

References concerning 458 Squadron

from book by *John Herington.*

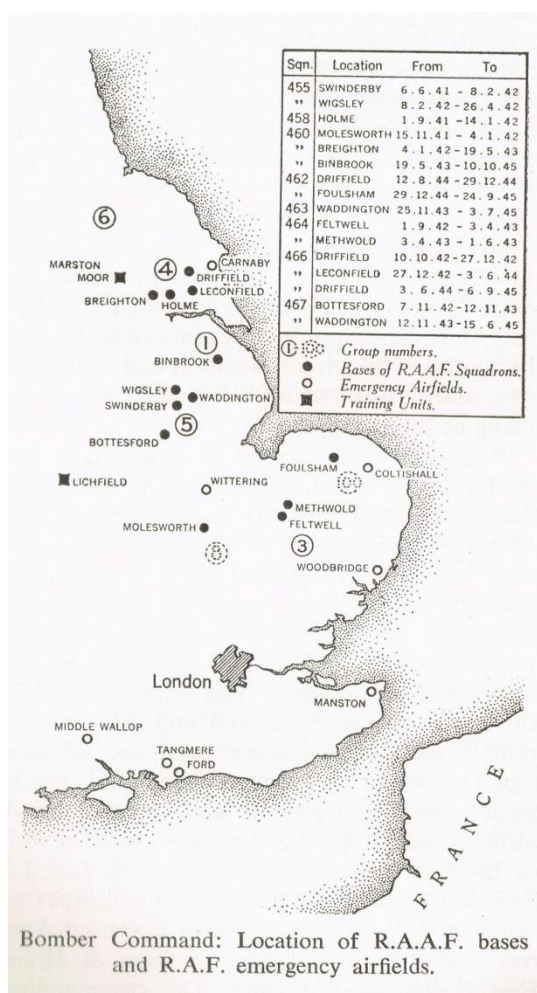
AIR WAR AGAINST GERMANY & ITALY. 1939-1943.

Page 116.

"This was 458, which began to form in No 1 Group Bomber Command on the 25th August equipped with Wellington aircraft and for which a satisfactory number of predominately Australian crews were quickly available.

Page 179.

A chart of forming squadrons showing 458 listed at Holme 1.9.41-14.1.42.



Page 180/181.

Meanwhile on the 1st of September a second Australian unit No 458 Squadron R.A.A.F had begun to form at Holme-on-Spalding Moor in the east riding of Yorkshire.

The commanding officer Wing Commander Mulholland and one of his flight commanders, Squadron Leader Johnston were Australians and a number of R.A.A.F aircrew members were immediately posted in, though R.A.F personal predominated for some time.

Notation at the bottom of the page.

W Cdr N.G.Mulholland, DFC 34098 R.A.F 48 & 115 Sqdns R.A.F comd 458 Sqn 1941-1942.

Commercial pilot; of Brisbane; b Sydney 18 June 1908.Killed in action 16 Feb 1942.

W Cdr L.L. Johnston DSO 39463.R.A.F, 207 Sqn R.A.F; comd 458 Sqn 1942-1943,328 Wing R.A.F 1943-1944, 340 Wing R.A.F 1944-45. Regular air force offr; of Winton, Qld. B Ingham Qld, 18 Jun 1914.

The experience of this unit is in sharp contrast to that of 455 because it suffered practically no delays or handicaps.

It was formed in NO 1 Group which was equipped with Wellington aircraft, and because this type had been given priority above the other mediums there was no difficulty in procuring either aircraft or crews.

Within 6 weeks it was able to conduct its first operation with 10 aircraft as against the single Hampden which No. 455 had sent out after 3 months; it operates regularly for the remainder of the year.

It had in fact so strong in numbers that by 24th November it was possible to transfer 4 officers and 117 airmen to the third formation, No 460 Squadron R.A.A.F.

This squadron had begun to form nine days earlier at Molesworth in Huntingdonshire, the R.A.F again one of its most experienced pilots, Wing Commander Hubbard to command.

