



# Spotlight

## Bristol Beaufighter

Graham Pitchfork profiles three leading exponents of the Beaufighter

# Masters



**S**heffield-born Archibald 'Archie' Boyd was educated at Harrow School, where he became a sergeant in the Officer Training Corps, before going to Trinity College, Oxford. He joined the University Air Squadron and trained to fly before cutting short his studies on the outbreak of war to join the RAF.

He was posted to 600 (City of London) Squadron, equipped with obsolescent Blenheim fighters, and flew throughout the Battle of Britain on night sorties but always claimed that he "didn't really qualify as one of the 'Few'". Despite this modest claim, he took part in many night patrols from Manston in Kent during



**SPOT FACT** The prototype flew just eight months after the design process started

**Men Behind the Beaufighter**

# of the 'Beau'

the German Blitz on London.

Early in September 1940 Beaufighter Ifs started to arrive on the unit and Boyd made his first flight in the new type on the 14th. After a few further test sorties, he carried out 600's first operation on the 30th when Aircraftman Burley was his radar operator. The Airborne Intercept (AI) radar Mk.IV, with its characteristic 'arrow head' aerials in the nose and wing leading edges, had its problems, but with the increasing sophistication of ground controlled interception (GCI) the night-fighter 'Beau' crews soon started to prove an effective force.

Operating from Colerne near Bath, Boyd, who was now a flight

commander and crewed with Plt Off Alex Glegg, gained his first success on May 16, 1941 when he shot down a low-flying Junkers Ju 88 near Exeter. Shortly afterwards, 600 started to receive the Mk.IIf, powered by Rolls-Royce Merlin XXs – arguably the least effective and most unpopular mark of an otherwise outstanding aircraft.

On the night of October 10/11, Boyd and Glegg achieved their second success when they destroyed a Heinkel He 111 northwest of St Ives in Cornwall. Two months later they accounted for a second He 111 near Portreath, Cornwall. In the new year both Boyd and Glegg were awarded the DFC for attacking enemy

bombers "at extremely low level".

Boyd achieved his final success with the Mk.IIf on January 25, 1942 when Glegg directed him onto a low-flying He 111 approaching the Dorset coast. Boyd's 20mm Hispano cannons sent the enemy bomber into the sea.

In March 1942, the outstanding Hercules VI-powered Mk.VIf began to replace the troublesome Mk.IIs. On the 7th, Boyd and Glegg were returning from escorting a VIP aircraft across the Bay of Biscay when they spotted something at low level – an He 115 flying at cliff-top height near Lizard Point. Boyd opened fire and the floatplane crashed into the sea. ➔

**Left**

*'Archie' Boyd during his time with 600 Squadron.*

**Below**

*A trio of 600 Squadron Beaufighters Ifs in close formation for the camera, circa 1941.*



**SPOT FACT** *The first Beaufighter arrived at Tangmere for trials on August 12, 1940*



**Right**  
*Pit Off Alex Glegg (left) and 'Archie' Boyd. The two scored their first success on May 16, 1941 when they shot down a Junkers Ju 88 near Exeter.*

**Below**  
*Beaufighter VI night-fighter in North Africa, circa 1942. ALL VIA AUTHOR UNLESS NOTED*

### North African 'ops'

After almost two years of continuous night 'ops', Boyd and Glegg were rested in the autumn of 1942. Six months later the 24-year-old Boyd took command of 219 Squadron in March 1943 and Glegg rejoined him.

Boyd was tasked with preparing 219 for an unknown destination overseas. After re-equipping with Beaufighter VIs fitted with the new Mk.VII 10cm AI radar, the squadron was ready to depart at the end of May. Led by Boyd and Glegg, 18 aircraft left Portreath at five-minute intervals on the long flight across the Bay of Biscay to Gibraltar and then on to Casablanca, Morocco.

After a few days, when the aircrew serviced their own machines, the unit left for Bone in Algeria and met up with groundcrew who had travelled by sea. On June 28 the squadron was ready for action.

Two days later Boyd and Glegg opened 219's account when they shot down two Ju 88 bombers. As the Axis forces were driven out of North Africa, 219 moved to Sebala, between Tunis and Bizerta, to provide escort to convoys supporting the invasion of Sicily. Boyd shot down another Ju 88 towards the end of August.

Following the Allied advance into Italy, 219 covered the landings at Salerno and provided an aircraft at constant readiness against Luftwaffe intruders attacking the rear of the beachhead. During this period, Boyd and Glegg shot down two He 111s – the second, on September 18, being the final success for 219 flying from North Africa. It was Boyd's tenth victory.

With decreasing Luftwaffe activity the squadron returned to the UK in January 1944 to re-equip with the Mosquito and, in May, Boyd's long partnership with Alex Glegg came

to an end. They had been together since the Battle of Britain and had flown 595 sorties. Boyd was awarded the DSO for "his outstanding courage and initiative in action". Glegg received a Bar to his DFC.

A particular feature of Boyd's time on night-fighters was his involvement with the development of radar. His mechanical and electrical expertise was invaluable in troubleshooting the many early teething troubles, as was his attention to detail.

Archie Boyd remained the CO of 219 Squadron, flying Mosquitos until August 1944 when he was posted to HQ Fighter Command. An immensely popular and effective CO, he had created one of the RAF's



best night-fighter units which went on to achieve great success for the rest of the war in northwest Europe.

At the end of the conflict, he became the Air Attaché in Dublin before leaving the RAF in April





1946. Decorated with the Air Efficiency Award, he joined Vickers as a test pilot and flew all the company's aircraft including the Viscount, which he helped sell successfully around the world.

Archie Boyd, one of the RAF's most successful night-fighter leaders, died in April 2014.

## French Strike Pilot

When he was mobilised in 1939 as a sergeant into the 2nd Régiment de Zouave à Meknès, an air defence unit, Frenchman Max Guedj was 26. With the fall of France, he rallied to General de Gaulle's call and headed for England to join the Free French forces.

After a period of training he arrived at 2 (Coastal) Operational Training Unit (OTU) at Catfoss, Yorkshire, to convert to the Beaufighter and teamed up with Sgt Charles Corder. At the end of February 1942 they joined

248 Squadron just before it moved to Dyce, near Aberdeen.

At this point the authorities decided that to safeguard his Jewish family in Vichy-held France, Max Guedj should adopt the alias 'Maurice', and for the rest of his service he was known by this surname. The crew flew their first operation, a six-hour search for enemy shipping in the Skaggerak, on April 1. For the next two months the pair flew out of Dyce and Sumburgh on convoy escorts, enemy shipping searches and line patrols.

On May 17 they took off to escort Beauforts sent to attack the heavy cruiser *Prinz Eugen*, which had an escort of four destroyers. After locating the force the cannon-armed Beaufighters headed for the destroyers to suppress the flak and enable the torpedo-carrying Beauforts to take on the cruiser.

Maurice selected a ship and made

three runs, scoring hits on each occasion. On landing he was informed he should make only one pass against such a formidable target, but such was his fighting spirit Maurice attacked at every opportunity.

## Dinghy vigil

After more operations over the North Sea and off the Norwegian coast, 248 was detached to Malta to provide additional forces to cover the transit of the crucial 'Pedestal' supply convoy. Maurice and Corder took off from Portreath on August 9 and, after an overnight stop at Gibraltar, landed at Takali on Malta.

