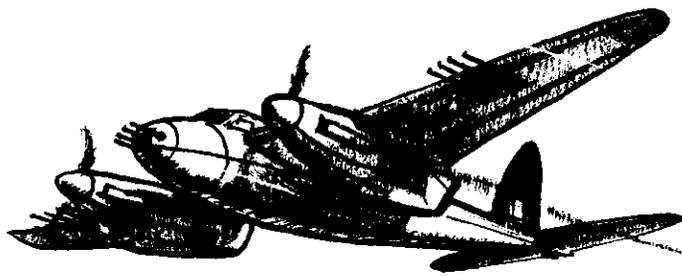


HISTORY OF 410 SQUADRON



JUNE 1941-

JUNE 1945



DEATH IN THE DARK

Call Sign RANDOM • Squadron Letters R



No. 410 (Cougar) Squadron

(Prepared by the Air Historian)

Introduction

No. 410 (Cougar) Squadron of the Royal Canadian Air Force has the distinction of being the top-scoring night fighter unit in the Second Tactical Air Force in the period between D-Day and VE-Day. Its record book shows 78. $\frac{3}{4}$ enemy aircraft destroyed, two probably destroyed and eight damaged, of these 85 victories, 60 were won in the 11-month period between June 1944 and the end of April 1945.

The story of No. 410 falls into five periods. It opens with a long, relatively quiet and uneventful sojourn in the Lowlands and northern England from June 1941 to February 1943. Its role was the night defence of the British coast, but enemy aircraft were rarely seen, and the squadron could count only one destroyed and one damaged during these 20 months. Then it moved south to a station in Lincolnshire where, in addition to its usual defensive duties, it embarked on a period (March to October 1943) of offensive operations into enemy-held territory by day and night to disrupt Nazi rail, road, canal and air traffic. More than 30 trains were attacked, as well as freight cars, vehicles, barges, tugs, factories and freight yards. In air combat four Dornier bombers were destroyed and Cougar crews had a share in the destruction of two more Hun aircraft.

In the next period, November 1943 to May 1944, the squadron was again engaged in the night defence of Britain. This was the period of the "little blitz" on England and the Cougars were at long last able to come to grips with the foe. They shot down 14 raiders with five more probably destroyed or damaged for good measure.

But this success was overshadowed by the events of the next three months (June to August 1944) when the squadron patrolled nightly over the beachheads to guard our troops and shipping against enemy bombers. Thirty-one times No. 410's Mosquitoes brought down their opponent and damaged, if they did not destroy, three more. Then the squadron moved to France and in the next eight months added 25 "Kills" and a damaged to its score.

The badge of No. 410 Squadron, approved by His Majesty the King, in May 1945, depicts a cougar's head superimposed on a crescent moon. The moon and the squadron motto "Noctivaga" (Wandering by Night) refer, of course, to the unit's wartime role as a night fighter unit. The cougar was selected as the squadron emblem because it was "a Canadian animal, noted for its speed and power in striking down its prey". No. 410's record shows how well its personnel lived up to these characteristics of its namesake.

The city of Saint John, New Brunswick, adopted the squadron during the war. In 1948, after a lapse of almost three and a half years, No. 410 was re-formed as the first fighter squadron in the

peace-time Regular Force. Equipped with Vampires, it is now stationed at St. Hubert, near Montreal, but will eventually move to another base in eastern Canada. Although no longer directly associated with its war-time foster parent, the unit will be part of the air defence of the Maritimes and its personnel will, no doubt, have many opportunities to renew the old bonds of friendship.

Part I

Training and Waiting

(June 1941 - February 1943)

Early in 1941, as the training schools in Canada got into their stride and the flow of aircrew graduates to the United Kingdom began to increase in volume, the RCAF started forming additional units to join the three squadrons that had been sent overseas in the previous year. With memories of the Battle of Britain and the "blitz" on London, Liverpool, Coventry and other cities still fresh in everyone's mind, priority was naturally given to the creation of more fighter and night fighter units for the defence of the United Kingdom. Between March and June 1941, ten new RCAF squadrons were formed in Britain; of these, three were day fighters, three were night fighters and the remainder were divided between Coastal and Bomber Commands.

No. 410, the last of the night fighter units to be formed, began life at Ayr in Scotland on the last day of June 1941, under the command of S/L P.Y. Davoud, a very able and experienced Canadian officer.¹ His two flight commanders were F/Ls R.L.F. Day, DFC (RAF) and M. Lipton (RCAF). Robert Day had won his decoration one night in May of that year when he and his air gunner destroyed two enemy aircraft. His squadron, No. 141, was also stationed at Ayr and was equipped with Defiants, a type which No. 410 was to fly for almost a year.

The Defiant was a single-engined monoplane carrying a pilot and air gunner and armed with four machine-guns in a power-driven turret. It had first been used on operations as a day fighter in May 1940 and won several spectacular victories over Dunkirk. Once the enemy fighter pilots became familiar with the new type, however, its advantage was gone, and after one disastrous encounter over the Channel in July 1940, in which No. 141 Squadron lost six out of a formation of nine aircraft, the Defiant was withdrawn from day operations and assigned to night fighter work.

While awaiting delivery of their aircraft the aircrew of No. 410 Squadron made some familiarization flights on the Defiants of No. 141.² On one of these flights on 8 July, Sgt.-Pilot B.P. Dawbarn (RAF), who had just been posted to the RCAF unit the previous day, crashed and was killed. He was the first of 60 members of the Cougar squadron who gave their lives in the war. On the same day No. 410 received its first five Defiants and by the end of the month its full complement of 18 (16 for duty with two in reserve) had arrived.³ Once the aircraft were delivered, S/L Davoud lost no time getting his crews ready for operations. Before the end of July, F/L Day's "A" Flight was passed as operational and on 5 August it flew its 8 Defiants to Acklington in Northumberland. The next day Headquarters and "B" Flights left Ayr for Drem in East Lothian, near the Firth of Forth. Its training completed, "B" Flight was declared ready for duty on 29 August,⁴ so that within two months of its formation the whole squadron had become operational. On 2 September, "A" Flight moved again from Acklington to Ouston, a few miles from Newcastle-upon-Tyne, where it remained until early in April 1942. During this period personnel alternated between Drem and Ouston, spending about a fortnight away on detachment before returning to base.

¹ Except where otherwise indicated, personnel mentioned were members of the RCAF.

² No. 141 Squadron had provided a nucleus of experienced crews for the now Canadian units.

³ The night fighters were painted black and carried the squadron letters RA with a third letter to designate the individual aircraft.

⁴ In an accident near Gifford that night, Sgt. D.W. Hall and F/S D.G. Cresswell (both RAF) lost their lives when their Defiant crashed into a hill.

A month after the move to Drem, S/L Davoud, having seen the squadron through its formative stages, left to take command of No. 409 Squadron and was succeeded by S/L Lipton. F/L R.M.M.D. Lucas (RAF) was the new commander of "B" Flight. The weeks passed quietly at Drem and Ouston. Aircraft and crews were at "readiness" every night, but apart from an occasional patrol or scramble there was little operational activity. Training, however, kept the crews occupied, the squadron averaging about 350 hours a month, while operational flying averaged only about 25 hours.

Although RCAF in name, No. 410 was, during the early months, largely RAF in personnel. At the end of November, 1941, there were 86 Canadians (12 aircrew and 74 groundcrew) in its total strength of 248 officers and airmen (48 aircrew and 200 groundcrew). The next few weeks saw an influx of RCAF ground personnel, as the "Canadianization" of our squadrons was carried out, and by the end of March 1942, the Cougars had become almost 60% RCAF (22 out of 51 aircrew and 122 out of 195 groundcrew). At one period there were several Australians in the squadron and also a Belgian officer, P/O A.G.T. Van den Branden, while the RCAF contingent included some Americans.

One incident which occurred at Drem brought the squadron its first decoration. On the night of 8 December, F/L Day had taken off with his air gunner, F/S J.J. Townsend (RAF), on a scramble after a "bandit" reported in the vicinity. Unable to locate the raider, F/L Day was instructed to return to base. The weather and visibility were very poor and as the Defiant came in on the approach run, with undercarriage down, it hit the top of a belt of trees, about six miles from base, and ploughed its way through them. In the process, the wings were torn away and the engine became detached; the perspex from the pilot's cockpit cover and the turret cupola were also torn away. The aircraft was finally stopped by an almost head-on crash into a large tree, which was demolished, and the fuselage came to rest ten yards beyond the tree, lying on its starboard side with the engine a few feet ahead. The engine and the fuselage caught fire, the flames rising to ten or twelve feet. The flames did not last long as the petrol tanks had fallen out in the wood.

"Although suffering from severe shock and in a collapsing condition, F/S Townsend at once crawled from his turret and assisted his pilot, who, though conscious, was suffering from severe head injuries. The rescuer released the pilot's harness and, with some difficulty as the pilot's legs were jammed in the rudder pedals, he managed to extricate him. In his dazed condition F/S Townsend did not know that the petrol tanks had fallen out and his anxiety was therefore increased because of the fire near the aircraft's bulkhead. He had just dragged the pilot clear when a civilian arrived who assisted him to carry the injured pilot from the aircraft.

"With great forethought, F/S Townsend inflated and inverted the dinghy to serve as a bed for the injured pilot and wrapped him in his parachute for warmth. Securing the first-aid kit from the fuselage, he administered morphia to the pilot, who was suffering acutely, and applied bandages to his head wounds. He then ensured that the guns, which were apparently undamaged, were made safe. Throughout, this airman, without any thought for his own welfare, although suffering from cuts over the eye and severe shock, displayed most praiseworthy conduct."

The British Empire Medal was awarded to the gallant air gunner whose "every thought (eyewitnesses testified) was for his pilot". Three weeks before the accident F/L Day had taken over "B" Flight from F/L Lucas when the latter was posted to an O.T.U. Lucas returned briefly to his old command until F/L R.G. Woodman (RAF) was designated to take over. Meanwhile F/L D.S. Edwards (RAF) had become C.O. of "A" Flight when F/L Day was transferred to "B".

Christmas 1941 was a quiet day, life continuing much as on other days. The dispersion of the squadron between Drem and Ouston somewhat restricted the Yuletide festivities. Two days later the unit was still more dispersed when a detachment of four Defiants was sent north to Dyce for a period of dusk, dawn and night patrols over convoys. Shortly after the arrival of the detachment, Sgt. W.A. DuPerrier was sent out to assist a Coastal Hudson which, with its wireless unserviceable, had become lost on the return flight from Norway. Guided by the ground controller, DuPerrier found the Hudson

in the night sky and his gunner signalled the pilot to follow as the Defiant led the way back to Dyce. The Canadian pilot was commended for his presence of mind and initiative.

The Dyce detachment returned home on 8 January 1942. The weather during the first month of the year was naturally consistently poor or bad, with much snow that hampered operations. It had been intended to send another detachment to Dyce and the necessary maintenance personnel had proceeded thither by rail on 25 January, but the weather kept the Defiants earthbound at Drem so long that the ground party was finally recalled after a strenuous week of snow-shifting duty.

February was even quieter than January had been, although the Hun did cause considerable excitement on the night of the 16th when as many as 17 raiders were plotted on the operations board. Both Drem and Ouston scrambled several crews but they had no luck. If the month as a whole was uneventful for the squadron, Sgt. P.R. Brook had no cause to lament a lack of excitement. One afternoon, just after taking off on a night flying test, his engine developed "a severe grinding noise" accompanied by white smoke and oil fumes. Brook managed to get the Defiant up to 1000 feet where the air gunner, on the pilot's instructions, baled out and landed safely. Despite the obvious risk he was taking, Brook stayed with the aircraft and was able to make a normal landing. A few days later, when making a practice flight, Brook discovered his air speed indicator, altimeter and rate of climb indicator were out of commission. Over the R/T he explained his predicament to another pilot who brought his Defiant alongside and guided Brook in for a perfect formation landing.

The March lion arrived in company with a blizzard, which kept everyone busy on the handle of a snow shovel. The enemy too came over several nights that month but No. 410 was still out of luck. One night a crew saw bomb bursts near Farne Island, although control had not reported any raiders in the area. Another night, the 27th, when several Defiants were up on vain patrols for elusive Huns, Sgt. F.E. Haines was heard to instruct his gunner to bale out as some of the aircraft instruments were unserviceable. F/S J.G. Pelletier made an emergency jump, escaping with slight injuries, but Haines was killed when the Defiant crashed near Morpeth.

Earlier in the month there had been another unfortunate accident at Ouston when P/Os I.B. Constant and W.J. Lewis (both RAF) lost their lives while making a night flying test. Constant was one of the original members of the squadron and Lewis had been with it since early August; both had only recently been commissioned.

In February S/L Lipton had started giving his pilots some dual instruction on a twin-engined Blenheim, in hope of early re-equipment of his squadron with more modern aircraft. The pilots made the most of their opportunity and many of them, led by P/O A. Barker, soon went solo. Late in March they learned that their hopes and zeal had not been in vain: Beaufighters were on their way to replace the now old and decrepit Defiants. Minor technical troubles with the latter aircraft were not giving the engineering staff much work and it was becoming increasingly difficult to maintain them in serviceable condition. On 2 April the first of the Beaufighter II's arrived and were surrounded by an admiring throng. A new era was dawning!

"A" Flight returned from Ouston to Drem and No. 410 was united for the first time since early August 1941. To accelerate conversion to the new type, "A" concentrated on twin-engine training on Blenheims at nearby Turnhouse, while "B" took over the operational commitments on Defiants. Re-equipment meant other changes. The air gunners were posted away and in their place came Radio Observers (or Navigators/ Radio) trained to operate the A.1. radar equipment with which the Beaufighters were fitted. This change facilitated further Canadianization of the squadron, as the first batch of 11 RO's, who arrived from Radio School on 21 April, were all RCAF. The new status of No. 410 also meant a promotion for Lipton who on 1 May became a Wing Commander. At the same time

S/L R.J. Bennell arrived as "B" Flight Commander in succession to F/L Woodman and a few days later S/L F.W. Hillock was posted in from No. 406 to replace S/L J.R.C. Young (RAF) in "A" Flight.⁵

While conversion was in progress a few more operations were carried out on the Defiants, the last sorties being made on 28 April. A week later "B" Flight was released from this duty and the squadron was non-operational for a month to complete the change-over to twins. Before the Defiants went, however, there was another accident in which a new crew, Sgts. R.G. Smith and A.G. MacKinnon (RAF), who had Joined No. 410 just 48 hours previously, met their death. They were making a familiarization flight over their new sector on 11 April, when the aircraft was seen to dive out of low cloud, strike the water and submerge. In ten months on Defiants, No. 410 Squadron had lost one pilot killed and another severely injured on operations, and four pilots and three air gunners killed on training or test flights.

The conversion work was divided into three stages. In "B" Flight the pilots received elementary dual and solo on Oxford or Blenheim twin-engines. Then they went to "A" Flight for day flying on the Beaufighter and, after S/L Hillock had checked them out as solo on that type, they crewed up with a Radio/Observer for 25 to 30 hours flying by day. After this the crews did dusk circuits and landings, followed by about ten hours night flying, before being passed as fully operational. The station commander at Drem congratulated the squadron on the manner in which its personnel tackled the conversion. "The way the boys are tearing into the air with out respite reflects the greatest credit on your leadership, organization and enthusiasm which is seen, in turn, in the hard work and long hours that the ground staff are doing and the way the air crews handle their new equipment." By the end of May, 12 crews had become operational on the Beaus and on the night of 4 June the first sorties, two uneventful scrambles, were made.

On 15 June, No. 410 left Drem for Ayr, its birthplace, exchanging stations with No. 406. Five Beaufighters and six crews, under the command of S/L Hillock, were left behind at Drem, where they remained until the end of August. During this time Frankie Hillock was posted to No. 406; S/L G.H. Elms then took charge of the detached flight for a month until he too was posted to the same squadron and was replaced by S/L B.G. Miller. At the same time Hillock returned to No. 410 as C.O. in succession to W/C Lipton who had returned to Canada at the end of July. In the King's birthday honours list in June, Lipton had been mentioned in dispatches for his outstanding service as flight and squadron commander with the Cougars.

As far as operations were concerned, the two and a half months which the squadron spent at Ayr and Drem could be summed up in the words "There was no activity".⁶ There were only eleven sorties on scrambles to intercept "bandits" (two of which proved to be friendly aircraft), but only once was a contact made. On that occasion, a scramble by Sgts. R.D. LittleJohn and W.M. Keith (RAF) from Drem, the crew got a "blip" on their A.I. and closed to 400 yards, but the radar went out of commission before a visual was obtained and the enemy got away. The same night a Ju.88 flew across the airfield at Drem, dropping a few bombs that caused slight damage.

If operational activity was at low ebb there was much flying training and so much air firing practice that at one time the squadron's supply of ammunition was almost exhausted. On several occasions crews participated in commando exercises, simulating attacks on the landing barges. The demonstrations were most realistic. Several Incidents occurred on this training. One night early in July the port engine in P/O J.H. Devlin's Beaufighter caught fire; then the other engine cut out. With his windscreen coated in ice Devlin could only glide straight ahead and trust to luck. The Beau hit a power pole, ploughed across a field, killing three cows that were lying there, and burned for almost an hour with the war load exploding in all directions. Miraculously Devlin and his observer, Sgt. H.J.

⁵ At the end of May 43 out of 51 aircrews were RCAF, and 133 out of 185 groundcrew, i.e., 75% Canadian.

⁶ The "night state" was two crews at readiness.

Tennant, were able to jump clear and neither sustained even a scratch. It was the squadron's first major accident since re-equipping. A month later S/L Bennell and P/O P. O'Neill-Dunne (RAF) had an equally miraculous escape when the weather suddenly closed in while they were on a G.C.I. (ground controlled interception) exercise. Flying control attempted to guide the Beaufighter in and, following instructions, Bennell had lowered his wheels and reduced height to 500 feet, when the aircraft hit the ground and was completely wrecked. The crew received only a few scratches and bruises.

A fortnight previously, Bennell had participated in a happier episode. On the afternoon of 21 July, a wet, miserable day (there was much bad weather during the stay at Ayr), Bennell and several other officers visited the Transatlantic Operations Room at Prestwick. Quite a little "flap" developed when a number of Fortresses and P.38's, en route from Reykjavik to Prestwick, were unable to pinpoint their position and became lost. After the Canadian party returned to Ayr a call for help was received and S/L Bennell with F/L R.G. Quest (RAF) took off to see what could be done. Despite heavy rains and extremely bad weather, they found the American aircraft and shepherded them safely to base. A few days later Bennell escorted a formation of P.38's from Ayr to Coxhill.

While at Ayr the squadron celebrated its first birthday with a stag party in the ballroom of a local hotel. A sing-song, musical program, and refreshments followed by an excellent floor show made the occasion "an outstanding success". Since July 1941, No. 410 had changed from predominantly RAF to a unit that was RCAF in personnel as well as name. Of its 46 aircrew all but seven radio observers were from the RCAF, while 236 of its 313 groundcrew were Canadians. There were some changes in personnel in the summer of 1942 as a number of crews volunteered for service in the Middle East where the Battle of Malta was at its height.

On 1 September the squadron moved again to Scorton in Yorkshire, once more exchanging places with No. 406. The farewell to Ayr was a sad one as F/Ss N. MacPherson and S.M. Cooksey (RAF) crashed and were killed. At the same time the detached flight at Drem moved to Scorton and No. 410 was reunited once more. The change in locale brought a great increase in activity and a change in luck. There were 19 sorties in September, a total equal to that for the past five months combined, and flying hours jumped to 78. All that was required to make the night fighters' joy complete was enemy activity, and Jerry obliged by coming over quite frequently.

On the first night at Scorton W/C Hillock and F/L E.P. Sharpe were scrambled and secured contacts, but the raiders took evasive action and escaped. Five nights later (6 September) P/O R.R. Ferguson, with P/O D. Creed as observer, was up on a G.C.I. exercise when bandits entered the Middlesborough area at the mouth of the Tees. Guided by vectors from ground control, Ferguson and Creed came within A.I. range of a raider and retained contact until a visual was obtained of a Ju.88 silhouetted against a clear patch in the sky. Closing in to 150 yards dead astern, Ferguson fired two bursts from his four cannons and six Brownings. Vivid explosions of several cannon strikes were seen on the mainplane and fuselage. The Junkers then made a tight turn and dived out to sea where contact was lost. No return fire was noticed but a bullet was later found in the port engine fairing of the Beaufighter. At long last, after more than a year of watching and waiting, the Cougars had opened their scorebook with a damaged Ju.88. Jerry evened the score, however, on the 19th when six crews were scrambled. P/Os S.J. Fulton and R.N. Rivers closed in on a Do.217 for two bursts that apparently missed. But the Dornier gunner was on his toes and let off some accurate shots that so badly damaged the night fighter's undercarriage and starboard wing that Fulton had to make a crashlanding.

There were no further operations in September, but training continued daily and the crews visited local G.C.I. stations to establish personal contacts that were of great value for mutual co-operation between ground and air. An active sports programme, with baseball naturally predominating, was another feature of squadron life at this time. A big party and dance on 15

October symbolized the excellent spirit of camaraderie that existed between air and ground personnel of the unit. S/L Bennell left the Cougars at this time and S/L A. Barker took over "B" Flight.

S/L Bertie Miller, "A" Flight commander, and Sgt. E.H. Collis (RAF) won a "double halo" by surviving two "shaky does" in quick succession. On the last night of September, they were up on an exercise when the Beaufighter went into a spin, falling 12,000 feet before Miller was able to pull out. The next night, when they were 18 miles out over the sea, one engine caught fire, forcing both men to take to their parachutes. Thanks to quick work by rescue launches, they were speedily picked up and returned to Scorton, a bit shaken but eager to fly again.

There was some enemy activity on two nights in October, which resulted in a few A.I. contacts but no visuals. Otherwise "night state" passed uneventfully, and the squadron prepared to move again. On 20 October, the Cougars left Scorton for Acklington in Northumberland, on exchange with No. 219 Squadron. The move was a welcome one, for coupled with it was news that was greeted with "loud cheers on all sides" - No. 410 was to be re-equipped with Mosquitoes, the most modern type of night fighter.

Immediately after arrival at Acklington, a dual-control Mosquito was delivered and intensive training began. By 3 December, conversion was well advanced, and the first Mosquito sorties were made that night. The Beaufighters remained in service for a month longer, the last sorties being made on 4 January. By the end of that month, the squadron was wholly equipped with the Mosquito II. Both December and January were active months, totalling 93 operational sorties. Much of the activity was devoted to high altitude day patrols to waylay the Jerry "weatherman" who came over almost every morning to sniff the air, but he was difficult to catch and the "milk train" patrols, as they were dubbed, proved fruitless.

There was some night activity too. Scrambles after raiders on 13 January 1943 were luckless, but another raid nine nights later brought the Cougars their first kill. The lucky crew were FS B.M. Haight and Sgt. T. Kipling (RAF). Ground control put them on to a target which Kipling picked up on his radar, holding the contact until his pilot got a visual at 600 yards. From its silhouette against the clouds, he identified the bandit as a Do.217. One brief burst at 100 yards range produced a brilliant white flash on one engine. A second burst of 75 rounds from the Hispanos had no visible effect, but the bomber disappeared into the clouds in a steep spiral dive and contact was lost. The Royal Observer Corps, however, saw the aircraft dive into the sea, with a brilliant flash and explosion, five miles off Hartlepool.

About a month before this incident, F/O R.M.G. Currie returned from a night flight to report that he had seen an elderly man with white whiskers and clad in a red suit making a ZZ approach to Acklington airfield on a vehicle powered by eight reindeer. The time was 2359 hours and the date, of course, was 24 December. The next day No. 410 celebrated its second Christmas overseas; it was not white, except in dreams, but it was filled with good food and good cheer.

In January 1943, F/LW.B. Boggs, an American in the RCAF who had been squadron engineering officer for 15 months, left on posting to No. 6 Group. His services with No. 410 had been outstanding and it was largely due to his ability, initiative and work that a remarkably high rate of serviceability had been maintained despite three conversions in aircraft equipment.

A crew was lost on 23 January when Sgt. G.G. Mills and Sgt. M. Lupton (RAF) crashed into the sea while on a training flight. There was another less serious accident some days later when a Mosquito overshot when landing, scraped by the control tower and crashed into a dispersal hut. The aircraft was wrecked but the only injury was cuts and bruises received by a startled occupant of the hut. S/L Bert Miller was posted from No. 410 late in January and S/L R.R. Ferguson took his place as "A" Flight commander.

February was quieter than the two previous months. The crews made a few more attempts to catch "Weather Willy", and had sane scrambles after bandits, chiefly on the night of the 3rd, but there

was no joy. An evasion exercise proved more enjoyable, as well as interesting and amusing. Twelve aircrew were driven in a closed vehicle to a point five miles from the aerodrome where they were released one by one. Each man carried a small map of the district and was instructed to try to regain camp without being detected en route. This exercise was part of the training in preparation for a new role which the squadron was about to undertake.