This Wellington Squadron was to form part of a new (No.8) bomber group as part of the expansion, but plans were changed because as seen above conservation not expansion had become necessary and both No.8 Group and 460 Squadron remained virtually in abeyance. Finally, on 4th January 1942, the Australians moved to Brighton, also in East Riding, to form part of No.1 Group.

The result of this unavoidable delay was that the squadron was prevented from commencing operations before the spring of 1942.

Any assessment of the Australian contribution to Bomber Command effort at this period is thus hindered by the fact that while R.A.A.F airmen in growing numbers, approximately sufficient to man 2 squadrons, were dispersed as individuals on a large number of Whitley, Wellington and Hampden squadrons, two titular R.A.A.F bomber squadrons had begun to operate with at first only a small proportion of Australian crews.

As the nature of the routine strategic-bomber task, the dangers and the difficulties to be faced, and the incidents encountered were the same for all men engaged, the operations of Nos. 455 and 458 may fairly be taken to illustrate Australian participation during this transitional era.

In the campaign against German transport centres and the morale of the two new R.A.A.F Squadrons (Nos 455 and 458) took part in raids during the autumn and winter of 1941 (see table No.1).

Their sorties were relatively few in number for only the most experienced crews were sent to inland targets, and throughout this period the squadrons were staffed with "freshman "crews.

Again weeks elapsed before another inland target was attempted by the Australians when on the 7th-8th November four Hampdens attacked Cologne and four Wellingtons of 458 were sent to Mannerheim.

At Cologne the defences were very active and 2 R.A.A.F Hampdens failed to return and another, unable to identify the target, dropped its bombs in the centre of anti-aircraft fire.

Heavy cloud obscured Mannerheim and only 1 Wellington crew actually observed results, one failing to attack and the other two aiming at fires presumed to be in the town area.

Chart listing Early R.A.A.F targets mention details of raid and 458 participation.

TABLE NO. 1

EARLY R.A.A.F. TARGETS

	Target	Total Force		RAAF Force			Tons of Bombs	Total aircraft lost	RAAF aircraft lost
		Dis-patched	Attack-ing	Sqn No.	Disp	Atkg			
1941-42									
Aug 29-30	Frankfurt-on-Main	143	101	455	1	1	91	2	—
Sep 2-3	Berlin	50	33	455	1	1	40	2	—
Sep 12-13	Frankfurt-on-Main	116	111	455	1	1	135	2	—
Oct 12-13	Huls	90	23	455	4	3	26	2	—
Oct 13-14	Cologne	39	29	455	2	1	36	4	—
Nov 7-8	Cologne	105	52	455	4	4	58	2	2
Nov 7-8	Mannheim	55	43	458	4	3	44	7	—
Nov 8-9	Essen	54	35	455	2	1	49	6	—
Dec 7-8	Aachen	132	54	458	7	5	54	—	—
Dec 11-12	Cologne	60	43	458	4	4	58	1	—
Dec 27-28	Dusseldorf	132	96	455 458	7 9	7 7	126	7	— —
Dec 28-29	Huls	81	61	455	7	5	60	4	—
Jan 22-23	Munster	47	35	455	2	2	65	1	—
Jan 26-27	Hanover	71	34	455	5	4	38	—	—
Jan 28-29	Munster	84	39	455	9	8	38	5	—
Feb 11-12	Mannheim	49	38	455	3	3	67	1	—

Page 185.

The next series of raids did not come until December, No 458 making two sorties early in that month.

Seven Wellington crews flew to Aachen on the 7th-8th December, but one failed to locate the city and another was forced to jettison its bombs twenty miles west of the target when attacked by a night fighter.

On 11th-12th December all four Wellingtons dispatched attacked anti-aircraft positions at the estimated time of their arrival over Cologne.

Much better results were achieved at Dusseldorf on 27th-28th December when seven Hampdens and nine Wellingtons were sent out.

