



'THE WOODEN WONDER'

We present a tribute to de Havilland's amazing all-rounder aircraft of the Second World War – the Mosquito.

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Andrew Thomas outlines 456 Squadron's time as a Mosquito night-fighter unit during World War Two.

PAGE 28 MOSQUITOS OVER THE EAST INDIES

Tom Spencer examines the RAAF's Second World War Mossie photo reconnaissance operations over the Dutch East Indies.

PAGE 34 THE LAST RAID

Mosquitos from 608 Squadron played a key role in attacking German ports during the final months of war in Europe. They also have the distinction of dropping the last bombs on Germany, as Andrew Thomas describes.





ABOVE
Up from Middle Wallop in mid-1943 is Mosquito II DD739/RX-X. It was lost on a 'Mahmoud' bomber support sortie to the Kassel area on 4 December along with its crew. (RAAF)

ANTIP DEAN NIGHT HUNTERS



Andrew Thomas outlines 456 Squadron RAAF's time as a de Havilland Mosquito night-fighter unit during the Second World War.

OVERLEAF
Wg Cdr George Howden, the CO (front, 5th from right), with his aircrew in front of a Mosquito II. (23 SQUADRON RECORDS)

The Royal Australian Air Force's 456 Squadron received its first three Mosquito IIs, equipped with the AI Mk.IV radar, at Valley on Anglesey on 30 December 1942. By the end of January 1943, it had 17 of de Havilland's elegant masterpieces and it was destined to be the sole RAAF night-fighter squadron within Fighter Command during the war.

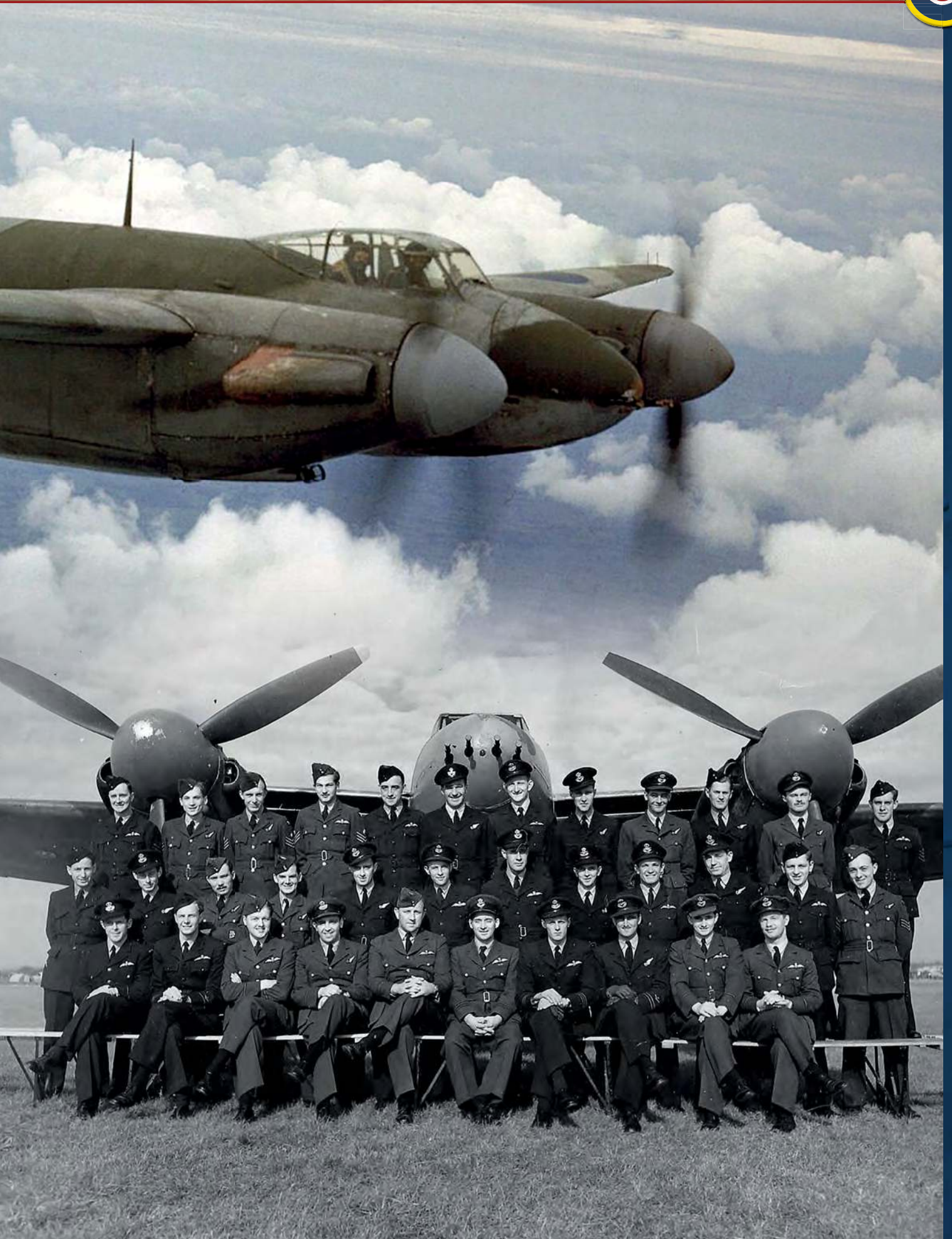
The Australian unit began Mosquito operations on 22 January when Sqn Ldr Hank Richards in DZ297/RX-R flew a night patrol. By the end of

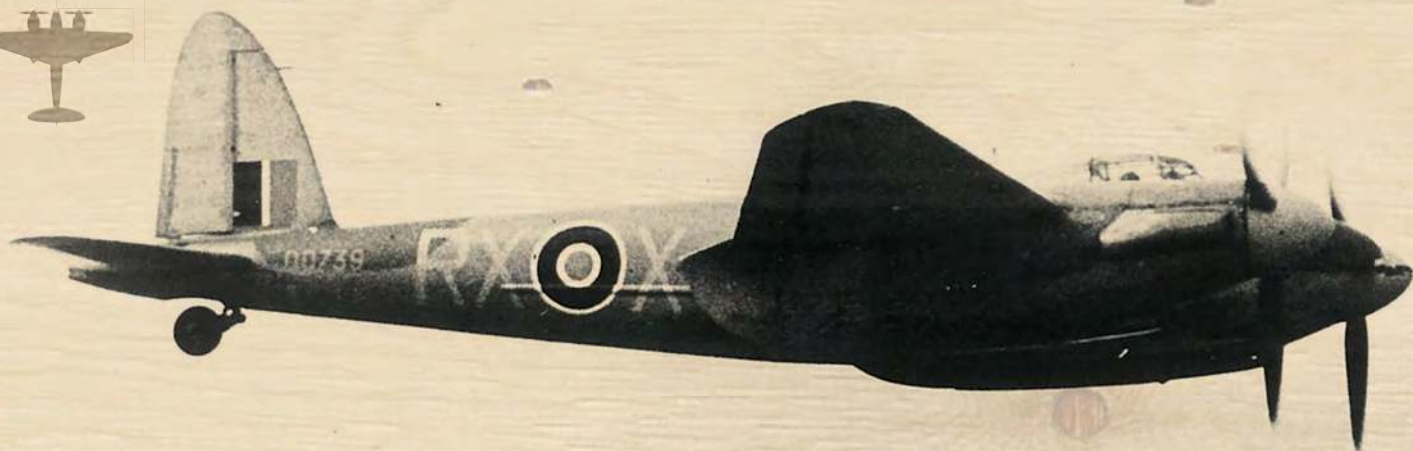
February it started flying offensive 'Ranger' sorties over occupied Europe for which one flight moved south to Colerne in Wiltshire. (Ranger was the codename for missions designed to draw up and engage enemy fighters.)