On 21 February 1943, No. 410 left Acklington for Coleby Grange in Lincolnshire, where it replaced No. 409 Squadron. The move marked the close of the first, long period in the Cougar's history. Hitherto, the squadron had been in the relatively quiet zone of No. 13 Group in the north. Now they joined No. 12 Group for eight months and embarked upon a much more active and exciting career.

Part II

"Rangers" and "Insteps"

(March - October, 1943)

The move to Coleby Grange was not completed until 23 February as the morning haze, which was a feature of this low, level area, delayed the aircraft for two days. Once arrived at their new base, the aircrews settled down to intensive training for day and night "rangers" (low flying offensive sorties) into enemy-held territory. They would still be available for defensive night patrols if required, but their major activity for the next few months would be offensive missions. Their operational "day" was no longer restricted to the hours of darkness; it extended now around the whole clock. Plans were to make three rangers a night during the moon period, which would begin on 17 March, and day rangers as conditions permitted.

Meanwhile, as preparations and training went ahead, the squadron continued "night state" and had a number of scrambles over the Wash. These led to one vain chase, a victory and a tragedy. The chase was on the 15th when one crew closed on a Ju.88 that dived to sea level and got away. Three nights later, when some Huns came over again, F/L D. Williams and P/O P.N. Dalton found a Do.217 near King's Lynn. The sighting was mutual and the enemy pilot dived away with the Mosquito in hot pursuit. At 1800 feet Williams pulled out in a steep turn, but the Dornier continued to dive and a moment later a huge ball of crimson fire exploded on the ground. Although the Mosquito had not used its guns, the crew believed they had been responsible for the bomber's headlong crash. The assessment officer, however, decided to share the credit between the nightfighter and the anti-aircraft defences.

Pleasure at this success was short-lived for another Mosquito, returning from a patrol that night, crashed near base and FS B.M. Haight and Sgt. O.S. Milburn (RAF) died in the wreck. Haight, it will be recalled, had scored the squadron's first kill in January of that year.

The moon period of March came and passed while the night rangers cursed the weather which made it impossible for them to operate. The day rangers were somewhat more fortunate, attempting nine sorties on the 26th, 27th and 30th. Eight had to turn back when the weather over the Dutch coast was found to be unsuitable for penetration inland. S/L Ferguson, who with W/C Hillock made the first two sorties on the 26th, met some concentrated and accurate flak which gave his Mossie a good shaking before he got out of range.

The one successful day ranger in March - Fighter Command's first daylight penetration by a Mosquito into Germany - was a remarkable achievement. Taking off from Coleby Grange at 1415 on the afternoon of the 27th, P/O M.A. Cybulski and his navigator, P/O H.H. Ladbrook (RAF), struck across the North Sea to Vlieland, turned south-east past Stavoren to Meppel where they altered course eastward and, hedge-hopping across northern Holland, reached Meppen, just across the German border; here they flew down the Ems to Papenburg and then turned westward for home where they landed at 1725 after covering more than 600 miles. Flying down the canal and rail line between Meppen and Papenburg, the Mosquito attacked five targets. First it damaged a tug and two barges; from which debris flew into the air: then it riddled a locomotive and raked a line of six freight cars; two military buses were shot up and, to end the strafe, pieces were shot off another locomotive which was left wreathed in clouds of steam. Newspapers heralded the record flight but the pilot's name had to be suppressed lest it bring reprisals upon his relatives in Poland. Cybulski's home was in Renfrew, Ontario; his grandparents were Polish.

The next few day rangers were less fortunate and indicated the great danger attending these daylight penetrations into enemy territory. On 6 April, F/L C.D. McCloskey and P/O J.G. Sullivan

did not return from a sortie. The German radio announced that a British aircraft had been shot down over north-west Germany and it was later learned that the two men were prisoners of war.⁷ Mac McCloskey, one of the original members of No. 410, had just that day been informed of his promotion to Flight Lieutenant as deputy commander of "A" Flight. Four days later F/Os J.E. Leach and R.M. Bull were lost over Friesland and were presumed killed in action.

When the moon period began in mid-April, the night rangers were at last able to get into action. W/C Frank Hillock who, with his navigator, F/L O'Neil-Dunne, was the first to take off, on the night of the 15th, headed for the Ruhr. The weather was not too good and, as the Mosquito was skipping along at 300 feet over Holland, Hillock suddenly saw the eight radio masts of Apeldoorn station rushing at him. There was no time to climb and no room to fly between them, so the pilot threw the Mossie on its side and ripped through the antennae, tearing away several wires. On return to base it was found that one wing tip of the aircraft had been sliced off, and another wing had been cut through to the mainspar before the wire broke; about 300 feet of well-made quarter-inch copper cable were trailing behind the Mosquito. Despite this shaking experience Hillock had coolly flown to his target area before coming home.

On the 17th, one crew, crossing the North Sea, spotted a convoy off the Dutch coast and reported it for suitable action by the Royal Navy at dawn. The same night, FS D.M. Norman and Sgt. J.R. Hunt (RAF) flew up the Rhine, strafing barges and a factory near Rees. Three nights later Norman and Hunt shot up a freight yard at Cleve and strafed some more barges near Cuijk, across the frontier in Holland. But FS W.J. Reddie and Sgt. K. Evans (RAF), who had gone out on a ranger in the early morning of the 20th, were missing. On these night sorties the crews usually encountered considerable flak as they crossed the coast and it was presumed that the Mosquito had been shot down by the Nazi gunners.

For over a week the weather was unsuitable for rangers. Finally, on the last day of April, WO D.M. Mackenzie and Sgt. B.H.T. Taylor (RAF), on a day sortie into Holland, shot up two coal trains, bringing both to a stop, and seriously damaging one of the engines. The next day a barge on a Dutch canal was strafed by F/O C.F. Medhurst and FS W.J. Gordon.

The moon period in May was busy and profitable for the night rangers whose sphere of operations was now extended to include France and Belgium as well as Germany and the Netherlands. The squadron also undertook night intruder sorties in support of Bomber Command operations, sending out aircraft to patrol over airfields from which enemy fighters might be active. Altogether, between 14 and 29 May, the Cougars made 10 intruder and 14 night ranger sorties, as well as seven scrambles. The intrusions and scrambles were uneventful, but seven of the rangers crews found targets in France, Holland and Germany, attacking 14 locomotives, 11 freight cars, and a number of barges in addition to destroying a vehicle and a high-powered railroad light. Norman (now a Pilot Officer) and Hunt made two of the attacks, the other crews being P/O C.F. Green – Sgt. E.G. White (RAF), MacKenzie - Taylor, F/O H.O. Bouchard - Sgt. W.S. Fyfe (RAF), S/L R.R. Ferguson - P/O D. Creed, and Sgts. S.B. Huppert – J.S. Christie (RAF).

"Butch" Bouchard and Fyfe, a very good team who on their sortie to the Dummer Sea area on the 15th had made a spectacular haul of five locomotives, eleven freight cars, a vehicle and a light, did not return from another ranger to the Hanover-Bremen area three nights later.

On 20 May Frank Hillock completed his tour and on his departure from the Cougars was presented with silver mugs, cigarette case and smoking box W/C G.H. Elms succeeded him in command, having returned from No. 409 Squadron. Early in April F/L Don B. Freeman, one of the original members of No. 410, had gone to No. 406 to take command of a flight. Another departure in

⁷ Out of eleven Cougar crews missing on operations over enemy territory, McCloskey and Sullivan alone survived.

May was F/O D. Williams who was tour-expired; a month later he was killed in a flying accident in Northern Ireland,

One of the highlights of May occurred on the 27th when the squadron's aircrew went to Digby to be presented to their Majesties the King and Queen, and have an informal chat with the King who took a keen interest in the work of the Cougars.

After the day and night ranger activity of May, June was a decided contrast. The only two sorties of this type were foiled by lack of adequate cloud cover over the Dutch coast. Nor were the 14 scrambles any more eventful. The squadron's major activity this month was a new operation called "Instep". For many months Coastal Command had been maintaining a close surveillance of the Bay of Biscay to harass or stop the movement of U-boats. Recently the enemy counter air activity over the Bay had increased and Coastal Command asked Fighter Command for assistance in protecting its crews. As a result No. 410 was instructed to detail several crews to Predannack in Cornwall as reinforcement whence, in company with Mosquitoes of Nos. 307 (Polish) and 456 (RAAF) Squadrons, they made "Instep patrols" over the centre of the Bay (47°N - 07 °W and 44°N – 03°W). The detachment remained in the south for a month, making 20 patrols (each of four or five hours duration) between 12 June and 7 July. Four of the sorties were eventful.

On the afternoon of the 13th P/O R.B. Harris and Sgt. E.H. Skeel (RAF), accompanied by three other Mosquitoes, were over the Bay, south-west of Brest, when four Ju.88's were sighted. The enemy took cover in the clouds and the British formation became broken up. Some minutes later the patrol leader heard one of his crews say it was being chased by FW.190s and another requested an emergency homing. Nothing more was heard. The other three Mosquitoes did not return. Harris and Skeel, an able and popular team, had joined the squadron late in March.

The next morning P/Os J.A. Watt and E.H. Collis (RAF), flying with three Polish Mossies, sighted five U-boats, which drew into a tight circle to throw up a wall of flak. Two of the fighters attacked nevertheless, making strikes on two conning-towers. One Mosquito was also damaged and the patrol returned to base.

Yet another patrol from Predannack, consisting of three crews from No. 307 and F/Os E.A. Murray and P.R. Littlewood (RAF) from No. 410, had an encounter with the enemy. The patrol was zigzagging at sea level over the Bay at mid-day on the 19th when an olive-green camouflaged BV.138 was seen, also at sea level. In line astern the four Mossies made two attacks in succession as the big flying-boat climbed desperately for the cover of the clouds. One engine soon began to smoke and, unable to gain height, the aircraft nosed down toward the sea. Another attack set the starboard engine ablaze. After the BV crashed into the water, three men emerged and scrambled into a dinghy.

The last bit of action occurred on the 21st when P/O C.F. Green and Sgt. E.G. White (RAF) shared in an attack on two small armed merchant vessels or trawlers. Both ships were damaged, steam escaping from near the bridge of one. Their defensive fire was inaccurate.

S/L A. Barker, one of the squadron's old-timers who had been in command of "B" Flight for eight months, ended his tour in June, and was posted to an O.T.U. as an instructor. In his place came S/L A.G. Lawrence, DFC, from No. 406 Squadron. Lawrence brought with him his team-mate, FS H.J. Wilmer, DFM, (RAF). With the Lynx Squadron they had destroyed three enemy bombers between April 1942 and March 1943. They were soon able to add another e.a. to their score.

July was a busy month, thanks in considerable measure to enemy activity. When a raid came over Hull and Grimsby about midnight of the 12th/13th, four Mosquitoes were scrambled from Coleby Grange to intercept.⁸ Over the mouth of the Humber, Lawrence and Wilmer caught a Do.217, which took violent evasive action and got away after the Mossie had fired one short burst. Flares,

⁸ There were also three intruder and one ranger sorties that night, making it the busiest the squadron had known for many weeks.

ack-ack and searchlights over Hull made it impossible to continue the chase. Resuming their hunt for targets, the Mosquito crew was vectored on another Do.217, obtaining A.1. contact followed immediately by a visual. This one did not get away, although it tried to by diving, climbing and making tight turns. One short burst from the Mosquito's four cannons had no effect; a second squirt caused a huge flash in the Dornier's starboard engine followed by clouds of smoke. In a diving turn to starboard with the engine glowing brightly, the bomber went down, hitting the sea with a great splash. Its gunners had opened fire on the night fighter for Lawrence and Wilmer had seen some streaks of red and white tracer pass under the starboard wing.

Again the next night Jerry came over but the six crews that went up did not get one contact. Nor were six further scrambles later in the month any luckier.

After a month's layoff the intruders and rangers resumed operations in July, making 20 sorties. Early in the month the squadron received six type VI Mosquito bombers for use on this work and a special flight was formed under F/L Murray for night rangers and patrols over enemy aerodromes. The new aircraft were used for the first time on the night of the 15th when P/O Norman and FS Hunt attacked a tug boat on the Elbe river and strafed a marshalling yard at Lenzen. Another crew, P/Os Watt and Collis on a Mosquito II, damaged a locomotive on another ranger in the Netherlands. Both crews had trouble with their cannons; Norman's guns jammed and Watt's wouldn't stop firing until the ammunition was gone.

The next ranger sortie on the 18th resulted in the loss of P/O L.A. Wood and F/O D.J. Slaughter (RAF), who did not return from France after leaving Ford, their advanced base. The crew had joined No. 410 early in March.⁹

Poor weather intervened for a week. Then on the 25th two crews went out to patrol Deelen aerodrome, in the Netherlands, in support of Bomber Command operations. Earlier in the month there had been five of these "flower" sorties, as they were called, all of which were without incident. It was otherwise this night. The first crew, Norman and Hunt, saw the visual Lorenz lit three times during their patrol and noticed bombs fall on or near the aerodrome, starting fires. An hour later they were relieved by Murray and Littlewood. As the second Mosquito approached Deelen, after orbiting a dummy aerodrome for a few moments, the crew saw an aircraft come in and land. Half an hour later a second Hun appeared, flicking its navigation lights off and on. Murray came in behind, saw it was a Do.217 and fired a three-second burst. Searchlights coned the Mosquito while the flak guns opened up. But the Dornier was finished; its port engine on fire, the bomber, lit up by five searchlights, veered to the left, crashed and exploded in flames on the boundary of the airfield. As the Mosquito continued to circle, a third e.a. slipped in for a hurried landing. When it reached the end of the runway the Jerry switched on its navigation lights again and Murray came down in a sharp diving turn to fire a long burst that struck and damaged the aircraft. The navigation lights were quickly doused as the defences, flak and searchlights, again came into action.

On three other nights (28 to 30 July) crews went out to patrol Schleswig/Jegel, Gilze-Rijen and Venlo aerodromes while our bombers were abroad, but apart from haze and flak, there was little to report.

The Cougars suffered a severe blow on the 30th when F/L Murray and F/O Littlewood were killed in the crash of the squadron Oxford near Honiley, Warwickshire, while on a navigation flight. Murray was deputy flight commander of "B" Flight and was in charge of ranger and intruder operations. With his observer he had destroyed one enemy aircraft, shared in the destruction of a second, and had damaged another on the ground. Murray was a native of Stellarton, N.S. His navigator was also a Canadian, from Saanichton on Vancouver Island. Just a few days before their

⁹ A summary of the squadron's ranger and intruder operations shows that Sgt. Huppert and FS Christie damaged two trains on the night of the 19th. The squadron diary makes no mention of the incident and does not report any operational activity that night.

death both officers had been highly commended for their services and the received, posthumously, a mention in dispatches.

It was anticipated that August would be another busy period for the flower and ranger crews. Six Mosquito VI bombers and six Mosquito II night fighters fitted with Mark IV A.1. were available for these operations over enemy territory, in addition to the squadron's normal defensive commitments. Twenty-five sorties were made over enemy territory, including four by day. Most of the activity was concentrated in the last half of the month, the first fortnight being a period of poor weather. There were, however, numerous bullseye exercises and much bombing practice during the first part of August, and one novel mission when two Mosquitoes went out on Air/Sea Rescue work to keep watch for a long period over an airborne lifeboat and its occupants. During this period too the squadron welcomed a number of U.S.A.A.F. pilots.

Three day rangers set out at dawn on the 14th but had to turn back at the Dutch coast because of unsuitable weather. The next night (15th) two rangers went out from Castle Camps (used as an advanced base for night operations) on the squadron's first operation with bombs: their target was St. Dizier aerodrome. Lawrence and Wilmer dropped their two 250-lb bombs on the runway and, on the return flight, attacked a train near Paris. Cannon and machine-gun strikes were seen, followed by a vivid blue flash. The second crew, P/O R.D. Schultz and F/O V.A. Williams, did not reach St. Dizier, but had an exciting sortie nonetheless. First three locomotives and three freight cars were damaged between Clermont and Poix and a bridge was bombed; then, 20 miles off Beachy Head on the way home, they met another aircraft and closed to investigate. It proved to be a Do.217 whose under gunner opened accurate fire on the Mosquito. Schultz engaged in a long chase while the enemy pilot tried to shake off pursuit. His second burst hit around the Dornier's cockpit where fires broke out and burning debris fell away. Three, perhaps four, of the crew were seen to bale out. Then, as the Dornier turned toward the French coast in a shallow controlled dive, Schultz fired again. The starboard wing and engine broke away and, completely enveloped in flames, the bomber hit the sea where it continued to burn brightly. After taking some cine camera films of the scene and reporting the position of the crew, Schultz headed for home. En route he flew over an Air/Sea Rescue launch already on its way to the crash.

On the 16th, seven locomotives were attacked, Dijon aerodrome was bombed twice and St. Dizier once by three crews, P/O Norman - FS Hunt, P/O Watt - F/O Collis, and P/O K.R. McCormick - FS W. Nixon. Further sorties on the 17th and 18th found no targets. F/Os G.B. Mac Lean and H. Plant (RAF) were lost on a ranger over Germany the second night. A relatively new crew, they had joined No. 410 from O.T.U. on 25 May, and had become well-liked and able.

There was no further activity until the 23rd when Cybulski and Ladbroke dropped one bomb on a rail junction near Schleswig and another on the airfield at nearby Jagel. On the 27th Norman and Hunt bombed Florennes aerodrome while Deelen was similarly attacked by Watt and Collis three nights later.

Sgts. S.B. Huppert and J.S. Christie made an eventful daylight penetration into north-western Germany on the 29th, during which they damaged a motor launch, four barges and a dredge on the Ems canal between Lingen and Papenburg.

Enemy activity over England had led to a number of scrambles several nights, particularly on the 31st when five crews were sent off. With one exception they had no contact with the foe. The exceptional sortie was a case of the biter being bit. F/O F.W. Foster with P/O J.H. Grantham had just become airborne when an enemy intruder came in below the Mosquito and let off a burst of cannon and machine-gun fire that caused some damage. By climbing to 10,000 feet and taking evasive action Foster was able to shake off the Hun and landed safely.

Sgts. W.T. Cheropita and N.M. Dalton, who had been posted to No. 410 from O.T.U. on 17 August, met their death ten days later on a practice flight.

The first three weeks of September were somewhat quieter than August had been. Ranger sorties were cancelled, but flower operations continued in support of Bomber Command with 15 sorties between the 3rd and 16th. These resulted in six bombing attacks on St. Michel airfield, Laon airfield (twice), one railway bridge near Avranches, another south of Rennes, and a marshalling yard near Fougères. In addition F/Os E.S.P. Fox and C.D. Sibbett, who had joined the squadron in August, blew up a locomotive in the last attack of this type carried out by the Cougars. One crew was lost, P/O J.E. Fisher and Sgt. D. Ridgeway (RAF), who failed to return from a sortie to the Melun area on the night of the 16th, when the last Mosquito VI sorties were made.¹⁰ These aircraft were then transferred¹¹ and both ranger and flower operations ceased. In their place the squadron prepared to undertake "Mahmoud" sorties, or offensive patrols over specific points in search for enemy aircraft. For this purpose two specially equipped Mosquito IIs were to be kept at readiness each night.

For a week, from the 17th to the 23rd, there was no activity except for a number of fruitless scrambles. This gave the squadron time to train for Mahmoud, engage in more bullseye exercises, prepare for a visit from the Inspector General and engage in softball games with neighbouring USAAF units - some of the varied activities which filled in the time when there were no operations on the board. S/L Lawrence finished his tour early in September and was repatriated, his place in "B" Flight being taken over by S/L I.A. March, a native of Newfoundland.

Mahmoud was scheduled to begin on the 21st, but weather delayed the start until the 24th when F/L R.H.B. Jackson with F/O M.C. Murray made the first patrol. They had no luck, nor did two other crews on the 26th and 27th. But F/L M.A. Cybulski and F/O H.H. Ladbroke (RAF) had an experience, which brought them the immediate award of the DFC - the first won by the Cougars.

They had taken off from Coleby Grange shortly after 8 p.m. to make a Mahmoud patrol between Zuyder Zee and Meppen. Except for some heavy flak, a concentration of searchlights and jamming of the A.I. set, the 90-minute patrol was uneventful. Homeward bound, Ladbroke got a radar contact, and despite jamming, held it until he and his pilot caught sight of a Do.217 flying east. As the enemy pilot went into a steep climb the night fighter closed rapidly to deliver a three-second burst. "The e.a. immediately exploded with a terrific flash and descended enveloped in flames. Burning petrol and oil flew back onto the Mosquito, scorching the fuselage from nose to tail, the port wing inboard of the engine, the bottom of the starboard wing, the port tailplane and the rudder, from which the fabric was torn away. Pieces from the e.a. struck the port oil cooler, resulting in the loss of oil and making it necessary to shut down the engine.... The pilot was completely blinded by the explosion and it was necessary for the navigator to take control of the aircraft for approximately five minutes until F/L Cybulski regained normal vision ... Course was set for base and after a remarkable 250-mile flight on one engine with the aircraft seriously damaged" the Mosquito got safely home. "Cy" and "Laddie" had more than once distinguished themselves on operations and the squadron was delighted when they received the purple and white ribbon to climax the long period of splendid work.

There were eight more Mahmoud patrols in October, all without incident. The same was true of scrambles, which rose to the unusually high figure of 26 for the period 1 to 19 October, but this spate of Luftwaffe activity held promise of better hunting in days to come. One night, indeed, the enemy raiders dropped three H.E. and five anti-personnel bombs on the airfield at Coleby Grange, rendering it temporarily unserviceable. This visit from the enemy and this rush of defensive activity marked the end of No. 410's sojourn at Coleby Grange and the close of another phase of its career.

In its eight months at this base the squadron had made 286 operational sorties. The majority of these (125) had been scrambles on which one enemy aircraft had been destroyed and another

¹⁰ Two crews from another squadron on their return from France that night reported seeing an aircraft shot down in flames by flak and cannon fire near Beaumont le Roger. The location and time agreed with the flight plan of the missing Cougar aircraft.

¹¹ There had been 48 sorties on this type, 9 in July, 27 in August and 12 in September. Two crews had been lost.

shared. But the most interesting operations had been the 161 offensive missions into enemy territory or waters on day and night rangers (78), intruders and flowers (49), insteps (20) and mahmouds (12). These had resulted in the destruction of three Do.217s, a share in the destruction of a BV.138, and damage to another Hun. In addition, enemy airfields, bridges and freight yards had been bombed, 33 trains, more than 20 freight cars, two tugs and a motor launch, ten or more barges, a dredge, two trawlers, three vehicles, a factory and other targets had been strafed. Nine crews had been lost on these operations and, in the same period, two crews had been killed in flying accidents.

Part III

"The Little Blitz"

(November 1943 - May 1944)

Between 20 and 22 October 1943, No. 410 Squadron moved from Coleby Grange in Lincolnshire to West Mailing, a few miles west of Maidstone in Kent. Here it was located in an area that, during the Battle of Britain, had become known as "Hell's Corner"; it was still one of the most active centres of Fighter Command's operations. The move brought the Cougars into No. 11 (F) Group, with which it remained until the spring of 1944. The crews anticipated "lots of joy" in their new zone, and they were not disappointed. It proved to be a very successful period. At the time the squadron joined No. 11 Group its score stood at five enemy bombers (all Do.217s) destroyed, two more shared and two damaged. Seven months later, on the eve of D-Day, the score had risen to 19.3/4 destroyed, one probably damaged and six damaged. In seven months, the Cougars won more than twice as many victories as they had in the previous 26 months. The explanation was simple. The German bomber force had become more active, making numerous small scale attacks on London and south coast ports: and the Cougars were in the right place at the right time.

The stay at West Mailing was brief, just 20 days, during which time the squadron made 55 patrols and scrambles - figures which illustrate the greatly increased scale of activity.¹² (In the previous nine months of 1943 the number of sorties had averaged only 34 per month) Operations began with an unfortunate loss. On the night of the 22nd, F/L R.H.B. Jackson and P/O M.C. Murray, while on patrol off the English coast, picked up a contact; then the radar plotting of their aircraft faded, and the crew did not return.

On several other nights there were chases after "bogeys", but the crews were unable to close. Once S/L March and F/O K.M. Eyolfson followed a bandit, a Ju.188, to near the French coast where it flew into a heavy cloud bank just as March was about to open fire. When the Mosquito followed, electrical disturbances caused the A.1. set to blow up and the hunt had to be abandoned. Finally, on 5 November, the luck changed and the Cougars made the first of their long series of kills in No. 11 Group. While on patrol over the Channel off Dungeness F/O C.F. Green and P/O E.G. White (RAF) were vectored after a bandit flying north at 23,000 feet. White picked up the raider on his A.1. and Green closed in below, identifying it as an Me.410. The first cannon burst hit around the port engine, whereupon the enemy went into a tight diving turn with the Mosquito in close pursuit. After further strikes, the 410 exploded with a brilliant white flash, breaking into burning fragments that caused another explosion when they struck the water.