Two Wellingtons did not attack, one being damaged before reaching Dusseldorf, but the others identified the aiming point and reported bomb bursts close to it.

458 was not involved in any further raids and indeed at the end of January withdrawn from Bomber Command duties in preparation for transfer to the Middle East.

Only the raids in which Nos 455 and 458 actually took part are listed in Table 2 although there were many other of the same type.

		Total Force		RAAF Force			Tons of Bombs	Total aircraft lost	RAAF aircraft lost
	Target	Dis-patched	Attack-ing	Sqn No.	Disp	Atkg			
1941-42									
Sep 15-16	Hamburg	50	34	455	3	3	42	2	1
Sep 20-21	Bremen	2	2	458	2	2	2	—	—
Sep 29-30	Hamburg	95	72	455	1	1	85	2	—
Sep 30-Oct 1	Cherbourg	41	39	455	1	1	44	—	—
Oct 10-11	Dunkirk	23	19	455	1	1	16	1	—
Oct 20-21	Emden	33	31	458	2	2	46	1	—
Oct 20-21	Bremen	154	92	455	3	3	140	4	—
Oct 20-21	Antwerp	35	9	458	7	5	12	3	1
Oct 20-21	Rotterdam	1	1	458	1	1	1	—	—
Oct 22-23	Le Havre	22	20	458	8	8	32	1	—
Oct 23-24	Kiel	71	64	455	4	3	64	1	—
Oct 26-27	Hamburg	115	78	455	3	2	103	5	—
Oct 26-27	Cherbourg	17	9	455	2	2	7	—	—
Oct 28-29	Cherbourg	24	14	458	4	4	22	—	—
Oct 29-30	Brest	16	14	458	5	5	21	—	—
Oct 29-30	Schipol	45	12	455	4	2	15	—	—
Oct 31- Nov 1	Hamburg	123	76	455	2	2	93	4	—
Oct 31- Nov 1	Dunkirk	28	18	458	2	2	28	1	—
Nov 5-6	Cherbourg	27	21	455	1	1	38	2	—
Nov 6-7	Terschelling	1	1	455	1	1	8	—	—
Nov 7-8	Boulogne	22	18	458	1	1	28	—	—
Nov 7-8	Dunkirk	1	1	458	1	1	1	—	—
Nov 8-9	Dunkirk	18	15	455	2	2	21	1	—

TABLE No. 2—continued

R.A.A.F. TARGETS IN THE SEA WAR

	Target	Total Force		RAAF Force			Tons of Bombs	Total aircraft lost	RAAF aircraft lost
		Dis-patched	Attack-ing	Sqn No.	Disp	Atkg			
Nov 15-16	Emden	49	23	458	6	5	25	1	1
Nov 30- Dec 1	Hamburg	129	84	455	5	4	138	13	2
Dec 7-8	Boulogne	19	14	455	4	1	14	—	—
Dec 7-8	Calais	24	23	458	3	2	33	—	—
Dec 11-12	Le Havre	37	9	455	7	4	16	1	—
Dec 15-16	Ostend	25	16	455	7	7	21	1	—
Dec 16-17	Ostend	32	23	458	3	2	37	1	—
Dec 17-18	Le Havre	14	1	455	2	—	2	—	—
Dec 27-28	Boulogne	34	25	455 458	4 2	4 2	35	—	—
Dec 27-28	Ostend	2	2	455	1	1	3	—	—
Jan 5-6	Brest	154	140	458	5	3	205	—	—
Jan 6-7	Warships								
Jan 6-7	Emden	3	3	455	3	3	2.5	—	—
Jan 7-8	Brest	68	61	458	4	4	90	—	—
Jan 8-9	Brest	151	116	455	7	6	186	1	—
Jan 8-9	Cherbourg	31	11	455 458	2 4	2 4	16	1	— 1
Jan 10-11	Wilhelmshaven	124	91	455	9	8	116	6	—
Jan 10-11	Emden	29	23	455	3	3	26	—	—
Jan 14-15	Hamburg	95	48	455	4	3	73	5	—
Jan 15-16	Hamburg	96	52	455	4	4	74	3	—
Jan 17-18	Emden	28	14	455	2	2	23	1	—
Jan 21-22	Emden	44	16	455	4	3	50	4	2

