only a minor irritant!

On 15th November, the Squadron flew on to Algiers Maison Blanche airfield, ostensibly escorting a squadron of American DC3s³. At Maison Blanche, only a few days after the ground troops had landed on the coast, chaos reigned. Perhaps the toughening-up exercises undertaken so unwillingly at Honiley had not been such a waste of time after all? To start with there was nowhere to sleep and no camp kits, therefore the crews had to make do with a blanket on the concrete floor of the airport lounge, or on the grass under their aeroplanes. They queued for hours at the airport café where a harassed RAF cook, with the aid of M le Patron, tried to keep all supplied with food. Water for washing and shaving was collected in cut down petrol tins from a cold water tap outside the airport building. If nothing else 255 aircrews will never forget having to refuel the Beaufighters from four gallon petrol tins, it was exhausting work in hot sunshine dressed in winter-weight khaki, and seemingly never ending, none of the aircrews before had anticipated life without a petrol bowser to hand! Having no ground crews of their own 255 were lucky enough to have some help with minor repairs from the ground crews of 43, 154 and 241 Squadrons, who shared the airfield.

The main problem for the Squadron was, of course, the lack of A.I. sets which it had not been allowed to bring out in the Beaufighters, and as well, for the first vital ten days, there was no GCI ground control. During this time there were continuous German bombing raids on Algiers docks and on Maison Blanche airfield, and there was much damage and many casualties. Standing patrols at night without GCI and A.I. were hopeless; no interceptions were accomplished even though the nights were clear and moonlit. Without ground radar of any sort there was very little warning of the approach of the bombers, but many brave attempts were made by 255 aircrew to get the Beaufighters off the ground at the last moment to avoid the bombing. It was during one of these raids that F/O Hugh Wyrill DFC was killed as he was climbing into his aeroplane; Sgt Willins DFM was badly injured. During these first few days at Maison Blanche nine of the Squadron's Beaufighters were written off and others damaged on the ground.

The Beaufighters remaining serviceable continued to fly night patrols, sometimes having to land at Blida because Maison Blanche was unusable due to the bombing. During the day 255 ferried VIPs about North Africa in the Beaufighters, sometimes on dangerous missions near to the Army front line, and it never seems to have been explained why Royal Air Force Command did not have its own air transport! This is an example of the extra duties imposed on the Squadron: On 21st November the AOC, Air Marshal Sir W L Welsh, required to fly from Maison Blanche to Bône⁴, the Allied occupied airfield nearest to the front line. He was flown there by

1 Other accounts suggest that at least some aircraft flew solo on this leg of the journey.

2 Presumed drafting error by the original author – probably should be read as Portugal. See FO371/31179.

3 More probably C47 Skytrains, often mis-described as a DC3 or Dakota by the British.

4 Since renamed Annaba.

W/Cdr Kelly-F/Lt Lammer, and his SASO G/C Long by F/O Cox-F/Sgt Croft, and the escort was six Spitfires. During the course of the flight some idiot was heard over the R/T to disclose the presence of two Beaufighters with Spitfire escort. They landed safely at Bône, but 45 minutes later the airfield was strafed by Bf 109s. Cameron Cox recalls:

"We had been given orders by the CO at Bône that in the event of an attack we were to get the Beaufighters off the ground; naturally the ground crews were in the slit trenches, who can blame them, but the pre-overseas training had taught the 255 navigators how to prime the engines in an emergency, and both Beaufighters took off. Unfortunately, W/Cdr Kelly's aeroplane had a hydraulic pipe shot away, and, after take-off with the fluid spraying all over the fuselage, it was inadvisable to land again at Bône, therefore he flew back and crash landed at Blida. My take-off was quite dramatic, to start with I put down about 15 degrees of flap to clear a burning Spitfire and some trees, but in my hurry to get off the ground I had not checked my seat lock, neither was I strapped in, my seat collapsed, the aeroplane commenced to climb steeply, and I had no control. Fortunately Peter was able to rush forward and lift my seat into the upright position, and I was able to regain control and avoid (just) the fatal stall. After being chased by a 109 and other adventures, we landed again at Bône, collected the AOC and the SASO, and flew back to Maison Blanche."

The day before this episode the Hotel St George was requisitioned as an Officers Mess for Maison Blanche airfield, and then the Hotel de France in the village as the Sergeants Mess; as well, transport belonging to the French Air Force was commandeered to save the aircrews the very long trudge to their aeroplanes laden down with flying kit and parachutes. These and many other considerations were organised by Group Captain D F W Atcherley DFC, whose tireless efforts, together with F/Lt Aldridge, the airfield Engineer Officer, endeavoured to make the best of things for the aircrews and also get the available aeroplanes into the air.

On 22nd November, S/Ldr Brown MBE, the 'Sultan of Sopley', who was a first class ground controller, together with the makings of GCI control, arrived at Maison Blanche. Shortly afterwards F/Lt Dunning-White DFC also turned up with the advance party of 255 ground crews, consisting of F/Sgt Cunningham, and LACs Winter, Barron and Blake, they had with them RDF test equipment. However, there were still no A.I. sets, and, of course, by now 255 were very short of Beaufighters. On the 25th a flight of 89, a very experienced Middle East night fighter squadron possessing Beaufighters equipped with A.I., arrived at Maison Blanche. Led by S/Ldr Passy, they took over the defence of Algiers. By this time 12 aircrews of 255 were standing by to be flown back to the UK to fetch more Beaufighters.

Meanwhile back at Honiley, on the 26th the remaining aircrews and the ground crews entrained for Liverpool, and went aboard SS Maloja. The next day this troopship sailed, and it must be recorded that 255 were complimented by the ship's captain on their excellent behaviour, cleanliness, and neatness while on board, setting such a good example to others. On 7th December, this ship arrived at Algiers, but was then sent along the coast to Bône port, where 255 came ashore and were billeted in a former tobacco factory.

At Maison Blanche, on the 27th, a Flying Fortress arrived with the 255 A.I. sets as part of its cargo, whereupon 50% were immediately handed over to 600 Squadron who had been, in respect of A.I., in the same position as 255. At once sets were fitted to the three remaining 255 serviceable Beaufighters and, under GCI control, fully equipped patrols at night were commenced, if somewhat restricted by the shortage of aeroplanes.

In less than a week the first of the crews who had returned to England, in a DC3 to Gibraltar⁵, and then in a Flying Fortress to Portreath, both manned by American crews, arrived back at Maison Blanche with new Beaufighters. Incidentally, the short cut across SW Spain⁶ on the original flight out had caused an enormous diplomatic furore, and when going through Portreath the second time 255 crews wisely kept their own counsel when the Intelligence Officers implored them not to act like some idiots had a few weeks previously. On arrival at Gibraltar the queue for landing was much less than previously experienced, just as well for P/O Phillips-Sgt Pollard because their undercarriage refused to come down. After an impeccable wheels-up landing on the then small Gibraltar runway, Val Phillips ended up a foot or so from the end. To his astonishment a crane appeared and immediately tipped his Beaufighter over into the sea, packed out with aeroplanes for the North African battles, there was no room on the Rock for any that were unserviceable! At Maison Blanche, it was with great satisfaction that the Squadron, still reduced to only one flight of Beaufighters, took to the air at night on patrol fully equipped, however, by this time the enemy had reduced operations against Algiers, and was bombing further East. On 5th December all available 255 Beaufighters were flown forward to the most advanced Allied airfield in Tunisia, at Souk-el-Arba, defending the port of Bône; there they were gradually joined by further arrivals of new aeroplanes from the UK. Souk was a metal mesh runway built by the Americans; there was no accommodation other than billets in the Arab village, where massive quantities of AL 63⁷ were needed to protect the aircrews, but not before Freddie Lammer⁸, armed only with a torch and a lump of wood, claimed a record 200 bugs destroyed in a one hour operation! To the great relief of 255, and 89 Squadron aircrews, a wealthy local Arab's house was commandeered as a Mess shortly afterwards.

From Souk, on the night of 5th December, 1942, F/O Humes-F/Sgt Sayer opened the score for 255 Squadron in North Africa by shooting down two He 111s, and on the same night F/O Gloster-F/O Oswald followed this by destroying three He 111s. On the 6th, S/Ldr Player-F/Lt Lammer shot down one He 111 and two Cant 1007s, and F/O Cox-F/Sgt Croft one He 111. These successes were under the control of S/Ldr Brown, giving him cause to celebrate his 100th enemy aircraft destroyed as a ground controller. The other remembered GCI controller in North Africa was F/Lt Donald Roebuck ('Donald Duck')⁹.

During the day of the 7th, FW 190s bombed and straffed Souk airfield, but fortunately there were no casualties or damage to the aeroplanes. On the 8th, the aircrews were very pleased

5 Again, more probably a C47 Skytrain. See previous footnote.

6 Again, a suspected drafting error for Portugal. See previous footnote.

7 Standard British military issue Louse Powder.

8 During the second half of the century, Alfred Lammer adopted the spelling "Freddy" as his Anglicised forename. However, during WWII both he and others consistently used the spelling "Freddie". Hence, following advice from his son, that form is used here.

9 There is some doubt about the identity of this officer; he does not appear in the Air Force List.

to welcome F/Sgt Homer and a party of 31 ground crew who had come over from Bône, it was certainly comforting at last to have the Beaufighters properly serviced. They reported that the situation at the Port had become so bad that they were moved at night out to the hills at the back of Bône, where they had a good (and safer) view of the enemy bombing operations; they had still used the tobacco factory as a day headquarters while they continued to unload the Squadron transport and kit.

After experiencing the loss of nine bombers in three nights, not unnaturally there was a 111 in the enemy raids on Bône. However, from the 12th onwards to the 20th further raids were attempted and another seven enemy aircraft were destroyed by the Squadron, four of these by F/O Greaves-W/O Robbins, two by W/Cdr Kelly-F/Lt Lammer and one by F/Sgt Cameron-F/Sgt Hood. During this period there were several more daylight bombing and strafing attacks on Souk airfield, and on one of these, two FW 190s were shot down¹⁰. After this, even the most previously nonchalant of 255 aircrews were seen to be helping frantically with the digging of safety trenches!

By now a tented camp had been erected at Souk, with a marquee for the Mess, and it had become necessary for Cameron Cox, the Camp Commandant, to take part in raids on the Air Stores Park to try to extract from the Store Wallahs the necessary equipment of the camp site, which was no easy task. However, the latrine arrangements were a great success including some magnificent home-made six seaters, which became particularly necessary as the plentiful local produce, including oranges, was having a marked loosening effect on some personnel! Heating water for shaving, and other purposes, in cut down petrol tins filled with sand soaked in petrol was in vogue, but unfortunately this caused some casualties, including Kevin O'Sullivan losing his hair, and Arthur Woolley destroying his, and others, kit by setting fire to his tent!

In the meantime it had been decided that the main Headquarters for the Squadron would be at Sétif, a French Air Force base in Algeria, but the detachment at Souk-el-Arba would be maintained for the continued defence of Bône. On 16th December a tented camp site named Macdonald was established at Sétif, and any surplus personnel at Souk, and the rest of the ground crews at Bône port, with the Squadron's equipment, transport and kit, now unloaded, were posted there. The latter, under command of the Medical Officer, F/Lt Brennan, and the Intelligence Officer, F/O Cracknell, were transported from Bône to Sétif by train. They arrived in an extremely dirty and unkempt condition having spent two days and nights in traditional French railway trucks labelled 'hommes quarantes – chevaux huit's'¹¹, which had recently been used for the movement of cattle!

With all the above arrangements in hand, it will not surprise any old Service hands to learn that on 21st December, Cameron Cox, accompanied by his navigator and a small party of airmen, was sent to Duzzeville, South of Bône, to prospect for yet another landing ground. However, this was probably due to the Souk-el-Arba site having been a sea of muddy water for some days owing to the inclement weather, in fact scrambles only were allowed from

¹⁰ It is presumed these were shot down by anti-aircraft guns of the RAF Regiment, but this is not stated in the Squadron ORB. Such successes did not count towards the Squadron's official total score.

¹¹ Translation from the French: Men 40 – Horses 8.

there. The Duzzeville detachment was billeted on top of concrete wine storage vats. Apparently the inside of the vats were coated with a special substance to prevent the wine soaking away. Needless to say within a very short space of time somebody produced a length of piping to reach the Algerian red wine through the unlocked hatches of the vats, and a good deal was consumed by the detachment.

The site chosen was approved as a landing ground, and application was made to the British Army construction engineers to lay a wire mesh runway. The troops were under the command of Major Tingley, after whom the airfield was eventually named; the Army commenced the task, but due to heavy rain were having some difficulty in completing it. Camp Commandant Cameron Cox recalls:

"I was advised that some aircraft on the Squadron would be arriving in a 'few days' to commence operations from Tingley. I therefore went over to Bône to get a 'Chance Light', essential for night landings. I instructed the RAF driver of the tow vehicle to take it over to Tingley and position it at the end of the runway which would allow aircraft to land into the prevailing wind. Unfortunately the driver chose to drive his 10 tons of vehicle and Chance Light down the new but unfinished runway causing great grooves in the wire mesh. In fairness to the driver it must be recorded that because of the muddy state of the ground it is unlikely that he would have reached the correct position any other way, and he could not be expected to know he would cause such damage. Furthermore, some 500 Airfield Construction Engineers and Pioneer Corps personnel watched him without helping or attempting to stop the slow progress of the Chance Light down the runway. In the meantime, back at Bône, I had completed some other duty, and was waiting outside W/Cdr 'Razz' Berry's office to report, when I heard a hell of a row going on, and was aware that Major Tingley was accusing the RAF of ruining his runway, and wanted the driver court-marshalled. I decided to intervene. Although I had not specifically instructed the driver to proceed down the runway, he had in fact carried out my orders to attempt to position the Chance Light correctly. I entered the office, saluted, and took responsibility for the action of the driver, thereby getting him off the hook and putting myself on it. There was a stunned silence for a moment, and then I was dismissed. I at once took the opportunity to telephone S/Ldr Player and explain the position to him, also to report that, at the moment, Tingley was quite unsuitable for operations. S/Ldr Player sent Peter Dunning-White to Tingley to take over the detachment, who, with his usual charm, and higher rank, was able to salvage the situation. Neither the driver nor I suffered any disciplinary action, because I think it was realised by Major Tingley that in the event of an enquiry the Army would have been embarrassed by the evidence of having just stood by and watched the whole event taking place."

