Correspondance Roy C. NESBIT

SWINDON ENGLAND

Roy C. Nesbit
23 Newhall Street
Swindon
Wiltshire SN1 5QT
Tel: 0793 615157

19 February 1991

Monsieur Jean Yves Le Guillou
Route du centre Nautique
29460 Logonna Daoulas
FRANCE

Dear Monsieur Le Guillou

The secretary of our Beaufort Aircrews Association has passed on to me your letter concerning the restoration of the Beaufort of 217 Squadron which crashed on your area on 7 December 1940. I flew as a navigator in 217 Squadron from January 1941 to March 1942, and have written a number of books and articles about this type of aircraft. I am also the president of our Association.

The aircraft in question was Beaufort I serial N1154 of 217 Squadron based at St Eval in Cornwall, and the details of the crew which you sent are correct. The aircraft was on a bombing raid over Brest. I do not have the full history of the aircraft, which would require some additional research. However, it is likely to be only short, since this was one of the batch N1145 - N1186 manufactured by the Bristol Aircraft Company at Filton, near Bristol, and delivered between August and October 1940. 217 Squadron began to convert from Avro Ansons to Bristol Beauforts in the summer of 1940 and the first operational flight was on 25 September 1940. The squadron also continued to fly Ansons until December 1940.

We should be very interested to learn more about this restoration in our Association, and wonder if you could send some further details, including perhaps a photograph. It might also be possible to advertise for parts in the magazine 'Aeroplane Monthly', probably without charge. There is no need to write in English, since some of us can read French well enough.

I enclose some newsletters sent out by our Association (written by myself), which may help you. In addition, you may like to know that an article about Beauforts at St Eval will soon appear in your magazine 'Le Fana de l'Aviation', as enclosed. I do not have the exact date.

Finally, you may already know that the Mayor of Douarnenez, Monsieur Michel Mazeus, is very interested in aviation history, and I have had a considerable amount of correspondence with him on the subject of Beauforts.

With good wishes from the Beaufort Aircrews Association to Ailes Ancienne Armorique.

Yours sincerely,

Roy C. Nesbit

cc Mr Roger Hayward

SKOL-UHEL AR VRO
INSTITUT CULTUREL
DE BRETAGNE

15 MARS 1989

Correspondance à adresser à :

Monsieur Michel MAZEAS
Maire
Hôtel de Ville
29174 - DOUARNENEZ

M. MAZEAS
Maire de DOUARNENEZ
Vice-Président de la Section Histoire
de l'I.C.B.

à

Monsieur R.C. NESBIT
23 Newhall Street
Swindon
Wilts
SN1 5 QT

Dear Mr NESBIT,

Excuse me if J take the liberty to drawing your attention to my own researches regarding a raid of the COASTAL COMMAND, on the night of 28th november 1941.

Mr P.J.V. ELLIOT gave mé your address and J send you, enclosed, a copy of a letter J sent him on the 27th February, and his answer.

Please, if you have more details, eyen minor details, about this action, would you communicate them to me.

Thank you for your amability.

Yours sincerly,

Michel MAZEAS,

Le Jâse un numéro spécial "Pêche et navigation en Loire"

Créée en 1977 à Angers, l'association Ellébore consacre son énergie aux arts et traditions populaires de sa région. Regroupant au départ quelques musiciens, elle compte aujourd'hui plus de 120 adhérents se préoccupant avant tout des divers aspects de la culture orale.

Actuellement, Ellébore dispose de deux expositions : "La musique traditionnelle en Anjou et Vendée" et "Pêche et navigation de Loire en Anjou" qui comprend :
- des photos de bateaux, d'engins de pêche, de maquettes ;
- un film vidéo couleur de 20 min : "René Fauchard, artisan-pêcheur ;"
- des animations scolaires (chansons de mariniers, navigation en Loire au temps des gabares) ;
- une veillée constituée d'un concert de 1 h 30 de chansons de mariniers de Loire, suivi d'une partie dansée).