Jan-Feb

BREAKOUT FROM BREST

189

TABLE No. 2—continued

R.A.A.F. TARGETS IN THE SEA WAR

	Target	Total Force		RAAF Force			Tons of Bombs	Total aircraft lost	RAAF aircraft lost
		Dis-patched	Attack-ing	Sqn No.	Disp	Atkg			
Jan 28-29	Boulogne	48	34	458	2	2	52	—	—
Jan 31- Feb 1	St Nazaire	31	13	455	2	1	17	—	—
Feb 12	<i>Scharnhorst</i> and <i>Gneisenau</i>	244	39	455	9	6	52	15	1
Feb 27-28	Kiel	68	47	455	8	6	75	—	—

In January 1942 No. 458 R.A.A.F had been withdrawn from Bomber Command to transfer to the Middle East.

The ground staff members, of whom approximately 50% were Australians, went by sea and 32 Wellingtons were to be ferried out in two groups of sixteen, each crew making two trips.

The commanding officer, Wing Commander Mulholland was shot down near Malta on the initial flight, and then considerable delay occurred in arrangements to return air crews to England for the second ferrying flight.

Thus when the maintenance and administrative personal arrived at Suez on the 26th May aboard Mataroa and Mendoza they found no aircrews waiting them and the Wellingtons already delivered had been issued to hard-pressed squadrons.

An unexpected opportunity arose for these stranded ground crews.

Some of who were lent on 2nd June to service Liberators of the Halverston Detachment at Lydda on 29th June.

Other crews serviced the aircraft of Nos. 159, 147, and 108 Squadrons R.A.F and some ninety men under Squadron Leader Saville remained at Fayid as a refuelling and re-arming party.

Early in July, due to withdrawal of heavy bombers to Palestine, the ground detachments of No.458 were at Fayid, St Jean (No. 159 Squadron) and Lydda.

The aircrews arriving in Egypt on their second flight were posted as urgent replacements to Nos. 104, 108 and 148 Squadrons at Kabrit and Nos. 37 and 70 at Abu Sueir.

Notation at bottom of page 250.

W Cdr D.T. Saville, DSO DFC 74738 R.A.F. 12 Sqn R.A.F, 458 Sqn, 104Sqn, comd 218 Sqn R.A.F 1943. Mechanical engineer, of Sydney; b; Portland NSW, 22 Dec 1903, Killed in action 25 July 1943.

Although though formed around the nucleus of one flight of No.458 during November 1941, this Wellington could not operate immediately, as the airfield projected for its use had no serviceable winter runways.

In January 1942, when it was transferred from No. 8 Group to No.1 Group, and became established at Brighton, an out-station attached to Holme-on-Spalding-Moor; there were only thirty-eight Australians amongst the aircrews.

It was expected that, with the transfer of No. 458 to the Middle East, a large number of the men trained on Wellingtons would be available in England for N0.460, but this did not happen.

In April there were only 38 Australian aircrew members and the number fluctuated in subsequent months, falling to 27 during July, although it rose appreciably to 66 (505 of requirements) by September, when the squadron was withdrawn for re-arming with four engine bombers.

Nor were the ground crews of No. 458 still servicing the American Liberators, for Wing Commander Johnston's plea that the squadron be re-formed as a fighting unit had at last prevailed, and it was busy re-forming at Shallufa, not for bombing but for torpedo strike duties with N0, 201 Group.

In September the ground crews of No.454 were similarly withdrawn from R.A.F Liberator units, but as all these men were British , their absence represented a purely nominal decline in Australian effort. No. 454, originally intended as a bomber-transport squadron was now to train on Blenheim aircraft under Wing Commander I.E.Campbell, formerly of No. 459.