At the end of the month the rest of the unit moved down to Middle Wallop in Hampshire, as part of 10 Group, usually under the control of Sopley radar site. Plt Off Col Griffin, a newly arrived pilot recalled: "The Mosquito was fast, smooth and popular. I was one of the lucky few.

We were posted to Middle Wallop, based between Salisbury and Andover in Hampshire, for three or four months. Our duty was to fly over their [the Luftwaffe's] fields and make a nuisance of ourselves by dropping flares and bombs or shooting up 'planes on the ground. Our mere presence didn't terrorise them, but it did scare them.

"It was dangerous, because you never knew how high above the ground you were. We'd fly over at about 10,000ft and come down to around 1,000ft. ▶





ABOVE
The Mosquito II was flown by 456 Squadron when it was engaged on patrols over the Bay of Biscay and Rangers into France.
(R W RICHARDSON)

The German airfields were defended with multiple guns. Some of the intruders would bomb runways as well. I have nothing but praise for the Mosquito. It had two engines, which made a single engine landing tricky, because it was so streamlined. With one operational engine, when the undercarriage was lowered, you needed a lot of power. Recovery took 1,000ft, so if you were below that, then you were committed to the landing. My navigator was H P 'Hoppy' Williams."

BELOW
Wg Cdr Keith Hampshire took over command of the squadron at the end of 1944 and led it through its most successful period in which he personally shot down seven German bombers.
(AUTHOR'S COLLECTION)

Rangers were also flown and between Lamballe and Alençon in France on the night of 17-18 April and two trains were damaged. Another notable sortie was on 6 May when Fg Offs Peter Panitz and 'Hoppy' Williams shot up six trains in the St Méen area of France. However, after one Ranger on the 30th, Mosquito II HJ701/RX-C flown by the CO and Fg Off Don Shanks crashed seriously injuring them. Two days later W/O 'Red'



Ratcliffe and F/Sgt Ron Lowther were lost during an afternoon sortie over France in DZ308/RX-V.

LONG RANGE FIGHTERS

Soon after on 5 June three aircraft were detached to Predannack in Cornwall to fly 'Instep' patrols over

the Bay of Biscay to counter Luftwaffe long-range fighters that were intercepting RAF anti-submarine aircraft. Action soon came when a patrol damaged two Junkers Ju 88s on the 11th with W/O 'Gate' Gatenby engaging another on the 19th.

Two days later, Gatenby, flying DZ299/RX-D, spotted a U-boat and immediately attacked, damaging U-462 so badly that it had to return to port. This detachment concluded on 8 July, but at the end of the month, six fighter-bomber Mosquito VIs arrived to form a flight specifically for Rangers and Insteps. This flight returned to Predannack on 17 August, whilst the rest of the squadron moved to Colerne.

The Cornwall detachment had a good day on 21 September when in a stiff fight over Biscay a Ju 88 was shot down by Flt Lt Peter Panitz and Fg Off Sampson, while 'Gate' Gatenby claimed a probable and Fg Off Newall damaged another. Panitz with his navigator Fg Off Williams also destroyed a Ju 88 on 3 October.

MINI 'BLITZ'

The following month 456 Squadron moved to Fairwood Common near Swansea from where it began flying some bomber support sorties, though on one such 'Mahmoud' mission to Kassel on 3-4 December Plt Off May and Fg Off Parnell in DD739/RX-X were lost. Ten days later Wg Cdr Keith Hampshire took over as CO and under his energetic leadership No.456 embarked on a very successful period. On 29 January 1944 the first improved Mosquito XVIs arrived and they swiftly replaced the earlier variant.

The Luftwaffe's Operation Steinbock, the so-called 'mini blitz,' began on 21 January. To help counter the offensive No.456 moved to Ford in Sussex at the end of February. Nightly patrols began immediately, though initially crews had few contacts. Its first claim came in the early hours of 2 March when Plt Off Bob Richardson probably destroyed a Dornier Do 217. Better luck came early on 22 March when South Australian Fg Off Keith





Roediger in HK297/RX-V shot down a Ju 88 off Rye. There was further success on the night of 24-25 March when CO Wg Cdr Keith Hampshire with Fg Off Tom Condon flying HK286/RX-A attacked and destroyed Junkers Ju 88A-4 '3E+AP' of 6./KG 6. The German aircraft was flown by Hptn Anton Oeben and it crashed near Arundel railway station and though the pilot survived, his three crew died.

Three nights later, the Luftwaffe hit Bristol with almost 100 bombers and 456's Mosquitos were sent up to counter the raid. Once again, in HK286, Hampshire and Condon shot down Ju 88A-4 W/Nr 44551 '3E+FT' of 9./KG 6 over Devon and there was just one survivor – Uffz Günther Blaffert. A few minutes later the pair intercepted another Ju 88A, 'B3+BL' of 3./KG 54 flown by Ofw Brautigan, which came down near Isle Brewers in Somerset; the pilot and two of the crew were captured, but Uffz Robert Belz was killed. That night Sqn Ldr Bas Howard and his navigator Flt Lt Jack Ross in HK323/RX-R also brought down a Ju 88 off the French coast near Cherbourg.

The squadron remained in the forefront of the night defences against the 'mini-blitz' with the last major raid against London being



LEFT
Mosquito XVII HK312/RX-G was delivered to 456 Squadron on 31 January 1944 but crashed off Littlehampton chasing a V-1 on the night of 12 July. (VIA J W BENNETT)

on 18 April. That night Flt Lt Clive Brookes and W/O R Forbes (both RAF) intercepted one of the fast Messerschmitt Me 410s at 24,000ft (7,315m) near Nuthurst, West Sussex, at 10.28pm. Brookes' cannon shells destroyed the starboard engine and set the wing alight and W/Nr 20005 '9K+JH' of 1.KG 51 went down vertically, killing Lt Reinhold Witt and Uffz Ernst Tesch.

Raids on the south coast continued, however, and the unit was kept busy trying to prevent the Luftwaffe from getting to its targets. On 21 April the CO brought down a Ju 88 near Swanage, Dorset. When the naval base at Portsmouth was attacked on

24-25 of April, Fg Off Keith Roediger claimed a Ju 188 and Fg Off George Houston a Ju 88 that disintegrated at 20,000ft (6,096m). Shortly before midnight some 25 miles (40km) south of Portsmouth, Flt Lt Bob Lewis attacked another Ju 188 that exploded in front of the Mosquito, smashing the fighter's armoured windscreen.