Three days after this victory, No. 410 moved again from West Malling to Hunsden in Hertfordshire, about 20 miles north of London. Here the Cougars replaced No. 157 Squadron, which went to Predannack. The formation of the Second Tactical Air Force about this time led to the redesignation of Fighter Command as the Air Defence of Great Britain.

The seven weeks, which the squadron spent at Hunsdon, were not quite as busy as the previous three at West Malling, chiefly due to two periods of bad weather in December. Nevertheless there were 93 night patrols and scrambles,¹³ and November set a record with 80 sorties, the total of

¹² For a time the squadron supplied four aircraft nightly to reinforce Bradwell Bay and Ford in addition to four "available" at West Malling.

¹³ Three of the sorties late in November were uneventful Mahmoud patrols over an enemy beacon east of Bonn, Germany.

operational hours (144) passing the hundred mark for the first time in the unit's history. Bullseye exercises and G.C.I, practice continued to be an almost nightly feature of the training programme. It was on one of these flights that F/Os J.J. Blanchfield and K.J. Cox were killed. They had been scrambled, together with WO C.H. James and FS T.C. Levine, in the evening of 26 November, and after completing an uneventful patrol engaged in a practice interception. By mischance the two Mosquitoes collided. The one crew baled out safely but Blanchfield and Cox, who had been with the squadron since 14 September, died in the crash of their aircraft.

In the squadron's Operations Record Book the words "uneventful" or "no contact obtained" appear opposite 90 of the sorties carried out from Hunsdon. Once there was the comment "fleeting contact; unable to close." But the two remaining sorties could not be dismissed so briefly. They both occurred on the night of 10 December and one, as the squadron diary expressed it, "made a bit of history".

At 1800 hours that evening, F/O R.D. Schultz and his observer, F/O V.A. Williams, took off from Hunsdon for a routine patrol over the North Sea. Except for scattered cloud at 7000 feet the sky was clear and visibility was brilliant. For 50 minutes the Mosquito patrolled north and south along a line midway over the sea; nothing was stirring. Then the voice of the controller at Trimley Heath came through, giving the crew a vector with a warning to investigate the "bogey" with caution. Further vectors led to an A.I. contact at 2 ½ miles range. Diving rapidly, the Mosquito overshot the target, but regained contact with the controller's aid and caught sight of an aircraft approaching head-on. Schultz swung around, drew in to 50 yards astern and, after identifying the raider as a Do.217, opened fire. A second short burst made the starboard engine break into flames; a third, delivered as the enemy pilot tried to twist away, caused a large flash and explosion on the Dornier. Return fire from the bomber then ceased; but the Hun continued its evasive action, trying to reach the cover of the clouds 2000 feet below. It dived through, opened its bomb doors, presumably to jettison its load, and then, after a final long burst from the Mossie's cannons, hit the sea and burned furiously.

The controller now had another plot on the board and Schultz climbed rapidly to 15,000 feet where Williams soon picked up a contact, which led to a visual on a second Do.217. One burst from dead astern at range of 300 yards closing to 50 feet was enough. The Dornier blew up, giving the Mosquito a very perceptible jar. So close were the two that the night fighter flew through the debris of its victim.

During the brief action, Williams had been holding a third contact and Schultz set out in pursuit, catching sight almost immediately of yet another Dornier. "Now began a long duel with the enemy pilot showing a high degree of airmanship. The evasive tactics were excellent throughout. Mosquito fired two very short bursts from astern but missed. E/a peeled off to port and fired a very accurate burst from dorsal position. Mosquito followed e/a down to 9000 feet and pilot fired a long burst which set fire to starboard engine. Evasive action went on down to sea level and e/a turned for home ... This was a mistake for enemy pilot stopped evasion for this short period, enabling F/O Schultz to get in another short burst causing starboard engine to blaze. E/a put out almost a defensive barrage from every available gun and Mosquito was hit in nose while a cannon shell smashed the instrument panel, just missing the pilot by three inches. One more burst at e/a caused port engine to catch fire. The enemy pilot, however, still kept going with both engines burning but eventually hit the sea, going straight in."

On this Dornier, as on the first, Schultz and Williams could see the swastika markings on the rudder fin. In all three cases bright moonlight glittering on the dorsal turrets had facilitated visual location of the raiders. The third bomber appeared to have a gun turret fitted in the tail also.

Schultz and Williams had pulled the hat trick with three kills in 15 minutes, but their sortie was not yet ended. Damaged in the gallant combat offered by the third Dornier, the Mossie's starboard engine began to splutter; then the port engine caught fire. Luckily the first motor soon

picked up, and the fire died out in the other engine when the propeller was feathered. On one engine the pilot managed to reach Bradwell Bay and landed safely. For their display of skill, courage, determination and fine fighting qualities, Schultz and Williams received immediate awards of the DFC.

The same night a fourth Do.217 was damaged by F/O D.M. Norman and P.O. J.R. Hunt (RAF) in an encounter North of Chelmsford. The crew had been scrambled at the time Schultz and Williams were fighting their amazing battle over the sea, and soon saw searchlights and ack-ack batteries in action. The Mossie closed quickly on one target which was taking extremely violent evasive action, climbing and diving steeply and simultaneously making sharp turns. Despite these antics the night fighter closed to firing range for four short bursts that caused some strikes on one wing. Then the cannons jammed, due probably to the violent action necessary to keep in touch with the Dornier. The R/T and intercom also had gone U/S, but Norman continued the chase for some moments before turning homeward.

While at Hunsdon an important change was effected in the organization of the squadron. Hitherto, its strength had been about 260 officers and airmen, of whom 54 or so were aircrew and the remainder ground personnel. Late in November the squadron was reduced to air personnel only with just a handful of ground staff for necessary orderly room duties; the remainder were posted to No. 3062 Servicing Echelon, which attended to the multifold tasks associated with the word "servicing" throughout the rest of the squadron's career. There were also changes in equipment at this time. A travelling "circus" came to Hunsdon to train the aircrews on the latest model "Mark VIII" of the A.1. radar, in preparation for conversion to Mosquito XIII aircraft. The first of the new Mossies was delivered on 2 December and by the end of that month the Cougars had received their full complement of 17.

F/L M.A. Cybulski, DFC and F/O H.H. Ladbrook, DFC, completed their tour with the Cougars with two scrambles in the early morning of 20 December. Four days later Cybulski left Hunsdon to fly to a new post in No. 9 Group; en route his Oxford crashed in Lancashire and he received serious injuries.

Christmas 1943 was a bad day with weather "right down on the deck", but it did not affect the spirits of the Cougars, and, with no operations to interfere, everyone spent a very merry time. Then belongings were gathered up, equipment packed, and by air and road No. 410 and its echelon moved once more to Castle Camps in Cambridgeshire. The new station, where the squadron remained for the next four months, was in the southeastern corner of Cambridgeshire, not far from Saffron Walden and about 45 miles distant from London. They were busy months, as the Luftwaffe attacks on the capital rose to a peak, and the crews averaged more than 110 sorties per month - a figure never before approached in the squadron's career. They were successful months, too, with nine kills, a probable and three damaged to record for the new Mossie XIII's.

Most of the action, however, occurred in the two months February and March 1944. The first month of the new year was busy (102 sorties)¹⁴ but disappointing and aggravating. With few exceptions the sortie reports were again "uneventful" or "no contacts obtained". Twice contacts were chased as far as the French coast where controller called the night fighter to turn back; another time the chase had to be abandoned when the raider entered the balloon barrage of the inner defensive area around London. On the 28th, when a group of 40 or 50 huns came in the Cougars again had no luck. The enemy made extensive use this night of "window", a tinsel paper device to confuse A.1. interception. This was apparently the first time that No. 410 squadron experienced this counter-measure. The next night produced another aggravating incident when a Fleet Air Arm crew serving with the squadron attacked a Ju.88.

¹⁴ The squadron had one Mosquito XII on which six of these sorties were made.

They noticed no strikes at the time but, seeing the aircraft dive as though out of control and, some moments later, a large explosion and glow below the clouds, they believed they had destroyed the Hun. Their claim was disputed however, by another squadron, which received credit for the kill.

A flying accident on the 16th took the lives of F/L C.F. Medhurst and F/O A.B. Henderson. The former had joined No. 410 late in March 1943 and just a fortnight before his death had returned from a period of leave in Canada. Henderson had come to the Cougars on 22 December, on posting from No. 488 (RNZAF) Squadron.

A number of crews finished their tours in January, and left No. 410; among them were F/Os J.A. Watt and E.H. Collis, F/O D.M. Norman and P/O J.R. Hunt, F/O C.F. Green (pilot) and S/L R.R. Ferguson (pilot) all of whom had done outstanding work with the unit. Ferguson's place as "A" Flight commander was taken by S/L C.A.S. Anderson.

Enemy activity increased in February with the result that the Cougars had a profitable month on their new Mossies, destroying five Huns and damaging two. The action began on the night of the 3rd/4th when 135 raiders came over and the squadron made 15 sorties between 8 p.m. and 7 a.m., several crews going up twice during the night. Five got contacts and four were able to bring the enemy within visual range. Twice the target slipped away, one pilot narrowly avoiding a collision with an F.W.190. In another instance the two aircraft came so close together that the Mosquito's starboard propeller clipped the bandit and F/O S.G. Dinsdale was able to claim a damaged Ju.88. With his observer, FS J.E. Dunn, he had been chasing about, investigating ack-ack fire and searchlight "blobs" on the clouds, when a contact was picked up. He came in very close identifying it as a Ju.88, flying straight and level and scattering some "window". Just as Dinsdale was about to fire the 88 made a violent peel-off to port and headed directly for the night fighter, grazing the propeller as it flashed past underneath. On return to base it was found that two blades of the Mossie's propeller were scraped and scored from tip to base, and bore traces of olive green or grey paint.

About the same time that Dinsdale had his brush with the Junkers F/Os E.S.P. Fox and C.D. Sibbett stalked a violently jinking Do.217 that was also scattering "window". The first burst missed but Fox clung to his quarry for ten minutes despite its frantic manoeuvres until he could get in another long squirt. A large piece flew off the starboard side of the Dornier; then it exploded and went straight down in flames, striking the sea with a flash that lit up the clouds over a wide area.

In the next nine nights the enemy came over three times but the Cougars had no joy. On the contrary, they lost three of their personnel in accidents. P/O K.R. McCormick was killed when his Mosquito crashed during a night flying test on the 5th. His navigator, P/O W. Nixon (RAF), was able to bale out, escaping with a slight injury. McCormick had been with the squadron since the end of March 1943 and had just completed his tour. An extremely popular member of the Cougars, he was one of the mainstays of the squadron hockey team. There was another accident on the 11th when several crews that had been scrambled after raiders had to land at Bradwell Bay when the weather closed in at Castle Camps. WOs J.L.A. Madden and R.T. Currie were killed when their aircraft for some reason crashed near the other base.

S/L J.D. Somerville and F/O G.D. Robinson began their long string of victories on the 13th with a double success. They had been up for some time on a combined exercise and patrol when the controller directed them out over the North Sea to meet some approaching "trade". Presently they picked up a contact, identified it as a Ju.88 and fired one short burst. The 88 blew up. In the glare of the fire Robinson saw the back of its fuselage break in two as the raider disintegrated in the air.

Almost Immediately the Mosquito crew got another contact, which was soon sighted thanks to a brilliant greenish-white light in the tail. For half an hour, Somerville followed it, through violent peel-offs and other evasive action. Glare from the light made it difficult to recognize the type but finally, from the exhaust glow, it was seen to be a Ju.188. When the raider went into a steep dive and the range began to open, Somerville let off a burst that made strikes on the fuselage. The enemy

upper gunner also opened fire. Contact was then lost and could not be replaced.

The same night F/O Schultz and F/L Williams scored their fifth kill by destroying a Ju.188 over the sea. After several unsuccessful chases they were able to close on a raider, giving it a long burst from 200 feet that started a fire in the starboard engine. Schultz closed again to 100 feet for another short burst which made the port engine blow up. At the same time there was a small explosion in the fuselage below the pilot's cockpit. The Junkers went down, turning over on its back, while flames from the fiercely burning port engine spread over the aircraft. Schultz and Williams almost went down with it. In the second attack the bomber's upper gunner got in a very good burst as the Mosquito overshot. His bullets put the night fighter's port engine out of action, hit the starboard one also and started a bad oil leak. On one valiant Merlin, Schultz limped back to base.

There was no further enemy activity in the Cougars' area until the 19th. Then he came over on six nights in a row with forces varying from about 12 to as many as 150. The squadron had a few fruitless contacts but no joy until the 22nd when S/L C.A.S. Anderson and FS C.F.A. Bodard scored a double. The first target was difficult to close as the Mosquito twice overshot, but Bodard held the contact, despite the Jerry's evasive movements, enabling Anderson finally to come within visual range. Just as he was about to open fire on the Ju.88 it peeled off violently. The Mosquito followed, getting in a quick burst that struck the fuselage and starboard engine, setting the latter on fire. Two further attacks caused more strikes and small explosions. Bursting into flames, the Junkers spun seaward, breaking up before it finally plunged into the waves.

Trimley Control then gave Anderson another target and after some difficulty he came within range of a Ju.188. Two attacks were made as the bomber took violent evasive action, and both times strikes were seen on the fuselage. The Junkers dived steeply out of control, leveled out momentarily and then went into a spin which ended in an explosion as it hit the deck.

Three relatively quiet weeks followed this series of successes. W/C Elms left the squadron on 18 February after nine months in command and in his place came W/C G.A. Hiltz who led the Cougars until the closing days of the war. They were sorry to see Elms go; under his able guidance the unit had risen to a high degree of efficiency as its achievements during the past few months clearly testified. Building on this foundation, No. 410 under the leadership of the new C.O. went on to even greater triumphs. F/L Don Creed, who had been senior navigation leader, also finished his tour in February and relinquished his post to F/L K.M. Eyolfson.

Although March began quietly, in the end it proved to be almost as good a month as February.¹⁵ On the 14th about 140 raiders were plotted in four waves over East Anglia and the Home Counties, and the squadron sent up ten night fighters. One was flown by an RAF crew, S/L W.P. Green, DFC and WO A.L. Grimstone, DFM, temporarily attached supernumerary to the Cougars. Assisted by searchlight intersections, they picked up a Ju.88 fitted with external bomb racks, and quickly shot it down to crash on the ground where it burned. A few minutes later, Lt. A.A. Harrington (USAAF) and Sgt. D.G. Tongue (RAF), who were on their way back to base after an uneventful patrol, saw some incendiaries, bomb bursts and searchlight beams. Although short of fuel, they proceeded to investigate and obtained a contact on a Hun. Showers of window and skilful evasive action made it difficult to retain the contact, but Tongue held on until Harrington sighted the target, a Ju.188. A short burst of 35 rounds from the 20 mm. cannons had spectacular effect. Strikes flashed on the cockpit and wing roots; a red glow appeared in the cockpit and almost immediately both engines burst into flames. The fire grew until it enveloped the whole centre section and a solid sheet of flame streamed back, two or three times the length of the aircraft. Large pieces of debris flew off and explosions erupted through the flames as the Junkers went down through the clouds, its

¹⁵ It was apparently at this time that No. 149 Airfield was formed at Castle Camps. No. 410 was a part of this Airfield, or No. 148, throughout the rest of the war.

course marked by a vivid glow. Suddenly there was a brilliant flash below, and then the darkness closed in. As the bomber went down Harrington flew around it noting the large black crosses on the fuselage and the swastika on the tail fin.

There were further raids or threats of raids in the next few nights, but the enemy did not penetrate the North Weald sector in which No. 410 operated. On the 19th, for instance, about 50 Huns came in over the Wash to strike at Hull and Norwich. The night fighter units in that area had a good night, destroying at least eight and possibly nine of the raiders, but apart from one brief contact the Cougars could not get in on the fireworks. Two nights later about 95 Huns were plotted coming over from the Rouen and Dutch Islands areas and the squadron sent up six crews on patrol. While investigating a series of searchlight intersections, F/O S.B. Huppert and P/O J.S. Christie (RAF) picked up a contact on their A.1., and closed in for a visual which they identified as a Ju.88 when it was momentarily caught in a searchlight beam. With two short bursts from port and starboard rear, Huppert set fire to the port wing fuel tanks and blew up the starboard wing. Searchlights followed the flaming wreckage earthward until it crashed and exploded.

After two small "scalded-cat" raids on the 22nd and 23rd, the Luftwaffe reappeared in some strength on the 24th, about 120 aircraft coming in over the south coast to strike at London and other targets. WOs W.F. Price and J.C. Costello were on patrol doing searchlight co-operation when the controller informed them there was "trade" abroad and directed the Mosquito to patrol east of London. Twice the crew chased targets at very high speed (over 400 m.p.h.), but the raiders dived into the clouds before a visual could be obtained. They were then vectored onto a third, fast-moving target, 40 miles out to sea. Using emergency boost the Mosquito gave chase, closing in at last to 800 feet range where the e/a was identified as an Me.410. The controller called Price, telling him to "make it quick" as they were getting near the Dutch coast. The enemy pilot had been doing mild evasive action, but as he neared home he settled down to straight and level. Price then opened fire with a burst of 100 rounds from dead astern, observing numerous strikes on the tail and fuselage. Pieces of burning debris tore away and flew past the Mossie as the bomber dived into a cloud. Because of his proximity to the coast Price turned back at once and did not see his target again. He claimed it as probably destroyed.

The last week of March was quieter, with only one large (100 e/a)¹⁶ and one small raid by the Luftwaffe. S/L C.A.S. Anderson left the Cougars now, after a long period of service which included a number of ferrying flights to North Africa. He was posted to an O.T.U. for conversion to Mitchells. S/L I.A. March then took over "A" Flight and was replaced in "B" Flight by S/L J.D. Somerville.

April and May were less strenuous than February and March had been; the number of sorties, which had risen to over 130 for the earlier period, fell off to 96 for April and 109 in May. The results likewise diminished to a total of two destroyed and one damaged in the ten weeks preceding D-Day. The squadron had aircraft up on patrol or scramble almost every night, but the raiders, less numerous than in the previous months, seldom came into the Cougars' area. April passed with only four encounters. Twice the raider was too fast to be caught, although the Mosquitoes continued the chase right to the enemy-held coast. By contrast, the other two encounters were almost on the squadron's doorstep. About 50 Huns came over on the night of the 18th in a scattered raid. Several of them flew right over the Castle Camps sector with the result that No. 410 had an active night. F/O R.L. Snowdon and FS A. McLeod got a contact a few minutes after they had been scrambled and held it through streams of "window" until the Mosquito had climbed to the raider's altitude. At 19,000 feet they caught sight of a Ju.188, which, after some mild evasive jinking, was now flying straight and level. A 100-round burst of 20 mm. shells knocked fragments from the cockpit and starboard wing, whereupon the Junkers turned on its back and disappeared below. Some seconds later the Mosquito

¹⁶ This was a large-scale attack for the enemy, but for Bomber Command it would be a relatively minor effort.

crew noticed a large explosion and fire on the ground, about 12 miles from base, but it was not their Hun and they had to be content with credit for a damaged. Snowden and McLeod patrolled for 90 minutes more without any further luck.

The explosion, which Snowden observed, may have been the crash of a He.177, which Huppert and Christie shot down in flames at just this moment near Castle Camps. They had taken off somewhat earlier on a searchlight co-operation exercise, which developed into the real thing when "trade" appeared. Aided by a good searchlight intersection, they picked up a target, closed to a visual on a He.177 heading for the London area, and let it have a long burst at 300 feet range. Debris from the port wing and motor struck the Mosquito which received further damage in the starboard wing and aileron from an accurate burst fired by the Heinkel rear gunner. For a moment Huppert lost sight of the big bomber as it peeled off, but he found it again thanks to the glow of a fire that was beginning to spread. Three more bursts were smashed in as the Hun went down. Then it burst into flames, stalled and went into a spin, exploding and blazing as it crashed. Another chase had to be broken off when the raider was engaged by the heavy ack-ack batteries of the London defences.

These combats were the squadron's farewell to Castle Camps. On 28 April it moved back to Hunsdon in Hertfordshire where it had been stationed for about two months late in 1943. The seven weeks, which the Cougars spent here on their second visit, covered the pre-invasion build-up and the first fortnight of the campaign in Normandy.

Shortly before leaving Castle Camps, S/L A.I. Higgins, who had spent many months with the Cougars as their chaplain, was posted to Overseas Headquarters. Several crews also departed and replacements arrived from O.T.U.

The May nights passed quietly with a round of defensive patrols off the East Anglian coast or the Thames estuary. Usually the aircraft worked with Trimley Control and occasionally with Foreness. Some nights there was practice with a mobile G.C.I.¹⁷ But not until the month was almost spent did any "trade" appear. As a break from the normal routine one crew did an Air/Sea Rescue patrol on the afternoon of the 21st, locating a dinghy 38 miles out to sea off Bradwell Bay. The Mosquito orbited overhead until a rescue launch arrived.

The one victory won in May was unusual in that the Hun was destroyed well inside enemy-held territory. P/O L.J. Kearney and F/O N.W. Bradford were doing a routine defensive patrol in the early hours of the 28th when they were put on a bogey heading east. Pursuing the contact, they were able to close to 1000 feet and identify a Ju.88. A long burst from dead astern made flames erupt from the starboard engine and wing-root. Kearney followed the Junkers down to 800 feet where he left it falling through the clouds like a ball of fire. The chase had taken the Mosquito as far as Lille, France, and was the first time a Mark VIII A.1. equipped night fighter had pursued its quarry over enemy-held territory. Kearney conservatively claimed only a probably, but it was confirmed as destroyed.

At the end of May F/Ls Schultz and Williams completed their tour with the Cougars, during which they had destroyed five Huns and won the DFC. F/L Huppert succeeded Schultz as deputy commander of "A" Flight.

The short nights of May gave way to June. For five nights the Cougars continued their patrols over the North Sea, spending their time mostly in practice runs to maintain that high state of efficiency and co-operation, which was so essential to night fighting. Some night cross-country flights were also made in preparation for the possible resumption of intruder work. Except for several references to this training the squadron diary for this period does not reflect the spirit of tension and expectancy that appears in the record books of the day fighter units as D-Day drew nearer. But 6 June 1944 marked the beginning of the most successful period in the history of the Cougars.

¹⁷ Ross night glasses were also used for the first time in May and were reported to be most satisfactory.

Part IV

Over the Beaches and Normandy

(June - September 1944)

When the invasion of Normandy began, No. 410 Squadron, then approaching its third birthday, counted 19.3/4 enemy aircraft destroyed, one probably destroyed and five damaged. Fifteen weeks later, when the Cougars moved to the Continent, the number of "kills" had passed the half-century mark, and three more probables or damaged had been added to the score.

The squadron's first activity in connection with D-Day was to send a detachment of four crews, led by W/C Hiltz, to Colerne on the night of the 5th to provide cover for the airborne troops which opened "the Second Front" early on D-Day. The same night six other crews made the usual patrols out over the North Sea, east of Bradwell Bay and the Thames Estuary. They found no enemy air activity; nor was there any the next night (6/7 June) when nine crews formed part of a night fighter "pool" that had been set up to support Operation Neptune (the sea-borne crossing). Free-lancing or patrolling over the French coast, these crews did see much evidence of activity on the ground - numerous fires and the flashes of guns and bombs that flickered like heat lightning in the night sky. The only A.I. contacts obtained were on Lancasters that were abroad in great numbers.

The next night was much the same, with the addition of enemy flak and some vain chases after "bogeys" that could not be caught. Friendly bombers still outnumbered the enemy, although the night fighters had some doubts about the accuracy of the adjective, for the gunners of the bombers occasionally operated on the "Wild West" maxim of shoot first and identify afterwards. If the adjective sometimes seemed inaccurate, so too was their marksmanship, except for one Lanc mid-upper gunner who put some holes in F/O Dinsdale's Mossie.

Bad weather stopped flying on the night of the 8th/9th. The next night the Cougars made their customary nine sorties over the North Sea, the Rouen area and the beachhead. Five crews had nothing to report, two more had only friendly contacts, and another had a chase after a very elusive "bogey". But the last crew to return had a different story to tell. After leaving the fighter pool, F/O R.L. Snowdon and his navigator, Lt. L.A. Wilde of the RNVR, had patrolled over the beachhead around Cabourg for about an hour, engaging in one or two unsuccessful chases. Then the mobile G.C.I. gave them another vector which led first to a contact at 2 ½ miles, followed by a visual of a Ju.188 at 1500 feet range. Closing rapidly, Snowdon fired one damaging burst that made the Junkers dive while its rear gunner opened up. The Mosquito followed, getting in two more bursts after which the Hun exploded as if its petrol tanks had blown up. It plunged headlong into the ground. Returning to the patrol line, Snowdon and Wilde had another chase before returning to base at 0515 hours.