On arrival the Beaufighters were tasked to hit enemy airfields on Sardinia and Maurice and Corder took off the next day to strafe Decimomannu where they were credited with damaging three aircraft. The following day, one of the unit's 'Beaus' was shot down and ditched. The crew were seen to escape and the squadron dispatched four Beaufighters to search for them – a dinghy being located in the approximate position of the downed aircraft.

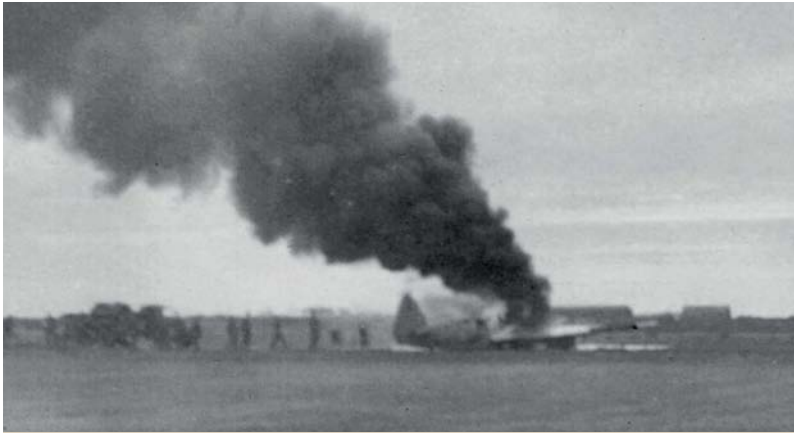
At 15.20 hours on August 18 it was Maurice's and Corder's turn to patrol over the dinghy, dropping rations and setting up an orbit. Corder reported to Malta that a flying-boat had arrived, only to be told that no Allied aircraft had been dispatched.

The 'boat was identified as a Dornier Do 24, but Maurice and Corder were instructed not to attack – unless they came under fire from its Italian fighter escort – and to

**Above**  
A flight of 248 Squadron Beaufighters in March 1942.

**Centre left**  
Wg Cdr Boyd and the men of 219 Squadron in Tunisia during November 1943.

**Left**  
Max Maurice of 248 Squadron.



**Right**  
Maurice and Corder's Beaufighter soon after its crash-landing on March 10, 1943.

**Below**  
A formal photograph of 248 Squadron, taken in May 1943.

“Maurice immediately crash-landed on the edge of an airfield that had appeared dead ahead”

allow the rescue. The survivors were picked up in the failing light and Maurice and Corder gave no more thought to the incident.

Twenty-nine years later Corder got a letter from Italian Generale Antonio Cumbat, thanking him for saving his life! He had checked official records in attempts to discover why a steady stream of Beaufighters had kept up a vigil over his dinghy after he had been shot down in his Ju 87 Stuka. Corder later visited ‘Tonio’ Cumbat and they met regularly, remaining close friends.

With the safe arrival of the remnants of ‘Pedestal’, the crews of 248 left their Beaufighters on Malta and returned to England. In September, the squadron flew to Talbenny in Pembrokeshire to bolster the long-range fighter force patrolling the Bay of Biscay in support of increasing anti-U-boat sorties mounted by Coastal Command. On the 27th, Maurice and Corder were providing an escort for a patrolling Whitley when they encountered a Ju 88, which they attacked and damaged. Shortly after

it was announced that Maurice had been awarded the DFC, the citation concluding “his exceptional keenness to fly and fight is a magnificent example”.

In January 1943, the unit moved to Predannack in Cornwall, cutting down the transit time to the operational areas. On March 10, Maurice and Corder took off in Beaufighter *W-for-William* as part of a four-aircraft line patrol. Flying at just 50ft some 80 miles west of Brest, a Ju 88 was sighted up at 2,000ft. The formation climbed to attack.

Maurice had taken position below the enemy and closed in. At 300 yards he fired a long burst of cannon and hits were seen on both engines and in the cockpit. The enemy aircraft banked steeply to port before levelling out, engulfed in flames. In the meantime, return fire had badly damaged *William* and Maurice pulled away as the Ju 88 glided towards the sea before crashing.

The Beaufighter's intercom had been destroyed and Corder crawled forward to assist Maurice and to pass a course to steer to base, 150 miles away. The port pitch lever had stuck in the fully fine position and fuel could not be transferred from outer to inner tanks. Most of the pilot's instruments had been destroyed, there were three big holes in the starboard wing, a third of the





starboard aileron was missing, the starboard air intake had been shot away, the hydraulics were out of order and both engines had been hit.

Maurice had suffered shrapnel wounds. In this parlous state, the crew headed directly for the Cornish coast. Then the port engine failed. With the port airscrew jammed in fully fine pitch, the aircraft could not maintain height and slowly descended to 500ft.

Corder sent an SOS and started to get QDMs – magnetic headings – from Predannack. Maurice managed to stabilise the aircraft a few feet above the sea in a semi-stalled attitude at 105 knots.

Just as Maurice considered ditching, the coast appeared and Corder fired flares to attract the attention ashore. Maurice was having great difficulty controlling the aircraft when the starboard engine burst into flames and burning oil seeped into the cockpit. Corder tackled the blaze before directing Maurice to the lowest part of the cliffs which they were approaching at sea level. They cleared them with feet to spare and



Maurice immediately crash-landed on the edge of an airfield that had appeared dead ahead. The aircraft caught fire as it slithered to a halt and the pair made a rapid exit.

## Recognition

A month later it was announced that Fg Off Maurice had been awarded the DSO, an award rarely made to such a junior officer. He was also the first Frenchman to be awarded both the DSO and the DFC (he would go on to earn a second DFC). Corder received the Conspicuous Gallantry Medal (CGM), one of only 110 awarded to airmen.

A special luncheon, with the menu written in French, was held at Predannack in honour of Maurice and attended by the AOC 19 Group, Air Vice-Marshal G Bromet, who presented him with the DSO and DFC. A few weeks later the Free French authorities awarded both men the Croix de Guerre avec Palme.

Maurice and Corder flew four more Biscay patrols and, on April 17, landed after completing 72 operations together. Both were sent to 2 (Coastal) OTU at Catfoss as instructors.

In the summer of 1944, Maurice was promoted to wing commander and appointed to command 153 Squadron, flying the Mosquito with the Banff Wing and leading many strikes against shipping off the Norwegian coast. On January 15, 1945 while he was heading a patrol of 22 Mosquitos attacking vessels at Leirvik, a large force of Focke-Wulf Fw 190s pounced on his formation.

A fierce combat ensued and Maurice called to the others to keep together. He was seen to engage a '190 but shortly after his aircraft appeared to have an engine fire and it ditched.

Sadly, he and his navigator did not survive. Wg Cdr Max Guedj, the quiet and thoughtful 32-year-old whom many believed to be France's greatest wartime pilot in the RAF, had been lost after 150 operations.

## Aegean Strike Pilot

Harold 'Binder' Yates was barely 20 when he ferried a Beaufighter from Portreath to Egypt in September 1943. Two weeks later the Lancastrian and his navigator, Sgt J Walley, joined 603 (City of Edinburgh) Squadron. By mid-October the unit, which had recently re-equipped with

**Top**  
Beaufighters of 603 Squadron starting up at Gambut airfield, in the North African desert.

**Above left**  
Harold Yates of 603 Squadron.

**Above**  
Beaufighter NE400 of 603 Squadron receiving maintenance in rudimentary conditions at Gambut, May 1944.



**Above**  
Fast patrol boats  
being attacked by  
Beaufighters in the  
Aegean.

**Right**  
An Axis-operated  
supply ship under  
fire while unloading  
its goods onto  
a caique in the  
Aegean.

Beaufighter TFXs, was established at Gambut III and El Adem airfields in the North African desert.