Le bulletin de l'association Ellébore, *Le Jâse*, consacre d'ailleurs son prochain numéro à ce thème. Intitulé "Pêche et navigation en Loire," il comporte une interview d'un pêcheur professionnel de Loire, un article sur cette activité, ainsi qu'un récit de navigation sur le Canal de Nantes à Brest sur *La Mathilde*.

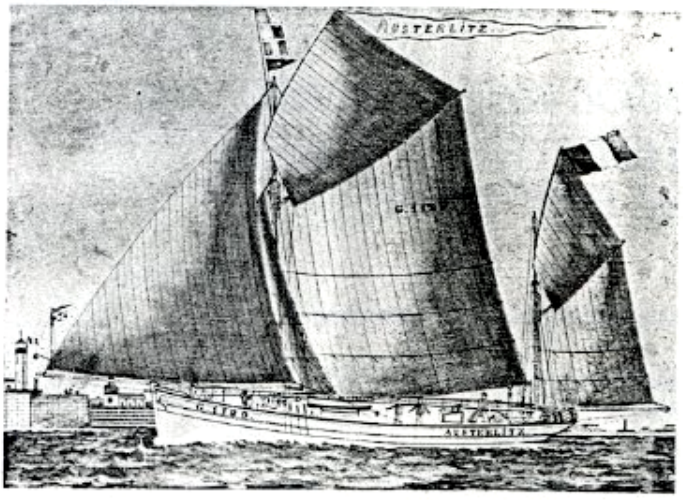
On y retrouve, à travers le texte de M. Téthiau, le souvenir du halage à cheval et du passage de l'écluse à Redon que nous décrivait Jacques Guillet dans le Chasse-Marée numéro 12.

Ce numéro 5 du *Jâse* comprend également un article sur les portes marinières (les ancêtres des écluses) dont il reste deux exemplaires en Maine et Loire. Une place enfin est faite à la musique.

Le cheminement intellectuel de la jeune équipe d'Ellébore mérite d'être souligné. Ces musiciens ont su ne pas se tenir au strict intérêt pour la musique. Très vite, ils ont compris que la culture populaire est un tout qui circule dans un milieu de vie global : on ne saurait connaître sa musique sans connaître aussi ses chansons, ses danses, ses coutumes, ses parlers, ses gestes. C'est tout cela - pour reprendre les termes de Patrick Hétier (*Le Jâse* numéro 4) - que l'homme crée pour pouvoir jouer entre sa vie et ses rêves.

Le Jâse
Association Ellébore
19 rue du Port-de-l'Ancre
49000 Angers

(Litho J. Frayssé).



Une exposition Paul-Emile Pajot à Pontoise

Nos lecteurs connaissent bien Paul-Emile Pajot (Chasse-Marée numéros 4 et 10), le peintre de La Chaume, ce quartier des marins des Sables d'Olonne. Tous, par contre, n'ont pas pu admirer de près ses toiles : nombre d'entre elles appartiennent au Musée de l'Abbaye Sainte-Croix des Sables d'Olonne, ou encore à son biographe Jean Huguet, qui a puissamment aidé à empêcher son œuvre de sombrer dans l'oubli ; d'autres enfin se trouvent tout au long du littoral atlantique, dans les familles des patrons-pêcheurs et des marins pour qui Pajot travaillait, exécutant ces travaux de commande pour améliorer l'ordinaire, certes, mais avec une passion jamais démentie.

Ses portraits de bateaux, exécutés entre 1896 et 1929, ont gardé tout leur charme coloré, et présentent un intérêt ethnographique incontestable : c'est tout un pan de la vie maritime de la côte vendéenne qui apparaît dans son œuvre.