Then on the night of the 28th during an anti-minelaying patrol Keith Hampshire probably destroyed a Dornier 217 over the sea. However, that night when also hunting minelayers Flt Lt Bob Pahlow and Fg Off Frank Silva in HK321/RX-X went missing, they were last heard of chasing an intruder at low ▶

MIDDLE
During the 'mini blitz' and D-Day one of No.456's most successful crews was that of Flt Lt Bob Cowper (right) and his navigator Fg Off Bill Watson. (R W COWPER)

BELOW
Wg Cdr Hampshire and Fg Off Condon examine the Ju 88A-4 3E+AP of 6./KG 6 (flown by Hptn Anton Oeben) that they shot down on 24 March 1944. (AUTHOR'S COLLECTION)





“I PRESSED THE GUN BUTTON. ONE OF THE FIRST INCENDIARIES MUST HAVE RUPTURED A FUEL CELL, FOR IT SEEMED THE MOMENT I PRESSED THE GUN BUTTON A HUGE BALL OF FLAME ENGULFED THE HEINKEL”

RIGHT
A sight witnessed by several RAF night-fighter crews as the unmistakable shape of a V-1 is launched from an He 111.

(VIA B KETTLEY)

level and probably flew into the sea.

After a two-week break the Luftwaffe returned on the night of 14 May with a ‘bomber’s moon’. A hundred aircraft raided Bristol, Portsmouth and Southampton. Flying HK246/RX-U, Fg Offs Arthur McEvoy and Merv Austin chased a contact that they identified as a Ju 188 and attacked it over Larkhill, Wiltshire, sending W/Nr 160089 ‘U5+HH

of 1./KG 2 flown by Uffz Heinz Mühlberger down. Also in action were Fg Offs Doug Arnold and John Stickley in HK297/RX-V, who shot down a Ju 88 at Medstead, Hampshire. During another raid on Portsmouth early on the 23rd, No.456’s CO and Plt Off Sanderson each brought down a Ju 88.

BELOW
The squadron’s top crew against the V-1, with nine destroyed, was Flt Lts Keith Roediger (left) and Bob Dobson.

(VIA J W BENNETT)

COVERING D-DAY

The priority then switched to patrols to protect the mass of shipping assembling in the south coast ports for the coming invasion of France. On the night of 5 June as the great naval fleet sailed toward the French coast, 456 Squadron Mosquitos provided part of the protective aerial umbrella. These intensive patrols continued after the landings

and the unit was soon in action, as Flt Lt Bob Cowper recalled: “I remember [that] on the first night of D-Day the squadron shot down four aircraft near Normandy, and we were proud to have been part of the entire operation that created history and helped end the war in Europe.”

There was more to come. On the evening of the 6-7th, 456’s Mosquitos intercepted five Heinkel He 177s of KG 40 between Cherbourg and Le Havre, destroying four of them.

The first contact came shortly after midnight when Fg Off Ron Pratt and Flt Lt Stew Smith in HK303/RX-H fired on one of the large Heinkels that burst into flames and the stricken bomber crashed into the sea. An hour later Fg Offs Fred Stevens and Andy Kellett in HK290/RX-J identified another, this one carrying an HS 293 glider bomb under each wing: “We were coming in much too fast so I closed the throttles completely. I turned the gun button to ‘fire’ as we hurtled in the last half-mile. He opened fire first, the coloured balls curled lazily away. I pressed the gun button. One of the first incendiaries must have ruptured a fuel cell, for it seemed the moment I pressed the gun button a huge ball of flame engulfed the Heinkel. The crew would have died instantly.

The left wing broke off, the rest of the wreckage disintegrating as it fell 10,000ft [3,000m] into the English Channel.”

Soon afterwards the pair spotted another Heinkel that was also sent into the sea on fire. The CO also got in on the act against the He 177s and shot one down just east of Barfleur.

The carnage of the He 177s from KG 40 continued the following night when off the Normandy coast Sq Ldr Howard with Fg Off Ross shot down another two, one of which was seen to be carrying glider bombs, while after a long chase Fg Off Butch Hodgen shot down a third in flames over the beachhead. Then on the 9th

Bob Cowper, flying with Fg Off Bill Watson in HK353/RX-M, fired three bursts to bring down another He 177





immediately after which they intercepted a Do 217 that was heading south near Cap de la Hague. This too was seen to be carrying a glider bomb under its port wing and when hit crashed in flames on the coast.

MORE SUCCESS

Night patrols over the Normandy beachhead continued, resulting in further claims, with Plt Off Ivor Sanderson getting another He 177

on the 10th, though his Mosquito suffered heavy damage from return fire and they were lucky to get home. Sqn Ldr Geoff Howitt also attacked one that was claimed as a probable.

Two nights later the CO with Tom Condon were in action again. They gained radar contact at two miles on an evading aircraft that as they closed was identified as a Ju 88. Keith Hampshire opened fire at 120 yards (110m) range and set both engines ablaze before the

German rolled over and dived vertically into the sea. It was Hampshire's seventh and final victory.

The next night Plt Off Stan Williams and Fg Off Ken Havord found another He 177 off Fécamp that they swiftly sent into the sea in flames. Then on the night of 14 June the Mosquito flown by Lt Dennis Thornley (RN) returned covered in oil after attacking what was probably another He 177. At the same time HK356/RX-D flown by Flt Lt Bob Cowper and Fg Off Bill Watson off the French coast gained a fleeting contact on a climbing target over the western tip of the Cherbourg peninsula. They opened fire from 400ft (122m) with a short burst on a Ju 88 flying at 12,000ft (3,600m). There was a large flash and much debris and three of the crew were seen to bale out before the Junkers spun into the sea. It was 22-year-old Bob Cowper's fifth victory.

'DOODLEBUGS'

In the middle of the year the Germans had begun launching large numbers of V-1 flying bombs against southern England and the squadron's first encounter was early on the 17th by Lt Dennis Thornley and Sub Lt Derek ▶

ABOVE
No.456 Sqn downed several He 177s in the weeks following D-Day. (VIA J WEAL)

LEFT
RAF and RAAF crew in front of Mosquito II 'RX-E' in October 1943. L to R: Fg Off Doug Wiley, Plt Offs Bob Richardson, Hoppy Williams, Fg Offs Nobby Clarke, Clive Brooks and WO Bob Wilmoth. (VIA J W BENNETT)

BELOW
No.456 began flying the Mosquito NF Mk.XXX in late 1944. NT311/RX-L was flown on 4 March 1945 by Sqn Ldr Cowper, 'A' Flight commander. (VIA J W BENNETT)





RIGHT
 In November 1944 Wg Cdr Bas Howard became the CO and had several successes against German bombers and flying bombs.
 (AUTHOR'S COLLECTION)

Phillips flying HK359/RX-K. Soon afterwards on 24 June, No.456 was switched to counter the V-1 menace by flying standing patrols off the south coast. Although no flying bombs were seen initially, the unit had a good night against the Luftwaffe on the evening of 5 July when the He 177s made their final appearance over the Channel and 456's crews claimed three, which fell to Plt Off Ivor Sanderson, Fg Off Ted Radford and Flt Lt Bob Cowper. Plt Off Stan Williams shot down a Do 217 for good measure. No.456 destroyed more He 177s than any other squadron but it was the pilotless V-1s that were now the priority.

The 'Doodlebug' was a small, fast, difficult and dangerous target and 456 claimed its first on the night of 9-10 July when Flt Lts Keith Roediger and Bob Dobson in HK297/RX-V found one flying northwest at 2,500ft (762m). Closing to 500 yards (457m) and offsetting to the right, Roediger opened fire and sent it into the sea.