Following losses in the Aegean campaign, 603 was soon in action against supply ships and armed caiques (fishing boats) around Kos. Yates and Walley flew their first 'op' on November 9 when they escorted two torpedo-carrying Beaufighters (or 'Torbeaus') of 47 Squadron on an anti-shipping sweep in the eastern Aegean.

The Germans had assembled an invasion fleet on Kos and nearby islands ready to land assault troops on Leros, where the British forces were established. Yates flew as part of a nine-aircraft formation escorting 47 Squadron Torbeaus hitting barges near Leros – but Messerschmitt Bf 109s broke up the assault, shooting down one of the attackers. Kos provided the Luftwaffe with forward airfields and it posed a continuous threat to the Beaufighters throughout the period.

The Germans made their move and landed on Leros on November 12. That day Yates flew in an escort formation against ships in the western Aegean, and a merchant ship plus two escorts were hit by Yates' cannon fire. Two enemy Arado Ar 196s were also damaged. Four days later, Yates and Walley took part in an attack against a convoy which was heavily escorted by fighters. Eight Beaufighters attacked with cannon and - before the Luftwaffe could intervene - blew up a ferry, leaving only burning wreckage

and large columns of black smoke; but in the ensuing fight four 'Beaus' were lost. By November 20 the ill-fated Dodecanese campaign was lost.

In the first ten days of his operational career, Yates had completed nine anti-shipping sorties averaging almost five hours each and had flown against heavy opposition, losing a number of his colleagues. One of the key lessons of combined ops had once again been highlighted: the need to control the air. With bases close by, the Luftwaffe achieved air superiority against the Allies who were flying at maximum range, giving them very limited time in the target area.

### Rocket mayhem

No.603 Squadron was released from commitments for modifications to carry 3in rocket projectiles (RPs) instead of bombs – the first of the Middle East units to be converted. Four rockets carried under each wing could be armed with 25lb armour piercing or 60lb high-explosive warheads.

Owing to a shortage of vessels, the Germans made increasing use of local caiques and schooners for supply and as flak ships. Almost daily they became targets for the Beaufighters, but ever-present Bf 109s and Ar 196s made the task of the Allied aircrew even more hazardous.

On December 15 Yates flew one of four Beaufighters on the first Middle East RP-equipped operation, but no suitable targets were located.

They didn't have to wait too long for success, however. In action on December 23 in a formation of four, Yates and Walley attacked and damaged a two-masted 60-ton caique with rockets and cannons. They proceeded to Naxos in the central Aegean, damaging landing barges despite intense flak.

Nine aircraft of 603, in two formations, took off for offensive sweeps in the central Aegean on the 26th. Yates flew in the second group to Stampalia to attack a 100-ton three-masted caique moored alongside a jetty. Two 60lb RPs fired from the first Beaufighter blew the vessel up. Yates switched his attention to the jetty, fired all eight rockets and "obliterated it in spray and debris".

On January 30, 1944 Yates' aircraft was armed with rockets and cannons for a shipping strike off Melos. Two hours after take-off a convoy was sighted made up of a 2,500-ton merchant ship, an 800-ton sloop (sailing boat) and two 500-ton flak ships.

The formation leader engaged the flak carriers, scoring cannon hits as a formation of 47 Squadron 'Torbeaus' dropped torpedoes. Three Ar 196s attacked but Yates continued his run against an escort vessel, despite intense light flak, and scored cannon strikes before achieving three rocket hits on the bow of the 800-tonner, which was left in a column of black smoke.

Yates' aircraft had been hit and he and his navigator were wounded –

but he damaged one of the enemy fighters. Walley was able to bind up leaking hydraulic pipes as Yates struggled to reach El Adem where he made a successful night crash landing. Both men were admitted to hospital and did not return to operations for almost two months.

Torpedoes were used successfully on February 22 when a large force of Beaufighters provided an anti-flak and escort force for 'Torbeaus' of 47 Squadron, which sank the 5,343-ton merchant ship *Lisa*. By this stage, a lack of worthwhile large targets led to the withdrawal of 47 Squadron which left for the Far East in March.

### From ships to radar

Yates returned to flying at the end of March and was soon involved in further action. On April 2 he was in a formation of four that found caiques moored alongside a harbour wall on Mykonos, Greece, one of the many islands in the central Aegean. Against light opposition, the formation made rocket and cannon attacks, causing extensive damage,

before flying to Naxos where they repeated the action against another caique moored alongside a jetty. A few days later Yates led a formation on an offensive sweep in the same area and more caiques were badly damaged.

With fewer ships to attack, 603 Squadron turned its attention to the main radar site in southern Crete when a large-scale offensive, Operation Blackeye, was mounted on April 5 and 6 against the early warning radars at Palaiokhora and Leonda. Two sections of four aircraft, escorted by Spitfires, carried out the attacks.

Yates was flying in the first section and strikes by four rockets were seen to hit the base of the 130ft-high Wasserman type radar tower at Palaiokhora while others fell near the Würzburg radar and gun positions. The attack at Leonda by the second section was more difficult as the target lay close to a ridge of higher ground, but RPs still hit a group of buildings.