The detachment was at Duzzeville over Christmas, and Peter Dunning-White did a splendid job in organising the chicken Christmas dinner. It was not until some of the detachment

rejoined the Squadron at Sétif on 4th January did they learn that they had fared even better there, with a choice of turkey or steak and kidney pie. It must be mentioned that there were few complaints about the food generally, the basic British front line rations known as "compo", each box containing enough for 14 men for one day, or one man for 14 days, were excellent – especially supplemented by local produce when available. NAAFI was now well established and doing a very good job; the price of local beer (tasting slightly of onions) and brewed by the large Algiers brewery, was 1 franc per bottle when the Allies landed. With the same staff plus a NAAFI manager, the price was soon 6 francs. The going rate was 176 francs to the pound.

Whilst Tingley was being prepared, Souk continued as the forward base for the Squadron. On 26th January a particularly heavy daylight raid by FW 190s destroyed two Beaufighters and damaged two others there, unfortunately on this occasion LAC Owen was killed by shrapnel. All through the month of January 1943 Algeria and Tunisia were cold, wet and windy, but conditions had improved at Tingley, and the runway had been repaired by the Army. On 2nd February Souk-el-Arba was abandoned to the weather, and from then on it was usual to take off from Sétif, complete a Night Flying Test on the way, and remain at Tingley on night readiness, if scrambled, the crew would afterwards land at Sétif, and if not they flew back from Tingley to Sétif at dawn. P/O Stephen beating up the camp site at nought feet was a well-remembered arrival!

Early in 1943, after the recent heavy losses the enemy had experienced in shot down bombers, both Germans and Italians were naturally less keen to cross the Mediterranean at night. Now, many interceptions attempted by the Squadron involved following extreme evasive action by the enemy aircraft, particularly rapid height changes. Another problem faced during defensive patrols was that RAF Bomber Command were now operating from North African bases, and there was many a Wellington or a Bisley intercepted by 255 coming back to its base without showing IFF, and therefore treated by Ground Control as a 'bogey'.

There were even more difficulties when German control in Sardinia discovered the common radio frequency used by the Allies, and were able to listen in. Therefore, quite often as soon as a Beaufighter was given the preliminary vector on to a 'bandit' by the GCI controller, this was communicated to the incoming aircraft which promptly turned tail out of range. Freddie Lammer recalls:

"Flying with Piers Kelly one night, three times we were told that a bandit was approaching and then that it had disappeared, and we decided some ruse was necessary to tempt the bandit to continue. Therefore we reported to Donald Roebuck over the R/T that we were returning to base with engine trouble. Having watched the antics of the bandit on his screen and seeing that we were not actually heading for base, Donald guessed the form. He delayed giving his first instruction to us until the bandit had almost reached Bône, then gave us the first vector, whereupon the bandit dropped its bombs into the sea and went into a series of steep diving turns. It was an extremely difficult interception, and as well the rear gunner hit us with a few bullets, but eventually Piers shot the Ju 88 down into the sea."

All told a further nine enemy aircraft were destroyed and two claimed as damaged by the Squadron during the first quarter of 1943, the confirmed victories were two Cant I007s by P/O Kendall-P/O Hill, and one each by F/O Gloster-P/O Oswald and F/O Tharp-P/O King, one Do 217 each by F/Lt Wright-F/O Sandow and F/Sgt Cameron-F/Sgt Hood and F/O Greaves-W/O Robbins, one He 111 by P/O Phillips-Sgt Pollard, and one Ju 88 by F/O Street-F/Sgt Thomas. Unfortunately, on 6th January, F/O Weston-F/O Hiles were killed in a flying accident.

There was much domestic activity in the Squadron during the first quarter of 1943. On 1st January there was the first pay parade in North Africa, the next day the first mail arrived, later on in January the Squadron soccer team beat 600 Squadron by one goal to nil. Early in February a rest camp was organised for the Squadron at Cap Tichy, 10 miles East of Bougie¹². There were chalets on the beach available for use, but not much sea bathing was attempted because of the inclement weather. On 10th February it snowed at Sétif, and when the ground thawed out the camp site was condemned as malarial. A new site was then established at Ain Arnat, on higher ground. In the meantime entertainment had caught up with the Squadron and films such as 'Rebecca', 'Pardon my Sarong' and 'Mrs Miniver' were enjoyed by all.

In February came the news of the award of the DFC to S/Ldr Player, F/Lt Lammer and F/Os Gloster and Oswald, also in February W/Cdr Kelly was posted to Algiers as W/Cdr Night Operations NWCAF. Due regard should be given to W/Cdr Kelly for his outstanding services to 255 Squadron; before he took over in December 1941 the Squadron losses in flying accidents had been considerable and had included two Commanding Officers and one Flight Commander, the morale of the aircrews had reached its nadir as they attended one funeral after another (which was the Service requirement in those days). Cranwell trained, and with much flying experience in France in 1940 and in the Battle of Britain, Piers Kelly set about the difficult task of rebuilding the Squadron and training the air and ground crews up to the high standard required to be selected for 'Operation Torch'. Then he led them through the initial period of a most successful campaign in North Africa.

W/Cdr Kelly's departure led to S/Ldr Player being appointed CO of the Squadron, and F/Lt Dunning-White as OC B Flight. A week later F/O Greaves and W/O Robbins were also awarded the DFC, about this time W/O J G B Burns, the Squadron Armaments Officer, was commissioned. As well as the changes in command, and following the more settled existence at Sétif, the powers-that-be ordered some drastic changes in the structure of the ground personnel, in fact reducing the establishment. This meant the posting of some friends to No.1 ARU for on-posting to other units, as well, 255 lost their own A.A. defence when P/O Henry and 36 other ranks of the RAF Regiment became No.4351 Flight, attached to Sétif.

'Goodbye Chiefy Curtis, goodbye Wilbur too,
Since we've been in 255 we've been fucked about by you
Your bullshit is a failure, your systems are a farce,
You can stick your fighting 255 right up your fucking arse.'

¹² Since renamed Béjaïa.

By this time there were less and less enemy raids on the Western North African ports, however, the readiness state was maintained by the Squadron protecting Bône and Phillipeville, (GCI had moved to Cap Serrat), and daylight bad weather convoy escorts were also flown. On 19th March a ground party, under Sgt Cornwall, was detached to Bône airfield to prepare for intruder operations; from two days later seven Beaufighters and crews in rotation were sent there from Sétif for intruding over the enemy airfields in Sardinia. There were 73 visits to Sardinia between March and May 1943, but from the Squadron records it appears the results in terms of enemy aircraft destroyed were disappointing¹³. As well, the Squadron lost F/O Humes-F/Sgt Sayer who failed to return from a mission. There were no navigational problems in operating over Sardinia as the blackout was poor, and GCI control from Cap Serrat stretched a good distance. Many enemy aircraft were seen and on occasions fired at, and F/O Gloster-Sgt Wall claimed a twin engined E/A damaged over Decimomannu, and F/O Cox-Sgt Madge also claimed one Ju 88 and one other twin engined E/A damaged over Villacidro, there were one or two other claims of damaged E/As during the Sardinia intruding of which the Squadron record is not very clear. No doubt, however, the 255 intruder activity interfered a good deal with enemy bomber operations from Southern Sardinia, kept German and Italian heads down, and seriously interrupted their night flying operations on occasions. As well as attacking enemy bombers returning to their home airfields, the Squadron beat up hangars and aircraft on the ground with cannon fire, and at one time 2 x 250lb bombs were fitted to racks on the Beaufighters for dropping on to the runways of the airfields in Sardinia.

In April the Squadron also undertook patrols in the Sicilian Straits on the lookout for Ju 52 transports. On the 13th, responding to a plea from the Navy, nine Beaufighters from the Squadron, in three flights of three, carried out daylight operations protecting a convoy from German torpedo bombers. Two of the flights got in amongst the attackers with splendid results, F/O Gloster-F/Sgt Wall shot down one Do 217, F/O Humphreys-Sgt Robertson destroyed one Ju 88 and claimed another as damaged, F/O Greaves-W/O Robbins claimed one Ju 88 as a probable and one as damaged, P/O O'Sullivan-Sgt W G Hood claimed a He 111 as damaged, and F/O Street-F/Sgt Thomas also claimed one Ju 88 as damaged. Unfortunately, F/O Street-F/Sgt Thomas failed to return from this sortie. As well as all this very busy activity the Squadron sent detachments to other parts, at one stage right back to Maison Blanche to help out 153 Squadron, also the Squadron operated from Souk-el-Khemis and from 'Paddington'¹⁴. It was while on detachment to 153 that F/O Tharp-P/O King went missing. Later on in April F/O Kendall-F/Sgt Talbot shot down another Ju 88.

Nearly 50 years on, the recording of the geographical movements of the Squadron is not helped by the chap writing up the Form 540 in 1943 suddenly, and probably by orders of the Group, substituting the expression "in the field" instead of the Squadron's actual whereabouts! This ploy, presumably, was designed to baffle the enemy in case the records were captured, but it certainly adds to the problems of future historians! It can be read that

13 Only aircraft attacked in the air should have counted towards the Squadron's official total.

14 Presumed drafting error in the original; Paddington was the codename of the temporary airfield at Souk-el-Khemis. TNA:AIR27/1518/54 (Forms 541 for the second half of April 1943) shows sorties from Sétif, Bone and Paddington.

'in the field' on 21st April, 1943, there was torrential rain and thunderstorms all day, the camp site (Sétif?)¹⁵ was flooded out; and the anti-mosquito campaign commenced. Also on that day F/O Kendall and P/O Hill were awarded the DFC, and Lt Bugge and Lt Bjorn of the Norwegian Air Force joined the Squadron.

The end of the ground war in North Africa on 13th May 1943 saw the surrender of General von Arnim¹⁶ at Tunis. With the probability of a move to another war zone, a new appreciation of 255 Squadron aircrew requirements was due. As well as the changes previously recorded, many of the pilots and navigators were now tour expired having completed 18 months on operations, or, in some instances much longer. For example, Charlie Hill, a former Battle of Britain air-gunner flying in 141 Squadron Defiants, and then on 255 re-mustering as a radio-observer, had by this time probably completed a three year operational tour, and fully deserved his DFC, as well as being lucky to be still alive. Doubtless the tour expiry situation had been anticipated by the Squadron because of the influx of new crews enabling the tour expired chaps to return to the UK for posting to staff jobs or Training Command, before commencing the next tour of ops.

Not only were changes in the aircrew of the Squadron taking place, but very importantly there was a change in the type A.I. to be used in the Beaufighters. Dear old Mark IV was all very well, and had done sterling service for night fighters during the last two and a half years, however, it was useless at low heights when the massive signal received from land or sea returns obliterated the signal of the aircraft being intercepted, even at 20,000 ft the maximum range did not exceed four miles. By contrast the narrow rotating 10 centimetre beam from Mark VIII, and later the American Mark X, gave a maximum range of eight miles at all heights above land or sea, which was a revolutionary advance for the Squadron. A specialist team from NWCAF, led by P/O Roger Kirkham, arrived to install the Mark VIII sets, and an instructional film was seen by all crews.

When the radar team commenced work it was discovered that some vital parts of the Mark VIII sets were in short supply, so S/Ldr Eliot and F/Lt Lammer were despatched to the UK to collect some more which obviously were urgently required. Freddie Lammer recalls:

"We were given a Beaufighter (whose A.I. apparently seemed u/s), and flew to Gibraltar. Having refuelled we took off from Gibraltar in the early hours of 28th May and flew right across Spain¹⁷ at 15,000 ft. When we reached the Bay it was broad daylight, and Hugh decided to come down to nought feet to try to escape detection from the Ju 88's based in SW France, this was a safer height but fuel consumption increased enormously. When we reached our ETA over the Scilly Isles, England was shrouded in thick mist, and we could not see whether we were over land or sea. By this time the outer fuel tanks had shown empty for some time, and there was precious little left in the inner tanks. We decided to fly NE and then E, and pray, as all fuel tanks were now

15 This suggestion of Sétif in the original appears actually to refer to the tented camp at Ain Arnat.

16 Colonel General Hans-Jürgen von Arnim, 1889-1962, commander of Axis forces in Tunisia after first Rommel and then Kesselring had been recalled to Europe.

17 This reference to over-flight of Spain is believed to be accurate.

showing empty. In desperation I switched on the A.I. and to my amazement and joy I found I could see a Mother homing beacon, I directed Hugh to fly towards it and then through a hole in the mist we glimpsed Lundy Island below, then the mist cleared and we saw an airfield dead ahead. Although control requested us to go round again because of workmen on the runway, Hugh put the Beaufighter straight down on the grass at Chivenor Naval Base; later the refuelling crew reported that our tanks were completely empty! We had a passenger on board, a F/Lt Barber, and it was ironic that because he had no means of plugging in to the intercom, he was quite ignorant of the high drama Hugh and I had experienced, and how near he had been to disaster."

After the return of Eliot and Lammer with the vital parts, the installation of Mark VIII progressed quickly, and as well, some brand new Beaufighters, already equipped with Mark VIIIs commenced to arrive from the UK.

Although the ground war in North Africa ended in May, the war in the air continued, and 255 maintained a full readiness state at Paddington and at Monastir, South of Sousse, on the East coast of Tunisia. As well as defence patrols and scrambles, intruding was also carried out, and F/O Kendall-P/O Nedahl claimed one Ju 88 destroyed¹⁸ and three damaged on the ground at Villacidro in Sicily. Towards the end of May there was a resumption of enemy attacks on Tunis and Bizerta, when the Squadron were again successful in the defence of these ports which were vital for the continuing of the Allied war effort. Altogether in May a total of six enemy aircraft were destroyed and one claimed as a probable and three as damaged, of those confirmed F/O Phillips-F/Sgt Pollard shot down one, F/O Kendall-P/O Nedahl -two, and F/O O'Sullivan-Sgt W G Hood three.