They scored again three nights later when the Cougars made four kills, (possibly five) within four hours for the most successful bag in their long career. The series opened with a Ju.88 which F/Os J. Maday and J.R. Walsh attacked over Bayeux a few minutes after midnight of the 12th/13th. The Mosquito's cannon shells ripped into the port engine of the enemy, causing a flash of orange flame. Then the 88 peeled off, and went straight down out of sight and A.I. contact. Maday claims it as probably destroyed.¹⁸ Eighty-five minutes later P/O L.J. Kearney and F/O N.W. Bradford, who already had one victory to their credit, made it two by shooting down a He.177 in flames north-east of Le Havre. Their first burst missed the Heinkel, which was seen to be carrying some object slung out-board of each engine; but the second burst struck home. The starboard engine and wing root began to

¹⁸ The assessors admitted it as "damaged".

burn, and a large panel flew off. As the Mosquito orbited, watching the bomber go down steeply in flames, one member of the crew was noticed to bale out. When the Heinkel crashed the terrific explosion illuminated and shook the night fighter 6,000 feet above. Kearney nosed down to take a photograph of the fiercely burning wreckage. At that moment the Mosquito's engines began to cut up. First, one ran rough, streaming sparks; then the other started to heat up and the first one again caught fire. The propeller was feathered and the flames died out but, unable to maintain height, Kearney asked if he could put down on one of the advanced landing grounds on the beachhead. It was necessary to fire Very lights so the night fighter could see where the strip was and in turn be located by the ground control. The first attempt at a crash-landing overshot and, after skimming under a balloon barrage that was flying at one end of the strip, Kearney and Bradford tried again. The Mosquito hit the ground, wheels up, and skidded to the end of the runway where it struck a truck, killing a man who was in it. The wreckage finally came to a stop in a field, a complete washout, but neither of the crew was injured.

WO W.F. Price and P/O J.G. Costello had taken off from Hunsdon at the same time as Kearney and Bradford to join the fighter pool off the beachhead. Directed by the same mobile G.C.I., they too got a contact and despite violent evasive action closed to a range where, by the use of Ross night glasses, they could identify a Do.217. Coming in behind and below the Dornier, Price raised the nose of the Mosquito for two short bursts whereupon the port engine and wing of the target disintegrated in a flash of orange flame. The night fighter then stalled and spun; Price pulled out at 2000 feet and saw a fire burning on the ground directly below. Resuming patrol, the crew found a second 217 and, following the same tactics, shot it down to crash and burn near the first some 25 miles south-east of Caen. Two down in twenty minutes!

These combats had been fought between 0200 and 0230 hours. At 0405 Snowdon and Wilde concluded the night's eventful and successful work by crashing a Junkers in the Caen-Lisieux area. The enemy, an 88 or 188, was taking no evasive action as the Mosquito closed in behind and below it, but, to Snowdon's disgust, the first two bursts from 200 feet missed. For a third time he pressed the firing button in a third, longer burst. That did it! A sheet of orange flame gushed from the petrol tanks around the port engine, lighting up the bombs hanging in external racks. Slowly the blazing Junkers spiralled earthward, exploding in a great flash of flame as it crashed.

These five successes marked the beginning of a remarkable week in which the Cougars destroyed 11 enemy bombers and probably destroyed or damaged two more, scoring one or more victories on every night except one.

In the early morning of 14 June, F/L C.E. Edinger and F/O C.L. Vaessen, who were to become one of the squadron's most successful teams, damaged a Ju.88 over the beachhead west of Rouen. They were handicapped by an unserviceable A.1., the set having gone out of action when the first burst was fired. As a result the target could not be relocated when it took evasive action out of visual range. A few minutes after this encounter S/L March and F/L Eyolfson found another Ju.88 over the sea due north of the beachhead. Closing on their A.1. contact, through several batches of "window", the Mosquito crew first sighted a white light slightly above them. With the use of Ross night glasses, they were able to identify the enemy aircraft and pulled up into position for one burst that smashed into the left side of the Junkers, starting a small, but bright blaze. A second burst, fires as the bomber went into a diving turn missed, but the fire and white tail light enabled March to calculate the correct deflection for three more quick squirts. He was about to fire again when the 88 suddenly burst into flames and disintegrated, forcing the Mosquito to pull up hard to avoid the flying debris. Like a ball of flame the Hun plunged into the sea.

The next night, shortly before midnight of the 14th/15th, F/L W.G. Dinsdale and P/O J.E. Dunn won one of the most unusual victories of the air war. From the fighter pool at the beachhead they were vectored south-east up the Seine to engage some bandits that were busily strewing

"window" in their wake. Turning westward the night fighter got several contacts simultaneously, followed almost immediately by a visual of a curious aircraft lumbering along at 11,000 feet. With the help of night glasses the crew identified a Ju.88 carrying what appeared to be a glider bomb attached to the top of the fuselage. Actually this composite aircraft consisted of an 88, packed with explosives, coupled to a Me.109, which carried the pilot. Dinsdale closed to 750 feet astern of the cumbersome contraption and fired a short burst of 32 rounds from his cannons. Flames streamed from the cockpit and wing root. Banking slowly to port, the "pick-a-back" bomber suddenly went into a steep dive and like a meteor plunged earthward, blazing fiercely and trailing sparks. When it crashed, some 25 miles south-east of Caen, the terrific explosion lit up the whole countryside.

The night of the 15th/16th was quieter, only five crews being sent out instead of the usual nine. Two of these sorties were abortive because of unserviceable equipment, and a third crew on patrol over the beachhead found only friendly aircraft. The other two crews patrolled over the North Sea. S/L Somerville and F/O Robinson during their patrol tried in vain to catch one of the new flying-bombs that were now bombarding south-eastern England. This was the Cougars' first encounter with the V.1. Several more were sighted on later occasions, but No. 410 was not detailed for "anti-diver" work, being retained for the night defence of shipping in the Channel and the beachheads in Normandy.

F/O I.S. Girvan and his RN navigator, Lt. M. Cardwell, had some anxious moments when they destroyed a Ju.88 over the Cherbourg peninsula on the night of June 16/17. Stalking one contact, they closed on a raider at 11,000 feet in time to see it drop two bombs on some target near Valognes. Then the aircraft turned to port, showing its outline clearly silhouetted against the lighter sky of the spring night. Girvan opened up with a long burst that dotted strikes along the Junkers from tail to cockpit. Just as he released the firing button the whole port wing blew up. The Mosquito then resumed patrol for an hour before setting course for home. Midway over the Channel, Girvan and Cardwell were startled by a crack and a flash, followed by another very vivid flash beside the starboard engine. Whence the attack came, neither could say; the pilot thought it was an ack-ack burst, but the navigator believed it was a night fighter. Fortunately the attack was not repeated, for the Mosquito was in difficulty. The engines were running smoothly, but the aircraft lost speed and became very hard to handle, requiring full left aileron and full left rudder to keep it stable. Cardwell had to relieve Girvan at the stick several times as the strain became exhausting. Heading for the nearest base, Ford, the pilot came in on a normal landing, but the starboard tire had been punctured, causing the aircraft to swing off the runway. The undercarriage collapsed under the strain and the Mossie skidded 50 yards tail first before coming to rest.

Two more Junkers, both of the 188 variety, went down the next night before the guns of Edinger - Vaessen and March - Eyolfson. The first crew found their Hun over the Channel and blew its port wing away. The bomber spun into the sea, a few miles west of Le Havre, exploding as it hit. On the way home Edinger saw a flying-bomb buzzing up from behind, several thousand feet below. A diving turn brought the night fighter into position behind the doodle-bug, but the Mossie could not overhaul it in level flight and Edinger could only fire two chance bursts at long range as the target drew away.

March and Eyolfson had a long 15 minute chase after their "bogey" before they caught up with it south-west of Caen. Night glasses showed it to be a 188. A short burst from 200 feet astern made debris fly from the cockpit, port wing and engine. The enemy pilot made a violent break down to the left, but a second burst caught his aircraft again in the port wing. After a great explosion the wing collapsed and the Junkers, flicking over on its back, went straight down in flames. March pinpointed the burning wreckage on the ground before heading for Hunsdon.

These were the last victories won from Hunsdon for on 18 June the squadron moved from that station to Zeals, near Warminster in south-western Wiltshire. Here it was closer to the Cotentin

peninsula and the western flank of the invasion area over which the Cougars did most of their work in the next two months. The first night at Zeals was marked by a pair of victories won almost simultaneously in the vicinity of Vire. Lt. Harrington and Sgt. Tongue were patrolling east and west along one beat south of the American lines when the G.C.I. controller put them on to a target. As they closed on their contact it divided into two aircraft, which broke away in opposite directions. From their movements Harrington suspected they were fitted with rearward searching radars. He pursued one, coming in to 400 feet before he could identify it as a Ju.88. Recognition was difficult because the aircraft had two large bombs mounted on external racks between the engines and fuselage. Satisfied that it was a Hun, Harrington moved in to 200 feet, pulled up the nose of the Mosquito and tripped his guns. No strikes were seen. Then suddenly the whole aircraft blew up in the air. One wing and engine tore away and went hurtling past the night fighter. Masses of smaller debris and burning oil splashed over it, puncturing some holes in the leading edge of a wing and smearing the fabric on wings and fuselage. Ten seconds after the wreckage disappeared into the void below there was a vivid explosion on the ground, which lit up the Mosquito 10,000 feet above. Some moments later Harrington and Tongue saw a second aircraft crash and burn near the blazing wreckage of their victim.

The second e/a had been shot down by F/O G.T. Edwards and FS W. Georges who were on patrol in the same area. Possibly it was the second of the two 88s that Harrington had stalked. Guided by the controller, the Mosquito crew were following one contact when another appeared nearer at hand. In one of its turns this "bogey" passed across a light patch in the northern sky and Edwards saw from the silhouette that it was a Ju.88. He got away a quick burst of 34 rounds, hitting the port engine and cockpit. They burst into flames. The Mosquito, breaking away to avoid a collision, passed through the slipstream of the bomber and Edwards, struggling to regain control, lost sight of his target as it peeled off in a vertical dive through a thin layer of cloud. Some moments later when he orbited the area he saw two fires burning on the ground - his Junkers and Harrington's.

Since D-Day the Cougars had destroyed twelve enemy bombers. They had to wait five nights before making it a baker's dozen. In the interval the crews, still maintaining their nine sorties a night schedule, had little but N.T.R. (nothing to report). One night there was much excitement and a near tragedy when one engine in W/C Hiltz's Mosquito failed on the take-off run and the aircraft, swerving off the runway, crashed into "A" Flight dispersal. The crew escaped injury but the Mossie, a truck, a tractor and a building went up in flames.

On the 23rd the squadron got its thirteenth Hun since D-Day, and suffered its first casualties in over four months. WO R.G. Jones and FA L.W. Gregory were the successful crew in an engagement that was reminiscent of Edward's victory on the 18th/19th. Patrolling east and west over the sea about 15 miles from the beachhead, they were vectored after a "bogey" which proved to be a Ju.188. The Hun was taking evasive action, but the Mosquito kept closing in until it could open fire at 400 feet, continuing to point blank range. Then the e/a exploded right in Jones' face, spattering the night fighter with debris and showering it with oil. As the Canadian crew orbited they saw the Junkers crash into the sea and burn. Visibility was difficult because oil smears covered the windscreen, so Jones deemed it prudent to return to base.

F/Os J.R. Steepe and D.H. Baker had taken off from Zeals at the same time as Jones and Gregory. Some time later Steepe reported that he had been hit by flak and that his aircraft was on fire.¹⁹ His position at the time was off Barfleur. No further report was received. Later Baker's body was recovered from the Channel where the Mosquito had presumably gone down. He and his pilot had been with the squadron since April of that year.

F/L Huppert and F/O Christie added a damaged to their score the next night (24th/25th), while

¹⁹ Crews frequently reported accurate flak at this period. One Mosquito returned with a flak hole through its cockpit cover, and on another occasion, S/L March's aircraft was thrown on its back by a very close burst.

on patrol up and down the west coast of the Cherbourg peninsula. Following a Ju.188, Huppert gave it two short bursts that struck on the port wing root and engine and on the bottom of the cockpit. One bright flash was seen, after which fragments flew away from the cockpit and fuselage. In a steep dive to port the Jerry disappeared from sight in the haze. At the same time the night fighter's radar suddenly went out of commission, preventing pursuit of the damaged foe.

For the next week the weather was poor, restricting operations by night. Most of the crews that did go out had to be diverted to other bases on their return. Enemy activity had also diminished and the beachhead was much quieter than it had been in mid-June. On the first two nights in July there were no sorties at all from Zeals. Then the weather improved and the nightly round of nine patrols was resumed. Edinger and Vaessen seized the opportunity to make another kill, their second, for "A" Flight. Working again with Pool 2 over the western beachhead, they were put on to a target off Pointe de la Percee. Pursuing it through mild evasive action and some window, the Mosquito crew closed on a Ju.188 and, after checking their identification, dropped back into firing position below. The enemy pilot apparently realized then that he was being pursued for he made a violent peel off to port. It was too late. Edinger followed, firing. After 22 rounds from the 20 mm. cannons, the port wing tore away and the Junkers spun into the sea with one nacelle blazing fiercely.

Another Hun went down in the same area four nights later (7/8 July), but this time the victory had a tragic sequel and the Cougars lost one of their ablest pilots. F/L S.B. Huppert and F/O J.S. Christie were on patrol over the beachhead with Pool 2 when they got a contact and gave chase. From the exhausts and a faint silhouette against patches of cloud, they could see it was a Ju.88. After a short burst from 600 feet, which hit on the port engine and cockpit, Huppert closed in to 300 feet for the kill. With a very violent explosion the Junkers disintegrated. Seriously damaged by the shower of debris, the Mosquito was in immediate trouble. The starboard engine stopped, the aircraft lost height, and presently the second engine, labouring under the strain, overheated and seized. The Mosquito was now down to about 1500 feet and the crew reported they were baling out. Christie got away through the hatch and as he was floating down he saw the night fighter hit the water. Inflating his dinghy, he climbed aboard, bobbing on the sea for almost six hours until an American naval patrol boat picked him up and carried him to Plymouth. "Red" Huppert apparently did not have time to jump before his aircraft went in. Long-timers with the squadron, Huppert and Christie had risen from sergeants to commissioned rank and had made an enviable record in air combat and ground attacks. A Canadian by birth, John Christie was educated in England where he joined the RAF in 1941. In September 1944 he was decorated with the DFC, the citation mentioning this experience and the "high degree of courage and determination" which he had invariably displayed in attacks on aircraft, airfields, locomotives and barges. Christie left No. 410 early in August on completion of his tour, but he later returned to the Cougars for a second tour and added further laurels to those already won.

The same night that Huppert and Christie won their tragic victory, a second Hun was destroyed by March and Eyolfson after a long chase which took them to the vicinity of Paris. They had gone out from Zeals in company with the first crew and had seen the Ju.88 go down in flames 15 miles north of Pointe de la Percee. A few moments later Eyolfson got a contact on his A.1. and the night fighter set out in pursuit. The enemy pilot seemed to know that he was being followed for he took violent evasive action at very high speed, dropping several batches of "window" as he fled southwards. Nevertheless the Mosquito was gaining on its target when the enemy veered sharply to the east and, probably presuming that pursuit had been shaken off, settled down to a steadier course. The range began to increase again. Opening up, March gradually drew in until he could see four bright exhausts which night glasses revealed were those of an Me.410. Two bursts were seen to hit the aircraft. Then the Hun, perhaps thinking he was being attacked by one of his own night fighters, switched on his navigation lights and fired a recognition cartridge. A third burst from March's four

cannons produced an explosion and large fire in the Messerschmitt's port wing and engine, the glare lighting up the blue-green camouflage and black cross on the fuselage. With the whole port side blazing furiously, the 410 spun into the ground, crashing with a terrific explosion that illuminated the countryside and revealed the dispersal area of an aerodrome. The Mosquito crew fixed the position as the southwestern outskirts of the French capital. The very long chase at high speed from the Norman coast had overheated the Mossie's port engine and it was running rough as March headed westward and set course for home.

This victory was the third won by March and Eyolfson within 25 days. They both received the DFC, being the third Cougar crew decorated simultaneously for their services. The victory also marked the close of a period of excellent hunting for the squadron. It was just over a month since the landings had been made in Normandy. In that time No. 410 had fought 19 combats, destroying 16 of its opponents. The next three weeks were much quieter over the Cherbourg peninsula and the battlefields of Normandy. Despite much poor weather at Zeals, the squadron was able to maintain its nightly schedule of sorties on every night except the 21st, but the Luftwaffe seemed to be resting from its exertions of invasion month and most of the contacts gained during this period were on friendly aircraft.²⁰

On 28 July, No. 410 moved to Colerne, another station in Wiltshire near Chippenham, and about 25 miles north of Zeals. As was so frequently the case, a change of scene brought a change of fortune and the six weeks at Colerne were another fruitful period of 14 victories over Normandy and the Channel. There were no losses. The Somerville- Robinson team was outstanding during these weeks, accounting for four of the 14 kills.

Most of the action came during the first fortnight at Colerne. It began with seven victories in the first week (28 July - 3 August), followed by a further three in the second week. The first aircraft to take off from Colerne on the night of the 28th had trouble with one engine and was forced to land at the American airfield at Mauperbus near Cherbourg. The Mosquito overshot and was damaged, but the crew, F/O F. Chad and FS W. Georges, escaped injury. This was the second, quite unpremeditated, landing on the continent by a Cougar crew. Later that night F/L W.A. Dexter took off to patrol along the Cherbourg peninsula. With him was S/Lt. R.M. Richardson of the RNZNVR, one of half-a-dozen naval personnel serving with the squadron. Several vectors from the ground controller brought the night fighter onto a violently jinking target, which was identified as a Ju.88. After a short burst from 500 feet dead astern, which blew up the starboard engine, the enemy aircraft went straight into the ground, lighting up the low clouds with a violent explosion. Dexter orbited the burning wreckage to fix his position some miles east of Tessy.

The next night another Ju.88 was destroyed inland of the beachhead by P/Os D.M. MacKenzie and G.P.A. Bodard. They had been on patrol for some time and day was beginning to break when Yardley control put them on to their target. Aiming at the port engine MacKenzie fired a fairly long burst and saw the 88 dive into the clouds with the engine flaming. Following it down below the clouds the night fighter crew saw their victim burning on the ground. By this time fuel was running low, necessitating a landing at Maupertus, whence they returned to base the next morning.

July ended with the destruction of a third Ju.88 in the Granville area on the western flank of the battle zone. For an hour F/Os J. Maday and J.R. Walsh had patrolled one line without a nibble; then they changed their beat and almost immediately got a contact, which the controller permitted them to investigate. At first the target was taking only mild evasive action, but as the Mosquito closed it began dumping very large quantities of "window". Despite the interference Walsh guided his pilot to a visual on a Ju.88, confirming the identification by night glasses. This first burst hit the

²⁰ June and July 1944 were the peak months in the squadron's operations, with 209 sorties in the first month and 206 in the second.

port engine; the second, fired as the 88 went down in a steep, sharp peel-off, made the other engine explode. There was another very large explosion when the Junkers crashed vertically into the ground.

August began as July had closed, with another Junkers diving into the deck. This time, for variety, it was one of the 188 type: but the locale was the same, a point ten miles north-east of Tessy, where the Americans had recently broken through the enemy lines and were rolling back the Nazi forces. At the beginning of their patrol, S/L Somerville and F/O Robinson intercepted two Stirlings. A third chase was more successful, as it led to the sighting of a Ju.188, weaving its way northwestward. In one of their "jinks" the enemy crew evidently saw the Mosquito close behind for they did a violent peel off. Luck was against them. The Junker's frantic manoeuvre carried it directly across the light of chandelier flares, enabling Somerville to keep sight of his target as he dived in pursuit. Then the e/a pulled up in a steep climbing turn, but the Mossie made a tighter turn, closing the range for one quick deflection shot. The port wing disintegrated and, flicking into a steep spiral dive, the 188 went down, exploding violently as it crashed.

That was No. 2 for Somerville and Robinson. They made it three the next night (2/3 August) by crashing a Do.217 a few miles from Pontorson, near the Bay of Mont St. Michel. Following vectors from the controller, the night fighter crew obtained a contact and, manoeuvring to silhouette it against the still bright northern sky, identified the target as a Dornier bomber. Somerville then got into position in line astern and opened fire. At that precise moment, the Hun pilot, catching sight of the Mosquito, made a sharp turn. But cannon shells tore away half of the port tail plane and rudder and holed the oil tank. A film of oil smeared the night fighter, so obscuring the windscreen that Somerville had great difficulty in keeping sight of the Dornier as it started down in a spiral dive. Either the enemy pilot had been put hors de combat or was having trouble in controlling his damaged aircraft. His gunners, however, were still in action, opening fire on the attacker from the dorsal and ventral turrets. The Mossie was not hit, but Somerville commented that the tracers "appeared to be uncomfortably close". He re-opened fire whenever he got close enough to see his target through the oil smears which were gradually clearing under the force of the slipstream. The dogfight continued, with both Mosquito and Dornier exchanging bursts until the night fighter's ammunition (600 rounds) was expended. As Somerville fired his last shells Robinson saw the other half of the Dornier's mutilated tail tear away. From 300 feet the bomber dived into the ground and burned furiously. During the long combat the Mosquito had encountered intermittent flak and on return to base it was found that a 13 mm. shell had punctured the left wing between the engine nacelle and fuselage.

Two hours after this Cougar victory another was won by F/L B.E. Plumer and F/O V.W. Evans in a brief combat over Normandy. In the bright moonlight of the August night the Mosquito crew sighted their target at 3000 feet distance and, after closing the range, identified it as a Ju.188, carrying two large bombs between the engines and fuselage. Thirty-eight shells barked from the four Hispano cannons. The port motor of the bomber blew up. Then, burning fiercely, it fell over to one side, crashed and exploded violently. Like Somerville and Robinson, this crew also met some flak in the combat area.

On the 3rd/4th Dinsdale and Dunn knocked down a Jerry to give the squadron its fourth successive night of joy. Working as usual with Pool 2 in the western area, the crew was informed of "trade" approaching from the east and given a course to intercept. Through some "window" interference Dunn got a contact approaching head-on. His pilot swung about, came in behind, and closing rapidly, soon identified an Me.110. It too was carrying bombs externally but, unlike the Junkers, they were suspended outboard of the engines. Dinsdale let off a longish burst at the mildly jinking target. It apparently missed. From dead astern he fired again. This time the starboard engine caught fire. With a start the Messerschmitt crew woke up. The rear gunner fired a short, wild burst, while his pilot took violent evasive action. Dinsdale went down after the bomber until his navigator cautioned him that they were approaching the ground rapidly. Yardley control also broke in with a

warning that the Mossie was getting very low. At 800 feet Dinsdale pulled out of his dive, leaving the 110 still going down with its engine ablaze. After pulling out the Cougar crew searched the ground for signs of a crash, but there were so many fires burning in the area around Avranches no particular explosion could be distinguished. Yardley, however, reported that while it could still plot the Mosquito it had no further contact on the enemy aircraft. Dinsdale initially claimed a probable with the request that, in view of the circumstances, consideration be given to up-grading. The assessors concurred and the Me.110 was confirmed as destroyed.

After this series of seven kills in seven nights, there was no further joy until 6/7 August when Somerville and Robinson got their fourth Hun, a Ju.88 shot down over St. Hilaire du Harcouet (near Isigny), followed the next night by another 88 shot down in flames near Rennes by F/L R.M.G. Currie and F/O A.H. Rose. The first action was fought while Somerville was on patrol south of St. Malo. Robinson got a contact on a target considerably higher than the Mosquito, which was cruising, at 4000 feet. Despite considerable trouble with one engine, which was missing badly, Somerville got the night fighter up to 5500 feet where he caught sight of his quarry, still 1000 feet above.

Then ack-ack batteries came to his assistance. Their bursts ahead of the enemy aircraft seemed to frighten the pilot who began to turn and let down. Somerville cut across inside the turn, getting within range of the Hun, which he now identified as a Ju.88 carrying the usual external bombs. The Mosquito's cannons set fire to one engine on the bomber, which went down in a wide, sweeping spiral. It struck the ground with a very violent explosion that scattered debris over a great area.

During the brief combat the enemy aircraft took no evasive action whatever, but the Junkers which Currie and Rose destroyed the next night was weaving mildly and dumping lavish quantities of "window" when the night fighter took up the chase. For almost five minutes Currie followed his target, closing the range until he could identify the type. Two short bursts had no effect other than to put the 88 into a sweeping turn. Coming in again, Currie fired a third time, hitting the port engine, wing root and fuselage. "The e/a exploded in a mass of white flame (Currie reported) and peeled off to port, going straight down. We followed him in an almost vertical dive from 9500 to 3500 feet before he disappeared into cloud. The last impression I had of the e/a was a burning mass going straight down with pieces falling off it."