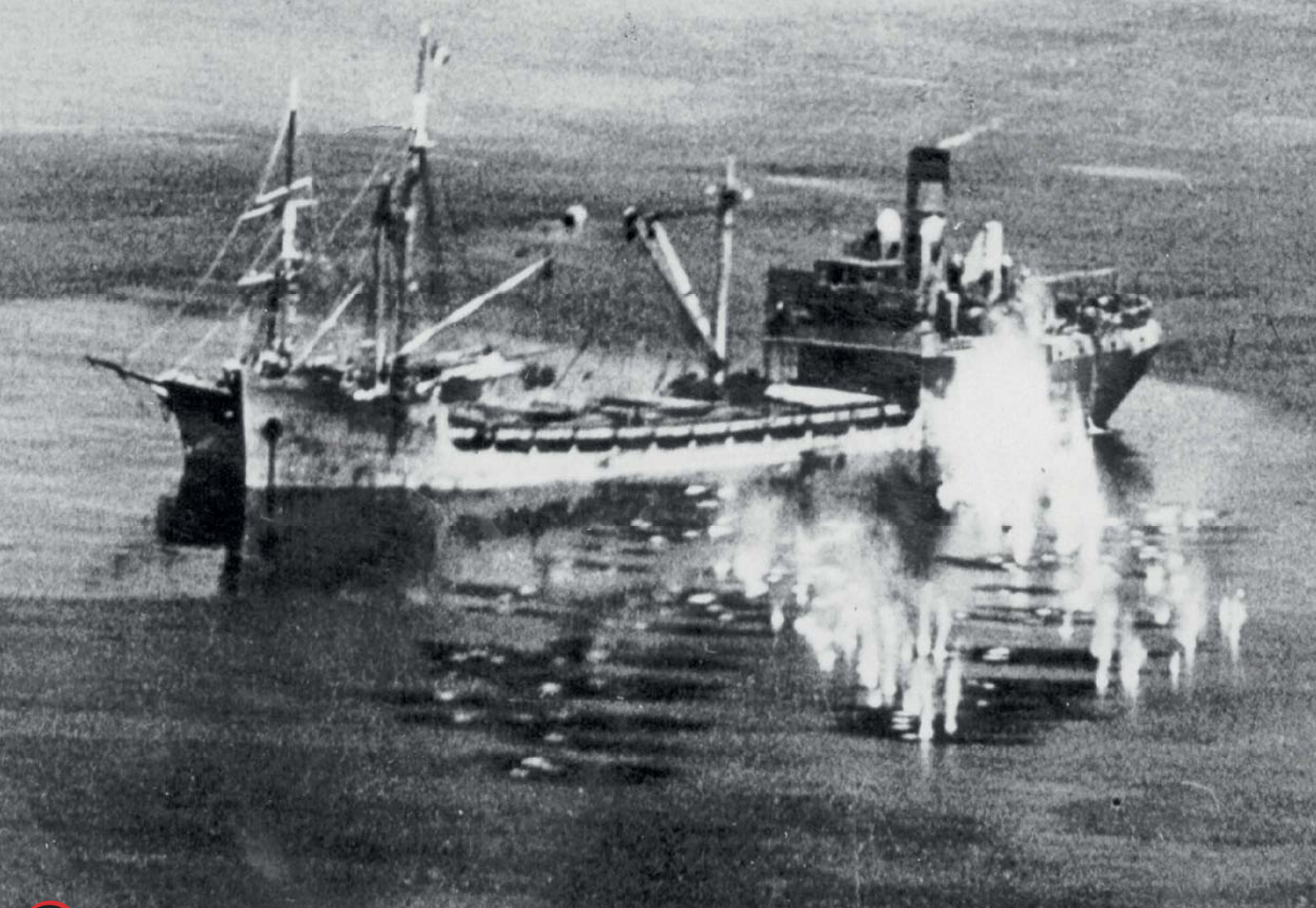
The sorties were repeated the

following day. The defences, however, were alerted and a number of Beaufighters were damaged – but not before 40 rockets had been fired to inflict further damage. Photographs and radio signals interceptions confirmed the success of the attacks.

Yates and Walley flew a number of offensive sweeps throughout the rest of May but targets were proving more difficult to find. On June 3 they flew their final operation together.

On July 29 it was announced that Flt Sgt Harold Yates had been awarded an immediate DFM. The squadron commander's strong recommendation made specific reference to his attack when he damaged a German destroyer off Melos, his masterly crash landing at night despite his wounds and his attacks against the radar stations on Crete.

Shortly afterwards, Yates was commissioned as a pilot officer and became a Beaufighter instructor at Nicosia. He finally left the RAF in May 1946 and resumed his career as a chemist. ●







# Spotlight

## Bristol Beaufighter

# Australian Ace

Adam Tooby artwork of a Beaufighter that flew with the RAAF

**Artwork**  
Bristol Beaufighter  
IC A19-40 'EH-G' of  
Sqn Ldr R L Gordon,  
31 Squadron RAAF,  
Coomalie Creek,  
Australia, October  
1943 - ADAM  
TOOBY-2014

One of five Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) units to operate the Bristol Beaufighter in the Pacific theatre (two others used them in Europe), No.31 Squadron was armed with the robust twin-engined fighter from August 1942 until disbandment in 1946.

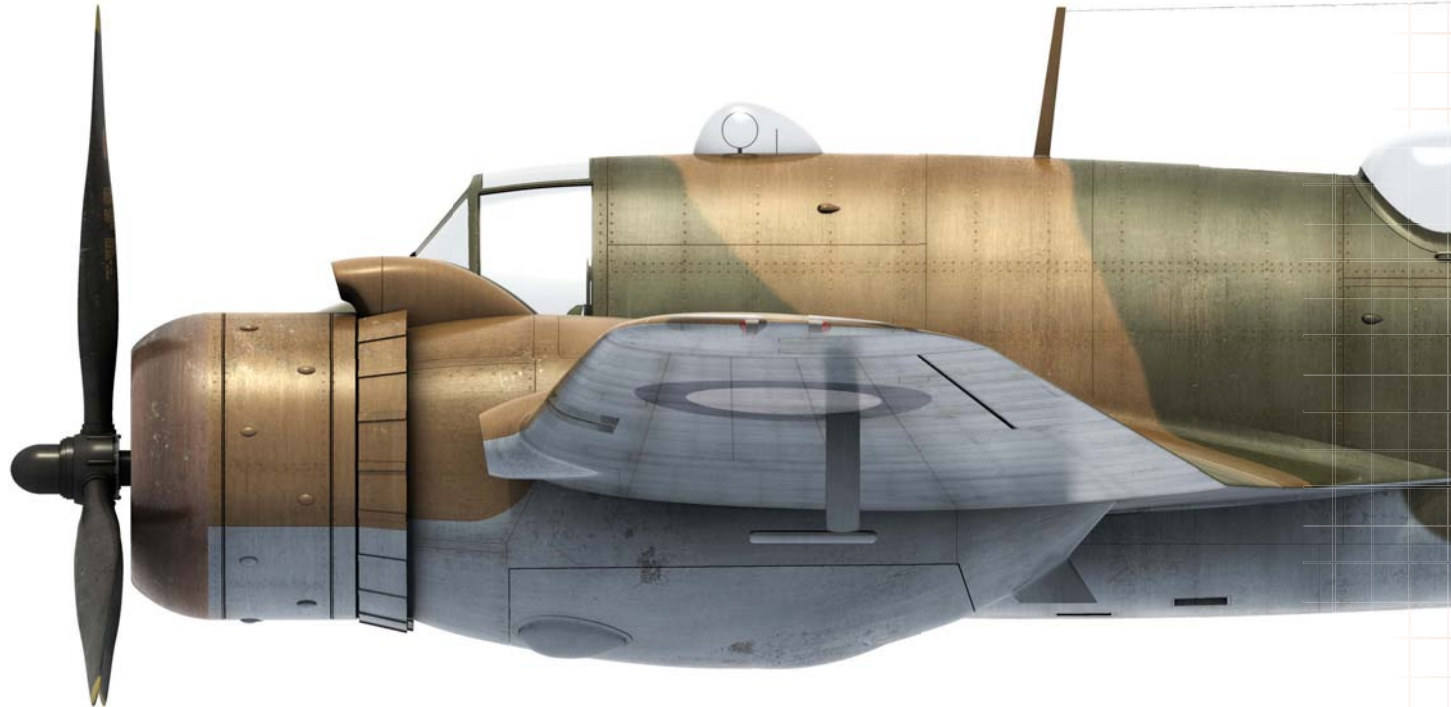
The unit was formed at RAAF Base Wagga in New South Wales and received its first Beaufighter on August 23. Under the leadership of Sqn Ldr Charles Read, who later went on to become Chief of the Air Staff, the squadron moved to its operational base at Coomalie Creek in the country's

Northern Territory on November 12, starting combat operations five days later. During its first engagement with the Japanese, one Beaufighter was lost, but on December 2 the unit destroyed 18 enemy aircraft on the ground, without loss.