Another was shot down the



following night as 456 got into its stride. Flt Lt George Houston destroyed one on the 11th but these operations were no sinecure, as was brutally brought home in the early

hours of the 12th when HK312/RX-G crashed off Littlehampton with the loss of Fg Off Ted Bradford and F/ Sgt Wally Atkinson. By the end of the month, 456's crews had shot down ten, including two more to Roediger, a brace to Fg Off Fred Stevens and one to Flt Lt Cowper. Keith Roediger opened the scoring for August when he brought another down on the 4th, eventually taking his V-1 tally to nine, making him 456's V-1 ace. The squadron's last Doodlebugs were both claimed by Bas Howard on the night of 30-31 August when he shot down two, taking his total to five, though debris from one hit his Mosquito.

MAINLAND EUROPE

In mid-September No.456 sent a detachment to Manston, Kent, from where night patrols were flown over Holland. The only success was a Ju 88 that was shot down over Nijmegen on 6 October by W/O John Mulhall. That month, two US Navy crews were attached to the unit to gain

BELOW
 A Mosquito night-fighter off on another sortie.
 (KEY COLLECTION)

“BUT THE DAMAGE HAD BEEN DONE ON THE FIRST ATTACK, AND THE FLAMING HE 111 DIVED INTO THE WATER. A FLASH LIT UP THE SKY AS THE BURNING WRECKAGE BOUNCED OVER THE SURFACE LEAVING A SEA OF FLAMES. IT WAS THE MOST EXHAUSTING 25 MINUTES FLYING I’VE EVER HAD”





operational experience on the Mossie. The squadron then concentrated at Ford, West Sussex, for patrols over the southern North Sea against Heinkel He 111s that were air-launching V-1s as the land-based sites in France had been overrun. Patrols began on the 17th though the low flying bombers proved difficult to detect and engage as they only climbed to fire the missile.

On 11 November the unit had a change of leadership, when Wg Cdr Hampshire was replaced by the newly promoted Wg Cdr Bas Howard. The first success under his control came on the 19th when Fg Offs Doug Arnold and John Stickley in HK246/RX-U were vectored onto an He 111 off the coast of Suffolk. The Mosquito

crew gained visual on their foe at an altitude of just 300ft (91m) over the water. Arnold closed to about 100 yards and fired three bursts, though return fire hit one of the Mosquito's propeller blades. However, they saw the Heinkel's starboard engine start to burn before it crashed into the North Sea.

These patrols were hazardous as crews had to fly at low level and just above the Mosquito's stalling speed to engage the bombers. HR317/RX-Y flown by W/O Mulhall was lost on the 24th, though may have shot down the Heinkel it was attacking before crashing.

The following day He 111H-16, W/Nr 110304 'A1+BH' of 1./KG 53

carrying a V-1 was attacked at 5.10am 10 miles (16km) off Texel by Fg Offs Stevens and Kellett in HK290/RX-J. Fred Stevens recalled: "So began a 25-minute chase, the target making continuous weaves, altering heading and height, forcing us to get our speed down to 140mph [225km/h], with flaps and wheels down. We did an orbit to let the enemy aircraft get ahead. As the target climbed to 600 feet [182m] and straightened on a north easterly heading, into a lighter part of the sky, we were able to identify it as a Heinkel. As we closed, the rear gunner opened fire and I pressed the button, firing into the cabin area.

"Our high closure rate meant I had to yank the wing over his fin and ▶

ABOVE
Wg Cdr Howard and his navigator Flt Lt Jack Ross were killed in Mosquito Mk.XXX NT264/RX-R on 29 May, 1945. (P H T GREEN COLLECTION)

BELOW
Sqn Ldr Bob Cowper was the CO who oversaw the unit's disbandment on 15 June 1945. (R W COWPER)





continued into a steep left turn to position for a second pass. But the damage had been done on the first attack, and the flaming He 111 dived into the water. A flash lit up the sky as the burning wreckage bounced over the surface leaving a sea of flames. It was the most exhausting 25 minutes flying I've ever had."

This was the last air combat success for 456 Squadron. It was withdrawn from anti-V-1 operations on 30 December and moved north to Church Fenton, Yorkshire, where it trained up on the Mosquito NF Mk.XXX – the first examples of which had been delivered on the 5th – and its more effective centimetric AI (Airborne Interception) Mk.X radar.

BOMBER SUPPORT

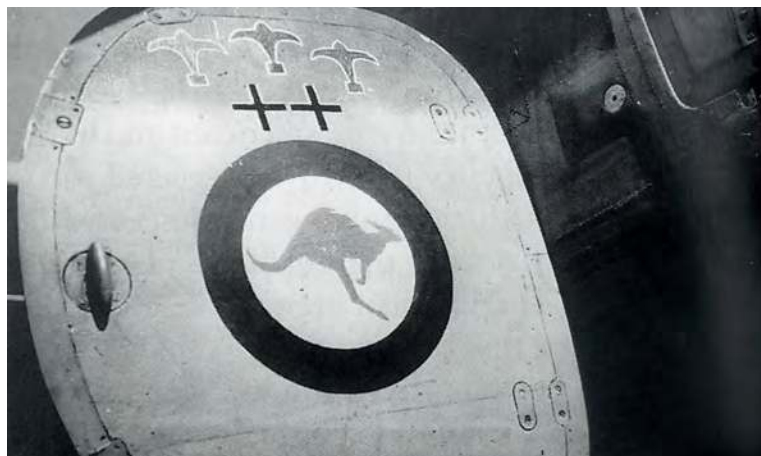
Anti-intruder sorties occupied the squadron for the early part of 1945, but in early March it moved to Bradwell Bay in Essex for bomber support work. Patrols were flown into Germany accompanying the bomber stream to hunt for Luftwaffe night-fighters. By this stage, though, the Nachtjagd was a largely spent force and success proved elusive. Night Rangers into Germany were also flown with the first success

BELOW
 During mid-1944 one of the flight commanders was Sqn Ldr Geoff Howitt, a night-fighter ace seen leaving Mosquito XVII HK249/RX-B in which he shot down two V-1s during August. (VIA J W BENNETT)

ESPRIT DE CORPS

Shortly after the unit was equipped with the Mosquito, the aircraft access doors were decorated with a distinctive marking of an RAF roundel where the central red dot was replaced by a kangaroo. Although unofficial, this was the first use of the design that was the inspiration for the RAAF roundel that was adopted during the 1950s and identifies Australian military aircraft to the present day.

After the Second World War, former members of the unit formed an association and as the squadron had been disbanded before its badge had been approved, lobbied for this to be corrected. Finally, on 1 September 2006, it was given official approval by the Chief of the RAAF and depicts the leaping kangaroo first worn on the unit's Mosquitos in 1943, so bringing its history fully to a close.