As an example of a combat report, two of the Kevin O'Sullivan-Wally Hood¹⁹ battles have been selected for inclusion in this history:

"On patrol for 'Mixture' at 10,000 ft, went over to 'Spongebag' who reported 5-10 bogeys heading for Bizerta. Vectors given and A.I. Contact obtained at 8,000 ft, reduced height to 6,000 ft. Closed rapidly to 3,000 ft and identified Ju 88 by silhouette against light sky in West, closed to 80-100 yds a little below and dead astern; gave a one second burst with all guns and starboard engine of E/A immediately burst into flames. As Ju 88 broke away to port rear gunner opened fire without hitting Beaufighter. The visual was lost but contact held through E/A evasive action, closed in again and at 1,500 ft a further visual was obtained, flame and smoke could be seen coming from starboard engine. E/A was doing tight turns and lost height to 4,000 ft. A full deflection one second burst was given at 60 yds range when E/A's port engine exploded and strikes were seen on fuselage. E/A went down straight into the sea and disappeared, no one was seen to bail out. Nav/rad found he had another contact at 4,000 ft range above and well to starboard closed to 2,000

18 Only aircraft attacked in the air should have counted towards the Squadron's official total.

19 Flight Sergeant W G Hood.

ft and identified Ju 88 by silhouette against lighter W sky. At 100 yds range from dead astern and slightly below a two second burst was given from all guns. E/A's starboard engine exploded and strikes seen on fuselage. E/A went straight down into the sea and on the way down two more explosions were seen in the engine. After following another bogey for 80 miles without catching up, and also chasing a friendly, resumed patrol and then returned to base. Weather cloudless, two cannons did not fire due to dust in breech. CLAIM: Two Ju 88s destroyed."

Unfortunately there was a prang about this time when F/O Ward-F/Sgt Marsden, with passenger AC Hogan, had to force land at Ain Messaud due to engine failure, at the time they were stooing around waiting for the early morning mist to clear from Sétif. In the middle of May came the rumour of the possibility of a move for the Squadron when S/Ldr Eliot, accompanied by Camp Commandant Cameron Cox, visited La Sebala to prospect for a suitable camp site. They were successful, and on the 19th Cpl Fisher and an advance party of 13 airmen proceeded there, closely followed by F/Sgt Ennor with the water bowser. On the 21st came the first readiness state there, and by the 31st Ain Arnat had been cleared and 255 was established at La Sebala. The farewell to Sétif had been celebrated by dances in the Officers, the Sergeants and the Airmen's Messes, and one can be sure the local girls, accompanied by their families, had a good time, if only for the eating. It is hard to believe that some 255 chaps did not find a way round the strict chaperone system prevailing at the time! Incidentally, nobody with any service experience will be surprised to learn that many of the 255 airmen posted to No.1 ARU in March were posted back to the Squadron in May, as well as some new faces.

In June, from La Sebala, the flying beat for the Squadron was defensive patrolling of Bizerta-Tunis-Sousse with visits over Pantellaria from time to time before its capitulation on the 11th. Up to 10 patrols of about three hours each were flown on most nights, but there was not a lot of enemy activity but plenty of returning Bomber Command aircraft to be carefully inspected and passed through. Nevertheless there was the occasional battle and three Cant 1007s were shot down during the month, one each by W/Cdr Player-F/Lt Lammer, F/Sgt W C Phillips-Sgt C P Smith and Lt Bugge-Sgt Robertson. It was reported continually by the pilots that the German boffins had stepped up both R/T interference and A.I. jamming.

At La Sebala there was really more going on at ground level than in the air. On 11th June, Doc Brennan, the 'Benny Goodman of 255 Squadron' was posted to HQ NWACAF, and Doc Reeves arrived to replace him; soon after F/O Sexton also left. On the 17th there was a parade for the visit of King George VI, accompanied by the Secretary of State for Air, and Air Chief Marshal Tedder; W/Cdr Player DFC was presented to His Majesty. On the 20th F/Sgts Talbot, Wall and J L Hood were commissioned, and the following were Mentioned in Despatches - F/Lt P C Wright, F/Sgts Homer and Harding, Sgt Bean and Cpl Hall. Religion was well looked after at La Sebala with Church Services conducted by S/Ldr Soutt for C of E, and Mass for Roman Catholics by S/Ldr Donaghue. ENSA had arrived in Tunis, and parties of all ranks were taken to see arguably the finest cabaret yet put on for the troops including Leslie Henson, Beatrice Lillie, Vivien Leigh, Dorothy Dickson, Richard Haydon, Kay Young and Mae Craven. Unfortunately, on the 27th F/Sgt Scroggs was killed in a flying accident 15 miles from Sétif.

There were not many chances of combat in July, in fact there were many more interceptions of Wellingtons returning from bombing raids on Sicily than on enemy aircraft. On one night visuals were reported on 16 Wellingtons in one three hour patrol! However, there were two victories for the Squadron when on the 3rd P/O Lewis-P/O Hurley shot down a Ca 1007, and on the 31st when F/Sgt Cameron-P/O J L Hood bagged a Ju 88. Early in the month a signal arrived from the AOC, Vice Marshal Sir Hugh Pughe Lloyd, as follows:

"Please convey my heartfelt congratulations to all concerned for the magnificent performance in protecting the Eastbound 26 ship convoy through your dangerous sector. This reflects great credit on all concerned. Well done."

Incidentally, the AOC of 242 Group, of which 255 was part, was Air Commodore K B B ('Bing') Cross.

During the month F/O Ward was welcomed back from hospital, S/Ldr Dunning-White DFC was posted to HQ NWACAF tour expired and F/Lt Graham was promoted to S/Ldr and assumed command of B Flight; soon after this W/Cdr Player DFC relinquished command of the Squadron and S/Ldr Eliot DFC was expected to take over. The first issue of the Squadron newspaper 'Beau Gen' was published. Unfortunately on the 4th Sgt D Griffiths was killed in a crash landing five miles east of La Sebala, he was buried in the British Cemetery at La Borgal, near Tunis. The navigator, Sgt Hilliard, was unhurt. Returning from an operational patrol F/O Kendall DFC crashed two and a half miles south west of La Sebala, neither he nor P/O Talbot was hurt.

On 10th July 1943, Sicily was invaded by the Allies – 'Operation Husky'. It was business as usual for 255 Squadron flying defensive patrols, but there was very little activity on the Tunis coast area, and soon the Squadron was patrolling the coast of Sicily as well. The Squadron was warned to be 'on top line for a move to fresh fields' and the main effort on the ground was to prepare for this. A new personnel establishment had been ordered by Group, in effect reversing practically all the changes in ground crew manning since Honiley! New postings came flooding in, including three Sergeant Pilots. S/Ldr Eliot DFC was confirmed as W/Cdr OC the Squadron, and F/O Greenland was promoted to F/Lt on becoming Nav/rad leader. Outwards to No.1 ACPD tour expired, went many of the original aircrew on the strength at Honiley, including W/Cdr Player, F/Lt Gloster, F/Os Cox, O'Sullivan, W/O Biggs and F/Sgt W G Hood as well as F/Lt Campbell, F/Os Davey, Goucher, Kane and Bullock and W/O Whitby.

On 1st August F/O Roker and 17 other ranks departed for Sicily as the advance party for the Squadron's next base. After passing through 'Arizona' staging post on the 4th, they left for the docks at La Goulette and embarked on the 5th, arriving at Palermo a day later. By the 8th they had arrived at Bo Rizzo, midway between Trapani and Marsala, where they set about preparing a camp site. They also established an emergency landing ground at Castel Vetrano. On the 11th, after the 5am reveille, the main party did their last minute packing and two officers and 160 other ranks, with 41 vehicles and nine trailers left La Sebala and set off along the same route. They embarked on the 14th and eventually sailed as part of a convoy,

reaching Palermo on the 16th after an uneventful journey except for the considerable rolling habits of LST 325. This vessel carried other service personnel as well as 255, but the six cooks of the Squadron supplied food for all 340 bods on the LST.

Whilst all this was going on the Squadron was still on readiness at La Sebala II, in fact at this time F/O Humphreys-Sgt Robertson destroyed a Ju 88, P/O Lewis-P/O Hurley claimed a damaged Ju 88, and F/O Giles-F/Sgt Drake shot down a Cant 1007. The much depleted ground staff of the Squadron continued to maintain a very high level of serviceability, working extremely long hours; the aircrews shared a combined Mess of about 60. As a final gesture of farewell to Africa, 255 beat the American 415th Squadron at baseball! On the 17th August, 1943, 18 Beaufighters of 255 Squadron flew to Bo Rizzo, followed by the rear party in 12 DC3s²⁰, and on the next night provided a readiness state during which eight patrols were flown. Entry into the new war zone was confirmed when francs were collected in exchange for BMA lire.

In North Africa 255 Squadron had shot down 42 enemy aircraft and claimed two probably destroyed and 13 damaged. The full total for the Squadron since being re-formed in November 1940 was 53 destroyed with claims for five probably destroyed and 26 damaged.

Operations from the new Station commenced well for the Squadron with one Ju 88 being shot down, as well as a claim for one probably destroyed, by F/O Giles-F/Sgt Drake, and one shot down by F/O Leppard-P/O Houghton. Later on one SM 84 was destroyed by F/O Phillips-F/Sgt Pollard. Unfortunately there was a tragic end to a training flight when Sgt Lennards and Sgt Rastall were killed when they crashed into a hill; they were buried in the British Cemetery at Marsala. Bo Rizzo was visited by the AOC NWCAF and the AOC 328 Wing, but what the lads really wanted was a visit from the postman! After much effort by the Adjutant, some mail did arrive at last on 28th August. At this time a bomb disposal unit was attached to the Squadron for the removal of the many bombs from the airfield. The weather was changing, and on the 29th a heavy storm collapsed many tents and soaked the contents. The runway was in a mess, but the Squadron managed to continue a readiness state and in fact on this and most nights flew eight or nine patrols.

After the Allied landings on the 'toe' of Italy on 3rd September, the Squadron's main role shifted to the defence of the Salerno landings, and later of Naples, and this is where it found plenty of trade. During the struggle at the Salerno beach-head, 'Operation Avalanche', the number of sorties flown increased to 12-15 per night, and on the nights of 7th, 8th, 9th and 11th September the Squadron destroyed a total of nine enemy aircraft, and claimed one damaged. F/O Giles-F/Sgt Drake shot down one Do 217, F/O Berry-F/O Watson one Me 210 and one Ju 88, F/Sgt Hale-Sgt D C Cooper one He 111, F/O Leppard-F/O Houghton one Ju 88, W/Cdr Eliot-F/O Barker one Me 210, F/O Gunn-P/O G H Carter one Ju 88, F/O Brook-F/Lt Greenland one Ju 88, and S/Ldr Graham-Sgt G P Smith one Do 217 and also claimed one Ju 88 damaged.

There was chaos in the air over the Naples-Capri area, at one time freelance patrols were flown because 'Adlux' control, operating from LST 305, just could not cope with the number

²⁰ Again, probably C47 Skytrains mistaken for DC3s.

of aeroplanes milling around there. Pilots even reported visuals on FW 190s, and complained of recognition problems because of the similarity between the Mitchell and the Do 217, with very little help from control. As well the German boffins were hard at work interfering with the Allied R/T channel, and 'window' was being dropped by enemy aircraft, although F/O Watson said this was no problem on his screen because the 'window' blip was short and fat and easily distinguishable from an aircraft blip. F/O Humphreys complained of being shot at by a 600 Squadron Beaufighter, on investigation it was discovered that the two Squadrons were using different types of IFF, which was hardly likely to help identification by control. Another problem was the high speed of the Me 210s which were impossible to catch up with after they had dropped their bomb load.

Unfortunately there were casualties during this period, on the 11th S/Ldr Graham-Sgt G P Smith were posted missing after it was reported they had gone down into the sea 16 miles SE of Licosa Point. After his combat later that night F/O Brook reported an engine failure and loss of height; he and F/Lt Greenland bailed out off Licosa Point. After some hours in the water F/O Brook was rescued by a hospital ship, but F/Lt Greenland was posted missing.

Although there was less trade about in the latter half of September and in October, when low cloud and torrential rain were often experienced, Group still expected constant patrolling of the west coast of Italy, which meant 220 miles to fly before the patrol line Naples-Ischia-Salerno-Naples was reached. With the longer hours of darkness in the Autumn, and the casualties suffered, 255 was finding it difficult to cope with these demands, and on 15th October a detachment from 219 Squadron arrived to help out. From then on six aeroplanes of each Squadron were on readiness every night.

Soon the weather interfered with standing patrols, and on certain nights it was scrambles only from Bo Rizzo. During this period there was almost constant interference of the R/T by the German boffins. On the 16th F/O Brook rejoined the Squadron, but on the 26th during a NFT, W/O Cotterill went into the sea 10 miles west of Cap San Vito, both he and P/O Nedahl were posted missing. It is thought he collided in cloud with F/O Ward, whose aeroplane was damaged, but he and F/Sgt Marsden were unhurt.

One of the ex-Honiley members of the Squadron, F/O Roker, was posted in October to HQ 242 Group, and F/Sgt Hopkins and LAC Ronald, having been granted commissions in the A&SD Branch, went to HQ NWAAF at La Marsa, and F/Sgts Drake and Robertson and Sgts Hilliard and Minett, attended a Commissions Board at HQ 325 Wing. One 255 navigator, F/O Johnson, found time to write and produce a melodrama entitled "Ffoiled Again, Ffuck it"²¹.

After the glories of early September, the three months of October to December were disappointing in respect of Squadron victories, only three Ju 88s were destroyed, two by F/O Berry-F/O Watson south of the Volturno River, and the other by P/O McEwan-F/O R H Lewis north of Naples. During this quarter of 1943 there were awards for the Squadron and some more casualties. Another move was made with the usual Squadron efficiency, this time to mainland Italy, and was much welcomed by the Squadron to be nearer to any possible action.

21 It is not known whether or not the use of the double-F harked back to the Squadron's Welsh origins in WW1.

The weather in early October was terrible with many severe rainstorms, and for a time there were no standing patrols, and only scrambles which amounted to about two per night. Nearly all the bogeys turned out to be friendly bombers without their IFF switched on. In the second half of the month the weather improved and standing patrols were resumed to the extent of about six per night.

According to Squadron records the mail situation was always bad in Sicily; as well there was a shortage of letter cards for sending home. This situation improved when the Squadron moved to Italy. When F/Lt Greenland was lost, F/O Barker was promoted to F/Lt on becoming Nav/rad leader. The Squadron soccer team was playing plenty of matches, including beating Marsala by 2 goals to 1.