Our subject was the mount of Sqn Ldr Reginald Lloyd 'Butch' Gordon. Having already led several successful long-range attacks to Timor, he flew this machine – A19-40 – on October 9, 1943, accompanied by Sgt Ron Jordan. During a strike on Selaroe Island, off the north coast of Australia, they were intercepted by a Kawasaki Ki-45 'Nick', which

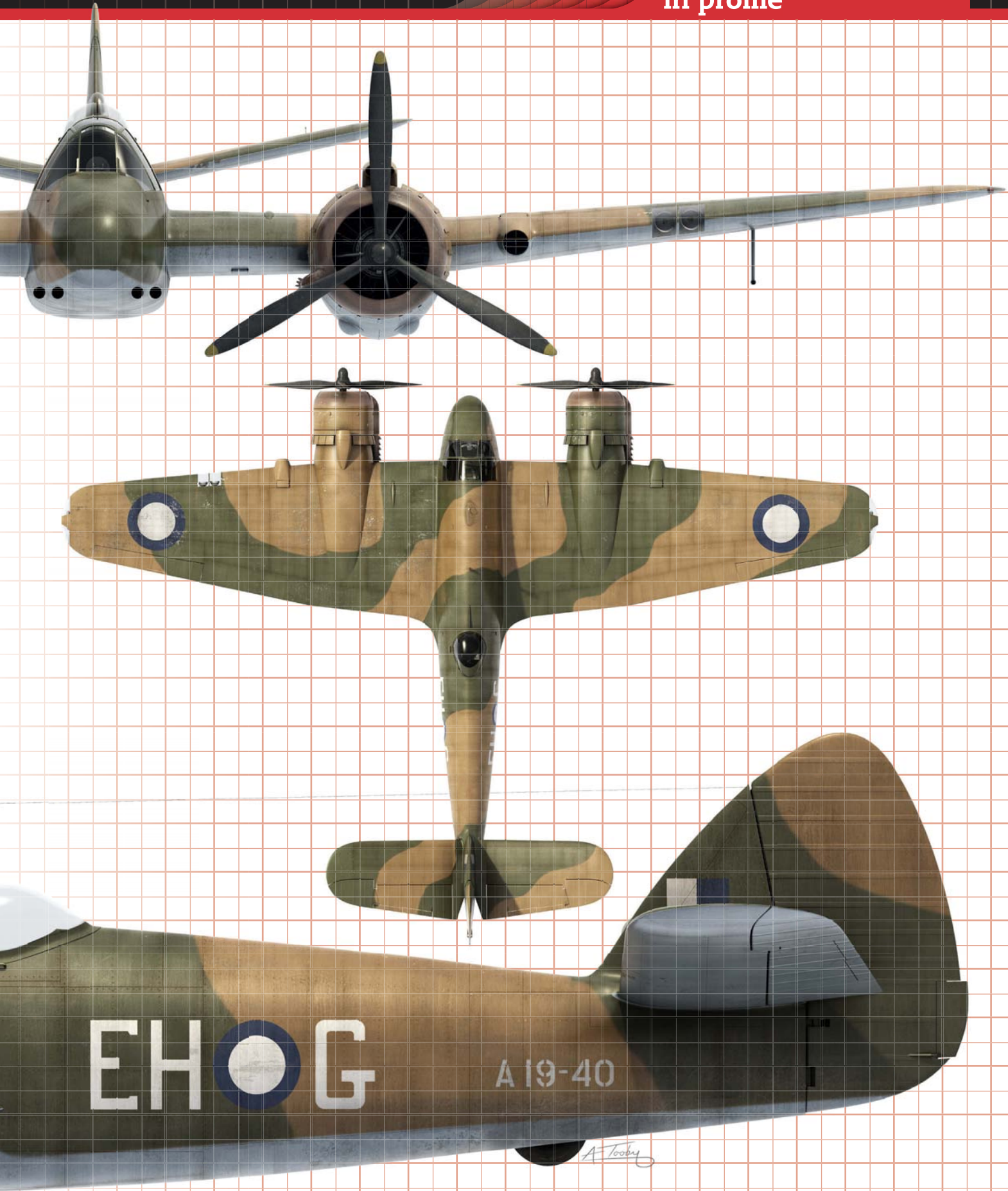
'Butch' destroyed. A second then attacked, damaging the Beaufighter, before Gordon sent the Japanese machine down in flames. He then managed to crash-land his stricken aircraft at Livingstone airfield. It was too badly damaged to be repaired and was subsequently scrapped.

Gordon's two victories that day were the first of five, making him the only RAAF pilot to become a Beaufighter ace in the Pacific theatre. After the war, his unit disbanded at Williamtown on July 9, 1946. It was resurrected in 2010, and today provides airbase support services and training to RAAF Base Wagga.



**SPOT FACT** The RAAF's 445 Squadron used the Beau in the maritime strike role

## Beaufighter in profile



**7** RAAF units operated the Beaufighter



# Spotlight

## Bristol Beaufighter



# War

on all fronts

The pugnacious Beaufighter saw action in all theatres in World War Two in a variety of roles, as **Andrew Thomas** describes



**A**s the Luftwaffe's night blitz against British cities began in the autumn of 1940, the RAF was fortunate in introducing a powerful new night-fighter to service, albeit in relatively small numbers. Nocturnal defence largely fell to Defiants and some radar-equipped Blenheims but Bristol's Beaufighter offered a huge increase in capability.

Charged with tactical trials of the newcomer, the Tangmere-based Fighter Interception Unit (FIU) flew its first Beaufighter operation on the night of September 4, 1940. Four early production examples had been delivered to frontline units: R2056 to 25 Squadron at North Weald, R2072 to 29 at Digby, R2070 to 219 at Catterick and 604 at Middle Wallop received R2073. This initial batch was armed with cannon

of radar and four cannon, but most important of all it had a cockpit out of which the pilot could see well."

The combination of the Beaufighter and ground radar control to position the night-fighter close enough to a bomber to pick it up on its own AI radar gradually began to counter the Luftwaffe's blitz. By the start of 1941 the 'Beau' had largely replaced the Blenheim in the night-fighter role.

The first success using AI came on November 19, 1940 when Flt Lt John Cunningham and Sgt



**"April 1943 also saw the introduction of 60lb rockets to 236 and 143 Squadrons. They were to prove a devastating weapon"**

only but also had AI (airborne interception) Mk.IV radar.

First to be declared operational was 'B' Flight of 219 Squadron just as the Luftwaffe was increasingly turning to night attacks on British cities. On October 25, Sgts Arthur Hodgkinson and 'Ben' Gunn, as radar operator, of 219 were in R2097 on patrol from Redhill at 16,000ft when they encountered a Dornier south of London. Hodgkinson said: "I opened fire at 200 yards – firing approximately 200 rounds in two bursts. I gave a third burst at 70 yards but the cannon failed to fire. My AI operator observed the e/a [enemy aircraft] dive steeply into cloud. The e/a returned no fire." The Beaufighter had claimed its first victim.

### **Famous names**

Flt Lt Roderick Chisholm of 604 Squadron was impressed with the new Bristol: "On the ground it was an ominous and rather unwieldy-looking aircraft, with its outsize undercarriage and propellers and small wings, but in the air it looked just right. It had an improved type

Phillipson of 604 Squadron shot down Ju 88A 'B3+VL' of 3/KG 54. Shortly before Christmas they found a Heinkel over the Channel off Dorset and after a slow approach Cunningham opened fire, the bomber plunging into cloud in a spectacular pyrotechnic display for his second success.