The kangaroo roundel as worn on 456 Squadron Mosquitos, in this case carried on the door of XVII HK290/RX-J showing the 'score' of Fg Off Fred Stevens for two He 177s and three V-1 flying bombs. (VIA J W BENNETT)



coming on the 27-28 March 1945. Nocturnal intruder and bomber support operations continued through April with 456 Squadron flying its last Ranger on the 25th, when four Mosquitos flew to Munich. The final war patrol was flown on 2 May. After the German surrender, on 9 May the CO flying NT264/RX-R led the squadron on a flag-waving demonstration over the Channel Islands, racing across at low level. This was repeated the next day as a re-occupation force approached and on 11 May a demonstration was flown over the shattered Ruhr towns. Some training followed this, but there was a tragic irony when on the 29th, NT264 flown by Wg Cdr Howard suffered an engine failure and crashed, killing him instantly. Sqn Ldr Bob Cowper assumed command and he supervised the rundown of 456 Squadron, which was disbanded on 15 June 1945. During its four-year existence 456 Squadron had established a fine reputation as the only RAAF night-fighter outfit. It had flown more than 6,200 hours on operations and claimed 41 enemy aircraft and destroyed 24½ V-1 flying bombs – a proud and distinguished record. ☺

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MOSSIES

OVER THE

EAST INDIES



Tom Spencer examines the RAAF's Second World War Mosquito photo reconnaissance operations over the Dutch East Indies.

RIGHT
Mosquito PR.XVI A52-601 flew its first sorties over the islands of Timor and Flores in late March 1945.
(QUEENSLAND TIMES)

BELOW
A solid-nosed Mosquito PR.40 in its shelter at Coomalie to protect it from the blistering sun of northern Australia.
(F F SMITH)

In mid-1944 the first of six Mosquito PR.40s, modified from the Australian-built FB.40 variant, was delivered to No.1 Photographic Reconnaissance Unit (PRU) at Coomalie Creek in the Northern Territory. They were to supplement the unit's miscellany of CAC Wirraways and Lockheed Lightning F-4s, the latter on loan from the US Army Air Force.

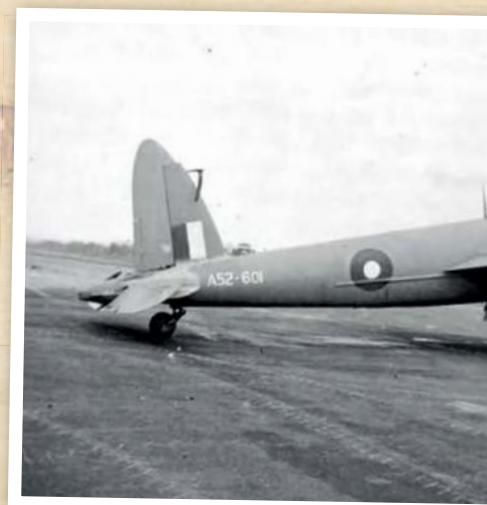
The 'Mossie' was an ideal aircraft to cover the Japanese-held islands of the Dutch East Indies, as it had the speed and range to do the job. Mosquito FB.40 A52-26 served as the prototype for the 'solid-nosed' PR variant, the first two of which (A52-2 and A52-4)

arrived at Coomalie Creek in May and August.

They soon began operations, supporting the capture of Noemfoor Island in Dutch New Guinea during late August and A52-2 flying nine sorties. But A52-4 did not survive long as on 6 September it force-landed on a beach west of Manokwari in Dutch New Guinea where, to prevent it falling into enemy hands, the crew set fire to it.

OPERATIONS BEGIN

On 10 September, 1 PRU re-formed as 87 Squadron Royal Australian Air Force under Sqn Ldr Alfred Hermes. It had the same tasks, but the gradual





“THE UNIT MADE AN IMPORTANT DISCOVERY ON 7 NOVEMBER WHEN SQN LDR HERMES LOCATED A DOUBLE RUNWAY AIRFIELD AT DENPALAR ON SOUTHERN BALI WHICH HAD SEVERAL BOMBERS AND FIGHTERS IN PROTECTIVE REVETMENTS”



At least one reconnaissance sortie was tasked each day and so the pattern was set for several months: sorties to photograph Ambeia and Koe pang airfields were carried out on 14 October, and post-attack reces on the port area of Macassar on 1 November, for example. Most missions were of about six hours' duration.

As well as reporting general shipping and barge activity, the focus was on locating and identifying Japanese airfields – all potential staging bases for 'kamikaze' attacks on the landings in the Philippines. The squadron made an important discovery on 7 November when Sqn

Ldr Hermes located a double runway airfield at Denpalar on southern Bali which held several bombers and fighters in protective revetments.

A change of area – and a considerable challenge – came in late November when, on the 24th, two aircraft flown by Sqn Ldrs Alf Hermes (A52-6) and Kym Bonython (A52-7) conducted reces of eastern Java, having forward-mounted to Broome in Western Australia.

Each sortie was eight hours long and the CO repeated it the next day, covering the Kali Konto dam and shipping off Pasoerdean. The crew also encountered some inaccurate, ▶

ABOVE
Mosquito A52-4, one of six modified with a solid nose to become a PR.41, operated until the end of the war.
(F F SMITH)

BELOW
PR.XVI A52-609 Mosquito powers down the runway at Labuan in May 1945.
(F F SMITH)

increase in Mosquito numbers enabled recce coverage of more distant targets such as Koe pang on the island of Timor, and Macassar in the Celebes (now Sulawesi).

The Celebes sorties were in support of the US reoccupation of the Philippines and, on 2 October, Flt Lt Hugh Bonython and Fg Off Roget covered the southeast of the island in Mosquito A52-2. The following day the CO reced Macassar and Bima and spotted a convoy escorted by two destroyers heading north.

Then, on the 4th, Flt Lt Proctor and Fg Off Garrett flew a mapping sortie at 17,000ft (5,182m) over the Cape Boetoeng area in A52-6. The next day Fg Off Phillips conducted a recce of Salajar Island where inaccurate anti-aircraft fire was encountered.





RIGHT
The Japanese light cruiser *Isuzu*, which was shadowed by 87 Squadron's Mosquitos in early April and eventually sunk by US Navy submarines. (USN)

BELOW
Mosquito PR.XVI A52-604 - delivered to 87 Squadron at Coomalie on 22 May 1945 - flew a post-strike recce on an airfield at Cape Chater on Timor on 3 June. (F F SMITH)

but heavy enemy anti-aircraft fire from Malang airfield.

Two days later Flt Lt Arthur Spurgin, a night-fighter ace from the North Africa theatre, flew his first operation since joining the squadron, covering Boeloedoang, and landing at Truscott on return.

Flt Lt Spurgin in A52-2, with Sqn Ldr Kym Bonython in A52-26, flew another lengthy recce of eastern Java from Broome on 17 December. These, the only two aircraft available, encountered severe weather during the sortie.

A few days later, command of 87 Squadron passed to Sqn Ldr H A Gamble - the unit operating with the five surviving Mosquito PR.40s, A52-2, 6, 7, 9 and 26.

CRUISER SHADOWED

New Year's Day 1945 opened with Sqn Ldr Ken Gray flying through bad weather to the south coast of Timor

to reconnoitre the mouth of the Dilor River in A42-9. The objective was achieved although during the return flight an oil leak meant that the starboard Rolls-Royce Merlin engine had to be shut down.

Five days later Flt Lt Langsford and Plt Off Tozer in A52-26 flew from Truscott to the Celebes, noting the

airstrip there appeared unserviceable with bomb craters. Flt Lt Proctor covered the Tanimbar Islands in A52-2 and had to fly through a weather front over the Arafura Sea. The aircraft then suffered a failure of the 36in (914mm) F-52 lens camera after the first run.