The advance party of the move to the mainland was commanded by F/Lt P C Wright, and with two other officers, 96 other ranks, 14 vehicles, 7 trailers and 2 motorcycles it arrived at Grottaglie, near Taranto, on 9th November, and there proceeded to set up a camp site. The Squadron continued with a readiness state at Bo Rizzo until the 13th and then flew the Beaufighters to Grottaglie, becoming part of 286 Wing, 242 Group, and made six defensive patrols that very night; two Beaufighters were pranged en route but there were no casualties. Also on this day the very successful crew F/O Berry-F/O Watson had the highly undesirable experience of being involved in a prang at Al Aounina whilst being flown as passengers to Group, tour expired; the pilot was F/O Sparg, there were no injuries.

On the 14th the main party left Bo Rizzo, consisting of three officers, 159 other ranks, 24 vehicles, 5 trailers and 2 motorcycles. Apparently at Messina they had to spend the night in 'a concentration camp atmosphere' behind barbed wire, and with guards patrolling all night. On the other side of the wire a large number of prostitutes were offering themselves, and many scroungers were after food and anything else they could persuade the airmen to part with. The crossing was delayed by bad weather in the Straits of Messina, and also by the bureaucratic action of the authorities questioning the Squadron's many 'requisitioned' vehicles. Because of this delay the main party took seven days to complete the journey; in the meantime the rear party of 25 airmen, under F/Sgt Ennor, had cleared up and left Bo Rizzo.

For the first few days in Italy the weather was so bad that flying was cancelled, however, the soccer team carried on, winning against 2865 LAA Squadron by 2 goals to 1. F/Lt P C (Wilbur) Wright had no sooner arrived at Grottaglie than he was posted to HQ 325 Wing; he had been Engineer Officer of the Squadron since May 1941. His replacement was F/O Laver from 113 MU. Soon after this Sgt Shaw and 30 airmen were sent to Pomigliano to prepare for the servicing of aircraft there, and to set up a camp site. Pomigliano was selected as an airfield near enough to Naples for defensive scrambles rather than constant patrolling. From Grottaglie the remainder of the Squadron would be protecting Taranto, as well as Bari and Brindisi on the other coast. On the 29th the Squadron commenced a series of exercises with the Navy. HMS Spartan was the ship involved.

On 1st December came official notification of the awards mentioned earlier, W/Cdr Player DFC received the DSO, W/Cdr Kelly the DFC, F/Lt Lammer and F/O Kendall bars to their DFCs, and

F/Lt P C Wright was Mentioned in Despatches; at the same time F/Sgt Pollard was commissioned. On the 3rd came the first night of readiness at Pomigliano, but there was not much activity by the enemy on the west coast of Italy at this time, a little more on the east coast over Bari. The Squadron was undertaking some daylight bad weather patrols over convoys, and bitterly complaining about the flak from the Royal Navy escort ships coming up even though all the correct identification procedures were carried out by the Beaufighters. During December there was a fatal prang at Grottaglie during take-off, when F/O Coggins and F/O Beckett were killed. F/O Lewis experienced the loss of a propeller while on patrol over Naples, but made an excellent one engine landing, both he and F/O Hurley were unhurt.

The second Christmas overseas was celebrated by the Squadron with a 'stupendous feast' at 17.00 hours, there was turkey and port and fruit and wine purchased locally. In accordance with RAF tradition the Airmen were first served by the Officers and senior NCOs; afterwards there was a variety show put on by members of the Squadron including a male voice choir, and a jolly time was had by all. Unfortunately the Squadron soccer team was knocked out of the (AVM) Cross Cup by 242 Group, having reached the semi-final.

The year 1944 opened with a severe thunderstorm which practically wrecked the camp at Grottaglie, after this there was heavy rain and high winds for some time, quite unfit for flying. There were no standing patrols, and, as the Squadron had perfected the four minute scramble, and was near enough to most possible activity to get there in a short space of time, patrolling was not considered necessary until the weather improved. Unfortunately, during the comparatively small amount of flying undertaken there were some bad prangs. F/Sgt R D Kelly and Sgt T W Waters were both killed when their Beaufighter crashed on take-off from Grottaglie, and on 8th January when limited patrolling had recommenced, F/Sgt Luckhurst and W/O Poulton were both killed when their aeroplane crashed two miles NNE of Alberobello. This was due to an engine failure, and the propeller not feathering. They were buried in Taranto cemetery. On the 20th F/Sgt Hewitt was taking off from Pomigliano for an operational patrol when the Beaufighter swung to starboard, and crashed into a Mustang, Hewitt broke an ankle, but F/Sgt Williams was unhurt. Even now, due to the inclement weather continuing, patrolling at night was limited to about four each from Grottaglie and Pomigliano.

During January F/O J Ward was promoted to F/Lt, and commissions came through for F/Sgts Minett, Marsden and Hilliard. The Squadron soccer team was having problems, for example on the 8th losing 2-3 to 286 Wing. On the 11th the Squadron pantomime was put on, and there was a repeat performance on the 12th. It was 'Jack and the Beanstalk', with dialogue by F/O Johnson, lyrics by LAC Mayor, and was produced by F/O Cracknell, who also played the part of the Fairy Queen. On the 14th 'A' Flight ground crews were entertained to dinner by the aircrew. On the 16th came the first news of a move from Grottaglie to Foggia Main, and on the 20th the advance party made its way there. Originally it was planned for all ranks to be housed in flats local to the airfield, but on inspection it was found they were not fit for habitation, the Adjutant, the SWO, and members of the PSI Committee confirmed this, and voted unanimously that it was preferable to live under canvas in spite of the inclement weather, therefore a permanent camp site was prepared.

The first night of readiness at Foggia was on 22nd January, but there was no flying due to the

bad weather, and there was bad and good news over the next few nights when there was flying. F/O Giles-F/O Johnson were fired at over Naples by an aircraft thought to be a Ju 88, and had to crash land at Pomigliano, the crew were unhurt but the Beaufighter was Category B2. F/Lt Ward developed engine trouble, due to oil loss, over Naples, and also crash landed at Pomigliano. Ward and F/Sgt Taffs were unhurt, but the Beaufighter burnt out, category E.

On the 24th there was a revival of enemy activity, no doubt due to the Allied landing at Anzio, and there were 11 sorties that night from Pomigliano. F/O Gunn-F/O G H M Carter claimed two Ju 88s damaged, this claim was later stepped up by Control to one destroyed and one damaged. F/O Giles-F/O Johnson, back in the air again, destroyed a Do 217, and F/Sgt Scollan-P/O Minett shot down two He 177s. On the 29th W/Cdr Eliot-F/O Barker destroyed a Do 217, and F/O Bretherton, newly arrived on the Squadron, and flying as a passenger under instruction, standing behind his CO, was a witness to this combat. Actually, this was the last flying from Pomigliano by 255, because the airfield was then taken over by 416th Squadron, USAAF. On the last day of January the Squadron was sad to have to say goodbye to F/O Cracknell, the Intelligence Officer; 'Crackers' had been with the Squadron since 31st October 1941 and had done a tremendous job. He was posted to a F/Lt position at 338 Wing. Awards of the DFC to P/Os Cameron and J L Hood came through; the Africa Star was distributed to over 90% of Squadron personnel.

There was very little action for 255 Squadron in February 1944, and due to the bad weather there were few patrols, but there was quite a lot of activity on the ground. The aircrew of 'B' Flight gave a dinner to their ground crew, which was much enjoyed by all. At last, two Nissan huts were acquired, one of which was allocated for dispersal, and the other became the Airmen's Mess. During the month W/Cdr Eliot became tour expired and W/Cdr C L W Stewart AFC was posted in from 256 Squadron to replace him, F/Lt Cunningham arrived as Senior Nav/rad. F/Lt Ward was posted to No.3 ACPD, tour expired, F/Os Gunn and McGugan were promoted to F/Lt, and F/Sgt Drake was commissioned. There were two flying accidents during the month, F/O Jones was ferrying a Beaufighter from Blida to Foggia when the aeroplane developed serious icing-up with subsequent failure of instruments, he bailed out but landed badly and broke his back. Then F/O Skidmore crashed when doing his circuits and bumps, but only suffered shock, S/Ldr Wells was involved in a MT accident, and was admitted to hospital.

March 1944 saw more aircrew changes, several became tour expired and eight new crews were posted in, therefore some instructional flying and interception practice was attempted, but this was hampered by the bad weather. By now Foggia airfield had been u/s for days because of the rain, in fact was under water, a detachment of 255 was sent to Amendola in order that defensive operations could be carried out if necessary; during the latter part of the month night cover was provided over the Island of Vis. During March DFCs came through for F/Lt V G J Phillips, F/Os Berry and Watson, and P/O Pollard. F/Lt Murfin, Squadron Adjutant since 17th November 1941, was posted and F/Lt W Duckworth took over. On Sunday 12th March there was a Church Service in the Airmen's Mess conducted by the Wing Padre S/Ldr Kelly. After much searching a suitable place for a rest camp was found on the seashore at Manfredonia, a marquee and tents and a cookhouse were transported there, and the system was inaugurated for a six day stay for those interested. As well, proper leave was introduced,

and the Toc H hostels at Taranto and Bari were used for this purpose. Apart from one or two cases of influenza the health of the Squadron was said to be very good. At the end of the month the Officers and Senior NCOs gave a dinner to the Airmen of the HQ and Maintenance Flight.

In the first part of April the Squadron carried out about four patrols each night but with no trade showing up. However, for some time Group had been worrying about low level German recce aircraft flying along the coast, and the Squadron, from the 10th of the month on, spent much time in the air chasing these bandits. On the night of the 12th S/Ldr Arnsby-P/O Hyett shot down this Ju 88 into the sea, much of the interception being at 50ft! On the 17th another Ju 88 was destroyed by F/O Pinks-F/Sgt Noble. The patrols over Vis continued but there were no engagements in this sector. The Squadron were pleased to receive the following signal from the AOC 242 Group:

"Well done 255, not a single accident recorded against you in March."

It was in April that F/Sgt Borthwick and F/O Morris had to bail out when both engines failed five miles out to sea. Borthwick came down safely on land, but Morris went into the sea and was posted missing. Fourteen days later his body was washed ashore, and he was buried at Foggia with full military honours. The Squadron spent many flying hours searching for any sign of Morris but without any luck, however, during this searching F/Lt McLaren-F/O Tozer found a dinghy full of survivors of a crashed Wellington, who were eventually picked up. During the month Air Marshal Sir John Slessor KCB visited Foggia, and as well, the Group Senior Medical Officer visited the 255 camp site and expressed approval. The Squadron soccer team was doing well, having drawn their Cup match with 242 Group 0-0, in the replay they won 3-1. An interesting talk on Pompeii was given by LAC Plunkett. On the 12th notification came through of the award of the DFC to F/Lt Giles and P/O Drake.

As previously reported, March had been free of aircraft accidents, but April, unfortunately, was not so good. On the 13th W/O Hewitt, ferrying a Beaufighter to Grottaglie, force landed at Gioia del Colle, due to engine trouble. A passenger, Sgt Backhouse, was trapped for some time in the crashed aeroplane, but luckily it did not catch fire and he escaped with only a sprained ankle. Then on the 27th, F/Sgt Rushworth suffered a fractured skull when he had to force land half a mile north east of Canosa, Sgt Blundell was uninjured. However, enquiries into these two incidents, published later, found both pilots exonerated from blame.

On 27th April, a Wellington taking off from Foggia burst its starboard tyre. It swung off the runway and caught fire, its 6 x 500lb bombs blew up and this spread fragments of burning material over a wide area, resulting in two other parked Wellingtons catching fire and burning out; 255 Squadron joined the rest of the airmen clearing the runway of debris. Also on the 27th two old hands of the Squadron were posted away, F/Sgt Madge, the last remaining aircrew member of the Squadron ex-Honiley, was posted to No 3 ACPD. Dennis Madge deserves high praise as a navigator who never seemed to have a regular pilot, but was called upon to fly with all sorts when required. Another ex-Honiley member, F/Lt Grouser, the Radar Signals Officer, was posted to Group. The weather continued to be most inclement at Foggia, and because of this the Squadron sports day was cancelled.

In May, a total of 153 operational patrols were flown, usually lasting two to three hours, but were mostly uneventful, and the only score was one Ju 88 shot down by F/Lt Pinks-F/Sgt Noble. The patrols covered convoy escort work, searchlight co-op, and visiting Vis Island and the Gargano promontory. Towards the end of the month intruder sorties over Yugoslavia were commenced. On the 16th it was learned that a former CO W/Cdr Eliot DFC had been awarded the DSO, and his navigator, F/Lt A Barker, the DFC, on the same day F/Sgt H J Taffs was commissioned. At last the Squadron sports day meeting took place in the Foggia Stadium, the AOC 242 Group presented the prizes, then in the final of the 242 Group soccer cup, the Squadron beat 2864 Squadron RAF Regiment. During the month all personnel were re-vaccinated and inoculated where necessary.

The most important news received by the Squadron in June was of the D-Day landing in Normandy on the 6th. More locally, came the news of the entry of Allied troops into Rome. For the third month in succession F/Lt Pinks-F/Sgt Noble shot down a Ju 88, and also in June F/Sgt D Fisher-W/O Walsh and F/Sgt Burnett-F/O Booth each destroyed a Ju 88, and as well W/O G R Smith-P/O Taffs claimed one Ju 88 damaged. All these combats were with low flying recce aircraft. Other action by the Squadron was in intensive intruder operations over Yugoslavia, entry into that country was over Šibenik and Split, and the area Belgrade, Zara²² and Split were well covered. Trucks and trains were destroyed or damaged, and as well there were visits to the Danube where barges and E-boats were attacked.

During June, the Squadron was informed of a change of establishment from LWE/MAAF/23a to LWE/MAAF/2209, which meant an increase in personnel and equipment, however the new category was not considered enough by the Squadron to operate from more than one Station, eventually 41 new ground staff were posted in. During the month there was an absolute flood of awards for 255 people or former members, S/Ldr P H V Wells received the DSO, and also was Mentioned in Despatches. S/Ldr J Arnsby received the DFC, and F/Lt P C Wright the MBE, F/Lts A Barker, J Ward and S Cracknell were also Mentioned in Despatches; commissions came through for F/Sgts D B Williams, M A Wingham and D C E Cooper. It was very hot in June with the Foggia campsite temperature well over 100°F, and the rest camp on the coast was never more popular.