W/C Hiltz with F/O J.R. Walsh as his navigator made the first patrol on 10/11 August, a night on which there was considerable enemy "trade". (No. 409 Squadron had three successful encounters.) Guided by ground control, the Cougar C.O. obtained a contact over the Channel about 10 miles north of Pointe de la Percee, following the raider as it weaved eastward, scattering "window" for a time. With night glasses Hiltz and Walsh confirmed that their target was a Ju.88 and then attacked from dead astern. Nineteen shells sped from each of the four cannons. Strikes flashed on the starboard wing of the 88, followed by an explosion, which appeared to be that of a bomb. Orbiting overhead, the night fighter crew watched their opponent go down through the clouds with a large orange glow shining on the wing. For some moments longer the clouds were lit up by the reflection of a fire from the burning wreckage. There were more Huns about, but Hiltz's windscreen and cockpit cover were smeared with oil, forcing him to cease patrol and return home.

Yet another Ju.88 was destroyed on the 14th/15th by Somerville and Robinson in a combat that might almost be described as "routine". A patrol with Pool 2 off the beachhead; vectors leading to a contact; a chase ending in a visual; identification at close range, confirmed by night glasses; then a carefully aimed burst from dead astern at 450 feet range. The result, however, was not "routine". The Junkers, carrying two heavy bombs on racks between the engines and fuselage, disintegrated with a violent explosion and Somerville had to pull up in a very steep climb to avoid the flying debris. Calling control for a "fix", he was told that his position was 15 miles due west of Le Havre. As a

sequel to this victory, their fourth since the beginning of August, "Red" Somerville and "Robby" Robinson were decorated with the DFC.²¹

S/L Somerville's "B" Flight had enjoyed a monopoly of all the fighting since the beginning of August, as "A" Flight had been temporarily withdrawn from operations to convert to the Mosquito XXX equipped with the new Mark X A.1. While training on the new type progressed at top speed, "B" undertook all the operational commitments that were now reduced to four and later (after 11 August) to three sorties per night instead of nine, which had been the schedule since D-Day. On 15 August the whole squadron was ordered to go non-operational for a fortnight in order to accelerate the change-over, but by that time such progress had been made that the conversion had been virtually completed and W/C Hiltz was able to get the orders amended.²² Very poor weather stopped flying on the night of the 16th/17th, but the next night "A" was ready to resume operations on their Mossie XXXs making three patrols nightly until the 25th when the schedule was stepped up to six. By early September the Cougars were again able to carry out a full programme of nine sorties.²³

In the eight and a half months (December 1943 - 15/16 August 1944) that they flew the Mark XIII Mosquito, No. 410s crews made over 1000 sorties, destroyed 37 enemy aircraft (roughly one-half of their total bag) and probably destroyed or damaged seven. They almost equalled this record in the next eight and a half months on their Mark XXX night fighters, with a total of 29 kills and one damaged.

"A" Flight was soon in action on its new aircraft and began to whittle down the lead which "B" Flight had gained - in mid-August the score stood: "B" 25.3/4 destroyed, "A" 21 destroyed. F/Os J.W. Fullerton and B.E. Gallagher did much to cut down this lead by scoring a double "kill" on the night of 19/20 August. Working with Pool 1 this night (the western area had now been liberated), the Mosquito was sent to patrol south-east of Caen. Control reported a raid coming in from the east and Fullerton caught sight of flares, which the enemy bombers dropped. Through "window" interference, several contacts were pursued until finally a Ju.88 was sighted and identified. Fullerton's first burst produced a cloud of sparks from the port engine; his second made the other engine blaze with a brilliant white flame. In a steep dive, with the engine burning fiercely, the Junkers hit the ground and exploded in a sheet of dull red flame. For five minutes the Mosquito circled about the burning wreckage, looking for further contacts. Then, as the raiders were returning from their attack, the night fighter found another Ju.88 that was throwing out "window" and doing fairly violent evasive action. At first its movements were too jerky to permit an accurate attack, but Fullerton waited patiently until the enemy pilot eventually steadied down. Then he fired a short burst. Blinded momentarily by his gun flashes and the glow of his ring sight, the Mossie pilot could not see if his shells struck home. The target, however, peeled off to the left and as Fullerton followed in a hard diving turn he saw the 88 crash and burst into flames. After this engagement one engine of the Mosquito packed up, forcing the crew to land at Camilly in France, where they remained overnight.²⁴

For twelve nights there was an uneventful round of patrols, hampered somewhat by poor weather, which washed out operations on three nights. Hitherto the squadron had been engaged exclusively with enemy bombers. It was therefore quite an innovation when one crew encountered and destroyed a Jerry single-seater fighter on the first night of September. The Mosquito, flown by F/L I.E. MacTavish and F/O A.M. Grant, was on patrol off the beachhead, between Cherbourg and Le Havre, when a bomb flash was seen amid our shipping. Turning towards it under the guidance of

²¹ Their total score was five destroyed and one damaged, including two successes in February 1944.

²² For the past week the crews of "B" Flight had been taking instruction on the new equipment on their free afternoons.

²³ As a result of the reduction in their commitment during August, the Cougars' sorties fell off to 121, a decrease of 40% from the previous two months. Non-operational flying, however, was doubled.

²⁴ These two combats showed that with the new Mark X A.1. it was much easier to retain contacts through "window" interference.

ground control, Grant got a contact, which was flying eastward and gradually losing height. MacTavish caught up with the Hun over Le Havre, identifying it as an FW.190. After one short burst of 29 rounds, the fighter blew up in a large mushroom of orange flame, forcing the Mosquito to swerve violently to clear the blazing debris. Most of it burned out before reaching the ground, but one large piece was seen to hit in flames.

With this victory the Cougars' sojourn at Colerne ended. After weeks of hard fighting in Normandy the Allied forces had broken out of the beachhead and, wheeling eastward, were now driving ahead rapidly in pursuit of the Nazi armies as they fell back on their Rhine defences. It was time for the nightfighters to cross to the Continent and hunt in more distant skies. In preparation for the move, No. 410 returned to Hunsdon on 9 September. Here the squadron remained for a fortnight, shifting its patrols from the familiar areas of Normandy to Brussels, Antwerp, Liege, Maastricht and Aachen. The weather was still poor, as it had been during the early days of September, and on only one night could any trade be found.

The lucky hunters were Edinger and Vaessen who destroyed an unidentified aircraft in a most unusual manner over Walcheren Island. While patrolling west of Antwerp, they were vectored to the north to intercept some "trade". A contact was picked up and, as the Mosquito closed in at 330 m.p.h., the target began very violent evasion, warned possibly by a rearward looking radar. Despite its antics, Edinger continued to close in, but could get no nearer than 1200 feet due to the hard turns to one side and the other. This desperate effort to escape was the enemy pilot's undoing. In his turns he lost height to 600 feet at which point he began another hard turn to port, followed by an abrupt reverse turn in the other direction. Either he lost control or his aircraft did a high-speed stall, for it suddenly passed under the Mossie's wing and crashed into the sea. Not a shot had been fired. With this unique victory the squadron reached the half century mark (excluding two shared "kills"), and left the United Kingdom for a new base and new hunting fields.

Before leaving Hunsdon several crews made the acquaintance of "Big Ben", as the new German V.2 (or A.4) rocket bomb was nicknamed. F/L Currie and F/O Rose were the first to meet it, on the night of 10/11 September. While on patrol from Brussels to Antwerp and Rotterdam they saw a bright orange light dead ahead and seemingly at their own level, 10,000 feet. At first glance Currie paid no attention to it, taking it for a bright star. Suddenly, Currie said, "it began to climb - hell it climbed!" The light appeared to go straight up, so rapidly that within a few seconds it had passed out of sight. On return to base the crew reported the sighting as a V.1, or flying bomb, but their account of the spectacular rate of climb and other details aroused great interest at higher levels. That night, a few moments after Currie and Rose made their sighting, a V.2 crashed on the English coast.²⁵ Two nights later F/Os Fullerton and Gallagher also saw a ball of yellow flame streak vertically into the night sky, and in the weeks that followed there were many more similar reports.

Several changes in personnel had occurred during the last weeks in England. On 16 August F/L T.B. Allerton, who had been squadron adjutant since July 1943, handed over his duties to F/O E.P. Ward. A week later S/L March and F/L Eyolfson finished their tour and were posted for repatriation. Command of "A" Flight then passed to S/L R.H. Hedger, formerly in No. 409 Squadron.

²⁵ The first reported V.2 incident had occurred in London on 8 September.

Part V

Hunting on the Continent

(September 1944 – June 1945)

At the beginning of September an advance party of 149 Wing went to the continent to prepare for the movement of the squadrons. On 22 September No. 410 Squadron followed, flying from Hunsdon to Glisy airfield (B.48), about four and a half miles south-east of Amiens. The new home of the Cougars had previously been occupied by the Luftwaffe, which carried out extensive demolition before departing hurriedly. Hangars and buildings had suffered, but much furniture - chairs, tables, lockers, and so on - had been left behind and were promptly appropriated by the new tenants to furnish their quarters and dispersals.

Thanks to the supplies of abandoned Jerry furniture, the Cougars made their dispersal area one of the most comfortable spots in the whole camp. They were particularly proud of their dispersal tent which had floor boards, manufactured from prefabricated enemy buildings, stoves, easy chairs and furnishings; - as the squadron diarist commented, this was probably the only time the G.A.F. unintentionally assisted the R.C.A.F. Visiting units cast envious eyes upon the comfortable accommodation and their compliments were a tribute to the energy and hard work of the members of No. 410.

Three patrols were carried out from Amiens/Glisy on the first night (22/23 September) over the battle area from Liege north to Maastricht and Eindhoven. For four nights there was little to report. Lt. Harrington and P/O Tongue finally broke the calm on the 26th by destroying a Stuka, the first in a series of 25 victories won by the Cougars on the continent. At the beginning of their sortie, the crew had several futile chases, in the course of which they saw one bomber illuminated by a cluster of searchlights; then they were put onto another target at a very low height. While Tongue was trying to pick it up on his radar, Harrington noticed three bombs explode near the bank of a river, after which contact was obtained on a bogey, three miles distant, and well below the Mossie. Giving chase, the night fighter pursued its target down to 150 feet, despite the difficulty of keeping in touch at this low altitude through a series of hard turns. Presently the enemy pilot began to climb, enabling the Mosquito to close in and, after very careful study from less than 50 feet, identify the Hun as a Ju.87. Harrington then dropped back to 300 feet to open fire. With its undercarriage blown away and the pilot perhaps dead at the controls, the Stuka turned slowly and started down. Two further bursts were delivered, the second striking all over the fuselage, following which the machine exploded on the ground, some 12 miles north of Aachen, "where it could be seen burning very nicely."

Some anxiety was caused that night when one crew, returning from patrol, became lost. Over the R/T, WOW Broderick, the pilot, reported that he was going to attempt a belly-landing on a field, which he could distinguish in the first light of dawn. A search in the early morning revealed no trace of the missing Mosquito and it was not until the following day that the squadron learned that the crew had got down safely near Paris and were "languishing" in that city while awaiting transportation home.

The next few nights were less exciting, although one evening F/Os Fullerton and Gallagher crashed while making a forced landing at Lille/Vandeville and received minor injuries, and another night F/O MacKenzie chased one "bogey" at 25,000 feet as far as Hamburg without being able to catch it. Since arriving on the continent, the squadron's schedule called for eight sorties per night. Early in October a new system was introduced whereby the aircraft were sent out in groups of four,

one patrol leaving in the early evening and the other several hours later. Sorties normally lasted about three hours.

Business picked up at the end of the first week in October, adding three victories in two nights to the credit account of "A" Flight. F/L "Pop" Edinger and F/O "Chuck" Vaessen led off with a Ju.88 for their fourth "kill" since D-Day, and thereby won the DFC. On patrol over the Maastricht area in the early evening of 6 October, Pop and Chuck were vectored south after some "trade" 30 miles distant. They succeeded in picking up a customer at eight miles range, flying at 16,500 feet. Closing in, Edinger recognized it as a Ju.88 and pulled up close alongside to verify his identification. With one short burst he set fire to the port engine and turned to one side to watch developments. But the fire died out and for a moment the Junkers disappeared. Hurriedly nosing down, the Mosquito regained contact and closed on it until the quarry again came in view, going down in a series of hard orbits to port. Edinger cut in once more for a long burst that caused both engines to blaze. Rolling to one side the 88 went straight in, exploding as it crashed, 16 miles from Namur where the wreckage was presently found by a ground party.

F/Ls B.E. Plumer and W.W. Hargrove took off from Glisy as Edinger and Vaesson landed at 2055. When they returned (to Le Culot, not home base) three hours later they too had a victory to report - won in even more bizarre fashion than Edinger's of three weeks previously. Working with the same controller ("Rejoice"), the Mosquito was dissected to Venlo, on the Dutch-German border, where, thanks to skillful direction from the ground, a contact was secured. Hargrove held it through a succession of peel-offs until his pilot could see the enemy's exhaust flames. Guided by their glow, Plumer zigzagged to avoid overshooting the target, which had throttled back until it was mushing along at 120 m.p.h. At close range he could see it was a Me.110, carrying long-range tanks. The Jerry then began to weave violently and lose height, making it impossible for the night fighter to get into fitting position on the slow target. The enemy gunner was not so handicapped and he let off an accurate, long burst that set fire to the Mosquito's starboard engine. The tables apparently had been turned, but the action wasn't over. By feathering the propeller and using the graviner, "Hargie" extinguished the flames, while Plumer followed his foe, waiting for it to level out and give him a chance to fire. The opportunity never came; nor was it needed. Still weaving and losing height at very low speed, the enemy pilot failed to level out in time from one manoeuvre and ploughed into the deck, the Messerschmitt exploding as it struck. This unusual victory was cited when Ben and his navigator were awarded the DFC together.

The next night a Ju.88 was shot down north-east of Hasselt by F/Os Fullerton and Gallagher. As a tribute to the efficient co-operation of "Rejoice" G.C.I, they crashed their Hun within sight of the ground personnel of the radar unit. The Mosquito crew began their patrol over Eindhoven, whence they were vectored south to intercept some "trade". A contact led to a visual of a Ju.88, flying straight and steady. Two bursts sufficed. After the first shots the enemy's port engine exploded, scattering debris and flaming so brightly that Fullerton could not see where his second burst struck. As the Junkers went down in a steep spiral dive one gas tank blew up, followed by a second, larger explosion when the machine crashed.

Hopes, which had been aroused by this string of victories gradually, faded as three weeks passed without another encounter. Many sorties were made in efforts to intercept the "milkman" who was believed to be carrying supplies to the Nazi garrison in beleaguered Dunkirk, but like "weather Willi" of an earlier period he could not be caught. The weather was often unfavourable for operations, no sorties being possible on five nights in October.

Two accidents marked this period. In the first, F/O K.R. Walley and FS F.R. Chamock were killed on 20 October when their Mosquito crashed into a hill near Corbie as they were returning from a patrol. A comparatively new crew, Walley and Charnock had joined No. 410 late in August while the squadron was at Colerne. The second accident, six evenings later, was fortunately less serious.

S/L Hedger and P/O Bodard were coming back from an uneventful scramble when the pilot discovered his undercarriage was u/s. He attempted to belly-land, but the port wheel, stuck in half-down position, caused the aircraft to crack up and S/L Hedger suffered a broken leg. Command of "A" Flight, which Hedger had held for two months, passed now to S/L I.S. MacTavish. "B" Flight also received a new commander in October when "Red" Somerville was posted to No. 409 Squadron as C.O. and S/L S.J. Fulton came from that unit to replace him.

With the approach of winter life under canvas began to lose its charm. On 21 October the officers abandoned their tents in favour of a "chateau", a large, rather dilapidated house, on the outskirts of Blangy-Tronville, a nearby village. While some cleared up the premises and made them habitable, others went scrounging for stoves, now much in demand, and those fortunate enough to obtain one kept careful watch over their property. Some nights later there was a party given by the aircrew for their servicing flight. The banquet included chicken and goose, acquired by sundry devious means beyond the ken of official service procedure.

So the October nights slipped past, with little to record for operations except for rather frequent sightings of V.2s being launched against England. Before the month ended, however, the American-English team, Archie Harrington and Dennis Tongue, bagged their fourth Hun in a long, eight-minute chase over eastern Holland. Taking off from Glisy at 5 o'clock on 29 October, they patrolled over the Venlo area in company with another crew until it became dark. Presently Harrington was sent northwest to St. Antonis where he encountered showers of "window" as well as concentrated and accurate flak. Finding no joy at low altitude, the Mosquito pilot began to climb and his navigator soon got a contact on a "bogey" which, unlike the lower Huns, was travelling at a good pace. As the range began to open, Harrington increased to full throttle, closing slowly at 340 m.p.h. The enemy aircraft started to let down in a succession of "steps", while the night fighter moved within visual range, identifying the Hun as an FW.190. Four brief bursts from close range smashed around the cockpit, knocking off "various debris". Thereupon the 190 turned on its back, plunging vertically into the ground where it burned fiercely.

The Cougars normally roamed far afield in search of prey; they were therefore taken completely by surprise when a Jerry flew right over their heads about 8 o'clock one evening (1 November). Hearing an aircraft approaching, one of the navigators glanced up expecting to see the familiar silhouette of a Mossie coming home from a patrol. Instead he was considerably shaken to see the unmistakable swept-back wings and oval tailplane of an He.111 - possible one of the Dunkirk "milkmen". At about 400 feet the aircraft swept across the field, heading north. It was too late to scramble any Mossies, but later a crew went out in a luckless effort to catch the Jerry on its way home.

The squadron had scarcely got settled in winter quarters at Glisy when orders were received to move on 3 November to Lille/Vendeville (B.51), some 60 miles to the north-east. Here the aircrews again set to work to make their quarters as comfortable and ship-shape as possible. For dispersal they had at first a wooden hut, half buried in the ground, but the area soon became a sea of mud in the November rains and a move was made to another site which had hard standings for the aircraft and more comfortable accommodation for the personnel.²⁶

When the Cougars moved to Vendeville they changed their operational schedule. Since early October two four-crew patrols had been made before midnight each evening; now they did their work in the early morning hours, sending out one section of four about midnight and a second section about 0530 a.m.²⁷ As the autumn nights lengthened into winter, with the inevitable rains and fogs, the number of sorties, which had risen to 168 in October, began to decline. There was no flying on seven nights in November and nine in December, but the squadron maintained a six-sortie average for the

²⁶ No. 409 (Nighthawk) Squadron was also stationed at B.51 from 12 October 1944 to April 19, 1945.

²⁷ The schedule was not a rigid one as the squadron frequently operated on the old time-table.

other nights when operations were possible. Snow and biting cold in January 1945 kept the aircraft in their dispersals on 19 nights and only 62 sorties could be made; it was the quietest month in more than a year. February was somewhat better (99 sorties) but it was not until March that the Cougars again got back into their stride. Nevertheless, hampered though they were by the weather, the crews tallied 14 kills and a damaged during these long winter months, most of the action occurring in one hectic week late in December.

The first victories from Lille/Vendeville more than atoned for almost four weeks of joyless patrols. Once before, in December 1943, a Cougar team had destroyed three enemy aircraft in a single sortie. Harrington and Tongue pulled the "hat trick" again on the night of 25 November. The story can be told in the pilot's own words:

Taking off at 1740 hours, the crew did an uneventful patrol for well over an hour. "I was finally handed over to Rejoice control and told of trade ahead between 10,000 and 15,000 feet. Then I was told of joy 15 miles to port and to steer 100 degrees. Contact obtained crossing to starboard above, range four miles. Closed fairly rapidly to two miles. Then target commenced moderate evasive action. Visual obtained at 4500 feet, height 16,000 feet. Closed right in and finally identified a Ju.88 night fighter with Ju.188 tail ... Dropped back to approximately 600 feet and opened fire. Strikes seen in cockpit, engines, and wing roots, followed by explosion and debris. E/a diving very steeply, followed him on A.I. and visually. E/a was seen to strike the ground and burn. Our aircraft had been hit by debris as we fired, shaking aircraft badly ... Position given by Rejoice as approximately at Muntz (north of Julich). Time 2008.

"Climbed back up and Rejoice gave us another chase on vector of 280 degrees, head-on, range 11 miles. At same time observer obtained a head-on collision contact, above at range of three miles. Did hard port orbit, and no joy. Continued orbit, searching and regained contact, hard over to port, on aircraft doing a hard port turn. Apparently he was trying to intercept us. Target commenced very violent evasive action and increased speed, climbing, diving and turning. Closed very slowly to 4000 feet range and target did even more violent evasive, getting out to 6000 feet range. This lasted for nine to ten minutes. Visual obtained finally between 4000 and 3500 feet. Closed in very slowly at an A.S.I.270, height 12,000 feet. Identified as ... another night fighter (Ju.88 with 188 tail). Dropped back to 5/600 feet, and opened fire. Strikes seen on cockpit, engines and wing roots, followed by explosions. E/a did a half roll and went to port, then became straight and level, finally going into a loop. It stalled at the top of the loop and went into an inverted spin. E/a seen to hit the deck with a large explosion, illuminating the houses in the vicinity... Position given by Rejoice as ... near Jackerath (north of the first combat area). Time 2019.

"Climbed back up and obtained two contacts. One to port, range three miles and one to starboard, range four miles. Asked Rejoice which one was hostile; advised to take our choice as both were hostile. Intercepted the one to port through moderate evasive action. The furthest a/c came in head-on to starboard and above, appearing to intercept us. We continued interception, observer covering tail with night glasses in starboard turns as well as controlling interception. Visual finally obtained at 4500 feet. We closed in to about 75 feet and identified as Ju.88 with 188 tail. E/a still doing evasive action, suddenly throttled back and I narrowly escaped ramming him. Then

I dropped back to about 300 feet and opened fire. Strikes seen in cockpit, on engines and wing roots. Debris flew off. E/a then started burning on port engine, fire spreading to cockpit and starboard engine. E/a vent down in spiral dive to starboard. I followed down, taking pictures of him burning. E/a went into cloud and a few seconds later a very large explosion lit up the underside of the cloud and continued to burn fiercely.... Rejoice was unable to give me a definite fix as I was then off their tube, but approximate area was somewhere north around Hunxe.²⁸ Time 2026. I then did very

²⁸ The only Hunxe, which can be identified is east of Wesel, far to the north and more than 40 miles from the scene of the previous combats.

violent evasive action myself, including hard orbits, as Rejoice seemed to think there might be someone on my tail ... I claim three Ju.88s destroyed,"

All three aircraft were Ju.88 G-1 night fighters, identifiable by a blister under the nose, and radar aerials projecting from the nose. Large black crosses could be seen under the wings and close to the engine nacelles. Harrington believed the enemy tactics were for two night fighters to fly in line astern, approximately two miles apart, the rear one covering the other. He and Tongue therefore concentrated on intercepting the tail-end Charlie. Throughout the chases they were held by the German ground radar and could hear the enemy controller over their radio telephone. No return fire was encountered in the combats, but the Mosquito was slightly damaged by flying debris.

Harrington and Tongue had previously destroyed four enemy aircraft and had been recommended for the DFC. Now, after their seventh joint victory, Harrington received the DSO and his navigator a Bar to the DFC. Harrington was also awarded the American DFC, and the Air Medal with several oak leaf clusters. He left the squadron at the end of December, on transfer to a unit of the USAAF, but Dennis Tongue crewed up with a new pilot and remained with No. 410 until April 1945, adding another victory to his score. With eight confirmed kills he was the leading navigator/radar in the squadron.

"B" Flight accounted for another Ju.88G night fighter on the last night in November when F/O "Mac" MacKenzie got his second kill and P/O Bodard, the navigator, his fourth. For his example of skill and ability in these combats George Bodard was decorated with the DFC; his score had risen to six, however, by the time the award was promulgated. On this occasion in November the Mosquito crew, directed again by Rejoice control, was on patrol in the same general area, between Aachen and Erkelenz, in which Harrington and Tongue had had their good scrap. Vectored towards some "trade", they discovered that the "bogey" was also apparently trying to investigate them. For 15 minutes the two night fighters stalked one another. Finally MacKenzie was able to close within sight of his opponent, as it made a hard starboard turn, and saw the Hun was a Ju.88 G-1. While still in the turn he opened fire with three short bursts that hit the fuselage and both engines. Very bright explosions flashed from each motor, after which the outer sections of the wings tore away and the Junkers went into a vertical spin. Seconds later there was a fierce explosion on the ground near Erkelenz.