PR ops continued thereafter, often with two tasks a day, though poor weather sometimes caused postponement. On 28 February the squadron lost another of its precious Mosquitos when A52-7 ditched off Sunday Island at the entrance to King Sound, Western Australia, after a starboard engine failure. Thankfully Sqn Ldr Gray and Fg Off Bill Sudlow were rescued. Squadron strength reduced further a few days later when A52-26 crashed on landing at Coomalie Creek.

The losses were partially mitigated when, on 4 March, the first of the definitive recce variant of the Mosquito, the PR.XVI, arrived.





The aircraft, A52-600, flew its first operational recon sortie – of 5hrs 30mins – to Timor and back in the hands of Flt Lt Kearney and Plt Off Alan Hardwicke on the 24th, followed soon after by Flt Lt Neil Johnson's 5hr 3min recon trip to southeast Flores in PR.XVI A52-601.

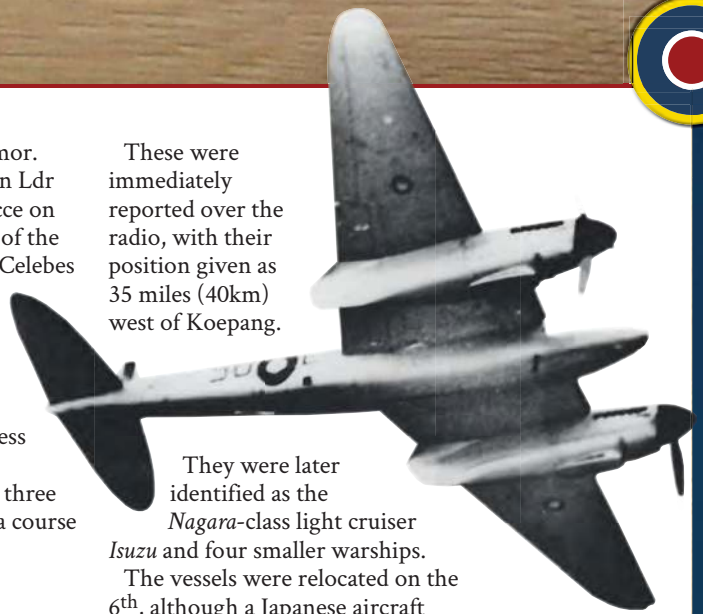
Three days later Flt Lt Timbury covered the southern Celebes in PR.40 A52-6, spotting shipping in Macassar harbour and three possible aircraft on Boroboro airstrip. The same day Fg Off Davis flew to Timor and Flores in PR.XVI A52-601 and Flt Lt Kearney

in A52-605 recon areas of Timor.

In something of a change, Sqn Ldr Bonythorn flew a low-level recon on 4 April, taking oblique images of the Lasolo Bay area of the eastern Celebes in A52-6.

The next day Flt Lt Langsford in A52-602 and Flt Lt Gil Lundberg in A52-605 searched for a suspected convoy off Koepang. In cloudless conditions they found a naval force comprising a cruiser and three escorts, possibly PT boats, on a course of 250°, steaming at 20 knots.

These were immediately reported over the radio, with their position given as 35 miles (40km) west of Koepang.



They were later identified as the *Nagara*-class light cruiser *Isuzu* and four smaller warships.

The vessels were relocated on the 6th, although a Japanese aircraft spotted one of the shadowing Mosquitos. The Allied crew, on observing the enemy approaching, simply increased their speed, leaving their foe far behind.

Based on 87's sighting reports, *Isuzu* was then attacked north of Sumbawa by ten B-25 Mitchells of 18 (Netherlands East Indies) Squadron and damaged by near misses off her starboard bow – before being attacked again near Flores by RAAF B-24 Liberators from 21 and 24 Squadrons and hit in the bow.

Flt Lt Phillips in Mosquito A52-9 continued the shadowing on 7 April when the Japanese force was found in the Flores Sea, weaving 60 miles northwest of Bima. The cruiser was duly photographed but a pair of Japanese *Oscar* fighters then attempted to intercept the Mosquito. They climbed to within 2,000ft but couldn't keep up as Phillips powered away from trouble. ▶

“THE ALLIED CREW, ON OBSERVING THE ENEMY APPROACHING, SIMPLY INCREASED THEIR SPEED, LEAVING THEIR FOE FAR BEHIND”



ABOVE
One of the Mosquito PR.40s was A52-6. Eventually coded 'SUL', it was delivered shortly after 87 Squadron formed in September 1944. (VIA N MACKENZIE)

LEFT
The first Mosquito PR.XVI delivered to 87 Sqn, A52-600. It flew 21 missions over Japanese-occupied territory. (VIA N MACKENZIE)

BELOW
Air and ground crew of 87 Squadron at Coomalie at the end of the war. (RAAF)





Soon afterwards, probably based on 87 Squadron's sightings, the submarine USS *Gabilan* torpedoed the *Isuzu*, striking portside below the bridge, a blow that caused major flooding. Her speed fell away and she went down after being hit by two torpedoes fired by another submarine, the USS *Charr*.

LONGEST SORTIE

After that exciting interlude, 87 Squadron's crews returned to more routine reconnaissance work, but conducted another unusual task on 29 May when Sqn Ldr Bonython flew from Broome and reced central Java, spotting seven aircraft on the strip at Djokjakarta. Two scrambled to give chase, but the Mosquito left the area unmolested and returned safely.

On 2 June, Sqn Ldr Gamble in PR.XVI A52-604 flew a post-strike recce on Cape Chater airstrip on the northeast coast of Timor after an air attack. The next day, Flt Lt Spencer Bell and W/O Ralph Strange were over Java when they were intercepted by a twin-engined enemy aircraft they thought might have been a Yokosuka P1Y *Frances*.

The squadron's strength fell later in the month when a PR.XVI crashed on take-off at Coomalie, and after an operational sortie on the 24th another had to force-land on Keeling Island in bad weather. Later that day Flt Lt Lundsberg conducted a recce of the airstrips on the Kai Islands in the Banda Sea, including low-level runs.

Fg Off Ken Boss-Walker and Fg

RARE SURVIVOR

A former 87 Squadron aircraft – and the world's only surviving de Havilland Mosquito PR.XVI – A52-600 is undergoing a lengthy and meticulous restoration at the Royal Australian Air Force Museum at Point Cook, Victoria. Built as NS631 it was shipped to Australia and issued to 87 Squadron in March 1945, and later coded 'SU-A'. It flew 21 operational photo-reconnaissance missions over the islands of the Netherlands East Indies (now Indonesia) until the Japanese surrender.

It later took part in the aerial mapping of Australia before being grounded and sold in 1954. In 1987, A52-600 was acquired by the museum to begin the lengthy restoration.



Mosquito PR.XVI A52-600 under restoration at the RAAF Museum, Point Cook, in August 2018. (VIA AUTHOR)

Off Jeff Love, flying PR.40 A52-2 on 26 June, reced the Javanese port of Surabaya but had to return on one engine after a serious mechanical fault developed.