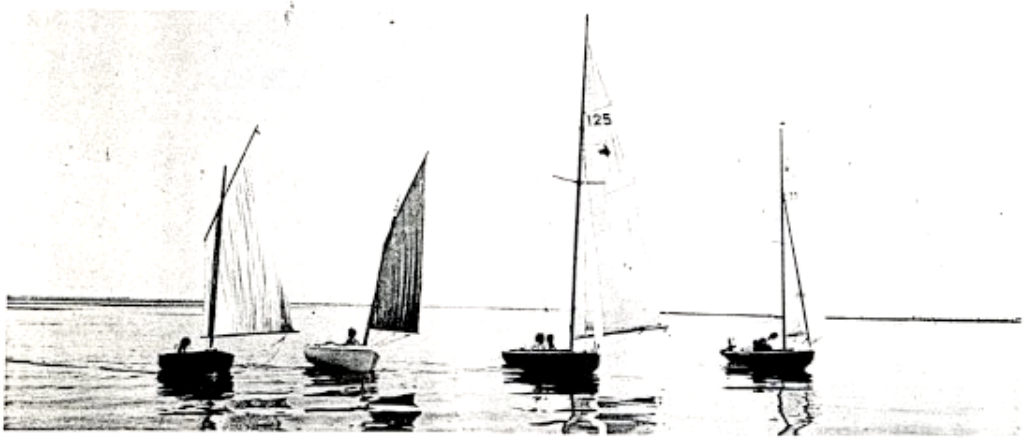
Marin-pêcheur lui-même, Paul-Emile Pajot demeure, selon le mot de Jean Cocteau, "un peintre pour les gens qui aiment les bateaux." L'occasion est belle de s'en rendre compte une fois encore en allant voir l'exposition que lui consacre le Musée de Pontoise jusqu'à la fin du mois de Février.

Musée de Pontoise
tous les jours sauf mardi et fériés
de 10 à 12 h et de 14 à 18 h
jusqu'au 28 février

Revival sur le Bassin d'Arcachon

Cette belle photo a été prise cet été, lors du premier rassemblement organisé par l'Association de la Plaisance Traditionnelle de la région d'Arcachon (APTRA). On y voit, de gauche à droite, dans le chenal de l'Ile, *Meraki*, monotype d'Arcachon à Madame Vonnig Corre, *Lou Dequero*, monotype à Monsieur Philippe Bret, *Le Loup*, un Loup appartenant à Monsieur Pierre-Louis Germain et *Orrona*, Pacific à Monsieur Jacques Martin.

Ce premier rassemblement regroupait une dizaine de bateaux de plaisance du Bassin et donnait surtout le coup d'envoi de cette nouvelle association, qui entend réactiver les séries locales : monotypes, loups, pacifics, pinasses, etc... De nombreuses unités ne demandent qu'à naviguer et à régater ; il existe en effet au moins une vingtaine de monotypes en bon état, et autant de Pacifics. Certains sont à l'eau, mais beaucoup se trouvent dans des hangars privés ou des chantiers. L'activité de l'association entraînera certainement les propriétaires à les faire revenir goûter le sel du Bassin. D'autant qu'une seconde association, celle des pinassotes, est également en train de se créer. Une belle animation en perspective.



(Photo F. Bunuel).

Pierre-Louis Germain
Président de l'APTRA
B.P. 18
33260 LA TESTE

BEAUFORT AIRCREWS

Squadron Nos. 22, 39, 42, 47, 86, 217

Tel: 0793 615157

Roy C. Nesbit
23 Newhall Street
Swindon
Wiltshire SN1 5QT
England

22 March 1989

Mr Gordon Carter
Ar Gouez
22620 Ploubazlanec
France

Dear Gordon,

Thanks for you letter of 20 March. I did receive a letter yesterday from Monsieur Mazeas.

I'm replying on our association notepaper, so that you can see the squadrons which were equipped with Beauforts at some stage of the Second World War.