A few days after the squadron moved to Lille/Vendeville it was called upon to provide a special patrol of four aircraft as air cover for Armistice Day ceremonies being held in Paris; no enemy intruders attempted to intervene. Later in the month there was a tragic accident at base which took the lives of two pilots who had joined the Cougars a short time previously. F/Os H. Connelly and J. Hunt had gone up together to practice circuits and landings; as they made a circuit, preparatory to coming in, the Mosquito suddenly stalled and crashed from 500 feet. A few days before Christmas there was another disaster, the heaviest blow suffered by the squadron throughout its long career. For several days the airfield had been fogbound. When the sky cleared a bit in the afternoon of the 21st, S/L Fulton, "B" Flight commander, took off for England in the squadron Oxford. With him were three officers and two airmen, all going on leave, one of the airmen counting the minutes until he met his bride-to-be. Near Wrotham, Kent, the aircraft for some reason crashed and only one of its occupants survived, seriously injured. Killed with S/L Fulton were his navigator, F/O A.R. Ayton (RAF), who had accompanied him on posting to the Cougars in October, F/L F.G. Thomson, DFC (RAF), who had arrived late in November to begin a second tour, and LACs E. Wahlers and R. Seefried. F/O W. Rumbold, another RAF navigator, was the injured passenger; he had been with the squadron for two months.

Less serious was another mishap at Brussels/Melsbroek where a Mosquito force-landed one night in November and overturned when it ran off the runway into soft ground. The aircraft was badly damaged, but the pilot, F/O E. Sexsmith, escaped unscathed. His RAF navigator, F/O W. Nixon, received a small gash in the head and returned to Lille looking like a pirate in his big turban

bandage.

On many nights in November and December there were sightings of "Big Ben", one crew seeing as many as seven during a patrol. There were also numerous reports of enemy R/T "jamming" and "window" contacts, but there was no further "joy" after the MacKenzie - Bodard victory until the Germans launched their counter-offensive in the Ardennes on 16 December. That marked the opening of another period of great night fighter activity (when the weather did not intervene) and another string of successful encounters.

The first night of the offensive was quiet for No. 410, only four patrols being carried out. On the 17th, however, when ten sorties were made, two of which were abortive, several crews found indications of enemy activity. "Pop" Edinger and "Chuck" Vaessen were directed to investigate Bonninghardt airfield, southwest of Wesel, where ground control plotted six "bogeys". Patrolling in the area, they saw two Huns briefly illuminated by searchlights as they came in for a landing. In neither case was the night fighter in a position to attack, and it soon became obvious that the other enemy aircraft had been diverted elsewhere because of the Mosquito over their home base.

Indications of increasing Jerry activity aroused great keenness among the Cougar crews. When "Pop" Edinger took off for another patrol the next night (18th/19th), he had a hunch that he was going to be in luck. Twice previously he had scored a "kill" on the eve of departure on leave - and he was due for another spell of leave tomorrow. His hunch was right. With Vaessen he began his patrol between Tilburg and Eindhoven, receiving numerous reports that there was "trade" abroad. They saw one aircraft shot down by the guns of the anti-flying-bomb defence zone to the south. Then control gave the night fighter a target which led to a merry chase. Several times contact was lost and regained, and when "Chuck" brought his pilot within sight of the violently weaving Jerry several minutes passed before the guns could be brought to bear. The Cougar crew identified their quarry as a Ju.88 as they closed in. Finally the enemy made a steep turn to starboard, whereupon "Pop" let off a quick burst of 44 rounds. The 20 mm. shells struck on the fuselage and started a small fire in the 88's starboard engine. In a steeper turn the target went down under the Mossie's wing. Edinger could not follow as he was down to about 200 feet, so low indeed that Vaessen swore he saw trees flash past! Pulling up, "Pop" and "Chuck" saw their 88 hit the ground and explode near the airfield where they had patrolled the previous night. It was their fifth "kill" and gave "A" Flight a one point lead in the number of e/a destroyed since D-Day.²⁹

"B" Flight itched to even the score again, but fog descended on Lille/Vendeville and for three nights in a row (19th to 21st) no flying was possible. "A" was on duty on the 22nd, when the fog finally lifted; it had no luck. The next night was "B"'s turn and nine crews were sent out, five to patrol between 10 p.m. and 1 a.m., and four more between 4 a.m. and 9 a.m. (Each aircraft was out about three hours.) The early patrols were uneventful, but F/Os D.M. MacKenzie and G.P.A. Bodard, who took off at 4 a.m., knocked down two Ju.88s, thereby regaining the lead for "B" Flight and raising their own scores to four and six respectively.

Under the control of Rejoice G.C.I, "Mac" and "Bode" patrolled around Krefeld until vectored south-east after some "trade" 30 miles away. Picking up a contact, they gave chase, closing in on a Ju.88 whose mild evasive action scarcely bothered the Cougar pilot as he took careful aim. From dead astern the burst smashed into the fuselage and engine nacelles of the Junkers, starting a fire in the wing-root. Slowly it dived earthward, exploding as it crashed near Wickrath (south of Munchen-Gladbach). MacKenzie resumed his patrol for 30 minutes, until Rejoice found another distant target. The second combat was a duplicate of the first, except that the night fighter was momentarily puzzled when the target fired the correct colours of the day. Close scrutiny, however, verified that it was in fact a Ju.88 with external bomb racks, and a few moments later its blazing wreckage strewn the

²⁹ No. 409 (Nighthawk) Squadron, which shared Lille/Vendeville with No. 410, got three Huns the same night. A keen rivalry had developed between the units and the Cougars were anxious to retain their lead.

ground near Grefrath (due west of Krefeld). For his four second-tour victories, Don MacKenzie was decorated with the DFC. On his first tour with the squadron, as a warrant officer in the spring of 1943, he had done good work on "ranger" sorties, destroying four locomotives and several barges. Bodard, his navigator, had already been put up for the DFC after his fourth victory at the end of November.

"B" Flight was again in front, 22 to 21, but held the slim advantage for less than 24 hours. "Pop" Edinger and "Chuck" Vaessen tied it up early on Christmas Eve; S/L MacTavish and F/L Al Grant put their flight out in front before Santa had finished his rounds, and F/O J.A. Watt and F/L E.H. Collis (RAF) increased the lead by another kill early on Christmas morning.

"Pop" and "Chuck" were the first crew off on Christmas Eve, leaving Vendeville at 1750 hours to patrol over the Dutch border between Sittard and Venlo. For a long time they had nothing but a couple of chases that turned out to be other Mosquitoes. Then control put them on to a "bogey" and guided them through frequent changes of course and altitude until Vassen picked up the target on his A.I. at two miles range. Closing within sight of the enemy, now recognized as a Ju.87, Edinger had to lower his flaps and undercarriage to reduce speed to that of the slow-moving Stuka. His first burst shot debris from wings and fuselage; a second burst, at closer range, yielded more fragments - but still no fire. Again he fired and this time the 87 burst into flames as it dived toward the ground. Oddly, the enemy pilot took no evasive action during the combat. The location was near Wassenberg, south-east of Roermond; the time 1955 hours; and Edinger - Vaessen now had a score of six destroyed and one damaged.

Half an hour before midnight MacTavish and Grant crashed another Stuka near Walbeck, just north-east of Venlo which was their patrol area. Unlike Edinger's 87, however, this one made very good use of its speed range to evade attack, several times cutting its speed sharply, turning abruptly, and then opening up at full throttle again.

MacTavish chased the Junkers as it flew north and east, and noticed that it carried two bombs under the wings. So difficult was it to keep the fast Mosquito from overshooting the target that for a time Mac was unable to get in position to fire. The first attack was unsuccessful because of the Stuka pilot suddenly opening up and pulling away while the Mosquito still had its wheels and flaps down. A second attack was made from closer range, causing strikes on the left side of the enemy, which then peeled off to 800 feet. At still closer range a third attack was carried out, hitting this time on the starboard side. Apparently out of control, the 87 headed earthward as the night fighter shoved its nose down for a final squirt. MacTavish's altimeter registered 500 feet and his air speed indicator a bare 130 m.p.h. when he flew over the enemy machine, still in its dive. "Almost immediately there was a large flash on the ground below which lit up our aircraft as if bombs had exploded."

That ended the squadron's Christmas Eve programme of patrols (five in number). Early Christmas morning four more crews were sent out. One was composed of F/O J.A. Watt and F/L E.H. Collis, two old-timers who had completed one tour together in 1943 and were now beginning their second. Their patrol area was Roermond-Julich where they were controlled by the same G.C.I. unit (Rejoice) that had put Edinger and MacTavish on their Huns. After stooing about for an hour, Watt was given a customer which he presently identified as a Ju.88. Startled by two near bursts, the Jerry pilot peeled off and was lost for some minutes. Then Collis regained contact and his pilot moved in again. The Hun was now taking violent evasive action, but Watt caught it in a diving turn with a burst that caused an eruption in the starboard engine. In a vertical dive from 3000 feet the 88 went down, blew up and burned. G.C.I. fixed the position as the Puffendorf area, between Geilenkirchen and Julich.

The pressure was now on "B" Flight to pull in front once more and before the month and year ended they did so. Eight patrols were made on Christmas night over the front from the Hook of Holland, eastward to Dordrecht and Arnhem, and southward over Goch and Roermond to Sittard; but

there was no joy and four crews had to curtail their patrols because of unserviceable radars. The next night fog again blanketed the airfield and "B" began to fidget. But joy was unconfined the following evening (27th/28th) when F/L Dinsdale and F/O Dunn bagged their third Jerry. As a mark of appreciation for the very efficient co-operation given the Cougars by Rejoice G.C.I., "Dinny" crashed his 88 just two fields away from the radar unit. ("A" Flight said he did it just to make sure that the "kill" was confirmed.)

The patrol began over Sittard, whence the night fighter was soon vectored after some "trade". This chase had to be abandoned though as Dunn's A.I. set was not functioning properly and the target entered an ack-ack zone. At the same time F/O T.H. Cameron had to withdraw from another "bogey" when he too had a "bent weapon". Rejoice then put Dinsdale onto the "bogey" and Dunn got a contact dead ahead. His set did not give the elevation, so the crew had to rely upon the ground controller for this information. Co-operation was perfect. Pursuing the contact, Dinsdale and Dunn sighted their quarry, weaving gently just above them. It was a Ju.88 night fighter, carrying what appeared to be streamlined long range tanks that were faired into the wings outboard of the two motors. From directly behind, "Dinny" fired and saw the port engine burst into flames. The 88 streaked across the G.C.I. site at Helchteren (north of Hasselt in north-eastern Belgium), dived into the ground and blew up. Rejoice (what an appropriate name) immediately gave the Mossie another target, but its port engine packed up due to debris in the radiator, forcing Dinsdale to relinquish the chase and fly home. With his navigator, like himself a Manitoba boy, Dinsdale later received the DFC. Walter and Jack were the eighth (and last) Cougar crew to be decorated simultaneously.

The 28th was foggy; the 29th was foggy; the 30th was even more foggy. This persistence of fog puzzled the squadron diarist because in his words, "some of the remarks passed by the aircrew were enough to burn away even a pea-souper." The crews did become very restless; fearing that Jerry's recent activity might cease before they could get into the air again. Their wishes were finally granted and the last night of the year was crisp and clear with a full moon in the sky. Since S/L Fulton's death on 21 December, "B" Flight had been without a commander. On the 31st word came through that F/L R.M.G. Currie had been promoted to squadron leader to fill the vacancy. Currie was in the air at the time on a night flying test and was quite surprised on his return to learn that he had taken off as a F/L and landed as a S/L. He immediately proceeded to celebrate his promotion and welcome the New Year in appropriate manner - and simultaneously pulled his flight up even with "A".

With his navigator, F/L A.H. Rose, the new squadron leader took off from B.51 at 10 p.m. and headed for the patrol area around Roermond. There they were put on to a target, which led them, westward in a chase almost to Antwerp before Currie could close to firing range. Two bursts of 107 rounds caused three explosions in the Ju.188, one in the port wing root and two in the fuselage. The e/a blew up in a cloud of debris which the Mosquito was unable to avoid. As he flew through it, Currie could feel fragments striking his aircraft. The wreckage plummeted to earth between Lierre and Antwerp. Several fleeting visuals were obtained as the night fighter resumed its patrol, but an oil leak had started in one engine and Currie had to turn back to Vendeville where he landed at 0030 of the New Year.³⁰

To be very precise 1944 ended with the two flights even-stein in the number of Huns destroyed since D-Day - 24 each, but before 1945 was 90 minutes old "B" Flight had gained the lead. Just before midnight, F/L.W.A. Dexter and F/O D.G. Tongue, DFC, had taken off in one aircraft, only to be forced back immediately by defective equipment. Switching to another machine, they set out again and soon found that business was good. Several brief chases led to a good contact on a fast "bogey" which Tongue held while the Mosquito picked up speed and gradually closed. As ground

³⁰ The squadron diary does not record whether S/L Currie sighted a high-flying feathered aircraft (type *Ciconia ciconia*) carrying slung externally, below the nose, a diaper-clad infant (serial number 1945). See above, p.13.

control (Avalon G.C.I, which had also worked with Currie and Rose) was uncertain of the "bogey's" identity, Dexter moved in to 100 feet to be sure. It was a Ju.88 G-1 night fighter, with black crosses and squadron markings clearly visible on the fuselage and radar aerials sticking out of the nose. Dropping back to 300 feet, Dexter fired a short burst and saw his target blow up with a bright orange flash. Then it crashed on the ground near Peer, Belgium, where it burned fiercely for some time. That was the eighth time Dennis Tongue had shared in the destruction of an enemy aircraft.

An hour after this action, F/L W.J. Whittaker and FS S. Albright had two chases and combats. In the first, a Ju.88 was definitely damaged before sight and A.1 contact were lost at a very low height. Whittaker was handicapped by a gunsight which went out of commission after the first burst, and for this reason was unable to make an accurate attack on the second Jerry that he encountered. It was exasperating luck to lose two almost certain "kills" because of a dud sight just when enemy activity was at its height.

During this busy period Christmas had come and gone and a New Year had arrived. By luck, rather than foresight, the Cougars had started their festivities before the rush began. No. 410 trimmed No. 409 at basketball and plans were made to organize a hockey team. On 8 December there was a big squadron dance in Lille. The met. people graciously co-operated by producing duff weather which cancelled operations that night so everyone was able to attend and enjoy the fun. Later in the month there was another big party for 300 poor children of Lille for which the squadron personnel all "chipped in" to give the youngsters the merriest Christmas they had known for five years. At Vendeville Christmas Day was observed in the manner traditional in the service with the officers and senior NCOs serving the airmen at dinner. The menu included canned turkey (it had been planned to have fresh turkey, but the foggy weather made it impossible to fly the birds from England), roast, pork, pudding, fruit and all the usual trimmings that war-time conditions permitted. Blissful expressions on the faces of the airmen were eloquent testimony to the quality and quantity of the repast.

Quite unexpected was another event that marked Christmas Day. Late in the afternoon an airman opened the door of the R/T room at the squadron dispersal and was met by a rush of flames. The fire spread very rapidly - many of the fire extinguishers were frozen - and the whole dispersal was completely gutted. Much valuable equipment was lost, including all the Intelligence Sections maps, publications and files. Thanks to prompt and efficient work by ground personnel who rushed to the scene, crew log books, the combat report file and the box of night glasses were saved. The destruction of their dispersal did not prevent the Cougars from operating that night and, making use of No. 409's facilities, they carried out a full programme of eight sorties.

On New Years Day, any members of the squadron who were in a retrospective mood could look back over a year that had been truly remarkable. On 1 January 1944 the Cougars could count their score upon their fingers - with a knuckle to spare (9.3/4 e/a destroyed). Now, a twelve month later, they could boast of 68.3/4 Jerries to their credit,- a record which made them the leading night fighter squadron in the number of enemy destroyed since D-Day. But more than a month passed before another victory was added to the list.

January was a disappointing month. The weather was poor for days at a stretch; heavy snow or heavy fog kept the crews grounded for 19 nights! Indeed between the 7th and 31st there were only seven flying days, and sorties for the whole month shrank to a mere 62. Equally discouraging was another move. On the 5th instructions were received that No. 410 was to return to B.48 at Amiens/Glisy. At Lille they had been closer to the scene of activity and had had good hunting (13 "kills"). At Amiens, they feared, they would be comparatively inactive. The move was duly made on the 6th and 7th and the squadron settled down to make the best of it.³¹ The airmen were temporarily

³¹ Because of cold, snow or haze no operations could be carried out from Glisy until the 17th. The aircrew chafed during these ten days of enforced inactivity.

billeted in Amiens, while the officers took over a fish hatchery near Boves village. Despite its former function, the building was fairly comfortable and the Cougars set to work to convert it into a "pukka" RCAF mess. If living quarters were reasonably good, the same could not be said of the dispersal which consisted of four shacks and a few tents, a rough-and-ready, make-shift set up in contrast to the accommodation they had had at Lille before the fire. After a few days the airmen too moved to billets in Boves, leaving their large, draughty building in Amiens. The new quarters were somewhat crowded, but more comfortable as all the windows were still intact! Then, at the end of January, the squadron got a new dispersal, consisting of several Nissen huts "reinforced" by two of the shacks, which were moved up from the old site. The shacks were lined with insulation board to ensure some measure of warmth. It was cold in northern France and one day there was a real Canadian-style blizzard.

Some nimrod in the squadron soon discovered that Hungarian partridge were plentiful in the countryside and thanks to their marksmanship several feasts were enjoyed. Wild pigs were also to be found and, organizing a drive, the officers' mess banqueted again on roast pork. Another time, thanks to Jimmy Fullerton, they smacked their lips over venison steaks.

Since Glisy was rather far from the battle zone a plan was devised, to begin in February, to use B.77 at Gilze-Rijen in Holland as an advanced field. Each day the squadron in addition to its normal patrols would send two aircraft to B.77 to refuel and standby for a scramble. At the end of their patrol the crews would fly back to Glisy. In this way it was hoped to overcome the disadvantage of distance, which made scrambles impossible, and weather, which so frequently hampered operations at Amiens.

During these weeks several tour-expired crews left the squadron and newcomers were welcomed. In December Kearney, Hargrove and Harrington departed, followed by Snowdon, Dinsdale and Dunn early in 1945. Two old-timers, F/L Schultz and F/O Christie who had both won the DFC on their first tour, returned to the Cougars to start on a second tour which proved to be as brilliant as their first.

February opened with sunny, mild weather, which melted away January's snow and left a morass of mud. The Gilze-Rijen advanced field programme was inaugurated, but the crews, patrolling over Nijmegen, Maastricht, Dusseldorf, Utrecht, the Scheldt, Arnhem, the Ruhr, Venlo and Dordrecht on their scrambles, seldom had anything but N.T.R. (nothing to report). Operations from base were somewhat luckier and on the 3rd "A" Flight scored a "kill" to pull even once again with "B". This victory, the first in over a month, put new vim and vigor into the crews, but alas! It was seven weeks before they could score again.³²

The victory which F/Ls Ben Plumer and E.H. Collis won on 3/4 February presented one unusual feature in that the enemy aircraft was an He.219, one of the Luftwaffe's newest night fighters. Only two or three had been destroyed previously by the Allied Air Forces. The Cougar crew patrolled around Roermond for a short time until "trade" appeared to the south and Rejoice control vectored then to investigate. A contact was obtained on a "bogey" which was orbiting continually at 26,000 feet. Climbing to that height Plumer caught sight of greenish exhausts and, closing to a position dead below, identified an He.219, Collis confirming the recognition through his night glasses. From 500 feet behind the night fighter Ben fired a brief burst of only 27 rounds. An explosion was seen in the fuselage, followed by some flames, after which the Heinkel dived steeply. The Mosquito followed until the A.S.I, passed 450 m.p.h. when Plumer pulled out and circled. The Jerry continued down until, far below, it exploded on the ground and burned. Control then reported

³² The squadron diary remarked: "When 'trade' is slack or the weather prevents flying, a feeling of gloom and depression seems to hang like a pall over the squadron. It is a strange phenomenon how the news of a victory electrifies and transforms the whole unit. Immediately a victory is scored the cloud lifts and personnel seem to do twice the work in half the time."

another "bogey" was in the area, possibly trying to intercept the Mossie. Plumer and Collis hunted for it in vain and then returned to the scene of the crash, near Garzweiler (in the Grevenbroich area), on the chance that the second Jerry might be investigating what had happened to its comrade. But there was nothing to be found, except the still flaming wreckage.

Plumer's victory, the Cougars' fiftieth since D-Day, provided the final touch for a "house-warming" dance held in the officers' mess that evening which was graced by the presence of nurses from a hospital unit and some other ladies from Amiens. The rest of the month was relatively quiet. On nine nights the crews were weather-bound, and on the nights they could operate most of the contacts proved to be other friendly aircraft. One night late in February, F/Os E.B. Sexsmith and W. Nixon (RAF) patrolled well to the east of Cologne, the deepest penetration into Germany, which the squadron had recorded up to that date.

The long winter finally passed and, although the nights grew shorter as spring advanced, the weather became better. In March, No. 410 was able to operate on 29 nights, making 184 sorties in contrast to February's 99. The activity indeed approached that of "invasion month"; it was the final flurry before the end.

There was little joy, however, at Glisy during the first three weeks of March. Fickle fortune had turned her back on the squadron. In a chase after one very fast target S/L Currie had the emergency exit of his aircraft blown off by the force of "G" in a tight turn. Several other crews had luckless pursuits of "bogeys" that got away by dumping "window" or taking violent evasive action. On 6 March, WO A.G. Cole and F/O S.I. Lees, who had joined the Cougars in November 1944, were killed when their aircraft crashed on the take-off from Gilze/Rijen. Three nights later another crew was missing from a patrol between Remagen and Bonn. While being vectored after a target, in the Zulpich-Euskirchen area, the Mosquito suddenly disappeared from the tube of the radar unit, which had been plotting it. F/L D.T. Steele, the pilot, had come to the squadron late in February; his navigator, F/O C. Home of the RAF, had joined it in December of the previous year. These two losses, coming so close together, were the last suffered on operations.

Rather frequently during this period crews reported that they had been fired upon by our own anti-aircraft batteries, happily without damage to aircraft or personnel. Naturally the crews took a "dim view" of the matter, one of them remarking, "anybody and everything can open fire at night fighters, but we practically have to take fingerprints to ensure a target's identity, before we can open fire." The care taken by the Mosquito crews to identify their targets has been repeatedly indicated in their reports of their combats. The importance of this had been tragically illustrated one night the previous summer. A crew, well experienced in night fighter work, was on patrol over the Gulf of St. Malo when control vectored them to investigate a vague target. A contact was obtained on which the Mosquito closed very rapidly, overshooting its target. An observation type aircraft was seen clearly outlined against the moon, as the night fighter flashed by. Swinging about, the Mosquito came in again very cautiously, with flaps down to reduce the speed. For 25 miles the crew followed their target, studying it carefully and noticing a long-range tank slung between the wheels. Recognition of the type was difficult - no national markings could be seen - but the crew were finally convinced it was an enemy He.126. They shot it down in flames. But it was subsequently learned that the machine was one of our own Lysanders engaged on a secret mission over occupied France.

The Squadron's luck finally changed and three victories were recorded in quick succession. The first two combats were fought within a few miles and a few minutes of each other on the night of 24/25 March. S/L I.E. MacTavish and F/L G.R. Leask, with their navigators, F/O A.M. Grant and F/L J.W. Roff, left Glisy shortly after 1 a.m. Leask and Roff patrolled first over Dordrecht, moving thence eastward to Arnhem. One chase ended in a visual of another Mosquito; a second target "escaped" into an ack-ack zone. Then control gave them a third prospect and the contact led to a visual of a Me.110 silhouetted against the moon. Leask opened fire as the 110 made a diving turn to

starboard and made hits on the port wing. He fired again, making strikes on the other wing and engine. Trailing smoke, the Messerschmitt went down in a steeper dive that ended in an explosion and large fire on the ground near Greffelkamp, south-east of Arnhem.

Fifteen minutes later MacTavish and Grant crashed a Ju.88 by Etten, some miles further east. Mac and Al had started their patrol around Bocholt, where they stooged about, waiting for a "bogey" to emerge from a "hot spot" (flak zone). When their target came out, the navigator made an excellent interception, manoeuvring his pilot into a position where the enemy was perfectly silhouetted up-moon. Confirming its identification as a Ju.88G, the Cougar crew closed in. The target momentarily disappeared from sight in a sudden peel off, but Grant skilfully held the range until the 88 levelled out and again came into view. Struck by one burst from 450 feet, the enemy's port engine burst into flames. For a time the aircraft maintained its height, shedding debris, while the blazing engine lit up the fuselage and tail, clearly revealing the black German crosses. The Mosquito came in once more for the coup de grace, whereupon the Junkers rolled over and went straight in, trailed by a shower of fragments. Like Leask's Jerry, it exploded and burned when it crashed. MacTavish and Grant then found a Me.110 whose top gunner opened fire on the Mossie while another aircraft attacked from the rear. The attacks, repeated several times, were successfully evaded, but ground control was unable to assist the crew and, with their R/T unserviceable, MacTavish and Grant worked their way back to base at a low altitude.