July 1944 was a most successful month for 255 Squadron. On the first night of the month F/O Reynolds-P/O Wingham shot down a Ju 88, and on the 2nd S/Ldr Patten-Sgt Blundell destroyed another. Then on the nights of the 6/7th the Squadron got amongst the Ju 87s dive bombing the Army at Ancona. F/O Bretherton-F/O Johnson shot down three, S/Ldr McLaren-F/O Tozer - one, F/O Reynolds-P/O Wingham - two, F/O Bretherton-F/Lt Cunningham - one, and F/Sgt T G Griffiths-F/Sgt Kimberley claimed one damaged. These super results produced a signal from the AOC 242 Group as follows:

"Please convey my congratulations to 255 Squadron on the great work during the past two nights. The Army is equally delighted."

22 More commonly known as Zadar.

Later on in the month F/O Reynolds-P/O Wingham shot down another Ju 87. The Ju 87 dive bomber was not exactly the ideal target for any normal fighter to intercept at night. The difficulties are well described by Timmy Reynolds:

"Our next three kills were all Ju 87s which were a very different type of target. They could practically hover compared with a Beaufighter, and if it had not been for the excellent forward vision from the pilot's seat in a Beaufighter we should have lost them. The Beaufighter's slow flying capabilities were reasonable enough, although the sight of us wallowing along behind a Ju 87 with full flap and undercart down, and in fully fine pitch, and still overshooting the target, had to be seen to be believed, and it was not the world's most stable gun platform at this speed."

As well as the eight Ju 87s destroyed, plus one damaged, and two Ju 88s shot down on defensive operations, the Squadron undertook extensive intruder operations during the month, particularly north of Zemain on the Danube, where 110 barges and other water borne craft were sunk or damaged, the barges were the Rhein type, each 200ft long, there was much flak experience here, as well as many searchlights. A total of 80 operational sorties were flown by the Squadron in July. In July two more detachments were formed, one at Malta Hal Far, of four Beaufighters, with a sub-detachment at Catania, and the other three at Falconara. The Squadron was now operating in five sectors and was greatly over-stretched, indeed, the rest camp had to be closed due to pressure of work. During July F/O Reynolds belly landed successfully at Falconara after a tyre burst on take-off, but there were no other accidents reported. F/Sgts Bradley and Noble were commissioned. The weather was fine for much of the month with a few thunderstorms appearing at the end. The morale of the Squadron remained high, and the health generally was good with everybody taking the necessary precautions against malaria and sand-fly fever. There was a good deal of cricket being played as well as softball.

August commenced with further victories for the Squadron, four Ju 88s were destroyed and one initially claimed as probably destroyed in the first week. F/O Reynolds-P/O Wingham shot down one north of Ancona, F/O Bretherton-F/Lt Cunningham - two, also near Ancona, this crew then had a most extraordinary experience with another Ju 88, which took violent evasive action at very low level, and was eventually chased into the sea. At first they were allowed only a probable for this, but later AMES confirmed that the Ju 88 went into the sea and wreckage was seen, the claim was therefore uplifted into "one Ju 88 destroyed without firing any ammunition". The final victory that week was when P/O James-Sgt McGibbon shot down one Ju 88 after return fire had hit their Beaufighter. Defensive patrols were flown from all five sectors where the Squadron was operating, from Foggia, Grottaglie, Falconara, Hal Far and Catania, later the Malta detachment returned to Foggia.

In August there were intruder sorties to the Danube Basin where barges were attacked and damaged, at the end of the month there was a claim for a probably destroyed when F/Sgt Dinham-Peren-P/O D B Williams intercepted a Ju 88 near Ancona. There were a few prangs during the month – W/O Swales-F/Sgt Holmes force landed on one engine with the result of the aeroplane being written off, but the crew were uninjured. F/Sgt Manns-F/Sgt Hyson

overshot in daylight on to soft ground after which the undercarriage collapsed, but they also were unhurt. On the 31st F/O J Summers-F/O C J Sanders failed to return from a Danube Basin sortie²³.

During August there was a considerable amount of movement of personnel in the Squadron. One of the oldest inhabitants, in terms of 255 service, was Sgt B F Bean (Fitt 2a), who was the first to report to Kirton-in-Lindsey in November 1940; he was posted on the 15th. Also posted were a number of tour expired aircrew including S/Ldr J F McLaren, F/Lt J M Ritchie, F/Os T E Johnson and Tozer, P/O Wingham and W/O G R Smith, as well as F/O Bretherton, who returned to Australia. Amongst the arrivals was another Reynolds, this time F/O T W, and several crews posted in from 153 Squadron. There were awards and promotions during the month with Cpls J Nield and T B Jones being Mentioned in Despatches, P/O H J Self (Technical Signals) promoted to F/O, as well as eight Sgt aircrew promoted to F/Sgt and four F/Sgts to W/O.

On 18th August there was the storm of storms at Foggia, most tents were wrecked, including the Officers Mess, and aircraft were shifted at their moorings. There was a whirlwind which lifted laden kitbags 150yds, and after this a great deluge with hailstones as large as golf balls. However, the camp drainage system coped remarkably well, and when the storm moved on things soon returned to normal. The last cricket match of the season took place when 255 lost to 73 Squadron by 70 runs, also the first soccer match when they drew 1-1 with 40 Squadron. Although there were one or two cases of jaundice, the health generally of the Squadron was reported as good.

Operations in September commenced with a battle between W/O Fisher-W/O Walsh and a Ju 88, which they claimed as damaged, they received very accurate return fire and the bandit made off. W/O I B Jones-F/O Ray also experienced return fire in another battle during which the pilot was temporarily blinded when his windscreen was shattered, but he landed safely. There were more intruder operations over the Danube Basin, where a barrage balloon was seen for the first time, and although some barges and motor transport were claimed as damaged, particularly by F/Sgt Griffiths-F/Sgt Kimberley during their sortie, September was not considered a good month for intruder activities. The weather was poor, and much of the month was a dark period. During the month patrols were commenced off the Greek coast and over Salonika. There were a couple of prangs when F/Sgt Dinham-Peren had to belly land because of problems with his wheels and flaps²⁴, and when F/Sgt Wingford's tail wheel collapsed on landing; there were no serious casualties.

During September, for reasons not reported in the records, the establishment of the Squadron was reduced from 18 to 12 aeroplanes. At once all detachments were recalled to Foggia, but later on a small one was sent back to Grottaglie. Notification was received of the award of the DFC to F/Os Bretherton, Johnson and Pinks and P/O Noble. There were various postings in and out, W/O Gardiner, i/c transport, was posted to 55 Squadron, P/O D P

23 This loss has since been explained by an entry in the Kriegesmarine KTB for their River Danube minesweeping fleet; Beaufighter MM838 was shot down by flak near Ram in Serbia.

24 Originally placed online on the BBC "The People's War" website, the navigator's essay describing this incident is now available from <<http://www.255.org.uk/sitemap.html>>.

Williams and F/Sgt Lane became tour expired, another eight crews arrived from 153 Squadron and two crews of 255 were attached to 272 Squadron; then F/O Viles arrived as the new Intelligence Officer. One pilot F/Sgt T W Bone and three navigators F/Sgts E Smith, D Fisher and T C Griffiths were promoted to W/O. There was an excellent Airmen's party in the American Red Cross in Foggia, with the RAF No 9 Command Band providing the music. A first sign of the approach of the end of the war was the arrival of a lecturer, to be heard by all ranks, whose subject was "Post War Britain".

October 1944 found the Squadron still based at Foggia, with small detachments at Grottaglie and Pomigliano, but there was little enemy activity in Italy, the Germans were more concerned with Greece and the Russian Army entering the Balkans. 255 Squadron intruder operations shifted to the Po Valley, with the beating up of trains and motor transport. W/O Fisher-W/O Walsh found the dinghy of a ditched 272 Squadron Beaufighter with the crew in it, and flew a protective role over it until they were rescued. During the month two lots of escort duty were undertaken by the Squadron, the first was escorting the Prime Minister, and Anthony Eden, and various high ranking officers who travelled in two Yorks and a Liberator²⁵, and then again the Prime Minister from Messina to Pomigliano for his visit to Rome.

There was plenty of activity on the ground in October, including awards and promotions and postings. F/O R E Reynolds' DFC came through for shooting down five enemy aircraft while serving on 255 Squadron, F/Lt Wheaton was promoted to S/Ldr and became a Flight Commander, F/Os Pinks, Kinnell and North to F/Lt, and amongst those posted tour expired were S/Ldr Patten, and F/Lt Pinks DFC, who, with P/O M Noble DFC, were especially commended for running the Grottaglie detachment. During the month a stage was built in the Airmen's Mess in the hope it would attract an ENSA show, but at least it provided the means for a Squadron show, indeed there was a pantomime in the course of production. A Canadian Film Unit arrived with films such as 'Dangerous Moonlight'; at the quiz between the Airmen and the Senior NCOs the Airmen won handsomely.

Midway through the month it was discovered that 20 parachutes had been stolen, as well as articles of personal kit from the camp site. The SIB was called in at once, and the hired Italian guards confined to billets pending an enquiry. Afterwards, these guards were sacked and airmen took over the guard duties. On the 17th No.5 BTO visited the Squadron and carried out blood tests and those personnel classed as blood group 'O' were asked to give a pint of blood. Over 90% agreed. As well, all personnel were brought up to date with inoculations and vaccinations. The general health of the Squadron remained reasonably good apart from a few cases of jaundice.

On the 27th, at a pay parade, a talk was given on the preparation of the Service Register for the British Parliamentary Election. Form 2040 was completed by the British members of the Squadron, which was well over 90%. On the next Sunday the Bishop of Portsmouth preached the sermon in Foggia. The soccer team played some good matches on the new pitch, the best of these were beating 682 Squadron 4-1 and No.4 General Hospital 2-0. Nurses from No.4 Hospital were entertained by the Officer's and Sergeant's Mess.

²⁵ This in connection with the Fourth Moscow Conference (codename Tolstoy) which took place 9-19th October 1944.

There were some intruder patrols and a few scrambles during November, but really very little activity. Unfortunately there were some casualties when on the 13th W/O M S Jones-P/O B Rae were killed when they crashed returning from a practice interception, and F/Lt T W Reynolds-F/O R E Rudling failed to return from a scramble ex-Pisa. F/O Dean-Cpl Stanley (radar mechanic) were uninjured when they had to land wheels-up at Guilea. There was more escort work when VIPs were escorted from Naples to Marseille. There were postings in and out during the month as W/Cdr C L W Stewart AFC became tour expired, and W/Cdr J W R Kempe (ex 153 Squadron) arrived from Bône where he was OC, to assume command of the Squadron. The Nav/rad leader, F/Lt Cunningham went, as well as F/Os B G Bennett and G W Eley, P/O B H R Smith and W/O B C Dinham-Peren, all tour expired, P/O J Scollan arrived to commence his second tour on 255. On the 20th the Pisa detachment moved to Rosignano.

In November the Squadron were very pleased at the arrival of 14 Flambeau huts for the camp site to provide some comfort after living in tents through the most inclement weather. At the end of the month action was completed in connection with the War Services Increment, and Age and Service Group numbers, for all personnel. The soccer team did even better with a 5-0 win over 272 Squadron. Other pursuits were a weekly whist drive in the Airmen's Mess, and also cross-country runs. The RAF Command Show 'Over to You' was considered a great success.

The weather generally in December was terrible and on many days there was no flying at all, and sometimes only NFTs. The worst of the weather was thick fog, and later in the month snow fell. There were very few enemy aircraft about in the 255 sector, and the only intruding was undertaken in the early part of the month, particularly F/Lt North-P/O Pickthall damaged a goods train and locomotive in the Lake Marano area. As F/Lt North fired the last burst a shell exploded on leaving the cannon and blew off the nose of the Beaufighter, but he got back to base safely. The main problem with intruding at this time was that the road in Yugoslavia allocated to 255 to strafe was in a deep gorge, and the bad weather and valley mists prevented a clear view of the target. General spraying of the area with bullets had to be banned to avoid doing damage to the partisan groups in the hills. In any event the shortage of aeroplanes prevented much flying at all.

Early in the month W/Cdr Stewart AFC, having been dined out by the Squadron Officers, went off to 242 Group, and thence to command 286 Wing. F/Lt North was promoted to S/Ldr to lead B Flight and F/O J V Noyes, soon to be F/Lt, arrived as Nav/rad leader. F/O H J Self, the Signals Officer, was sent to a F/Lt post at 3 FFCU, F/Sgt T W Burnett was commissioned which he celebrated by making a one engine landing after one cut out on the approach, F/Sgt E R Radesk was also commissioned, and F/Sgt R F Faris was promoted to W/O. Later on, the award of the DFC to F/Lt Cunningham and to P/O M A Wingham was announced, both now tour expired. W/O H J Hale-P/O D C E Cooper were posted in for their second tour on the Squadron instead of being sent back to the UK.

On 7th December a party in the Airmen's Mess celebrated the second anniversary of the ground crews arriving at Bône. There were mixed fortunes for the soccer team with some victories including beating 318 Coastal Battery 2-0 in the Foggia District League, but then on

the 16th losing 0-3 to 323 Wing, said to be due to some key players being absent because of operational requirements.

Everybody was hoping for thick fog over Christmas so that operations would not interfere with the celebrations, actually the weather was fair but with a biting cold wind; it was the third Christmas overseas for the Squadron and all ranks were in a festive mood expecting it to be the last. On the 23rd there was carol singing in the Airmen's Mess where Padre Metcalfe gave the blessing; on Christmas Day, after the D.I.s had been completed all ranks were free for the rest of the day, with the exception of those who were on guard duty. The stock of the Squadron's chicken farm was killed off, and this, plus extra goodies purchased, provided a first class dinner. In accordance with tradition the Airmen were served first by the Officers and Senior NCOs; after dinner a concert was organised, and a good party was enjoyed by all. Heavy rain fell that night and there was no chance of any flying, but on the 26th the weather improved and W/Cdr Kempe set a good example by flying an intruder sortie.

Prior to Christmas, on the 16th, No.8 RAF Gang Show had visited the camp and had given an excellent performance in the Squadron theatre, and after Christmas the RAF Command Band also gave a concert. In accordance with the latest Air Ministry instructions the whole of the Squadron was divided into discussion groups on a variety of subjects, each group with an officer in the chair. On the 29th the Squadron was notified of an outbreak of smallpox in Foggia. Protective measures were taken, including the vaccination of all Italians working in the camp, and suspending them from duty until the vaccinations had taken. On New Year's Eve parties were held in the Officers, the Sergeants and the Airmen's Messes; in his survey of the Year W/Cdr Kempe said it generally had been a very good year for the Squadron, and he was sure the present difficulty of shortage of aeroplanes would be overcome.