They were to form part of "Force D" equipped with light bombers and stationed in Iraq to combat any German threat to Transcaucasia.

Nor was the formation of N0. 462 Squadron R.A.A.F. at Fayid on the 6th September any real addition to Australian strength.

This was merely a fusion of crews and aircraft of Nos. 10 and 76 Squadrons of Bomber Command which had been temporarily been loaned to Middle East Command.

All of its ground compliment and all it air crew except one were British and it was less Australian in character than any other squadron in No. 205 Group.

The operation of these bomber units gave little opportunity for outstanding achievement, but the regularity of the raids and the high standard of serviceability of these squadrons was in significant contrast to the enemy effort at this time.

The most prominent Australian was Wing Commander Saville, formerly of No. 458, but who now commanded No. 104 Squadron R.A.F.

With No. 148 at this time was a particularity determined and skilful party of Australians.

Flying Officers Moore, Clarke, MacKellar and Wharton and Sergeant Stewart were all pilots who attacked Tobruk many times and repeatedly caused fires in the docks area.

Notation at the bottom of page 360.

Sqn Ldr Moore. DFC, 400595. 458 Sqn 1446 Flight R.A.F. 148 Sqn RAF., 460 Sqn, meter tester of East St Kilda, Vic; b. Caulfield Vic. 4 Dec 1916. Killed in action 4 April 1943.

No 458 Squadron was still mainly engaged in training, but Johnson dispatched four crews to Gambut for operations.

This detachment flew 15 sorties during November- 6 anti-submarine patrols,6 anti-shipping strikes in the central Mediterranean and 3 flights to lay mines at Buerat el Hsun.

This effort was increased in the next month to thirty-three sorties mostly against ports in the rear of the Germans positions in Tripolitania.

After 16th of November No 14 Squadron (which had exchanged its Blenheim's for Marauders) also joined 201 Group and began to sweep to Benghazi and beyond searching for enemy shipping.

This Squadron had a particularly high concentration of Australian air-crew; nine of the seventeen captains were Australians and these flew 34 of the 68 patrols sent out before the end of the year.

Attacks were made on enemy coastal ships, mines were laid in Tunis harbour and on 11th December four marauders bombed the airfield and railway station at Gabes in Tunisia.

In both the partnership of air and navy in the supply war and in the partnership of air and army in battle, Australian Squadrons and individuals played a consistent through by no means a dominant part.

On 30th December Australia maintained in this area only 3400 men, almost evenly divided between aircrew and ground staff.

There was still no cohesion on this force.

Page 384.

Of seven R.A.A.F squadrons only three (Nos. 3, 450 and 451) were truly Australian in character: two (Nos. 458 and 459) partly Australian, and two (Nos. 454 and 462) almost entirely non-Australian.

Page 390.

Air Headquarters Malta commanded one Australian squadron (Nos.458) and 25 Individuals.

Page 395.

Meanwhile units of No. 201 group were stringing out along the Libyan coast to give anti-submarine protection to convoys.

From Shallufa and later Amiriya, the base party of No.458 conducted 130 sweeps around or ahead of convoys while they were in the area of responsibility of No.245 wing.

Page 396/397.

The hybrid No. 69 R.A.F was already operating one flight of Wellington torpedo bombers from Malta, and to this unit were attached crews and aircraft of No.38 (R.A.F.) and 458 Squadrons.

On 6th of January three Australian Wellingtons reached Malta and others followed throughout the month until eighteen aircraft and crews were lodgers with No.69.

This unusual situation was rectified on 6th of February when No. 458 became established in its own name, at the same time absorbing the original elements of No. 69 Special Duties Flight.

To make room for this striking force, the two Wellington bomber squadrons were withdrawn from Malta but they continued to bomb Italian ports from Libya.

During January the Australians flew twenty-two armed night patrols over the Tyrrhenian Sea and Sicily Narrows.