This double "kill" had given "A" Flight a two point lead (27 to 25 since D-Day), and it was up to "B" to take appropriate action. They tried hard the next night, but luck was against them. F/L W.J. Whittaker and F/O B. Hannaford picked up a Ju.88, drew into position behind, and taking careful aim, Jack pressed the firing "tit". Nothing happened. For ten minutes the Mosquito stuck to its quarry, while the crew checked everything in vain. The guns refused to fire. F/L Plumer was called over from his patrol to deal with the Jerry, but by that time it had dropped its bombs and with nose down was heading for home at top speed. On return to base it was found that a broken wire had kept Whittaker's guns from functioning. It was the third time Jack had been robbed of a certain kill, two Jerries having escaped on New Year's morning because his gun-sight was u/s.

The next night (26/27 March) helped to cheer "B" Flight a bit. This was the time of the great Allied push across the lower Rhine and the Luftwaffe was reacting somewhat more vigorously than for many weeks past. Taking off from Gilze-Rijen advanced base, F/Ls "Ben" Plumer and "Brick" Bradford went on patrol north-east of Rheinberg. When a "bogey" appeared, heading westward, Radox G.C.I, sent the Mosquito in pursuit, giving various vectors to make the interception. Bradford picked up contact at four miles range and manoeuvred his pilot in behind the target, which was weaving gently and climbing. For a moment the aircraft could be seen silhouetted against a patch of cloud. The enemy pilot then began violent evasive action, but by means of radar contact and further brief sightings against cloud patches, Plumer continued to close in until his navigator could identify it as a Me.110. A moment later bright moonlight illuminated the target, confirming the identification. Ben then opened fire, hitting the starboard engine and wing root, which burst into flames. As he went down in pursuit of the Messerschmitt, intense light flak opened up and the controller gave him a course to get clear of the "hot spot". When the Mossie, weaving violently and losing height, was clear of the guns, Plumer said he was going back to look for his burning Jerry, but control replied that was not necessary as they had seen the aircraft crash and explode near Orsoy, on the banks of the Rhine south-east of Rheinberg. Two hours later Ben and Brick landed at Glisy to report their fourth and third victory respectively. "B" Flight had now narrowed "A"'s lead to one "kill", but events were to prove that this was the last combat for S/L Currie's flight. What joy the next few weeks produced was all for "A" - and was monopolized by two members of that flight.

The Allied advance across the lower Rhine into north-western Germany made it necessary for the night fighters to move forward to keep within range of the battlezone. From Glisy "A" Flight

went to Gilze/Rijen on 5 April. The field, which the Cougars had been using as an advanced base since February, was at first too congested to receive the whole squadron, so "B" moved temporarily to Lille/Vendeville, rejoining the other flight at B.77 on 8 April. At the same time there was a change in command, W/C Hiltz having completed his tour and handing over to W/C E.P. Heybroeck. At the end of April S/L Currie also became tour-expired and S/L W.J. Whittaker took command of "B" Flight for the few weeks that remained. There was quite a turnover in personnel during March and April, nine new crews having been posted in from 51 O.T.U. while F/Os W.G. Muschett, C.L. Vaessen, DFC, G.P.A. Bodard, DFC, R.C.M. Bayliss, D.G. Tongue, DFC & Bar, E.B. Sexsmith, and D.M. MacKenzie, DFC, F/Ls N.W. Bradford, W.A. Dexter, C.E. Edinger, DFC and A.H. Rose and P/Os R.G.H. Jones and W.J. Broderick left at the end of their tours.³³ In addition, F/L, Ben Plumer, DFC, was posted to No. 409 Squadron,

After the move to Gilze/Rijen, the squadron's patrols were extended deeper into Germany. Munster, the Ruhr, Hanover, Bremen, Osnabruck and Frankfurt were prominent among the new names that appeared. At least 19 of the 113 sorties in April were patrols over Hanover, 10 were around Bremen and 8 over Munster. The Ruhr too was frequently patrolled until Allied troops overran the Valley. In addition, the Cougars made numerous sorties to guard the Schelde estuary.

On the night of 10/11 April, F/L R.D. Schultz, DFC and F/O J.S. Christie, DFC, were on patrol in the Hanover area when control reported there was some "trade" to the north of that city. They got a contact, let the Jerry cross in front and then closed in behind, presently catching sight of a Ju.188, weaving mildly on a westward course at rather low altitude. A short burst from 600 feet range produced a big explosion close to the cockpit after which the 188 burst into flames and broke up in the air over Damme.

The 21st was another eventful night. For the first time a Cougar crew patrolled in the Berlin area and "Joe" Schultz and "Chris" Christie celebrated the occasion by scoring a double kill. While keeping watch over a beacon near Rhinow they obtained their first contact on a target flying at 2000 feet. It was a Ju.88 carrying bombs inboard of the engines. With his first burst "Joe" set fire to the port engine. Pulling in close alongside, the Mosquito pilot noted the Luftwaffe markings on the 88's flank and saw three members of the crew bale out. "Chris", who was able to get a clearer view of the enemy aircraft, counted four men who took to their parachutes. Uncertain how many there might be in the crew, Schultz gave the Hun three more bursts before turning away. He left the 88 slowly orbiting downward, well ablaze with a tail of fire streaming 300 feet from the port engine, and pieces of debris falling off. The night fighter turned away from its victim, somewhere in the Fehrbellin area, northwest of Berlin, to give chase to a second "bogey" which control had reported. When this plot faded Schultz returned to the scene of his first encounter and got a contact near an airfield, the circuit lights of which could be seen. Following the aircraft, another Ju.88, through various manoeuvres, Schultz got within range for a short burst. Once again, as in the first combat, an engine broke into flames. Then the 88 flicked over on its back and crashing onto the red perimeter lights of the airfield, blew up with a violent explosion. Warned by control that another aircraft appeared to be chasing them, the Cougar crew took hard evasive action to shake off the pursuer. Shortage of fuel then made it necessary to set course for Gilze/Rijen. The two 88s boosted "Joe" Schultz's score to eight "kills", the highest achieved by any Cougar pilot, and brought him a Bar to his DFC; Christie with six destroyed and one damaged shared second place among the navigators with "Chuck" Vaessen.

Thanks to these victories, "A" Flight strengthened its hold on first place in the post D-Day race, the final score being 30 destroyed, one probably and two damaged for "A", 26 destroyed and one damaged for "B". But in the over-all contest, from the beginning of operations to the end of

³³ A night fighter tour at this time was 200 hours.

hostilities, the two flights ended in a virtual tie; "A" Flight counted 38 destroyed, two probables and four damaged, to "B"'s 37.3/4 destroyed and four damaged.

There were no operations on the last four nights in April and the first night of May because of poor weather. In the early morning of 3 May, three crews went out, one to patrol over Hamburg and the others over the Schelde. They had nothing to report. The next night (3/4 May) the weather again intervened and on 5 May the German forces in Holland, Denmark and northwestern Germany laid down their arms.

The squadron continued training until the end of May to maintain operational efficiency in case of need.³⁴ On 11 May F/L T.H. Cameron, DFC, took off to test an aircraft; with him was LAC L.M. Thomas, one of the ground crew. Hours passed and the Mosquito did not return; word eventually was received that the Mosquito had crashed near Rotterdam and both men had been killed. Cameron was a second-tour pilot, having served his first tour with a night fighter unit in North Africa where he won his decoration for the destruction of three enemy aircraft. He had come to the Cougars in November 1944. Several days later a motorcycle accident at the airfield caused the death of LAC A.S. Friar, a member of the squadron's servicing echelon.

Training ceased at the beginning of June and the squadron spent the next week making sightseeing trips over the Ruhr to show the ground personnel something of the effect of Allied bombing in Germany. On one of these flights the perspex nose of WO D.D. Paton's Mosquito suddenly shattered, sending fragments into one radiator. When the engine began to overheat, the pilot feathered the propeller and tried to carry on; but the second engine also overheated and the Mossie came down for a wheels-up landing in the first available field.

On 9 June 1945, four years after it had been formed, No. 410 (Cougar) Squadron was disbanded.³⁵ One of its last acts had been to hold a memorial service for the 60 members of the squadron who gave their lives in the conflict. Ten crews, missing on operations, had been presumed dead;³⁶ four other crews had been killed in accidents in the course of operations and two pilots had been lost in the same manner. In other accidents on training, transportation flights or vehicle mishaps, 30 officers and airmen of the squadron and servicing echelon had lost their lives.

At the time No. 410 was disbanded its list of honours and awards showed one DSO, two Bars to the Distinguished Flying Cross, 19 DFCs, one BEM and four Mentions in Dispatches. Subsequently, in the King's Birthday list for 1945 and the New Years Honours List for 1946, thirteen Cougars received Mention and one was made a Member of the Order of the British Empire. The latter decoration was awarded to F/L S.E. Malouf who had given long and valuable service as squadron engineering officer. The MiDs included the two C.O.s, W/Cs Hiltz and Heybroek, two flight commanders, S/Ls Anderson and Currie, two crews, F/Ls J.W. Fullerton - B.E. Gallagher and F/L Edinger, DFC -F/O Vaessen, DFC. and F/L A.H. Rose, who had been S/L Currie's navigator. The invaluable services of the ground personnel were also recognized by the award of Mentions to FS A. Jones, the senior NCO on "A" Flight, Sgt. L.P. Eckstrand, "continuity" NCO, Cpl. D.A. Hopgood, a radar mechanic, and LAC E.J. Pile, the hard-working clerk of the orderly room.

When the squadron was disbanded on 9 June 1945, its personnel had received 41 decorations, and 62 officers and airmen had been entered on the Roll of Honour.

Reformed in December, 1948, at St. Hubert, P.Q., 410 was the first post-war fighter squadron in the RCAF (Regular). Originally equipped with Vampire jets, the Cougars became the first

³⁴ The squadron was very interested one day when a captured Me.262 (twin jet aircraft) landed at Gilze/Rijen to refuel en route to England. The machine was fitted with radar for use as a night fighter and its merits aroused much speculation and comment.

³⁵ At the time of disbandment, unit strength was 19 officers and 5 NCO pilots (all RCAF), 23 officers and 4 NCO navigators/radio (including 6 RAF officers), and 4 officers and 5 airmen groundcrew, total 46 officers and 14 other ranks.

³⁶ Another crew missing on operations had been taken prisoners of war.

squadron in the RCAF to fly Sabres, when they received the new jets in May, 1961. In November of that year another blue ribbon was added when 410 became the first RCAF squadron to go overseas equipped with Canadian-built aircraft. Based at North Luffenham, Nottinghamshire, they were the first unit of the RCAF's No. 1 Fighter Wing.

The squadron remained at North Luffenham until the fall of 1954, when it moved to Baden Soellingen, Germany, where it was attached to No. 4 Fighter Wing until March 1955.

The Cougars then moved to Marville, France, to rejoin the other two squadrons of 1 Wing. The squadron remained at Marville until October, 1954, when it was disbanded as a result of the decision to replace one Sabre squadron in each Wing with an all-weather CF-100 squadron.

One month later 410 reformed at Uplands as a CF-100 all-weather fighter squadron in Air Defence Command of the RCAF, and continued to operate from this base. In November 1961 they began to convert to the 1200 m.p.h. McDonnell Voodoos and were completely equipped at the end of December. On 31 March the squadron was officially disbanded at RCAF Station Uplands. It was noted at this time that No. 410 had a number of firsts to its credit. It was first RCAF (Reg) fighter squadron to be formed after the war, the first to fly Vampire jets, the first to fly Sabre jets, the first RCAF squadron to be sent overseas as part of the NATO force and the first to be equipped with the CF-101.

“A”	
Formation and Disbandment	
Formed at Ayr, Scotland	30 June 1941
Operational	31 August 1941
Disbanded at Gilze-Rijen, Netherlands	9 June 1945

“B”	
Higher Formations	
Fighter Command	30 June 1941 – November 1943
Air Defence of Great Britain	November 1943 – March 1944
Allied Expeditionary Air Force (2 nd Tactical Air Force)	March 1944 – 9 June 1945
No. 13 (F) Group	30 June 1941 – 22 February 1943
No. 12 (F) Group	23 February 1943 – 19 October 1943
No. 11 (F) Group	20 October 1943 – March 1944
No. 85 Group	March 1944 – 9 June 1945

“C”	
Stations	
Ayr, Ayrshire	30 June 1941 – 6 August 1941
Drem, East Lothian	7 August 1941 – 16 June 1942
Ayr, Ayrshire	17 June 1942 – 1 September 1942
Scorton, Yorkshire	2 September 1942 – 20 October 1942
Acklington, Northumberland	21 October 1942 – 22 February 1943
Coleby Grange, Lincolnshire	23 February 1943 – 19 October 1943
West Malling, Kent	20 October 1943 – 8 November 1943
Hunsdon, Hertfordshire	9 November 1943 – 29 December 1943
Castle Camps, Cambridgeshire	30 December 1943 – 28 April 1944
Hunsdon, Hertfordshire	29 April 1944 – 18 June 1944
Zeals, Wiltshire	18 June 1944 – 27 July 1944
Colerne, Wiltshire	28 July 1944 – 9 September 1944
Hunsdon, Hertfordshire	9 September 1944 – 22 September 1944
Amiens/ Glisy, France (B.48)	22 September 1944 – 2 November 1944
Lille/ Veneville, France (B.51)	3 November 1944 – 6 January 1945
Amiens/ Glisy, France (B.48)	7 January 1945 – 5 April 1945
Gilse-Rijen, Netherlands (B.77)	6 April 1945 – 9 June 1945

“D”	
Aircraft	
Defiant I	8 July 1941 – 6 May 1942
Beaufighter II	2 April 1942 – 26 January 1943
Mosquito II	November 1942 – 10 December 1943
Mosquito VI	6 July 1943 – 18 September 1943
Mosquito XIII	2 December 1943 – 17 August 1944
Mosquito XII	20 December 1943 – 18 March 1944
Mosquito XXX	1 August 1944 – 9 June 1945

“E”	
Commanding Officers	
S/L P.Y. Davoud	30 June 1941 – 5 September 1941 (Posted)
W/C (S/L) M. Lipton	5 September 1941 – 30 July 1942 (To Canada)
W/C F.W. Hillock	19 August 1942 – 20 May 1943 (Tour exp.)
W/C G.H. Elms	20 May 1943 – 18 February 1944 (Tour exp.)
W/C G.A. Hiltz	19 February 1944 – 2 April 1945 (Tour exp.)
W/C E.P. Heybroek	2 April 1945 – 9 June 1945 (Disbanded)

“F”	
“A” Flight Commanders	
F/L R.L.F. Day, DFC (RAF)	14 July 1941 – 17 November 1941 (To “B” Flt.)
F/L D.S. Edwards (RAF)	17 November 1941 – 4 April 1942 (Posted)
P/O W. Hamilton (RAF)	4 April 1942 – 22 April 1942 (Acting)
S/L J.R.C. Young (RAF)	22 April 1942 – 7 May 1942
S/L F.W. Hillock	16 May 1942 – 22 July 1942 (Posted)
S/L G.H. Elms	22 July 1942 – 19 August 1942 (Posted)
S/L B.G. Miller	24 August 1942 – 26 January 1943 (Posted)
S/L R.R. Ferguson	February 1943 – 25 January 1944 (Posted)
S/L C.A.S. Anderson	25 January 1944 – 29 March 1944 (Posted)
S/L I.A. March	April 1944 – 24 August 1944 (Tour exp.)
S/L R.A. Hedger	24 August 1944 – 26 October 1944 (Injured)
S/L I.E. MacTavish	November 1944 – 9 June 1945

“F” (cont’d)	
“B” Flight Commanders	
F/L M. Lipton	30 June 1941 – 4 September 1941 (Promoted)
F/L R.M.M.D. Lucas (RAF)	4 September 1941 – 15 November 1941 (Posted)
F/L R.L.F. Day, DFC (RAF)	17 November 1941 – 8 December 1941 (Injured)
F/L R.G. Woodman (RAF)	8 December 1941 – April 1942
S/L R.J. Bennell	1 May 1942 – 6 October 1942 (Posted)
S/L A. Barker	October 1942 – 17 June 1943 (Tour exp.)
S/L A.G. Lawrence, DFC	17 June 1943 – 11 September 1943 (Tour exp.)
S/L I.A. March	11 September 1943 – April 1944 (To “A” Flt)
S/L J.D. Somerville	April 1944 – 9 October 1944 (Posted)
S/L S.J. Fulton	15 October 1944 – 21 December 1944 (Killed)
S/L R.M.G. Currie	31 December 1944 – 30 April 1945 (Tour exp.)
S/L W.J. Whittaker	30 April 1945 – 9 June 1945 ...

SQUADRON LETTERS – RA

“G”

Honours and Awards

Number	Rank and Name	Trade	Decoration	London Gazette
965731	Cpl. F.W. Evans	Clk	MiD	01.01.42 ³⁷
937269	FS J.J. Townsen	A/G	BEM	08.06.42
C868	S/L M. Lipton	P	MiD	11.06.42
J15807	F/L M.A. Cybulski	P	DFC	09.11.43
139394	F/O H.H. Ladbroke	Nav	DFC	09.11.43
J16359	F/O R.D. Schultz	P	DFC	14.01.44
J9577	F/O V.A. Williams	Nav	DFC	14.01.44
J5142	F/L E.A. Murray	P	MiD	14.01.44
126814	F/O P. Littlewood	Nav	MiD	14.01.44
J3258	S/L I.A. March	P	DFC	22.09.44
J8799	F/L K.M. Eyolfson	Nav	DFC	22.09.44
157629	F/O J.S. Christie	Nav	DFC	22.09.44
J1999	S/L J.D. Somerville	P	DFC	20.10.44
J20412	F/O G.D. Robinson	Nav	DFC	20.10.44
J10272	F/L C.E. Edinger	P	DFC	05.12.44
J28073	F/O C.L. Vaesson	Nav	DFC	05.12.44
J10802	F/L B.E. Plumer	P	DFC	15.12.44
J9132	F/L W.W. Hargrove	Nav	DFC	15.12.44
177090	F/O D.G. Tongue	Nav	DFC	29.12.44
0-885992	1/Lt. A.A. Harrington	P	DFC	(18.01.45) ³⁸
0-885992	1/Lt. A.A. Harrington	P	DSO	(18.01.45) ²
J86079	F/O G.P.A. Bodard	Nav	DFC	23.01.45
J19197	F/O D.M. Mackensie	P	DFC	27.02.45
177090	F/O D.G. Tongue, DFC	Nav	Bar to DFC	02.03.45
J21124	F/L W.G. Dinsdale	P	DFC	08.05.45
J85003	F/O J.E. Dunn	Nav	DFC	08.05.45
C4994	F/L S.E. Malouf	Eng. Off.	MBE	14.06.45
J6956	S/L C.A.S. Anderson	P	MiD	14.06.45
R52307	FS A. Jones	NCO i/c “A” Flight	MiD	14.06.45
R58405	Sgt. L.P. Eckstrand	NCO	MiD	14.06.45
J16159	F/L R.D. Schultz, DFC	P	Bar to DFC	06.07.45
C805	W/C G.A. Hiltz	P	MiD	01.01.46
J7318	W/C E.P. Heybroek	P	MiD	01.01.46
J15468	S/L R.M.G. Currie	P	MiD	01.01.46
J10272	F/L C.E. Edinger, DFC	P	MiD	01.01.46
J18717	F/L J.W. Fullerton	P	MiD	01.01.46
J24213	F/L B.E. Gallagher	Nav	MiD	01.01.46
J15757	F/L A.H. Rose	Nav	MiD	01.01.46
J28073	F/O C.L. Vaessen, DFC	Nav	MiD	01.01.46
R128722	Cpl. D.A. Hoppood	Radar Mech.	MiD	01.01.46
R116779	LAC E.J. Pile	Clk. Admin.	MiD	01.01.46

Summary	
DSO	1
MBE	1
Bar to DFC	2
DFC	19
BEM	1
MiD	17
Total	41

³⁷ NCO i/c Orderly Room

³⁸ Not published in London Gazette

"H" Operational Summary								
Month	Flying Time			Air Victories			Casualties (killed & missing)	Type of Aircraft
	Sorties	Operational	Non Operational	Dest.	P.D.	Dam.		
1941								
July			306.00				1	Defiant I
August	?	?	? ³⁹				2	Defiant I
September	63	(63 hrs)	(372 hrs) ⁴⁰					Defiant I
October	23	23.00	362.00					Defiant I
November	22	27.00	259.00					Defiant I
December	36	31.00	349.00					Defiant I
1942								
January	24	29.00	243.00					Defiant I
February	15	17.00	335.00					Defiant I
March	16	26.00	377.00				3	Defiant I
April	5 ⁴¹	5.00	619.00				2	Defiant I Beaufighter II
May			760.00					Beaufighter II
June	3	5.00	553.00					Beaufighter II
July	2	2.00	559.00					Beaufighter II
August	9	16.00	457.00					Beaufighter II
September	19	78.00	495.00			1	2	Beaufighter II
October	21	51.00	559.00					Beaufighter II
November	16 ⁴²	28.00	651.00					Beaufighter II Mosquito II
December	61 ⁴³	90.00	400.00					Beaufighter II Mosquito II
1943								
January	32 ⁴⁴	63.00	477.00	1			2	Beaufighter II Mosquito II
February	18	36.00	504.00					Mosquito II
March	33	70.00	636.00	½			2	Mosquito II
April	31	63.00	731.00				6	Mosquito II
May	41	85.00	753.00				2	Mosquito II
June	32	90.00	729.00	¼			2	Mosquito II
July	41 ⁴⁵	98.00	754.00	2		1	4	Mosquito II Mosquito VI
August	40 ⁴⁶	95.00	785.00	1			4	Mosquito II

³⁹ Details not given.

⁴⁰ Flying times not given.

⁴¹ All sorties on Defiants.

⁴² All sorties on Beaufighters.

⁴³ On Beaufighters 18 sorties; on Mosquitoes 43.

⁴⁴ On Beaufighters 2 sorties; on Mosquitoes 30.

⁴⁵ Nine sorties on Mos. VI (51 hours); 32 on Mos. II (47 hours).

"H" Operational Summary								
Month	Flying Time			Air Victories			Casualties (killed & missing)	Type of Aircraft
	Sorties	Operational	Non Operational	Dest.	P.D.	Dam.		
								Mosquito VI
September	34 ⁴⁷	81.00	652.00	1			2	Mosquito II Mosquito VI
October	60	96.00	457.00				2	Mosquito II
November	80	144.00	273.00	1			2	Mosquito II
December	48 ⁴⁸	70.25	245.40	3		1		Mosquito II Mosquito XIII
1944								
January	102 ⁴⁹	195.00	398.00				2	Mosquito XII Mosquito XIII
February	133 ⁵⁰	289.25	360.05	5		2	3	Mosquito XII Mosquito XIII
March	131 ⁵¹	264.40	445.30	3	1			Mosquito XII Mosquito XIII
April	96	223.30	475.15	1		1		Mosquito XIII
May	109	231.40	508.45	1				Mosquito XIII
June	209	567.15	474.40	13	1	2	2	Mosquito XIII
July	206	539.45	324.50	6			1	Mosquito XIII
August	121 ⁵²	368.10	693.25	10				Mosquito XIII Mosquito XXX
September	139	362.15	334.20	3				Mosquito XXX
October	168	783.00 ⁵³	363.00	4			2	Mosquito XXX
November	138	324.50	321.20	4			2	Mosquito XXX
December	134	321.00	246.05	9		1	5	Mosquito XXX
1945								
January	62	155.00	284.05					Mosquito XXX
February	99	271.10	260.55	1				Mosquito XXX
March	184	475.55	314.15	3			4	Mosquito XXX
April	113	298.10	246.25	3				Mosquito XXX
May	3	9.20	256.35				3	Mosquito XXX
June			132.50					Mosquito XXX

⁴⁶ Twenty-seven sorties on Mos. VI (77 hrs); 13 on Mos. II (18 hours).

⁴⁷ Twelve sorties on Mos. VI (45 hrs); 22 on Mos. II (36 hrs).

⁴⁸ Sixteen sorties on Mos. II (19.25 hrs); 32 on Mos. XIII (51.00 hrs).

⁴⁹ Six sorties on Mos. XII (8.00 hrs); 96 on Mos. XIII (187.00 hrs).

⁵⁰ Ten sorties on Mos. XII (17.35 hrs); 123 on Mos. XIII (271.50 hrs).

⁵¹ Three sorties on Mos. XII (4.00 hrs); 128 on Mos. XIII (260.40 hrs).

⁵² Sixty-five sorties on Mos. XIII (218.00 hrs); 56 on Mos. XXX (150.10 hrs).

⁵³ This figure, given in two squadron reports, is obviously incorrect. About 500 hours would be more reasonable.