1st January 1945 found the Squadron still at Foggia, with a detachment at Rosignano. The weather at Foggia had improved enough for intruder sorties to be planned for the Lagreb district, but as it turned out the weather over the whole of Yugoslavia was impossible for ground strafing. On the 9th at Foggia there was sleet and snow again, however the Mark X A.I. Circus had managed to get through and the first of the navigators commenced training on the new equipment. Then it was announced that the Squadron would be converting to Mosquito aeroplanes, with Mark X A.I. and radio altimeters. Other news was that F/Lt Laver, the Engineering Officer, and Sgt E F Shaw had been Mentioned in Despatches, F/Sgts Wingfield and Nimmo had been promoted to W/O, and Sgt Coles to F/Sgt, and after a very short spell as a W/O, R Faris was commissioned. F/O C C Deane was appointed Welfare Officer and P/O Dutton, Salvage Officer. The idea of discussion groups had been a great success and weekly meetings were continued. The Squadron soccer team had their greatest victory beating 236 Wing by 15 goals to 1, F/Sgt Manns, in his first game for the Squadron, scored 10 goals as centre forward. On the 22nd there was a blizzard which left the runway completely iced over.

On the 26th the first Mosquito XIX arrived, and pilots queued up for dual instruction. The weather was a little better. There were a few scrambles and some convoy escort work, but no standing patrols because of the lack of enemy activity in the 255 sector. By the 31st the aircraft strength of the Squadron was 7 Beaufighters, 2 Mosquitos and 1 Hurricane; only 20

operational hours had been flown during the month.

Squadron morale was at a very low ebb because of the long time overseas and conditions at the camp site, as well as the absence of operational activity. It perked up a little when the announcement came that the establishment was to be raised to 16 aeroplanes, eventually all Mosquitos, and that the Squadron would be responsible, on a detachment basis, for the whole of Italy. But the best news of all was that the Squadron was to leave Foggia.

February commenced with Beaufighters on readiness, but with continuous practice flying day and night on the Mosquitos. Returning from one of the last operational sorties from Foggia P/O E Smith-F/O G Hilton spotted a dinghy floating in the Adriatic with four occupants; they flew guard until a Catalina landed and took them on board. On the 2nd, F/Lt T N Sandeman arrived as the new Adjutant, just in time to take part in the preparations for leaving Foggia. On the 3rd, five Officers and 270 other ranks commanded by F/Lt Laver, set off with 60 vehicles and 19 trailers. With all the squalor, the mud and the depressing atmosphere, nobody was reluctant to leave, and it was with light hearts that the party set off to travel the 600 miles to Rosignano, south of Leghorn.

After the long climb over the Apennines, which spread the convoy out somewhat, the first night was spent at Monteforte Irpino and the second at an American staging post at Sparanise on the Naples-Rome road, Highway 7. By accident or by design the convoy arrived early at the next night stop in some Italian Army Barracks four miles north of Rome and many chaps took the opportunity to sightsee in the Eternal City. The fourth night was in camp one mile north of Grosseto, and on the eighth the convoy arrived at Rosignano. Squadron HQ was in a house in the village of Vada, three miles from the airfield, this place was large enough to house the Officers and Sergeants Messes, and the Corporals' Room; for sleeping purposes there was a tented camp already set up.

Beaufighter patrols were being flown by the detachment already at Rosignano, and on the 9th the remainder of the aeroplanes were called forward from Foggia. There were several prangs in the early days at the new airfield, but nobody was injured. F/O James damaged his undercarriage running on to rough ground, S/Ldr North burst a tyre, and both W/Cdr Kempe in a swing on take-off, and P/O E Smith overshooting caused their undercarriages to collapse. Some of these difficulties were possibly due to the 100 feet wide runway having a ditch and large boulders close up either side, as well as the prevailing wind being right across the runway! The American Engineers came to the rescue and cleared 50 feet either side, as well as making some hard standing for the parked aeroplanes.

With the better weather up at Rosignano there was much more flying, there were patrols over Leghorn, and protective sorties along the coast of the South of France and the îles d'Hyères, where convoys of Allied ground troops were coming ashore; also there was a continuous programme of practice flying in the Mosquitos, with interceptions when possible. The radar section of 255 was commended by the Commanding Officer for tackling the many problems of the new A.I. under difficult circumstances. For some time the Beaufighters and Mosquitos shared the readiness state. Finally on 25th February 1945, a 255 Squadron Beaufighter flew for the last time and Mosquitos took over completely. The dear old Beau

had been the Squadron aeroplane for all of three-and-a-half years since July 1941, but what better aeroplane to take its place than the Mosquito?

Other news in February was the award of the DSO to W/Cdr C L W Stewart AFC, and P/O Dutton was promoted to F/O. Sgt R Coventry (Fitt IIe) was posted to 137 MU, Sgt Coventry had been with the Squadron for over four years, being one of the original members back to the Defiant days of November 1940. In their first senior match at the new Station the soccer team lost to Vada 1-3.

At the end of February 1945, the Squadron score stood at 94 enemy aircraft destroyed, with claims of seven probably destroyed and 31 damaged.

The beginning of March found the whole Squadron at Rosignano, with a strength of 12 Mosquito XIXs and 22 complete aircrews. However, on the 5th, a small detachment was sent to Falconara, billeted with 287 Wing, and on the 15th six Dakotas flew a ground crew detachment, under F/Sgt Homer, to La Vallon, in the South of France. Here the runway was so broken up and stony that holes were made in the tailplanes of the three Mosquitos when they landed there two days later. The other unit on this airfield was 108 RSU, and the GCI operating in this sector was in 340 Wing, the senior controller being S/Ldr Joyce.

Detaching to Falconara certainly paid off because on the 21st F/O Scollan-F/Sgt Blundell scrambled from there and shot down a Ju 188 between Pula and Trieste; it was F/O Scollan's third victory. The next night F/Lt Pertwee-F/Sgt Smith, after a 15 minute chase at a height of 100-200 feet, shot down another at the Po delta. Both interceptions were handled by the deputy GCI controller, F/Lt Hanks, who gave an excellent performance. These two battles produced a signal from the AOC, as follows:

"Congratulations on 255 Squadron's splendid efforts over the last two nights.
Well done, keep up the good work."

As well as the above F/O C C Deane also battled with a low flying recce enemy aircraft, with no known result. On the 15th F/O Scollan spotted a Spitfire circling a dinghy in the Adriatic, then led an air sea rescue Catalina to the dinghy and had the satisfaction of seeing the occupants rescued.

March, therefore, was quite an exciting month with 103 hours operational and 287 non-operational flying, the latter including air-to-air firing at a drogue supplied by 23 AACU. The operations total was practically all scrambles, with but a few patrols in the Florence and Gulf of Genoa areas, also there were quite a lot of Bomber Command friendlies to be investigated. The weather was mixed, with some glorious sunshine in the South of France, but still heavy rain and high winds at times in Italy. Unfortunately, there were some casualties during the month when F/O K Dutton-P/O J D Walker were killed as they crashed into the sea chasing a low level recce off Cap Corse. P/O Walker's body was recovered by the destroyer HMS Matchless and buried at sea with full honours. The news was received that a former CO of the Squadron, W/Cdr H W Eliot DSO DFC, had been killed while on operations in Italy with 256 Squadron, also that S/Ldr J Arnsby DFC, a former 255 Flight Commander, had been

involved in a mid-air collision in the UK and had not survived.

At La Vallon, S/Ldr North, commanding the detachment, decided it was quite impossible to continue to use it as an airfield, and two other airfields were investigated further west. However, at Le Luc there were hills each end of the runway, which was considered not very nice for night flying, and at Roquebrune it was found that peasants had already ploughed up part of the runway to plant the new season's crop! Therefore the detachment moved to Istres, occupied by 103 Staging Post, but also previously by some German POWs who had left an awful mess in the quarters, which had to be cleared by 255 airmen.

In March, 1945, there was much coming and going of personnel, and there were awards and promotions. P/O J J McGibbon went to 56 PTC, tour expired, also tour expired were F/O G Hinton, P/Os E Smith and R F Faris, W/Os I Jones, D Fisher and J Walsh, and F/Sgt E R Kimberley. W/Cdr Kempe received the Air Efficiency Award, F/Sgt Gill was promoted to W/O, and F/Sgt Hyson was posted back to the Squadron on receiving his commission. On the 27th the Falconara detachment was visited by the SASO Air Commodore Edwards-Jones, and at Rosignano F/Lt Schrieber of FIU gave a lecture on enemy rocket equipment, and the latest news about flying bombs. The Squadron Radar Officer perfected a radio altimeter jamming device to get low flying German recce aircraft into trouble. The Squadron sent a team from Rosignano to take part in an Allied Services cross-country event in which they came 22nd out of 44.

On 1st April the Squadron was still based at Rosignano, which is on the west coast of Italy about 15 miles south of Leghorn, with detachments at Falconara on the east coast of Italy eight miles from Ancona, and at Istres in the South of France, 30 miles north-west of Marseille. The Squadron strength was only 15 Mosquitos and 20 full aircrews. Early in the month it was called on to provide yet another detachment, this time back at Pomigliano again, where there was some enemy activity. F/Sgt Manns-P/O Hyson were very near a visual on a bogey when the radar scanner stuck pointing downwards. From Falconara patrols looked for enemy midget submarines, said to be in the Adriatic, but nothing was seen except for porpoises; some time was spent on air sea rescue duties.

The German Air Force seemed to have gone to ground, but all the same full readiness was kept up in the four sectors covered by the Squadron. In the second half of the month there was some excitement when it was thought that Lufthansa aircraft were transporting high Nazi officials, and loot, from Germany to Barcelona, and there was much patrolling of the Mediterranean, but nothing was seen. It is reported in the Squadron records that S/Ldr North-F/O Pickthall flew to the UK to deliver a letter to Field Marshal Smuts, but frustratingly no further explanation is given²⁶. There was a prang during the month when Mosquito TA 419 was written off by P/O Burnett, and also when TA 408 was badly damaged by F/Sgt Sinclair, both over-correcting swing on take-off, there were no injuries.

There was the usual busy time on the ground, first of all the AOC MACAF, AVM J Whitford,

²⁶ Declassified archives of the Republic of South Africa suggest this was the letter appointing Smuts as the country's representative at the San Francisco Conference, flown "Pony Express" style from Pretoria to London with 255 Squadron acting as courier for the last leg.

visited the Squadron at Rosignano, and expressed himself satisfied with the arrangements there, he was accompanied by the OC 338 Wing, GC Marvin. As well, the W/Cdr Flying MACAF, W/Cdr Stewart DSO AFC, an old friend, spent a day with the Squadron. There were Church Services at which the padre of 338 Wing presided. Zone B time came into being by advancing clocks one hour. The Knightsbridge Trio gave an excellent concert one evening. Two advisory officers from MACAF gave lectures on the subject of the Release Scheme and held a questions and answers session afterwards. The Squadron soccer team had mixed results during the month including winning against the Italian team Alto 4-0, and losing 4-5 to 111 RSU.

During the month W/O J Forrester was commissioned, W/O E V Ward was posted in as Equipment Officer, and F/Sgt (Pop) Harding NCO i/c Stores was posted out to HQ MACAF after two-and-a-half years on the Squadron. The weather during the month was generally fine, but the Mistral had started to blow in the South of France, which made life rather unpleasant there. Flying times for the month were 200 operational and 309 non-operational hours, an extremely good effort.

The 1st May 1945, found the Squadron still based at Rosignano, with detachments at Falconara and at Istres. During the month part of the latter was sent to Nice. On the 2nd came the news of the surrender of all the German forces in Italy which was duly celebrated by the Squadron, with the expectation of more good news to come. In spite of the surrender news the readiness state was still kept up by the Squadron, but soon the Falconara detachment was ordered back to Rosignano.

On 8th May the announcement was made of the end of the war in Europe, and the Squadron stood down for two days to celebrate this wonderful news. Due precautions had been made to protect the aeroplanes and the MT, but no untoward incidents took place in this respect. It is reported, however, that when the Squadron returned to its normal working routine on the 10th, some members were rather the worse for wear.

There was very little flying either at Rosignano or in the South of France, but there was a busy time on the ground. On the 13th there was a well-attended Thanksgiving Service at 338 Wing, and at Istres S/Ldr Evans, the Padre, held a Church Service in the Airmen's Mess. F/Lt Reeves gave a lecture on malaria prevention and F/O Viles was appointed officer i/c postal voting for the forthcoming UK General Election. At Rosignano there was a Squadron General Sports Meeting and a committee was appointed to organise summer sports such as cricket, baseball, athletics and swimming. There was a separate meeting to elect an EVT committee. The discussion groups were still very popular and held regular meetings. At Istres Air Commodore Rhys-Jones lunched with the detachment. On the 15th tropical kit was issued to come into general use, although the weather in Italy was not all that good being mostly cloudy with heavy rain at times, it was much better in the South of France.

During the month F/Sgts Wyatt and Manns were promoted to W/O, and F/Sgt P B George was commissioned. Unfortunately there was a prang when W/O Symons damaged Mosquito TA 131, when there was a swing on take-off. F/Lt F S Batty, tour expired, was seen off back to Canada. By this time peace-time working hours had commenced with every Sunday a free

day, except for the guards. On the 21st the postal voting was completed and 250 of the Squadron personnel cast a vote. Needless to say the hours flown in the month of Victory in Europe were quite small, operational 65, non-operational 122.

Early in June the South of France detachment returned to Rosignano, and therefore the Squadron were all together again, but not for long. The strength was 15 Mosquitos and there were 20 full crews. The Squadron occupied its time with practice interceptions, camera gun firing, and formation flying, the hours flown in the month were 219. At the end of June a detachment of three Mosquitos and a party of ground crew, flown in a Liberator, was sent to Hal Far, Malta. This detachment was to undertake calibration exercises for the Navy. Later it was questioned as to why the Navy could not do its own calibration sorties, using the Fleet Air Arm.

News came through that a former adjutant, F/Lt Duckworth, had been Mentioned in Despatches; a new Radar Officer, F/O C F Ridley, was posted in, F/Lts Bradley and Kinnell, and F/Os Deane and Scollan went to Egypt for an interview with BOAC. On the 4th it was announced that a free liberty run every evening to Leghorn was to commence. On the 13th EVT classes were started in Maths, English, French, Electricity and Agriculture; all the instructors were 255 people. Also on this day the 'Beau Gen' issue celebrated its second anniversary as well as publishing the details of the Allied victory in Europe. On the 19th a Board of Survey was held in accordance with existing regulations, and as well on this day the AOC visited the Squadron again.