My squadron, 217, had moved to Thorney Island by 28 November 1941. At that stage , I was the squadron navigation officer. It is possible that there was a detachment back at St Eval, but I'm not sure without checking. It seems to me more likely that the Beaufort which delivered the attack was from 22 Squadron, but again I'm not sure. We all moved about the coast so much that one has to comb through the records to find the answers.

The records themselves are not at the RAF Museum or at Lacon House, but at the Public Record Office, Kew. It will require a visit to dig out the information, for the staff there will not carry out such research. In addition, it may be possible to find the results of the raid from German records, but this is yet another section, in London.

As regards the Beaufort itself, it is possible that you may not remember much about this machine. I've written a fair amount on this subject, since taking early retirement (I was 19 when I flew operationally on Beauforts) and a list of my efforts is enclosed, with the relevant ones starred. You may have some sort of library service out there, but the publishers would obviously charge if anyone wanted to buy the books.

Beaufort squadrons suffered the heaviest casualties of all RAF squadrons - only about 17 per cent chance of finishing a single tour - so it is probable that whoever carried out the raid is no longer around. But I'll see what I can dig out next time I go to the PRO.

It looks as though you had quite an interesting tour yourself. It may be that the AHB at Lacon House has your report after you got back. Things are in a bit of a mess there, by the way, for they are busy packing up and moving to Great Scotland Yard.

With good wishes.

Sincerely,

Roy C. Nesbit
23 Newhall Street
Swindon
Wilts SN1 5QT
England

31 March 1989

Mr Gordon Carter
Ar Gouez
22620 Ploubazanec
France

Dear Gordon,

Further to my letter of 22 March I now enclose some notes taken at the Public record Office yesterday.

I don't know whether this crew lost their lives on 12 February 1942 or whether they were taken PoW. Without their initials, which are not recorded, it's difficult to check. Perhaps Lacon House will be able to check, if you want to pursue the matter further. They are moving to Great Scotland Yard on 16 April, if all goes to schedule.

Perhaps you would pass this on to Monsieur Michel Mazeas - it is probably easier if you explain the matter to him.

With best wishes,

Sincerely,

Roy

Extracts from Public Record Office

St Eval AIR28/729

29/11/41 Aircrafts Q & A of 22 Squadron went out on strike Treboul. Both failed to locate target. Aircaft Q returned with bomb load but aircraft A bombed building believed to be hotel on east side of Douarnenez Bay in estimated position of Hotel de la Bair. Four bursts were seen and the rear gunner saw the incendiaries ignite, and a large building was enveloped in smoke.

22 Squadron AIR27/278

Daily return

28/11/41 Strike - bombs and incendiaries 20.55 - 00.40 hours

Aircraft A. F/O White
Sgt Fordham
Sgt Hatherall
Sgt Hammersley

Owing to poor visibility four runs were made up to the target at Treboul before bombs and incendiaries were finally dropped from 100 feet, at 22.54 hours. Four bursts were seen and also incendiaries ignite, and a large building enveloped in smoke.

Monthly return

28/11/41 Three aircraft detailed for bombing operation with mixed load of incendiaries and high explosives in Brest area, target assumed to be living quarters of U-boat crews. F/O White, aircraft A, located the building and dropped his load at a low level, rear gunner noticing four distinct flashes and the building was seen to be enveloped in smoke. Unfortunately Sgt Howroyd in aircraft Q failed to locate the target and P/O thornton in aircraft P experienced trouble with gills prior to taking off which resulted in his trip being abandoned.

There is a note later on:

On 12 February (i.e. 1942) three of the squadron aircraft took part in a shipping strike from which one aircraft failed to return. Crew F/L White Sgt Hatherall F/S Wilson Sgt Hannersley.

(Note: it seems that White had been promoted to Flight Lieutenant and Wilson had taken the place of Fordham, probably the air observer).