Despite bad flying weather and occasional unreliability of radar sets, two effective raids were made.

On 18th-19th Flying Officer Prior damaged one of two merchant ships in a convoy located west of Matretime Island off Sicily.

Five nights later a composite force of six Wellingtons (Nos. 221 and 458) and four Beauforts (No. 39) found two more ships to the north of Sicily.

Wing Commander Johnson torpedoed one vessel amidships and it finally sank after other aircraft also scored hits.

Later in the night a second Beaufort broke the remaining vessel in two.

The Wellingtons flew seventy sorties during February mostly around the northern and western shores of Sicily.

Only twice did the Australians find enemy ships, and their own attacks failed although on 24th-25th February, a following wave of Beaufort's sank one of the two ships reported by the Wellingtons.

This action typifies the determination of Air Headquarters to hunt to the death any vessel within range.

During the evening of 24th February Flying Officer Taylor found two ships escorted by three destroyers between Ustica Island and Palermo.

He remained circling and dropped flares for an initial strike by three Beaufort's which damaged one vessel.

At midnight eight Wellingtons of No.458 left Malta for a second attack.

In bad weather two returned early to base and five failed to find the convoy but Pilot Officer Withecomb attacked with bombs and damaged but not disabled one of the ships.

An hour later came the final and successful Beaufort attack.

Notations at the bottom of page 397 state the following details.

W Cdr R.H.Prior, DFC, 112748 R.A.F 458 Sqdn, 37 Sqdn R.A.F: comd 221 Sqdn R.A.F 1944-45.

Schoolmaster of Eastbourne, Sussex, Eng. Born Bognor Regis, Sussex 8 Sept 1915.

F-Lt J.L.Taylor, 118487 R.A.F. 69 Sqdn, 458 Sqdn. Metropolitan Police Inspector: of Penzance, Cornwall and London. Born Penzance 18 August 1911. Killed in action 28 April, 1943.

F-Lt J.E.Withecomb, 401843: 458 Sqdn. School teacher of Colac, Vic. Born Colac 7 Feb 1916.

F-O K.W.Gale DFC 404241, 458 Sqdn. 221, 139 and 627 Sqdns R.A.F. clerk: of Gladstone Qld:

B: Brisbane 12 Apr 1920. Killed in action 8 June 1944.

During the first two months at Malta No.458 suffered heavy losses.

Four Wellingtons were lost at sea and another four crashed on return to Malta.

On 3rd March it was necessary to transfer sixteen aircrew members of No. 38 Squadron in order to maintain operational strength.

This further increased the cosmopolitan, rather than national, character of No.458 which was forced to absorb whatever torpedo trained men were available.

Another three Wellingtons were lost during sixty-nine patrols conducted in March.

The only visible success was damage to an Italian destroyer and a merchant ship during a joint attack with aircraft of No.221 Squadron and No.812 Squadron (Fleet Air Arm) on the 13th-14th March and to another vessel on 20th-21st.

The true value of this constant pressure by Wellingtons was that it forced the enemy to discontinue large convoys from Naples, and to attempt daylight passage to Tunis from Palermo and Tripoli under cover of heavy naval and air escort.

This not only had a disastrous effect on German offensive air operations but also gave excellent opportunity for attack by American Fortresses and Marauders against both the over-crowded Sicilian ports and the convoys at sea.

Actual sinking's were henceforth mostly achieved by bombers, but was really due to the complementary pressure exerted by several elements of the allied air forces.

A new campaign was begun in earnest against seaborne supplies to Tunisia, which were now mostly run across in small ships using the short route from Sicily.

Although No.458 Squadron flew eighty five night searches during April, their Wellingtons made only one attack-to sink *Fabiano* (2943 tons) off Cape Galloon 11th April.

The torpedo bombers were generally unable to locate vessels in time to attack them before they passed into the area patrolled by the North West African Air Force.