In June the soccer team was still playing in spite of the heat, and won against 237 Squadron twice, 2-1 and 6-0, and also against No.2 AF Signals 5-0. There was a large Allied Forces track meeting at Leghorn in which ten competitors from the Squadron took part, Sgt Gorman was third in the 800 metres and W/O Johnson fourth in the 5000 metres, both these chaps were selected to represent Allied Central Italy Forces in the forthcoming Mediterranean Championships.

In July the Squadron was still based at Rosignano, with just the one detachment at Hal Far. This was a period when 255 was very short of senior officers, the two Flight Commanders S/Ldr North and S/Ldr Wheaton were both sick non-effective, and in fact did not return to the Squadron, the next senior officer, F/Lt Kinnell, was in charge at Hal Far. Two weeks later W/Cdr Kempe was posted to MAAF for 218 Groups duties, on the 16th W/Cdr J R H Lewis DFC, ex W/Cdr training at HQ BAF, and a former CO of 272, 603, 227 and 504 Squadrons arrived to take over. F/O Viles was allowed a compassionate posting back to the UK because of the illness of his wife. During the month the following were commissioned, W/Os R C Gill, G L K Crawford and H Johnson, and F/Sgt Handley.

During July a total of 260 hours flying was completed by the Squadron, the strength was 16 Mosquitos and 15 full crews. Much of the flying was in preparation for a Greek Air Display, of course a great deal of practice was needed by the pilots as they had very little experience, if any, of flying in formation. At the end of the month a practice "balbo"²⁷ was flown consisting

²⁷ A large formation of aircraft assembled especially for display purposes.

of 6 Mosquitos plus Mustangs from 249 Squadron.

A most important happening on the ground in July was the first release to Civvy Street, when a few chaps were posted initially to No.1 Overseas Release Centre at Milan, and then home to the UK. As well, a home leave scheme was commenced. A lot of cricket was being played by the Squadron team, the ground just outside Leghorn was in delightful surroundings. In the Table Tennis League the 255 team was doing well, even beating the Navy 5-0. On the 25th at the Squadron's new open air theatre Anna and her Italian Cavaliers gave a performance, and on the 26th the Squadron gave its first open air dance. Apparently female partners were more than numerous, refreshments were provided, and a good time was had by all.

The best of news came early in August with the end of the war in the Far East, and this was celebrated in the usual fashion by the Squadron. Old service hands will not be surprised to learn that the Squadron, settled at Rosignano and beginning to live well, then heard they were being moved to Malta. However, before the move came a flurry of disagreement between the Squadron and MCAF, and BPD, about the personnel situation which was becoming increasingly desperate, and the Squadron especially requested this to be resolved before the move. So many experienced technicians were being released tour expired, with very few replacements, that flying was curtailed because of lack of serviceable aeroplanes, the new bods that did arrive were not Mosquito trained, and this training took time. It is not surprising to learn that this problem was not resolved before the move and in fact got progressively worse. In the middle of August an advance party was flown to Hal Far in a DC3, the main party followed early in September. The hours flown by the Squadron in August were a mere 146.

The Squadron strength on 1st September was 18 Mosquitos, many unserviceable. There were 16 full aircrews. There was a considerable amount of movement in personnel in late August and early September, before the move practically all the married ground staff were posted either to the UK or to other units in Italy; in total there were 120 postings out including nearly all the NCOs. As well F/Lt Reeves went to 56 PTC; but some aircrew did arrive when F/Lt G C Clark ex 600 Squadron, and F/Lt D B Taylor were posted in to fill the vacant S/Ldr Flight Commander posts. F/Lt Feast also arrived as Radar Officer. There were some promotions within the Squadron when F/Os J Drew and J Kirkman became F/Lts P/O Hyson's F/O came through.

In Malta the Squadron was divided between the RAF sites at Hal Far and Kalafrana²⁸. Anywhere in Malta there was a desperate shortage of water, there was none to keep the aeroplanes clean, and the personal ration was one shower per man per week – perhaps. Even more desperate was the shortage of RAF manpower, what with the clear-out before leaving Italy, the leave scheme to Sicily and Italy, as well as the home leave arrangements, the Squadron was down to less than two thirds of its establishment, with many of these needing training, yet still personnel were being released at a great rate whilst replacements were only a trickle. Because of the great heat the working day was only 6.30-7.30am and then 8.30am-1.30pm daily, with every Sunday off duty.

28 Cannot have been for flying purposes; this was a seaplane base.

As part of the Victory Celebrations there was a fly-past over Gozo in which the Squadron took part, and which was considered a great success. H.E. the Governor, Lt-General Sir M Schreiber, took the salute. Autumn in Malta means perfect flying weather, and every opportunity was taken by the Squadron to better its formation flying, but lack of serviceable aeroplanes restricted this to 147 hours in the month of October. There were also some practice interceptions and some cross country exercises. One important visitor was W/Cdr Braham DSO DFC, the night-fighter ace, and his navigator F/Lt Jacobs DFC. The Wing Commander gave a series of lectures on the history of night-fighting, current radar equipment, and the latest methods of interceptions.

Even in November the weather remained very good in the centre part of the Mediterranean, and the Squadron was in the air as much as possible, there were cross-country exercises and more formation flying, as well as air-to-ground firing and dinghy drill, the latter being the most important of all practice exercises while stationed at Malta, and there was much time given to this. However, lack of aircraft maintenance restricted the flying, it was becoming increasingly difficult for all the Squadrons based there to keep going, and eventually a meeting was called with the SASO Malta in the chair to decide the priorities. At the meeting were the COs and Engineer Officers of 255, 73 and 38 Squadrons, as well as representatives from HQ, when it was decided that because 38 was the Air Sea Rescue Squadron, and therefore the most important, that top priority should be given to the serviceability of this Squadron, and that the ground crews of 255 and 73 could be called on by 38 at all times for the maintenance of its aeroplanes. 255 suffered one accident during November when F/O Gill, during air-to-ground firing practice at Kaura Point was hit by a ricocheting shell, his starboard engine caught fire, but although he had to land down-wind and eventually overshot, the crew were not hurt.

For part of November, W/Cdr Lewis assumed command of Hal Far, and S/Ldr Taylor took over the Squadron.

In December 1945, the weather deteriorated somewhat with gales and strong winds on some days. The usual flying exercises were carried out when the weather and the serviceability of the Mosquitos allowed, there was also some ferrying of aircraft from Malta and Italy to Egypt; during this time there was always one Mosquito of 255 on readiness for possible ASR duties, needed over and above the aircraft provided by 38 Squadron. On the 21st F/O Gill scrambled and located a lost Warwick in distress which he escorted to Luqa, where it landed safely. W/O Wingfield, while on patrol, developed engine trouble, but flew his aeroplane 90 miles back to base and made a successful one engine landing.

During December F/Lt Sanders, the "professional" adjutant was posted, F/O Hyson, a navigator, took his place; P/O Johnson and W/Os Griffiths and Blundell also went tour expired. On the 18th there was a dance in the Officers Mess, guests included the Governor and Lady Schreiber, and the AOC and his wife. At Christmas the Squadron took three days off celebrating with the usual festivities, and as well having a vast programme of 6 a-side football. After a pre-dinner cocktail party for the SNCOs in the Officers Mess, the Airmen's Christmas Dinner was served by the Officers and SNCOs in the traditional RAF manner. After

dinner the Airmen's party continued on, and a rousing good time was had by all.

In January 1946, the whole Squadron moved to Gianaclis, in Egypt, near Alexandria, where they were greeted by several days of sandstorms!

While settling in at Gianaclis, the Squadron became very much aware of the nationalistic aspirations of the Egyptians; this had commenced with student demonstrations against the British, and became increasingly violent to the extent that British servicemen were banned at times in February from entering Alexandria and Cairo. The weather was terrible with frequent sandstorms followed by heavy rain, which turned large areas into muddy wastes. In between storms there was a little flying with sector recce, navigational exercises, A.I. practice and formation flying, also some affiliation exercises with 40 and 104 Squadrons. During February the duties of Flying Control Officer at Gianaclis became a 255 Squadron responsibility. In Egypt the Squadron worked a five-and-a-half day week, with Saturday afternoons and Sundays off duty. Unfortunately, with Alexandria out of bounds much of the time and the bad conditions at the camp, the Airmen's morale suffered. Needless to say they had "release" very much on their minds. Efforts were made to involve them in pursuits on the camp with the organisation of whist drives, bridge and tombola as well as an educational programme, all possible sports were played, with soccer as the major activity in this respect. There was a new film show every evening, and ENSA arrived every two weeks with shows such as "Pink String and Sealing Wax".

There was sadness, at least amongst the aircrews, when the Engineer Officer, F/Lt Laver, was posted home after four years overseas service, including two-and-a-half with 255 Squadron, F/Lts Bradley and Stinson, and W/Os Pottle and Symons also left tour expired, and F/Lt Deane was posted to HQ MAAF. The lack of ground crew situation did not improve and still tradesmen were being released with few replacements, particularly the manpower situation with fitters and riggers was desperate, and only 100 hours flying was completed during February, because of the lack of maintenance on the aeroplanes. It was obvious that this state of affairs could not continue, and the Squadron awaited some announcement about its future.

At the beginning of March 1946, the AOC RAF Eastern Mediterranean, AVM S E Toomer CBE, DFC, visited the Squadron. On the 4th there was a security raid by Service Police on the nearby Italian POW camp site where there was found many prohibited articles, as well as two females used for prostitution. Two Italians were placed under close arrest on serious charges. Later on in the month there was a series of raids by Arabs on the camp site and airfield with drums of oil being stolen, and roofs of outbuildings, as well as 100 blankets from the laundry, and NAAFI stores. F/Lt Kinnell became Security Officer and raised an armed squad to attempt to prevent future thefts. As well, the CO and others took to flying low over the nearby Arab villages to try to spot any stolen goods, or any suspicious vehicle activity, unfortunately this effort came to nothing.

The situation in Alexandria and Cairo had become even worse with very serious riots taking place daily, and of course much looting; when British servicemen were again attacked, some being killed or badly injured, these places were put out of bounds again. During March there

was some night flying for the first time at Gianacalis, this was dusk and dark landings and cross-country exercises. However, there was now such a shortage of tradesmen, particularly fitters and riggers, that flying was severely restricted because of the shortage of serviceable aeroplanes. On the 16th it was rumoured that the future of the Squadron was being debated at Group with three options, the first that it was to be reduced to a single flight, the second that it was to be merged with 256 Squadron, and the third that the surviving remnants were to be sent home to the UK and reformed.

On 31st March there is the sad final entry in the Squadron records:

"There have been more releases of airmen with no replacements, next month should bring forth information regarding the future of 255 Squadron, we hope this will turn out to be as the present optimistic rumour of our return to the UK."

But, on 30th April, 1946, 255 Squadron was disbanded.

The final total of enemy aircraft destroyed in air-to-air combat by 255 Squadron during the Second World War was 96, with claims of seven probably destroyed and 31 damaged. [See Appendix C and caveats for details - CE].

It is estimated that during intruder operations the Squadron destroyed or damaged over 100,000 tonnes of enemy-used shipping and barges, as well as a considerable quantity of enemy-used trains and motor transport.

[The copy held by the RAF Museum, Hendon, is endorsed "E&OE" at this point]

Appendices follow...

- A Detail of the Aircrew and the Ground Officers at 13 November 1942.
- B Detail of the Aircrew and the Ground Officers at 18 August 1943.
- C List of enemy aircraft destroyed by the Squadron during the Second World War and those claimed as probably destroyed or damaged. The table as reproduced here has been updated from Peter Croft's original to reflect, amongst other things, additional data brought to light by recovery of the Squadron's commemorative silver chain. Outstanding discrepancies are discussed on the 255 Squadron Association website's Scoresheet page <<http://www.255.org.uk/scoresheet.html>>.

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APPENDIX A

Detail of the 18 aircrews who flew out Honiley-Portreath-Gibraltar-Maison Blanche in November 1942, those crews who travelled by troopship, and the ground officers.

By Beaufighter:	Pilots	Navigators
	W/Cdr D P D G Kelly	F/Lt A Lammer DFC
	S/Ldr H W Eliot DFC	P/O M H Lewis
	S/Ldr J H Player	F/O R Wynzar
	F/Lt J D Wright	P/O L H Sandow
	F/O H G S Wyrill DFC	F/Sgt J Willins DFM
	F/O R M Graham	P/O E S Hickmore
	F/O M J Gloster	P/O J S Oswald
	F/O G Humes	F/Sgt J L Sayer
	F/O A S Kench	F/Sgt R D Wall
	F/O A W Woolley	F/Sgt J M C Talbot
	F/O H R Clarke	F/Sgt A S Biggs
	P/O J C Cox	F/Sgt P L Croft
	P/O D H Greaves	W/O F M Robbins
	P/O P S Kendall	P/O C R Hill
	P/O H I Stephen	Sgt W G Hood
	P/O V G J Phillips	Sgt D S Pollard
	P/O K T O'Sullivan	P/O R A Griffith
	F/Sgt T H Cameron	Sgt J L Hood

By Troopship:	Pilots	Navigators
	F/Lt P W Dunning-White DFC	P/O R N Kane
	F/O R V Weston	P/O C R Hiles
	P/O J Ward	Sgt E C Marsden
	Sgt D Wiggins	Sgt D G Madge
	Sgt J C E Clarke	F/Sgt T E Broadhead

Ground Officers travelling by Troopship:

Engineering - F/Lt P C Wright	Radar - F/O E S Crouser
Adjutant - P/O A D Murfin	Intelligence - F/O S Cracknell
Medical - F/Lt T N N Brennan	Codes and Cyphers - P/O G H Roker
Signals - F/O C V S Sexton	RAF Regiment - P/O J H Henry

APPENDIX B

Detail of aircrews and ground officers on the strength at Bo Rizzo, Sicily, on 18th August 1943

Aircrew:	Pilots	Navigators
	W/Cdr H W Eliot DFC	F/O A Barker
	S/Ldr J Arnsby	F/Sgt D G Madge
	S/Ldr R M Graham	F/Sgt N J Izowsky
	F/Lt J D Fox	F/O C A Pryor
	F/O J Berry	F/O I Watson
	F/O P R Brook	F/Lt C J D Greenland
	F/O D Giles	F/Sgt F M Drake
	F/O J A W Gunn	F/O G H M Carter
	F/O H K Humphreys	F/Sgt P A Robertson
	F/O L J Leppard	P/O P J Houghton
	F/O D McEwan	F/O R H Lewis
	F/O D H Nicol	P/O D S Carter
	F/O V G J Phillips	F/Sgt D S Pollard
	F/O D D Sparge	F/O R McGugan
	F/O J Ward	F/Sgt E C Marsden
	P/O T H Cameron	P/O J L Hood
	P/O W Lewis	P/O S A Hurley
	W/O D K Cotterill	P/O D M Nedahl
	F/Sgt H J Hale	Sgt D C E Cooper
	F/Sgt G R Smith	Sgt F J Taffs
	F/Sgt W C Phillips	Sgt C P Smith
	F/Sgt J Scollan	Sgt D M Minett
	F/Sgt J D Luckhurst	W/O D Poulton
		P/O R D Wall
		Sgt R M Hilliard

Ground Officers:

Engineering – F/Lt P C Wright
Adjutant – F/Lt A D Murfin
Medical – F/Lt V H Reeves
Signals – F/O H J Self
Radar – F/O E S Crouser
Intelligence – F/O S Cracknell
Codes and Cyphers – P/O G H Roker

APPENDIX C

Enemy aircraft destroyed by 255 Squadron during the Second World War and those claimed as 'Probably Destroyed' or 'Damaged'.