“T”
Squadron Victories

Date	Crew	Flight	Aircraft	Base	Destroyed	P.D.	Damaged	Location
6/7 Sep 42	P/O R.R. Ferguson P/O D. Creed	A	Beaufighter II	Scorton			Ju.88	N.E. of Whitby
22/23 Jan 43	FS B.M. Height Sgt. T. Kipling (RAF)	B	Mosquito II	Acklington	Do.217			Hartlepool
18/19 Mar 43	F/O D. Williams P/O P.N. Dalton	B	Mosquito II	Coleby Grange	½ Do.217 ⁵⁴			King's Lynn
19 Jun 43	F/O E.A. Murray F/O P.R. Littlewood (RAF)	B	Mosquito II	Predannack	¼ BV.138 ⁵⁵			Bay of Biscay (45.23N-7.35W)
12/13 Jul 43	S/L A.G. Lawrence, DFC FS H.J. Wilmer, DFM (RAF)	B	Mosquito II	Coleby Grange	Do.217			E. of Humber mouth
25/26 Jul 43	F/L E.A. Murray F/O P.R. Littlewood (RAF)	B	Mosquito VI	Coleby Grange	Do.217		E/a on ground ⁵⁶	Deelen
15/16 Aug 43	P/O R.D. Schultz F/O V.A. Williams	B	Mosquito VI	Castle Camps	Do.217			S. of Beachy Head
26/27 Sep 43	F/L M.A. Cybulski F/O H.H. Ladbrook (RAF)	A	Mosquito II	Coleby Grange	Do.217			W. of Ijmuiden
5/6 Nov 43	F/O C.F. Green P/O E.G. White (RAF)	A	Mosquito II	West Malling	Me.410			Off Dungeness
10/11 Dec 43	F/O R.D. Schultz F/O V.A. Williams	B	Mosquito II	Hunsdon	3 Do.217			Over North Sea between Clacton and Dunkirk
10/11 Dec 43	F/O D.M. Norman P/O J.R. Hunt (RAF)	B	Mosquito II	Hunsdon			Do.217	N. of Chelmsford
3/4 Feb 44	F/O W.G. Dinsdale FS J.E. Dunn	B	Mosquito XIII	Castle Camps			Ju.88	Stapleford Tawney
3/4 Feb 44	F/O R.S.P. Fox F/O C.D. Sibbett	B	Mosquito XIII	Castle Camps	Do.217			North Sea East of Harwich (61.67N-02.28E)
13/14 Feb 44	S/L J.D. Somerville F/O G.D. Robinson	B	Mosquito XIII	Castle Camps	Ju.88			North Sea East (51.44N-01.41E)
							Ju.188	Near Rochford (51.37N-0.36E)
13/14 Feb 44	F/O R.D. Schultz F/L V.A. Williams	B	Mosquito XIII	Castle Camps	Ju.188			North Sea East of Harwich (51.52N-01.56E)
22/23 Feb 44	S/L C.A.S. Anderson FS G.P.A. Bodard	A	Mosquito XIII	Castle Camps	Ju.88			North Sea East of Harwich (51.57N-01.54E)
					Ju.188			East of Clacton (51.41N-01.37E)
14/15 Mar 44	Lt. A.A. Harrington (USAAF) Sgt. D.G. Tongue (RAF)	B	Mosquito XIII	Castle Camps	Ju.188			Wrotham, Kent
14/15 Mar 44	S/L W.P. Green, DFC (RAF) WO A.L. Grimstone, DFM (RAF)	A	Mosquito XIII	Castle Camps	Ju.88			Rochford, Essex
21/22 Mar 44	F/O S.B. Huppert P/O J.S. Christie (RAF)	A	Mosquito XIII	Castle Camps	Ju.88			West of Colchester
24/25 Mar 44	WO W.F. Price WO J.G. Costello	A	Mosquito XIII	Castle Camps		Me.410		Off Dutch Coast
18/19 Apr 44	F/O S.B. Huppert P/O J.S. Christie (RAF)	A			He.177			Near Castle Camps
18/19 Apr 44	F/O R.L. Snowdon FS A. McLeod	A					Ju.188	S.E. of Castle Camps
27/28 May 44	P/O L.J. Kearney	A	Mosquito XIII	Hunsdon	Ju.88			Lille

⁵⁴ Shared with anti-aircraft defences.

⁵⁵ Shared with three crews of No. 307 (Polish) Squadron.

⁵⁶ Not counted in squadron score.

“I”
Squadron Victories

Date	Crew	Flight	Aircraft	Base	Destroyed	P.D.	Damaged	Location
	F/O N.W. Bradford							
9/10 June 44	F/O R.L. Snowdon Lt. L.A. Wilde (RNVR)	A	Mosquito XIII	Hunsdon	Ju.188			Beachhead
12/13 June 44	F/O J. Maday F/O J.R. Walsh	A	Mosquito XIII	Hunsdon		Ju.88		Bayeaux
12/13 June 44	P/O L.J. Kearney F/O N.W. Bradford	A	Mosquito XIII	Hunsdon	He.177			N.E. of Le Havre
12/13 June 44	WO W.F. Price P/O J.G. Costello	A	Mosquito XIII	Hunsdon	2 Do.217			S.E. of Caen
12/13 June 44	F/O R.L. Snowdon Lt. L.A. Wilde (RNVR)	A	Mosquito XIII	Hunsdon	Ju.88 or Ju.188			Lisieux
13/14 June 44	S/L I.A. March F/L K.M. Eyolfson	A	Mosquito XIII	Hunsdon	Ju.88			At sea off Beachhead (49.30N-0.30W)
13/14 June 44	F/L C.E. Edinger F/O C.L. Vaessen	A	Mosquito XIII	Hunsdon			Ju.88	Beachhead (Rouen)
14/15 June 44	F/L W.G. Dinsdale P/O J.E. Dunn	B	Mosquito XIII	Hunsdon	Ju.88 Me.109			S.E. of Caen
16/17 June 44	F/O I.S. Girvan Lt. M. Cardwell (RNVR)	A	Mosquito XIII	Hunsdon	Ju.88			Valognes
17/18 June 44	F/L C.E. Edinger F/O C.L. Vaessen	A	Mosquito XIII	Hunsdon	Ju.188			LeHavre over The Channel
17/18 June 44	S/L I.A. March F/L K.M. Eyolfson	A	Mosquito XIII	Hunsdon	Ju.188			S. of Caen
18/19 June 44	F/O G.T. Edwards FS W. Georges	B	Mosquito XIII	Zeals	Ju.88			Vire
18/19 June 44	Lt. A.A. Harrington (USAAF)	B	Mosquito XIII	Zeals	Ju.88			Vire
23/24 June 44	WO R.G. Jones FS L.W. Gregory	B	Mosquito XIII	Zeals	Ju.188			N.W. of Beachhead
24/25 June 44	F/L S.B. Huppert F/O J.S. Christie (RAF)	A	Mosquito XIII	Zeals			Ju.188	Off Coutances
3/4 July 44	F/L C.E. Edinger F/O C.L. Vaesson	A	Mosquito XIII	Zeals	Ju.188			N.E. of Pte. de La Percee
3/4 July 44	F/L S.B. Huppert F/O J.S. Christie (RAF)	A	Mosquito XIII	Zeals	Ju.88			Pte. de la Percee
7/8 July 44	S/L I.A. March F/L K.M. Eyolfson	A	Mosquito XIII	Zeals	Me.410			S.W. of Paris
28/29 July 44	F/L W.A. Dexter S/Lt. R.M. Richarson (RNZNVR)	B	Mosquito XIII	Colerne	Ju.88			E. of Tessy
29/30 July 44	P/O D.M. MacKensie P/O G.P.A. Bodard	B	Mosquito XIII	Colerne	Ju.88			Beachhead
31 July/ 1 Aug 44	F/O J. Maday F/O J.R. Walsh	A	Mosquito XIII	Colerne	Ju.88			Granville
1/2 Aug 44	S/L J.D. Somerville F/O G.D. Robinson	B	Mosquito XIII	Colerne	Ju.188			N.E. of Tessy
2/3 Aug 44	S/L J.D. Somerville F/O G.D. Robinson	B	Mosquito XIII	Colerne	Do.217			N.W. of Pontorson
2/3 Aug 44	F/L B.E. Plumer F/O V.W. Evans	B	Mosquito XIII	Colerne	Ju.188			W. of Vire
3/4 Aug 44	F/L W.G. Dinsdale P/O J.E. Dunn	B	Mosquito XIII	Colerne	Me.110			N.E. of Avranches
6/7 Aug 44	S/L J.D. Somerville F/O G.D. Robinson	B	Mosquito XIII	Colerne	Ju.88			St. Hilaire
7/8 Aug 44	F/L R.M.G. Currie F/O A.H. Rose	B	Mosquito XIII	Colerne	Ju.88			S.W. of Rennes
10/11 Aug 44	W/C G.A. Hiltz F/O J.R. Walsh	B	Mosquito XIII	Colerne	Ju.88			N.E. of Pte. de La Percee
14/15 Aug 44	S/L J.D. Somerville F/O G.D. Robinson	B	Mosquito XIII	Colerne	Ju.88			W. of LeHavre

“I”
Squadron Victories

Date	Crew	Flight	Aircraft	Base	Destroyed	P.D.	Damaged	Location
19/20 Aug 44	F/O J.W. Fullerton F/O B.E. Gallagher	A	Mosquito XXX	Colerne	2 Ju.88			E. of Caen E. of Mezidon
1/2 Sep 44	F/L I.E. MacTavish F/O A.M. Grant	A	Mosquito XXX	Colerne	FW.190			N.E. of LeHavre
16/17 Sep 44	F/L C.E. Edinger F/O C.L. Vaessen	A	Mosquito XXX	Hunsdon	E/A			Walchern Is. (51.37N-03.35E)
26/27 Sep 44	Lt. A.A. Harrington (USAAF) P/O D.G. Tongue (RAF)	B	Mosquito XXX	Amiens/ Glisy	Ju.87			N. of Aachen
67 Oct 44	F/L C.E. Edinger F/O C.L. Vaesson	A	Mosquito XXX	Amiens/ Glisy	Ju.88			N.E. of Namur
6/7 Oct 44	F/L B.E. Plumer F/L W.W. Hargrove	A	Mosquito XXX	Amiens/ Glisy	Me.110			Venlo
7/8 Oct 44	F/O J.W. Fullerton F/O B.E. Gallagher	A	Mosquito XXX	Amiens/ Glisy	Ju.88			N.E. of Hasselt
29/30 Oct 44	Lt. A.A. Harrington (USAAF) P/O D.G. Tongue (RAF)	B	Mosquito XXX	Amiens/ Glisy	FW.190			St. Antonis
25/26 Nov 44	Lt. A.A. Harrington (USAAF) P/O D.G. Tongue (RAF)	B	Mosquito XXX	Lille/ Vendeville	Ju.88G			Muntz Jackerath Hunxe
30 Nov/ 1 Dec 44	F/O D.M. MacKenzie P/O G.P.A. Bodard	B	Mosquito XXX	Lille/ Vendeville	Ju.88G-1			Erkelenz
18/19 Dec 44	F/L C.E. Edinger P/O C.L. Vaessen	A	Mosquito XXX	Lille/ Vendeville	Ju.88			Bonninghardt
23/24 Dec 44	F/O D.M. MacKenzie F/O G.P.A. Bodard	B	Mosquito XXX	Lille/ Vendeville	2 Ju.88			Wickrath Grefrath
24/25 Dec 44	F/L C.E. Edinger F/O C.L. Vaessen	A	Mosquito XXX	Lille/ Vendeville	Ju.88			Wassenberg
24/25 Dec 44	S/L I.E. MacTavish F/O A.M. Grant	A	Mosquito XXX	Lille/ Vendeville	Ju.87			Walbeck
24/25 Dec 44	F/O J.A. Watt F/L E.H. Collis (RAF)	A	Mosquito XXX	Lille/ Vendeville	Ju.88			Puffendorf
27/28 Dec 44	F/L W.G. Dinsdale F/O J.E. Dunn	B	Mosquito XXX	Lille/ Vendeville	Ju.88			Helchteren
31 Dec/ 1 Jan 45	S/L R.M.G. Currie F/L A.H. Rose	B	Mosquito XXX	Lille/ Vendeville	Ju.188			Lierre
31 Dec/ 1 Jan 45	F/L W.A. Dexter F/O D.G. Tongue (RAF)	B	Mosquito XXX	Lille/ Vendeville	Ju.88G-1			Peer
31 Dec/ 1 Jan 45	F/L W.J. Whittaker FS S. Albright	B	Mosquito XXX	Lille/ Vendeville			Ju.88	Esserden
3/4 Feb 45	F/L B.E. Plumer F/L E.H. Collis (RAF)	A	Mosquito XXX	Amiens/ Glisy	He.219			Garzweiler
24/25 Mar 45	F/L G.R. Leask F/L J.W. Roff	A	Mosquito XXX	Amiens/ Glisy	Me.110			Greffelkamp
24/25 Mar 45	S/L I.E. MacTavish F/O A.M. Grant	A	Mosquito XXX	Amiens/ Glisy	Ju.88G			Etten
26/27 Mar 45	F/L B.E. Plumer F/L N.W. Bradford	B	Mosquito XXX	Gilze- Rijen	Me.110			Orsoy
10/11 Apr 45	F/L R.D. Schultz F/O J.S. Christie (RAF)	A	Mosquito XXX	Gilze- Rijen	Ju.188			Damme
21/22 Apr 45	F/L R.D. Schultz F/O J.S. Christie (RAF)	A	Mosquito XXX	Gilze- Rijen	2 Ju.88			Fehrbellin

SUMMARY			
(a) By Types of Squadron Aircraft			
Type	Destroyed	Probable	Damaged
Beaufighter II			1
Mosquito II	7 3/4		1
Mosquito VI	2		1
Mosquito XIII	37	2	5
Mosquito XXX	29		1
TOTAL	75 3/4	2	9

SUMMARY			
(b) By Types of Enemy Aircraft			
Type	Destroyed	Probable	Damaged
BV.138	1/4		
Do.217	12 1/2		1
FW.190	2		
He.177	2		
He.219	1		
Ju.87	3		
Ju.88	29	1	4
Ju.88G	6		
Ju.188	12		3
Ju.88/ Me.109	1		
Me.110	4		
Me.410	2	1	
Unidentified	1		1
TOTAL	75 3/4	2	9

**“J”
Individual Scores
Pilots**

Name	Flight	Destroyed	Probable	Damaged
F/L R.D. Schultz, DFC & Bar	B&A	8		
Lt. A.A. Harrington, DSO, DFC (USAAF)	B	7		
F/L C.E. Edinger, DFC	A	6		1
S/L J.D. Somerville, DFC	B	5		1
F/O D.M. MacKenzie, DFC	B	4		
F/L B.E. Plumer	B&A	4		
F/L W.G. Dinsdale, DFC	B	3		1
F/L S.B. Huppert	A	3		1
F/O J.W. Fullerton	A	3		
S/L I.E. MacTavish	A	3		
S/L I.A. March, DFC	A	3		
WO W.F. Price	A	2	1	
F/O R.L. Snowdon	A	2		1
S/L C.A.S. Anderson	A	2		
S/L R.M.G. Currie	B	2		
F/L W.A. Dexter	B	2		
P/O L.J. Kearney	A	2		
F/L E.A. Murray	B	1 ¼		1
F/O J. Maday	A	1	1	
F/L M.A. Cybulski, DFC	A	1		
F/O G.T. Edwards	B	1		
F/O E.S.P. Fox	B	1		
F/O I.S. Girvan	A	1		
F/O Green	A	1		
S/L W.P. Green, DFC (RAF)	A	1		
FS B.M. Haight	B	1		
W/C G.A. Hiltz	B	1		
WO R.G. Jones	B	1		
F/L G.R. Leask	A	1		
S/L A.G. Lawrence, DFC	B	1		
F/O J.A. Watt	A	1		
F/O D. Williams	B	1/2		
P/O R.R. Ferguson	A			1
F/L W.J. Whittaker	B			1
F/O D. Norman	B			1
TOTAL		75 ¾	2	9

“J”
Individual Scores
Navigators/ Radio

Name	Flight	Destroyed	Probable	Damaged
F/O D.G. Tongue, DFC & Bar (RAF)	B	8		
F/O J.S. Christie, DFC (RAF)	A	6		1
F/O C.L. Vaessen, DFC	A	6		1
F/O G.P.A. Bodard, DFC	A&B	6		
F/O G.D. Robinson, DFC	B	5		1
F/L V.A. Williams, DFC	B	5		
F/O J.E. Dunn, DFC	B	3		1
F/L N.W. Bradford	A&B	3		
F/L K.M. Eyolfson, DFC	A	3		
F/O B.E. Gallagher	A	3		
F/O A.M. Grant	A	3		
P/O J.G. Costello	A	2	1	
F/O J.R. Walsh	A&B	2	1	
F/L E.H. Collis (RAF)	A	2		
F/L A.H. Rose	B	2		
Lt. L.A. Wilde (RNVR)	A	2		
F/O P.R. Littlewood (RAF)	B	1 ¼		1
Lt. M. Cardwell (RNVR)	A	1		
F/O V.M. Evans	B	1		
FS W. Georges	B	1		
WO L.W. Gregory	B	1		
WO A.L. Grimstone, DFM (RAF)	A	1		
F/L W.W. Hargrove, DFC	A	1		
Sgt. T. Kipling (RAF)	B	1		
F/O H.H. Ladbrook, DFC (RAF)	A	1		
S/Lt. R.M. Richardson (RNZNVR)	B	1		
F/L J.W. Roff	A	1		
P/O E.G. White (RAF)	A	1		
FS H.J. Wilmer, DFM (RAF)	B	1		
F/O C.D. Sibbett	B	1		
P/O P.N. Dalton	B	1/2		
FS S. Albright	B			1
P/O D. Creed	A			1
P/O J.R. Hunt (RAF)	B			1
FS A. McLeod	A			1
TOTAL		75 ¾	2	9

"K1"

Operational Casualties

Note: Rank shown is that held at time of casualty; rank in brackets indicates subsequent promotion.

(P) – Pilot; (N) – Navigator. Numbers without a prefix are RAF personnel.

Date and Aircraft	Number	Rank	Name	Trade	Casualty	Location And Cause
26/27 Mar 42 Defiant N3364	R73306	Sgt. (FS)	F.E. Haines	P	Killed	Morpeth, Northd. Crash on patrol
18/19 Mar 43 Mos.II HJ930	R90510 1324316	FS (WO2) Sgt.	B.M. Haight O.S. Milburn	P N	Killed Killed	Coleby Grange Crash on return
6 Apr 43 Mos.II DD674	J15107 J16257	F/L P/O	C.D. McCloskey J.G. Sullivan	P N	POW POW	N.W. Germany Shot down on Day Ranger
10 Apr 43 Mos.II DZ743	J15578 J8604	F/O F/O	J.E. Leach R.M. Bull	P N	P.D. P.D.	Friesland Missing on Day Ranger
19/20 Apr 43 Mos.II DZ694	R91868 1321850	FS (WO2) Sgt.	W.J. Reddie N. Evans	P N	P.D. P.D.	N.W. Germany Missing on Ranger
17/18 May 43 Mos.II DD713	J10298 1562615	F/O Sgt. (P/O)	H.O. Bouchard W.S. Fyfe	P N	P.D. P.D.	Diepholz, Germany Missing on Ranger
13 June 43 Mos.II DZ753	J8360 1391960	F/O Sgt. (FS)	R.B. Harris E.H. Skeel	P N	P.D. P.D.	Bay of Biscay (47.55N-05.35W) Air combat on patrol
17/18 July 43 Mos.II DZ742	J17041 123857	P/O P/O	L.A. Wood D.J. Slaughter	P N	P.D. P.D.	Northern France (Dieppe) Missing on Ranger
18/19 Aug 43 Mos.VI HJ825	J20356 49653	F/O F/O	G.B. MacLean H. Plant	P N	P.D. P.D.	Germany (Lingen) Missing on Ranger
16/17 Sep 43 Mos.VI HJ827	J17293 1088091	F/O Sgt. (P/O)	J.E. Fisher D. Ridgeway	P N	P.D. P.D.	Beaumont-le-Roger, France Missing on Flower
22/23 Oct 43 Mos.II HJ927	J15617 J15365	F/L F/O	R.H.B. Jackson M.C. Murray	P N	P.D. P.D.	North Sea Missing on patrol
11/12 Feb 44 Mos.XIII HK520	R119979 R146131	WO2 (P/O) WO2	J.L.A. Madden R.T. Currie	P N	Killed Killed	Bradwell Creek, Essex Crash on take-off to return to base
23/24 June 44	J22804 J25179	F/O F/O	J.R. Steepe D.H. Baker	P N	P.D. Killed	Off Barfleur, France Anti-aircraft fire
7/8 July 44 Mos.XIII MM570	J18426	F/L	S.B. Huppert	P	P.D.	Off Pte. de la Peroe Damaged by debris of enemy aircraft
20/21 Oct 44 Mos.XXX MM737	J15873 R167203	F/O (F/L) FS (P/O)	K.R. Walley F.R. Charnock	P N	Killed Killed	Corbie, France Crash on return from patrol
6/7 March 45 Mos.XXX MM788	R158752 J139878	WO2 F/L	A.G. Cole S.I. Lees	P N	Killed Killed	Gilze-Rijen, Netherlands Crashed on take-off
9/10 March 45 Mos.XXX MM787	J9239 149125	F/L F/O	D.T. Steele C. Horne	P N	P.D. P.D.	Ulpenich, Germany Missing on patrol

“K2”
Non-Operational Casualties

Date and Aircraft	Number	Rank	Name	Trade	Casualty	Location and Cause
8 July 41 Defiant I	(RAF)	Sgt.	B.P. Dawbarn	P	Killed	Ayr, Scotland Crash on familiarization flight
29/30 Aug 41 Defiant N1731	(RAF) (RAF)	Sgt. FS	D.W. Hall D.G. Cresswell	P G	Killed Killed	Gifford, E. Lothian Crash on practice flight
16 March 42 Defiant V1183	(RAF) (RAF)	P/O P/O	I.B. Constant W.J. Lewis	P G	Killed Killed	Stamfordham, Northd. Crash on night flying test
11 April 42 Defiant N3503	R92555 13087905	Sgt. Sgt.	R.G. Smith A.G. MacKinnon	P G	Killed Killed	Aberlady Bay, E. Lothian Crash on familiarization flight
1 Sep 42 Beau.II T3221	R71487 933244	FS (WO2) FS	N. MacPherson S.M. Cooksey	P N	Killed Killed	Ayr, Scotland Crash
23 Jan 43 Mos.II HJ919	R113366 1456999	Sgt. (FS) Sgt.	G.G. Mills M. Lupton	P N	Killed Killed	Sea Houses, Northd. Crash in sea on training flight
30 July 43 Oxford	J5142 126814	F/L F/O	E.A. Murray P.R. Littlewood	P N	Killed Killed	Honiley, Warwicks Crash on navigation flight
27 Aug 43 Mos.II DZ305	R123904 R88035	Sgt. (FS) Sgt. (WO1)	W.T. Cheropita N.M. Dalton	P N	Killed Killed	Suttonbridge, Lincs. Crash on practice flight
26/27 Nov 43 Mos.II DD669	J22457 J20251	F/O F/L	J.J. Blanchfield K.J. Cox	P N	Killed Killed	Nazeing Common, Hert. Collision on interception practice
16 Jan 44 Mos.XIII HK431	J8410 J20925	F/L F/O	C.F. Medhurst A.N. Henderson	P N	Killed Killed	Castle Camps, Cambridge Crash on landing approach
5 Feb 44 Mos.XIII HK454	J16757	F/O	K.R. McCormick	P	Killed	Castle Camps, Cambridge Crash on night flying test
29 Nov 44 Mos.XXX MT488	J24958 J27849	F/O F/O (F/L)	H. Connelly J. Hunt	P P	Killed Killed	Lille, France Crash on circuit practice
21 Dec 44 Oxford	J7537 156013 135422 R127513 R160895	S/L F/O F/L LAC LAC	S.J. Fulton A.R. Ayton F.G.N. Thomson, DFC E. Wahlers R. Seefried	P N N AEM AEM	Killed Killed Killed Killed Killed	Wrotham, Kent Crash on flight to England
11 May 45 Mos.XXX MM786	J17785 R251263	F/L LAC	T.H. Cameron, DFC L.M. Thomas	P AEM	Killed Killed	Rotterdam, Netherlands Crash on test flight
24 May 45	R165776	LAC	A.S. Friar	AFM”A”	Died	Gilze-Rijen, Netherlands Died of injuries received in motor cycle accident on 20 May 1945.

**“K3”
Summary of Casualties**

Casualty	Operational	Non-operational
Killed	10	29
Presumed Dead	20	-
Died	-	1
P.O.W.	2	
	32	30