Newly teamed with Sgt Jimmy Rawnsley, Cunningham was now 604's leading light and on the night of April 7, 1941 he became the first to achieve five victories in the 'Beau'. The pair shot down six more bombers in April, including three on the 15th, and three more in June. Cunningham later said of his success: "The essential element was teamwork between pilot and radar operator, ground control radar and searchlights." Fg Off Edward Crew was another of 604's 'stars', claiming three Heinkels in April.

Off the east coast 29 Squadron was also reaping a rich harvest with Fg Off Bob Braham – who would become the most successful Beaufighter night-fighter pilot – to the fore. Also with 29, on a rest

**Above:** Beaufighter I R2069 was delivered to 25 Squadron at Debden in October 1940, retaining day fighter camouflage. 25 SQUADRON RECORDS

**Main image:** Cannon fire surrounding a flak ship under attack on August 12, 1944. RCAF

**SPOT FACT** 'Torbeau' was the common nickname given to torpedo-fighter variants



**Above**  
A Beaufighter X of 19 Squadron SAAF firing rockets against a target at Zuzemburg, Yugoslavia, in early 1945. SAAF

“Raids continued on ports and industrial complexes as did ‘tip-and-run’ attacks on lightly defended cathedral cities – the infamous Baedeker Raids”

tour, was Fg Off Guy Gibson who, on March 14, shot down a He 111 off Skegness in spite of constantly jamming cannon and debris from his victim hitting his own wings. He later shot down two more before he returned to Bomber Command.

More units were being re-equipped with Beaufighters, some flying the Merlin-engined Mk.II – including the first RCAF night-fighter squadron, 406 at Acklington, Northumberland, under Wg Cdr ‘Zulu’ Morris. Many of its Mk.IIIs carried names incorporating the word ‘Beau’, including Beau Peep and Greta Gar-Beau!

The Polish 307 ‘Lwowski’ Squadron at Exeter also received Mk.IIs as did the Australian 456 Squadron at Valley,

Anglesey. Mk.IIs had acquired an unenviable reputation for poor handling, as Flt Lt Des Hughes of 125 Squadron commented: “I quite enjoyed the Beaufighter II, though they had a horrific ‘swing’ on take-off, unless one opened one throttle a full 2in ahead of the other. All first solos were interesting to watch!”

The Canadians of 406 Squadron kicked off their tally on September 1 when Fg Off ‘Moose’ Fumerton shot down a Ju 88 off Tyneside: “The first burst, fired from behind and below the Junkers at only 50 yards range, set the starboard engine afire and raked the fuselage from stem to stern. After a second attack the e/a exploded in mid-air and fell in flaming pieces.”

### ‘Tip-and-run’

Long summer days of 1941 and the German invasion of the USSR meant a marked reduction in attacks on Britain. Luftwaffe strikes continued on ports and industrial complexes, and later ‘tip-and-run’ attacks were mounted on lightly defended cathedral cities – the infamous Baedeker Raids, so named after a German tourist guide.

On April 29, 1942 Norwich was singled out by the Luftwaffe and the Czech-manned 68 Squadron scrambled nine Beaufighters from nearby Coltishall to defend it. Piloting X7583, W/O Ladislav Bobek chased a Do 217 for 20 minutes before bringing it down off Great Yarmouth. When the Luftwaffe returned two nights later (May 1) Plt Off Miro Mansfield got a brace of He 111s despite being hit by return fire.



## Beaufighter's Firedog finale



Beaufighter TF10 RD819 of 45 Squadron at Kuala Lumpur in September 1948 at the start of Operation Firedog. BRISTOL VIA J D OUGHTON

Beaufighters continued in service after World War Two, and the type was used by 45 and 84 Squadrons during the Malayan Emergency of the late 1940s. The TF10s began strikes using rocket projectile-equipped as part of Operation Firedog in Malaya on August 12, 1948 when a pair from 84 attacked a terrorist camp near the Thai border; 45 began 'ops' four days later.

No.84 then moved to Iraq, leaving 45 to soldier on, flying the RAF's final Beaufighter 'op' when a pair attacked a target near Johor Bahru on February 7, 1950. Beaufighters continued on target-towing duties until TT.10 RD761 flew the type's final sortie with the RAF on May 17, 1960.

Gradually the Mosquito began to assume the mantle as the premier night-fighter, although 'Beau' units, now mainly using Mk.VIIs, continued to make a valuable contribution. On June 14, 1943, under Wg Cdr Bob Braham's command, 141 Squadron began patrols over enemy territory using Serrate radar detector equipment to home in on enemy night-fighters. Five Beaufighters patrolled near bases in Holland to cover a bombing raid on Oberhausen. During the patrol the unit's CO, and his AI operator Ft Lt 'Sticks' Gregory, shot down a Bf 110 over the Zuider Zee to begin a successful period in this new role.

Several units flew 'Beaus' during the 'Baby Blitz' of early 1944. The Canadians' 406 Squadron retained them into the middle of the year, helping cover the D-Day invasion.

During the late summer the enemy began launching V-1 'Doodlebug' flying bombs from He 111s over the North Sea.

The slow



Left: Mk.Xs of 217 Squadron led by NE815 on an anti-ship search from Ceylon. VIA J D OUGHTON

speed of the combination during the launch phase was less than the Mosquito's stalling speed and so the Beaufighters from the Fighter Interception Development Squadron (formerly the FIU) were deployed.

On October 24, Fg Off Desmond Tull successfully shot down Ofw Hämmerle's He 111 '5K+ES' of 2/KG 53. Ten more Heinkels fell in November, the first claimed by the FIDS' Flt Lt Jeremy

Howard-Williams in Mk.VIi V8565 over the sea on the cloudless, hazy evening of the 4th. The following night Sqn Ldr Bill Maguire got another – the last by a Beaufighter over England.

### Strike wings

'Beaus' were used by Coastal Command to counter German bombers threatening shipping. The inaugural 'Coastal' unit was 252 at Chivenor, from December 27, 1940.

Its first Beaufighter Ic victory ➡

Main image: Beaufighter I R2069 was delivered to 25 Squadron at Debden in October 1940, retaining day fighter camouflage. 25 SQUADRON RECORDS



**29,762** tons of shipping was sunk in a ten-month period by 'Torbeaus'



**Above:** 'Torbeau' NE429 of 489 Squadron escorted by a Polish Mustang III of 315 Squadron off Norway on July 30, 1944. VIA AUTHOR

**Below:** The 29 Squadron CO's Mk.VI with a 'thimble' radome in place of the 'arrow' aerials, summer 1942. VIA C H GOSS

came on April 16 when Fg Off Bill Riley destroyed Oblt Hermann Richter's Fw 200C 'F8+AH' of 1/KG 40 off Scotland. Riley recalled: "Fire was opened at 300 yards and continued in short bursts to point blank range when astern. Fw caught fire at the rear port wing root, both engines appeared completely u/s [unserviceable], then dived into the sea in flames."

Further Coastal Command squadrons were re-equipped and in late December 1941 No.235 covered a raid on Vaagso on the Norwegian coast where its Beaufighters had several brushes with Bf 109s – as did those of 248 Squadron which shot down two He 111s. Over the Bay of Biscay in August 1942, No.235 destroyed a trio of Ar 196 floatplanes and in September its pilots claimed five Ju 88s and an Fw 200 'kill'.