Definitions, which remained unchanged throughout the relevant period, were as follows. [Source: *Fighter Command Victory Claims of WW2*, Foreman, J., London:Red Kite. ISBN: 978-0-95380-618-8.]

DESTROYED – Where an aircraft was seen to crash, to be on fire, or where the pilot/crew was seen to parachute from the aircraft.

PROBABLE – Where the aircraft was not seen to crash but was so badly damaged that, in the opinion of the claiming pilot, it could not have reached safety. (This category had been redefined in August 1940, shortly before No.255 Squadron was re-formed.)

DAMAGED – (Self explanatory).

The table below differs from the original in Croft (1992). The updated version takes into account information from AMES records, medal citations, personal diaries, autobiographies, Flying Log Books, combat reports, engravings on the Chain of Jerries and other sources, rather than relying on the Squadron's slightly error-prone ORB – apparently the sole source used to compile the 1992 edition. See the Scoresheet page of the 255 Squadron Association website for more details of primary sources: <http://www.255.org.uk/scoresheet.html>.

Event #	Night of...	Pilot + other aircrew	Destroyed	Probable	Damaged
001	10-11/02/41	F/Lt R M Trousdale – Sgt F J W Chunn		He 111	
002	Ditto	P/O R M D Hall – Sgt H D J Fitzsimons		He 111	
003	Day 07/03/41	P/O A A Ballantine – Sgt C McTaggart			He 111
004	13-14/03/41	F/Lt J G Sanders – Sgt C R Hill			E/A
005	Ditto	Ditto		He 111	
006	13-14/03/41	P/O M F Wynne-Willson – Sgt H Plant			Do 17z
007	07-08/04/41	F/Lt J G Sanders – Sgt C R Hill			E/A
008	09-10/04/41	Sgt J Craig – Sgt C S Emeny			E/A
009	04-05/05/41	S/Ldr R L Smith – P/O E Farnes	Ju 88		
010	07-08/05/41	Sgt J Craig – Sgt W Mair			He 111
011	Ditto	Sgt S J Johnson – Sgt R T Aitchison	He 111		
012	Ditto	P/O P A Dale – (Hurricane, no crew)	E/A		Upgraded
013	08-09/05/41	S/Ldr R L Smith – (Hurricane, no crew)	He 111		

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Event #	Night of...	Pilot + other aircrew	Destroyed	Probable	Damaged
014	Ditto	Ditto			He 111
015	Ditto	P/O H G S Wyrill – Sgt N H Maul	He 111		
016	Ditto	P/O M F Wynne-Willson – Sgt H Plant	He 111		
017	Ditto	P/O J D Wright – Sgt R I McChesney	Ju 88		
018	Ditto	F/Lt R M Trousdale – Sgt F J W Chunn	He 111		
019	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto		
020	24-25/06/41	Sgt P S Kendall – Sgt C S Emeny	He 111		
021	10-11/07/41	Sgt J Cameron Cox – Sgt H D J Fitzsimons			E/A
022	14-15/07/41	Sgt P S Kendall / (Hurricane)			E/A
023	13-14/01/42	P/O J Cameron Cox – Sgt P L Croft	Do 217		
024	15-16/01/42	P/O M J Mortimer – Sgt G Bedford	E/A		Upgraded
025	28/02-01/03/42	S/Ldr F P J McGevor – Sgt L S Barker	He 111		
026	25-26/04/42	F/O H G S Wyrill – Sgt J Willins	Ju 88		
027	27-28/07/42	F/Sgt P S Kendall – P/O C R Hill			He 111
028	30-31/07/42	F/O H G S Wyrill – Sgt J Willins			He 111
029	23-24/08/42	F/O H G S Wyrill – Sgt J Willins			Do 217
030	Ditto	Ditto			Ditto
031	05-06/12/42	F/O G Humes – F/Sgt J L Sayer	He 111		
032	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto		
033	Ditto	F/O M J Gloster – F/O J F Oswald	He 111		
034	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto		
035	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto		
036	06-07/12/42	S/Ldr J H Player – F/Lt A Lammer	He 111		
037	Ditto	Ditto	Ca 1007b		
038	Ditto	Ditto	Ca 1007b		
039	Ditto	F/O J Cameron Cox – F/Sgt P L Croft	He 111		
040	12-13/12/42	F/O D H Greaves – W/O F M Robbins	He 111		
041	Ditto	F/Sgt T H Cameron – F/Sgt J L Hood	Ju 88		
042	14-15/12/42	F/O D H Greaves – W/O F M Robbins	Ju 88		
043	15-16/12/42	W/Cdr D P D G Kelly – F/Lt A Lammer	Ju 88		
044	16-17/12/42	F/O D H Greaves – W/O F M Robbins	He 111		
045	17-18/12/42	W/Cdr D P D G Kelly – F/Lt A Lammer	Ju 88		
046	20-21/12/42	F/O D H Greaves – W/O F M Robbins	He 111		

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Event #	Night of...	Pilot + other aircrew	Destroyed	Probable	Damaged
047	28-29/12/42	P/O P S Kendall – P/O C R Hill			E/A
048	02-03/01/43	F/Lt J D Wright – F/O L H Sandow	Do 217		
049	06-07/01/43	F/Lt R M Graham – F/O E S Hickmore			Ju 88
050	07-08/01/43	P/O P S Kendall – P/O C R Hill	Ca 1007b		
051	15-16/01/43	P/O P S Kendall – P/O C R Hill	Ca 1007b		
052	18-19/01/43	F/O M J Gloster – P/O J F Oswald	Ca 1007b		
053	19-20/01/43	F/O D H Greaves – W/O F M Robbins	Do 217		
054	21-22/01/43	P/O V G J Phillips – Sgt D S Pollard	He 111		
055	23-24/01/43	F/Sgt T H Cameron – F/Sgt J L Hood	Do 217		
056	07-08/02/43	F/O J D A Tharp – P/O D A King	Ca 1007b		
057	11-12/03/43	F/O F H Street – F/Sgt G L Thomas	Ju 88		
058	23-24/03/43	F/O M J Gloster – F/Sgt R B Wall			E/A
059	Day 13/04/43	F/O M J Gloster – F/Sgt R B Wall	Do 217		
060	Ditto	F/O H K Humphreys – Sgt P Robertson	Ju 88		
061	Ditto	Ditto			Ju 88
062	Ditto	F/O D H Greaves – W/O F M Robbins		Ju 88	
063	Ditto	Ditto			Ju 88
064	Ditto	F/O F H Street – F/Sgt G L Thomas			Ju 88
065	Ditto	P/O K T A O'Sullivan – Sgt W G Hood			He 111
066	18-19/04/43	S/L H W Eliot– F/O A Barker			E/A
067	Ditto	F/O J Cameron Cox – Sgt D G Madge			E/A
068	Ditto	Ditto			Ju 88
069	27-28/04/43	P/O P S Kendall – F/Sgt J M C Talbot	Ju 88		
070	05-06/05/43	P/O P S Kendall – P/O D M Nedahl	Ju 52		
071	Ditto	Ditto		Ju 52	
072	10-11/05/43	F/L J D Fox – F/O C A Pryor			Ju 88
073	11-12/05/43	P/O P S Kendall – P/O D M Nedahl	One Ju 88 attacked on the ground		
074	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto		
075	Ditto	P/O K T A O'Sullivan – Sgt W G Hood	He 111		
076	24-25/05/43	P/O V G J Phillips – Sgt D S Pollard	He 111		
077	25-26/05/43	F/O P S Kendall – P/O D M Nedahl	Ju 88		
078	27-28/05/43	F/O K T A O'Sullivan – Sgt W G Hood	Ju 88		
079	Ditto	Ditto	Ju 88		

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Event #	Night of...	Pilot + other aircrew	Destroyed	Probable	Damaged
080	24-25/06/43	W/Cdr J H Player – F/Lt A Lammer	Ca 1007b		
081	26-27/06/43	F/Sgt W C Phillips – Sgt G P Smith	Ca 1007b		
082	Ditto	Lt P O Bugge – Sgt P A Robertson	Ca 1007b		
083	09-10/07/43	P/O W Lewis – P/O S A Hurley	Ca 1007b		
084	31/07-01/08/43	F/Sgt T H Cameron – P/O J L Hood	Ju 88		
085	03-04/08/43	F/O H K Humphreys – Sgt P A Robertson	Ju 88		
086	06-07/08/43	P/O W Lewis – P/O S A Hurley			Ju 88
087	08-09/08/43	P/O D Giles – F/Sgt F M Drake	Ca 1007b		
088	12-13/08/43	F/Lt J D Fox – F/O C A Pryor	Ca 1007b		
089	22-23/08/43	F/O D Giles – F/Sgt F M Drake	Ju 88		
090	Ditto	Ditto		Ju 88	
091	Ditto	F/O L J Leppard – P/O P J Houghton	Ju 88		
092	29-30/08/43	F/O V G J Phillips – F/Sgt D S Pollard	Sm 84		
093	07-08/09/43	F/O D Giles – F/Sgt F M Drake	Do 217		
094	08-09/09/43	F/Sgt H J Hale – Sgt D C Cooper	He 111		
095	Ditto	F/O P R Brook – F/Lt C J D Greenland	Ju 88		
096	Ditto	F/O J Berry – F/O I Watson	Ju 88		
097	Ditto	F/O L J Leppard – F/O P J Houghton	Ju 88		
098	09-10/09/43	W/Cdr H W Eliot – F/O A Barker	Me 210		
099	Ditto	F/O J Berry – F/O I Watson	Me 210		
100	Ditto	S/Ldr R M Graham – Sgt G P Smith	He 111		
101	Ditto	Ditto			Ju 88
102	11-12/09/43	F/O J A W Gunn – P/O G H M Carter	Ju 88		
103	Ditto	F/O P R Brook – F/Lt C J D Greenland	E/A		
104	23-24/10/43	F/O J Berry – F/O I Watson	Ju 88		
105	01-02/11/43	F/O D McEwan – F/O R H Lewis	Ju 88		
106	24-25/01/44	F/Sgt J Scollan – P/O T B Minett	He 177		
107	Ditto	Ditto	He 177		
108	Ditto	F/O D Giles – F/O T E Johnson	Do 217		
109	26-27/01/44	F/O J A W Gunn – P/O G H M Carter			Ju 88
110	Ditto	Ditto	Ju 88		
111	30-31/01/44	W/Cdr H W Eliot – F/O A Barker	Do 217		
112	12-13/04/44	S/Ldr J Arnsby – P/O W J Hyett	Ju 88		

Event #	Night of...	Pilot + other aircrew	Destroyed	Probable	Damaged
113	17-18/04/44	F/O D S Pinks – F/Sgt M Noble	E/A		
114	14-15/05/44	F/Lt D S Pinks – F/Sgt M Noble	Ju 188		
115	05-06/06/44	W/O G R Smith – P/O H C Taffs			Ju 88
116	07-08/06/44	F/Sgt D Fisher – W/O J Walsh	E/A		
117	08-09/06/44	F/Lt D S Pinks – F/Sgt M Noble	Ju 88		
118	12-13/06/44	F/Sgt Burnett – F/O Booth	Ju 88		
119	02-03/07/44	S/Ldr H P F Patten – Sgt Blundell	Ju 88		
120	06-07/07/44	F/O B A Bretherton – F/O T E Johnson	Ju 87		
121	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto		
122	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto		
123	Ditto	F/Sgt T C Griffiths – Sgt E R Kimberley			Ju 87
124	Ditto	S/Ldr J McLaren – F/O A W Tozer	Ju 87		
125	Ditto	F/O R E Reynolds – P/O M A Wingham	Ju 87		
126	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto		
127	10-11/07/44	S/Ldr J McLaren – F/O A W Tozer	Ju 87		
128	27-28/07/44	F/O R E Reynolds – P/O M A Wingham	Ju 87		
129	30-31/07/44	F/O B A Bretherton – F/Lt W T Cunningham	Ju 88		
130	01/08/44	F/O R E Reynolds – P/O M A Wingham	Ju 88		
131	04/08/44	F/O B A Bretherton – F/Lt W T Cunningham	Ju 88		
132	07-08/08/44	P/O C V James – Sgt J J McGibbon	Ju 88		
133	08-09/08/44	F/O B A Bretherton – F/Lt W T Cunningham	Ju 88		
134	24-25/08/44	F/Sgt B C Dinham-Peren – P/O D B Williams		E/A	
135	04-05/09/44	W/O D Fisher – W/O J Walsh			Ju 188
136	21-22/03/45	P/O J Scollan – F/Sgt Blundell	Ju 188		
137	22-23/03/45	F/Lt W R Pertwee – F/Sgt F E Smith	Ju 188		

In the above table, reference to “E/A” (meaning Enemy Aircraft of unspecified type) can arise in differing ways. EITHER the attacking Allied aircrew were uncertain, OR there is an unresolved discrepancy in the surviving records. Resolved discrepancies show the type as finally determined. See <<http://www.255.org.uk/scoresheet.html>> for detailed discussion.