On 24 July, 87 Squadron flew its longest reconnaissance sortie of the conflict when Flt Lt Kearney and Fg Off Hardwicke took off from Broome in A52-9 for Surabaya and central Java. The round-trip covered some 2,300 miles (3,700km) and took 8hrs 50mins – a tremendously long sortie in the days before air-to-air refuelling.

At the end of the month Sqn Ldr Lloyd Law assumed command of the squadron, which then suffered a tragic loss on 3 August when Mosquito PR.XVI A52-605 crashed at Coomalie Creek. Sqn Ldr Fred Gillespie and Fg Off Frank Haymes were both severely injured and the former succumbed to his wounds two days later.

The unit's original Mosquito XVI, A52-600, flew its last wartime sortie over Kuching, Borneo, on 11 August having flown 21 missions over the Japanese-held Netherlands East Indies and Borneo.

Two days later Flt Lt 'Red' Armour and Plt Off Doug Bateloe took off in PR.XVI A52-610 and completed 87 Squadron's last successful mission when they reced Timor during a five-hour sortie. And, on 15 August, PR.XVI A52-609 took off on the last RAAF operational mission to be flown from an Australian mainland base, but Flt Lt Bill Maitland and Fg Off Bill Reedy were recalled after an hour when word of the Japanese surrender was received.

The Mosquitos then conducted surveys of Japanese-held areas to locate PoW camps and monitor Japanese forces.

During the war, members of the squadron were awarded an MBE and four DFCs, and 87 Squadron was also later given six Battle Honours. These also reflected the earlier service of No.1 PRU: Pacific 1942-1945, Darwin 1942-1944, Philippines 1944, Dutch New Guinea 1945, Borneo 1945 and Morotai 1945. Ⓞ

BELOW
Sqn Ldr Lloyd Law (in bush hat) and his crews at Coomalie at the end of the war. In the third row, third from left, is Flt Lt 'Red' Armour, who flew 456 squadron's last mission. (RAAF)



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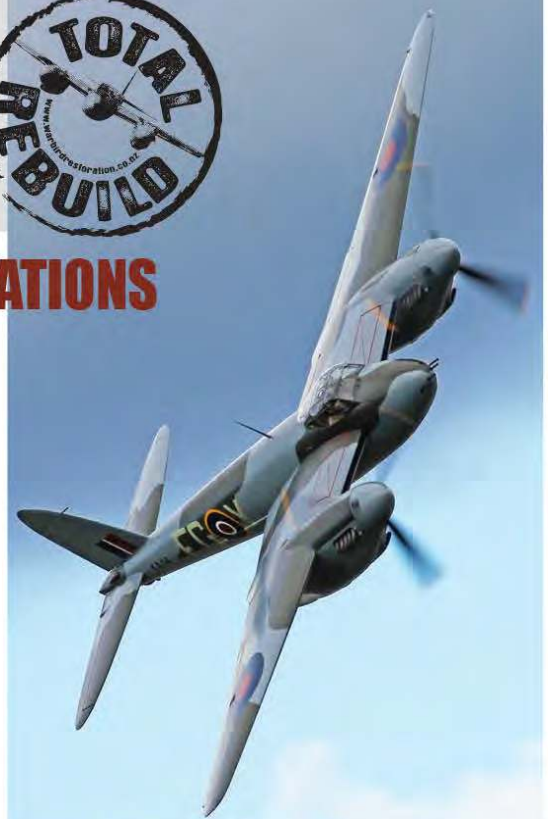
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THE LAST RAID

Mosquitos from 608 Squadron played a key role in attacking German ports during the final months of the Second World War in Europe. They also have the distinction of dropping the last bombs on Germany, as **Andrew Thomas** describes.



RIGHT
Plt Off Turner (left) and Flt Sgt Bryant before their final raid of the war against Kiel, during which they flew Mosquito XVI PF483/6TV. (P BROOKS VIA B BLANCHE)



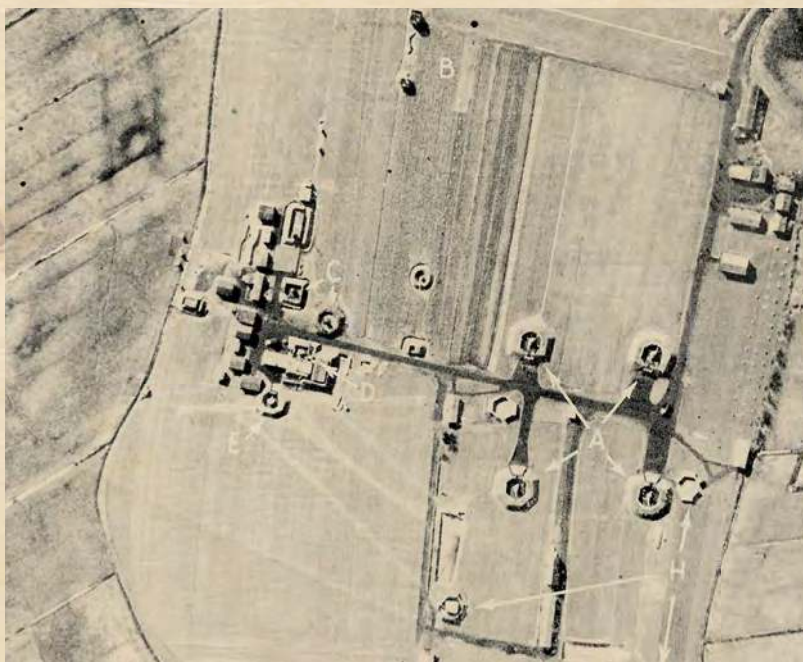
Hamburg was the target for three of 608's aircraft, each making successful attacks on the night of the 29th. However, among the enemy night fighters encountered was a jet, clearly one of the new Messerschmitt Me 262s. The squadron's Mosquitos returned to Hamburg just over a week later when it contributed to a diversionary nuisance raid by 32 LNSF Mosquitos. Then, on 15 September, when Kiel was attacked by the Main Force, nine Mosquitos flew a spoof raid on the port of Lübeck. The unit returned to the Hamburg area on the night of 30 September ▶

“HOWEVER, AMONG THE ENEMY NIGHT FIGHTERS ENCOUNTERED WAS A JET, CLEARLY ONE OF THE NEW MESSERSCHMITT ME 262S”

RIGHT
Heavy anti-aircraft guns defending the port of Bremen. (ALL AUTHOR'S COLLECTION UNLESS NOTED)

Based at Downham Market, Norfolk, 608 Squadron formed part of the Light (later Fast) Night Striking Force of 8 (PFF) Group of Bomber Command that was largely used for harassing raids on Germany. Under Wg Cdr Walter Scott, the LNSF began operations with Canadian-built Mosquito XXs in early August 1944, flying 78 sorties against various German cities during the month. Ports such as Hamburg, Emden and Kiel were to feature regularly as targets and 608 visited Kiel for the first time on the night of 13 August when two aircraft preceded a heavy bomber attack dropping 'window' to confuse the defences. ('Window' was bundles of aluminium strips that dispersed over a wide area after release from an aircraft and saturated enemy radar. The modern day equivalent is known as chaff.) The same night KB273/6T-E flown by Plt Off Wilkinson and Flt Sgt Dale successfully struck Bremen with 4,500lb (2,040kg) of bombs, dropping from 24,000ft, matched by Flt Sgt McLean and Sgt Tansley in KB197/6T-O.