Consequently No.458 increasingly substituted bombs for torpedo's and made night attacks against minor harbours on the southern coast of Sicily.

Although for two months the only Australian contribution to the bombing offensive lay in the efforts of individuals, the winter of 1942 saw a notable increase in the nominal size of the R.A.A.F. within Bomber Command.

Two new main force squadrons and one light bomber squadron were formed and all began to operate late in this period.

These new formations were less Australian in character than had been the earliest formed squadrons.

The only ground crew sent to England during 1942 had gone direct to No.10 Squadron, while Nos. 452, 457 and 458, on proceeding overseas from Britain during that year, had been given ground-crew backing as completely Australian as possible.

There remained approximately 1,100 ground crew members in Britain but these were already absorbed by Nos, 10, 455, 460 and the growing needs of the Overseas Headquarters.

This average of twenty-six sorties per squadron during each of the three winter months was a tremendous advance on the previous year when No. 455 had averaged forty-one sorties and No, 458 and 469 in the single month of their operation mounted fourteen and thirteen sorties respectively against main targets.

During May and June the North-West African Coastal Air Force was also reinforced from sources as widely separated as Great Britain and India so that it would be able not only to defend Allied shipping in the western Mediterranean, but also seek out and destroy enemy shipping between the Italian mainland and the major islands.

Three night fighter, one day fighter, three general reconnaissance and four torpedo bomber squadrons were absorbed at this time so that by July a total of 42 squadrons (of which 25 were British including 4 Fleet Air Arm units) were available.

Most of these were ungrouped and strung along the coast between Oran and Bone, but at the Sebala airfields, near Tunis was a fighter wing and at Protville No. 328 Wing controlled the specialist anti-shipping strike force.

It was in No. 328 Wing that Australian interest was greatest because No. 458 Squadron and 41 out of 65 Australian individuals serving with N.A.C.A.F were disposed within it.

Even so Australian participation was very small because by this time No. 458 had become a very mixed unit.

The Malta detachment began its move to Algeria on 15th May and after three weeks rest came forward to Protville on 6th June where it was joined by the base party from Amiriya.

While Nos. 3 and 450 were engaging in the ground battle, No.458 during July 1943 flew 1016 operational hours in 134 sorties on anti-shipping patrols and strikes around Sardinia and in the Tyrrhehian Sea.

An Italian cruiser was damaged and another torpedo fired at a destroyer on 10th-11th July, and four nights later a large merchant ship was sunk and one of its escorting destroyers damaged by torpedoes from Wellingtons of No.458 diverted from individual patrols after this convoy had been located by an aircraft of NO.221 Squadron.

Another merchant ship sheltering in a bay on the north-west coast of Elba was torpedoed on 22nd-23rd of July.

These attacks were made against strong anti-aircraft fire, and from all causes four R.A.A.F Wellingtons failed to return.

Two more crews were lost during the first week of August, the sole surviving member of one, Sergeant Watson eventually being rescued at sea 12th August after eight days adrift during which time he displayed considerable courage and endurance in circumstances where there seemed little hope of survival.

The air stranglehold on enemy movements in the western Mediterranean was maintained throughout August and the Wellingtons extended their action to the Ligurian Sea where on 16th-17th August a ship was torpedoed in Imperia Harbour.

Three more merchant ships were damaged by No.458 and the combined efforts of all the Squadrons of NO.328 Wing was intense enough to restrict severely both the provisioning of Sardinia and Corsica, and the apparent movement of shipping from the western Mediterranean towards the Aegean Sea.

Notation on the bottom of page 579.

W-O B.A.Watson. 406705. 52 Sqdn, 458 Sqdn. Grocers assistant: of Norseman W.A.born Perth W.A. 30 Dec 1917.

Notation on bottom of Page 617.

Sqn Kdr J.M Pilcher, DFC. 402880. 70 Sqn R.A.F, 458 and 455 Sqdns. Grazier of Thallon Qld. Born Burwood, N.S.W 5 Oct 1915.