The 'fighter' task decreased as Coastal Command concentrated on the anti-shipping role – for which specialised wings were formed, comprising of two or more Beaufighter VIc squadrons, each with a particular task. The first was the North Coates Wing, in Lincolnshire, with 236 Squadron equipped with bombs and 254 with torpedoes. They were later joined

**“Losses were steady but few matched those of ‘Black Friday’ - February 9, 1945 - when three squadrons of the Dallachy Wing attacked warships in Forde Fjord, Bergen”**

by 143 in the anti-flak role – a vital task as enemy coastal convoys were strongly defended.

The wing struck for the first time off the Hook of Holland soon after 16.00 hours on November 20, 1942. Despite an anti-aircraft barrage and Fw 190s of 11/JG 1,

the Beaufighters sank a tug and damaged two flak ships, but at the cost of three aircraft.

### Devastating rockets

Tactics were reviewed and more training instituted before the next big strike, led by Wg Cdr Neil Wheeler with a Spitfire escort on April 18, 1943. In a textbook attack off Texel, three torpedoes from 254 Squadron struck the 5,000-ton ore carrier *Hough Carrier*, which exploded and sank while four flak ships were shredded by cannon and bombs; just two Beaufighters were damaged. That month also saw the introduction of 60lb rockets to 236 and 143 Squadrons. They were to prove a devastating weapon.

More units were being formed into wings, and they took an increasing toll on German coastal traffic into 1944. One significant scalp being the sinking of the 6,500-ton *Maasburg* off Texel by the North Coates Wing on March 1.

In June priority switched to the Channel to cover the invasion of France. On the eve of D-Day, Mk.Xs of 114 and 404 Squadrons from Davidstow Moor in Cornwall found a trio of destroyers off Belle-Ile, France. Rockets hit Z32 and Z24 and all three were forced back to port. After the invasion, the wings returned to northern waters, flying from North Coates and Dallachy, Scotland.

Losses were steady but few matched those of 'Black Friday' – February 9, 1945 – when the Dallachy Wing of 144, 404 and 455 Squadrons attacked warships in Forde Fjord north of Bergen. In the narrow waters, flak and Fw 109s of JG 5 led by Rudi Linz hit many of the raiders. Nine were shot down, including six from 404. (See *Blue Four's Rebirth* in the November issue.)



## Bristol Beaufighter in Combat

YEAR	MONTH	AIRCRAFT TYPE	No.	PILOT, OR 1st PILOT	2ND PILOT, PUFFIN OR PASSENGER	DUTY (INCLUDING RESULTS AND REMARKS)
1942	DECEMBER	BEAUFIGHTER VIF	232	SELF	P/O HODGE	SHIPPING STRIKE - STRAPPED 2,000 TON M.V. - DECK CARGO ON FIRE - SHIP BLAZING STEAM TO STEER. POSITION - 300 S. 4. HANNAMET. HIGH P/O M. GREGORIAN N° 1.
		BEAUFIGHTER VIF	232	SELF	P/O HODGE	FIGHTER SWEEP - KIKKENNA - ZURRA - LAMPHAN - KORINT - ANTALLORIA - BARE. 4 M.V. 2 DRO SIGHTED. NO RETURN TO REPORT. ⑦
		BEAUFIGHTER VIF	202	SELF	P/O HODGE	CONVOY ESCORT - FROM EAST. NO E.A. SIGHTED. (30 GALLS) ⑧
		BEAUFIGHTER VIF	2137	SELF	P/O HODGE	SHIPPING SWEEP - ATTACKED FORMATION OF 50 JU 52s ESCORTED BY 5 ME 110s + 3 JU 88s. SHOT DOWN: 1 ME 110 + 2 JU 52s. SET BOMBING: 1 JU 52. PROBABLE: SELF: 1 JU 52. DAMAGED: 1 ME 110 + 1 JU 52. SET BOMBING: 1 JU 52. SELF: 1 JU 52. ⑨
GRAND TOTALS - (1) to (10)						TOTALS BROUGHT FORWARD
284						15
TOTALS CARRIED FORWARD						24-15 25-30 1-00 58-40 142-35



**Top right:** Kenyan-born Fg Off Raymond Modera of 227 Squadron was one of the most successful Beaufighter pilots flying from Malta in early 1943. VIA AUTHOR

**Top left:** Raymond Modera's logbook for December 1942. VIA AUTHOR

**Left:** Sqn Ldr Andrew Fletcher with his 272 Squadron Mk.Ic in Malta, circa July 1941. J. A. HEATH

**Below:** Wg Cdr Bill Moseby (left) chatting to his crews of 255 Squadron in front of a Beaufighter Vif at Maison Blanche, Algeria. W. G. MOSEBY



The last large ship sunk by Beaufighters was the 8,600-ton *Java* in the Bay of Kiel on May 3 during an operation by 144 and 455 Squadrons. The next day the type's 'coastal' war came to an end off the east coast of Denmark when 236 and 254 Squadrons sank four U-boats in a barrage of cannon and rockets.

### Mediterranean hunters

The Beaufighter's range and firepower made it highly suitable for the war over the Mediterranean and North Africa. The first in the area was a detachment of 252 Squadron sent to Malta in May 1941, from where it attacked enemy airfields in Sicily, Greece and Crete.

Later that month 272 Squadron moved to Egypt from where Sqn Ldr Andrew Fletcher led a detachment to Malta for convoy escorts. During a sortie to Sicily in T3317 he destroyed four Savoia-Marchetti S.79s and two Fiat CR.42s at Borizzo. In early August the Beaufighters returned to Egypt and continued long-range attacks; Fletcher destroyed three more S.79s at

Cagliari in late September.

The operation to relieve Tobruk began on November 18 and both 252 and 272 were heavily involved in the fighting that freed the port the following month. By then 89 Squadron had arrived in Egypt with AI-equipped Beaufighter Ifs, achieving its first success on March 2, 1942 when Sqn Ldr Derek Pain shot down a He 111. By the end of the war 89 was the RAF's second-highest-scoring night-fighter unit. Meanwhile, in May, 46 Squadron at Idku began forming under Sqn Ldr Jasper Read as the second Egyptian-based night-fighter outfit.

Despite being under siege, Malta remained a threat to the Axis' North African campaign and was constantly under attack. By mid-1942 the supply situation on the island was desperate. A massive







“89 Squadron’s Sgt Maurice Pring closed in on the unsuspecting bombers from the rear and shot down three in an engagement lasting less than five minutes”

**Above:**  
Beaufighter Mk.31  
A19-17 of 31 Squadron  
RAAF over northern  
Australia in 1943. RAAF

**Right:**  
All-green Beaufighter  
21 A8-122 of 93  
Squadron RAAF at  
Tadji on the coast of  
New Guinea at the  
end of the war.  
N MACKENZIE



convoy was sent to help restock the fortress in August and Operation Pedestal – featuring ‘Beaus’ from 235 and 248 Squadrons – went into action

Newly arrived from England, the units were soon involved in the fighting, helping the convoy to get through. Pedestal proved to be a defining moment of the Mediterranean war and when the crippled tanker *Ohio* docked on the 15th the enemy made huge efforts to destroy it.

Plt Off Nevil Reeves of 89 Squadron intercepted an S.84: “We closed to 100 yards and fired.