OVERLEAF
The final Bomber Command raid of the war was against the port of Kiel. (RAF LEEMING RECORDS)







RIGHT

The ground crew of 'B' Flight pose in front of one of 608 Sqn's Mosquitos at Downham Market.

(P BROOKS VIA B BLANCHE)



“THE LAST BOMBS DROPPED ON A GERMAN CITY BY BOMBER COMMAND WERE PROBABLY THOSE RELEASED BY THE CO WG CDR K GRAY AND HIS NORWEGIAN NAVIGATOR CAPT HALFDAN MEHRE FROM MOSQUITO XVI PF510”

RIGHT
The battered hulk of the cruiser Admiral Hipper, she was heavily damaged in Kiel during the last raid of the war in Europe.

when Plt Off Baker in KB346/6T-P, Flt Lt Lilley (KB269/6T-F), Flt Lt Richard Hardy (KB348/6T-M), Flt Lt Nevill (KB261/6T-D), Flt Lt Cock (KB273/6T-K) Flt Lt James Bartholomew (KB360/6T-H), Flt Lt MacDermott (KB347/6T-R) and Flt Lt Charles Lockyer (KB350/6T-B) all made successful attacks from 21,000ft (6,400m) at 8.15pm, noting the target indicators (TIs) were well concentrated and positioned just north of the River Elbe. Although cloud conditions made observation of results difficult, Plt Off Baker saw a large explosion among the TIs with the glow lasting up to ten seconds, followed by another large blast. Flt Lt Lockyer also witnessed his bombs detonate with flashes lighting up the streets, while fires were also noted.

NUISANCE RAIDS

During an attack by 46 LNSF aircraft against the naval base at Wilhelmshaven on 9 October, 608 suffered its first loss against a German port: on return to Downham Market XX KB261/6T-D crashed, killing Flt Lt Reginald Gardner and Fg Off Oswald Sweetman. The unit returned to hit Hamburg on 12 October and although poor weather hampered operations in November there were 'maximum effort' raids against Emden and Lübeck. Late in the month Wg Cdr Cliff Alabaster became CO and, with Flt Lt Robson in KB413/6T-V, led eight aircraft in an attack on the inland port of Duisburg on the 29th. All bombed on the Oboe leader's call



at just after 1pm, dropping 32,500lb bombs from 26,000ft. (Oboe was an aerial blind bombing system fitted to formation leading aircraft, including Mosquitos.) Cloud over the target prevented any results being seen. They returned the following day to attack the Duisburg area, bombing on sky markers through the clouds. As they left, a column of thick black smoke rising to 10,000ft was seen. That night 608 provided aircraft led by Flt Lt McDermott in KB441/6T-Q to a diversionary raid by 53 Mosquitos on Hamburg, bombing just after 8.30pm. The CO noted moderate, accurate, heavy flak was encountered but no fighters were seen. The attack was repeated on 8 December with 608 providing eight 'Mossies', though KB467/6T-K was hit by flak in the port engine and crash-landed near Brussels, earning Flt Lt Hank Henderson an immediate DFC for the exploit.

'Siren' sorties by the LNSF, intended to keep the German air raid system active to alert the populace and slow down production, began just before Christmas and Bremen was one target visited that first night. Berlin had become the priority but the Mosquito routes skirted the ports of Bremen and Hamburg, creating alerts there. Such raids continued into 1945 with, for example, Ludwigshafen, an industrial port city on the River Rhine, being one of eight targets on the night of 1 February. This heralded 608 Squadron's busiest month with 246 individual sorties flown including an attack on Bremen for which the (now) FNSF Mosquitos dropped 'window' to cover their approach.

This large port was hit again on 2 March, followed by another sortie on the night of the 8-9th, with a large raid by 312 aircraft intended to destroy U-boats in the Hamburg shipyards, though cloud cover limited the



LEFT
The crew stand in front of Mosquito XVI PF483/6T-V at Downham Market before the final raid on 2 May 1945. (P BROOKS VIA B BLANCHE)

damage achieved. No.608 provided three Mosquitos led by KB417/6T-D and all dropped 'window' before unloading their cargoes of 500lb bombs in the early stages of the attack. They noted the marking as concentrated but that the bombing appeared scattered and a very large reddish explosion was seen. There was no night fighter activity though heavy flak was observed. Four aircraft led by Flt Lt Henry Dobbs in KB438/6T-F attacked Bremen on the 20th from 22,000ft. Crews saw that the target area was well illuminated by flares and the River Weser was easily visible.

The squadron then began to partially re-equip with Mosquito XVIs and used some in its next attack on Hamburg on the night of 30 March. Kiel was the target for four aircraft on the night of 9 April, they dropped 'window' to confuse the defences before orbiting and then delivering their loads of 500-pounders into the battered port city. Two more Mosquitos, KB405/6T-G flown by Fg Off Pickard, and Flt Lt Bartholomew in KB321/6T-K flew a diversionary raid on Hamburg, dropping bombs and TIs on as a successful 'spoof'. These attacks were its last Mosquito XX sorties. Kiel then became a focus as it was assessed the port was being used for evacuation to a potential Nazi bastion in Norway; it was attacked five times during the month.

THE LAST RITES

As British ground forces rushed towards the Baltic, the north German ports continued to be attacked with 608 contributing eight to a large Mosquito raid on Hamburg on the night of 13 April, all of which dropped their single 4,000lb 'Cookies'. These were seen to explode adjacent

to the glow of the target indicators. Over Kiel on the 22nd, the squadron suffered its only Mosquito XVI loss when RV359/6T-X went down, with 25-year-old Sqn Ldr Eric Few and Glaswegian Plt Off Sam Campbell dying in the crash. A few days later a dozen aircraft led by Sqn Ldr Lawrence McArdle in RV358/6T-C bombed Eggebek airfield near Flensburg dropping their 4,000lb HC bombs at 11.30pm with no opposition seen. Bomber Command operations then ceased and most crews thought that it was all over.

However, it was feared that the Germans were assembling ships at Kiel to transport troops to Norway to continue the war. A raid 8 Group Mosquitos with 100 Group jamming support was therefore planned. On the evening of 2 May, 126 Mosquitos in attacked the port in two waves, separated by an hour. The target area was almost completely covered

in cloud so H2S radar and Oboe navigation aids were used to accurately bomb through the overcast below. The first munitions fell at 11.30pm from 19,000ft and the glow of large fires was observed. The second wave then arrived and flying RV363/6T-M Fg Off McFarland and Sgt Woodman noted the markers at 12.19am. The drop was well concentrated around them and a fire was burning intensely. The last bombs dropped on a German city by Bomber Command were probably those released by the CO, Wg Cdr K Gray and his Norwegian navigator Capt Halfdan Mehre, from Mosquito XVI PF510/6T-D. Mehre's log noted the time of the drop as 12.34am on 3 May. In the harbour the heavy cruiser *Admiral Hipper* was severely damaged and her crew scuttled the battered ship at the moorings. Wg Cdr Gray landed at Downham Market at 2.23am, bringing the long, bloody, bomber offensive against Germany to an end. Ⓞ

BELOW
A FNSF Mosquito XVI taxis out for a raid on Germany on 21 March 1945.