The port engine of the *e/a* caught fire immediately and numerous pieces fell off. I skidded over and shot at the starboard engine and the whole aircraft was enveloped in fire and went into the sea.”

In August the 235 Squadron detachment became 227 Squadron and continued strikes from Malta, taking an increasing toll on Rommel’s vital supply routes. Plt Off ‘Red’ Modera joined 227 towards the end of the year and was flying EL252 on December 1, noting in his logbook: “Strafed 2,000-ton M/V [motor vessel]. Deck cargo on fire. Ship blazing from stem to stern.” A week later, on a shipping sweep, 227 intercepted an escorted formation of 50 Ju 52s, three of which were shot down.

As the subsequent Italian campaign ground on, Beaufighters were used to great effect against communication targets in nearby Yugoslavia and the Adriatic. Perhaps the greatest prize came on September 8, 1944 when a dozen aircraft from 272 Squadron attacked the Italian liner *Rex* near Trieste, leaving her listing and on fire. Later in the day, 39 Squadron and 16 Squadron SAAF also attacked, after which the 52,000-ton vessel capsized.

### Whispering Death

To counter Japanese night raids on Calcutta, India, a detachment from

89 Squadron arrived in the area from the Middle East on January 14, 1943 and became 176 Squadron. The following night Mitsubishi Ki-21 ‘Sally’ bombers of the 98th Sentai headed towards the city. An RAF Beaufighter pilot said they were “completely uncamouflaged and they gleamed like silver fishes as they flew over in formation”.

During the raid, 89 Squadron’s Sgt Maurice Pring closed on the unsuspecting bombers from the rear and shot down three in an engagement lasting less than five minutes. On the 19th, Fg Off Charles Crosby accounted for two more – and Japanese night attacks on Calcutta stopped until the end of the year.

No.27 Squadron had re-equipped with ‘Beaus’ in November 1942 and staged its first long-range strike operation on Christmas Eve, strafing Toungoo airfield in Burma.

During 1943 further ‘Beau’ units formed in the Burma theatre – 177 Squadron began operations

**Right:**  
The crew of  
Beaufighter V1f  
MM849 of 125  
Squadron preparing  
for a patrol from  
Exeter on September  
14, 1943. VIA L  
MILBERRY



in September, claiming 15 locomotives destroyed. Meanwhile 211 formed using the rocket-equipped Mk.X.

The type flew intensively during the critical Battle of Imphal which opened in March 1944 and ranged far behind enemy lines. On April 8, Sqn Ldr John Muller-Rowland shot down a biplane near Chiang Mai, Thailand: "I fired a two-second burst at 150 yards. The elevators of the aircraft fell off. My observer saw the biplane crash and burst into flames – I believe it was a Siamese Hawk III fighter." The squadron's average sortie duration during April was more than four hours.

No.211's CO, Wg Cdr Pat Meagher, was also very productive, shooting down a number of Japanese aircraft on sorties deep into Burma. No.27 Squadron, having partially re-equipped with Mosquitos, resumed full Beaufighter operations around this time. These two units, together with 22, 47 and 217 Squadrons, played a full part in the Burma campaign until the Japanese surrender.

## Goodenough 'Aussies'

Beaufighters also flew over New Guinea and the sprawling islands of the Dutch East Indies in the hands of the RAAF. Led by Wg Cdr Brian 'Blackjack' Walker, 30 Squadron RAAF flew to Port Moresby, New Guinea, where it participated in the latter stages of the vital Battle of Milne Bay of August and September 1942 – the first repulse of the Japanese in the area. The squadron also had the occasional air combat, the first on September 23 when a strike was intercepted by six 'Zeros'.

The tempo of operations continued with 30 Squadron in the thick of the action, mainly on low-level attacks. During a strafe on Lae airfield on November 17 the 'Beaus' destroyed two 'Sallys' and four 'Zeros'. The squadron supported the assault on the Buna area in December and also interdicted enemy reinforcements arriving by sea.

In early March 1943, during the Battle of the Bismarck Sea, 30 Squadron played an important role against a Japanese convoy. It moved to Vivigani Strip on Goodenough Island in July where it supported the Australian landings at Lae and later took part in the suppression of the Japanese stronghold at Rabaul in New Britain.



**Above**  
A trio of Beaufighter Ics of 248 Squadron during the summer of 1942.  
G H MELVILLE-JACKSON



**Left**  
Italian liner 'Rex' under attack by Beaufighters on September 8, 1944. SAAF

The second RAAF Beaufighter unit, 31 Squadron, flew from Coomalie Creek, south of Darwin, where it remained for two years. On November 17 it mounted its first operation but the long flights over the Timor Sea to reach the enemy were constant challenges. The Japanese often intercepted the attacks and Sqn Ldr 'Butch' Gordon was particularly successful on October 9, 1943 when he shot down two Ki-45s and an A6M-3N

'Rufe' floatplane.

By the end of the year, 31 Squadron had claimed 18 enemy aircraft shot down and 49 destroyed on the ground, as well as a significant amount of shipping sunk or damaged. All of this came at a high cost – 17 aircraft and crews. Along with 22 and 93 RAAF Squadrons, 30 and 31 were instrumental in the difficult campaigns in New Guinea and the East Indies until the final victory in August 1945.

**Below:**  
Nose and wing-mounted radar aerials are evident on this 604 Squadron Mk.II in the spring of 1941.  
VIA R C B ASHWORTH



*Bristol Beaufighter V1f ND220 of 176 Squadron on standby at Cox's Bazar in April 1945, just a few days after the last victory. R. LYTHGOE*



## Spotlight Next Month Lockheed F-104 Starfighter

Next month, *Spotlight* shines on a jet-powered legend, the Lockheed F-104 Starfighter. This, sometimes controversial, machine was characterised by its very short wings, remarkable speed and rocket-like appearance. Around 2,500 were built, some serving until 2004. We reflect on the supersonic interceptor's history and its use in military service. The *January* issue is on sale in the UK on *November 28* – see page 64 for our latest money-saving subscription offers.



# Last of Many

Andrew Thomas describes the Beaufighter's final 'kill'

**A**lthough by 1945 the Bristol Beaufighter had been replaced in the night-fighter role in Europe by the de Havilland Mosquito, in Burma it remained the primary type, albeit with little 'trade' for the two squadrons in theatre, 89 and 176.

Late on March 25, 1945, Fg Offs J Forbes and H Pettridge of 176 Squadron were scrambled from Akyab in Beaufighter V1f KV977 and flew south to set up a patrol, as the squadron's diary recorded: "They flew to the west of Ramree Island and were vectored onto a low-flying bogey. Contact was made at 8 miles. An interception was carried out which subsequently proved [it] to be a friendly. A second vector was given for a Bandit at 7,500ft."

The 'Bandit' was encountered flying at 5,000ft – Forbes closed to 200ft below and identified it as a Japanese Nakajima Ki-43 'Oscar' so he dropped back and fired a short burst. Hits were observed all over the fuselage, and a large explosion enveloped the starboard mainplane. The K-43 then dropped away.

The ops diary continued: "The bandit was not seen to crash but interception took place over the coast and the Oscar may have gone into the sea. Claim one destroyed."

The enemy machine had indeed crashed to the west of Ramree Island to become Forbes' solitary victory. In the humid tropical skies of the Burmese coast, the Beaufighter had claimed its final kill.