Correspondance à adresser à :
Monsieur Michel MAZEAS
Maire
Hôtel de Ville
29174 DOUARNENEZ
FRANCE

14 AVR. 1989

Monsieur Michel MAZEAS
Maire de DOUARNENEZ
Vice-Président de la Section Histoire de l'I.C.B.

à

Monsieur R. C. NESBIT
23 Newhall Street
Swindon
Wilts
SNI 5 QT

GREAT BRITAIN

Dear Mr NESBIT,

Thank your for your letters of 20 and 31 March. I did receive them yesterday from my friend Gordon CARTER.

I was very sorry to know that F/L WHITE and his crew, probably, lost their lives on 12 February 42. After a shipping strike, I think that the sea becomes often the last grave for airmen. But, as you say, may be they were P.O.W.... I want to pursue the matter further, if Lacon House will be able to check it. My friend Gordon can ask it for me.

I send you, enclosed, some pages written about airmen and aircraft. I hope you will be interested by the stories, alas ! in written french.

Sincerly.

Michel MAZEAS

Mazeas

SKOL-UHEL AR VRO
INSTITUT CULTUREL
DE BRETAGNE

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Sincerly.

Michel MAZEAS

I believe you know that the shipping strike on 12 February 1942 was a raid against the german ships GNEISENAU and SCHARNORST which left BREST to KIEL.

Roy C. Nesbit
23 Newhall Street
Swindon
Wilts SN1 5QT
England

28 April 1989

Monsieur Michel Mazeas
Maire
Hotel de Ville
29174 DOUARNENEZ
FRANCE

Dear Monsieur Mazeas,

Thank you for your letter of 14 April.

I am glad that you reminded me of the date of 12 February 1942, for I should have remembered it. Enclosed are copies of a chapter of my book TORPEDO AIRMEN, which was published in 1983 by William Kimber of London, in which I mention that "Mac" White was lost during the attack on the German battleships.

Both Alan Etheridge and Stanley Clayton would remember Mac White, although I doubt whether I met him. I could give you their addresses if you wish. One point is that Alan is an expert photographer and could duplicate some of the photos of our Beauforts, although he might have to make a small charge for materials.

If Gordon has not already written to the Air Historical Branch, perhaps he should wait for a short while. I'd like to look up something else at the Public Record Office, next time I go there, and will try to find out more details of Mac White. I cannot find his name in the list of RAF War Dead, and it is possible that he became a PoW.

There is no need to reply to this letter - I'll write to you again before long.

Sincerely,

Roy C. Nesbit

P.S. After the war, Stanley Clayton rose to become Town Clerk of the City of London.

CHAPTER FOUR

Darky-Darky

'There are defeats more triumphant than victories.'
MONTAIGNE (*Essays* 1580-88)

During the war a macabre joke circulated amongst aircrews. It concerned a pilot speaking to ground control over the radio telephone when returning from a bomber raid. His aircraft had been badly hit and the undercarriage would not lock down; the bombs were still on board and the release mechanism had been severed; the fuel was nearly exhausted; some of the crew were wounded and could not use their parachutes. The pilot asked for instructions. There was a pause and the ground controller said quietly, 'Repeat after me. Our Father who art in Heaven ... ' A burst of nervous laughter always interrupted the continuation of the Lord's Prayer, for all crews could recognise this grim but unlikely situation. Yet these are almost precisely the conditions in which a crew of 217 Squadron returned from a torpedo attack on the German battle fleet on 12th February 1942, and what might appear to be a blasphemous joke turned into a reality.

In February 1942, the majority of the Beauforts of 217 Squadron were based at Thorney Island, on the coast of West Sussex near Portsmouth, whilst a small detachment remained at their former station at St Eval, on the north coast of Cornwall. By 1942 the majority of the crews in this squadron had been trained in torpedo work and some pilots had already released this weapon in action.

In the latter part of 1941, a powerful contingent of the German battle fleet lay in the heavily defended port of Brest, consisting of the modern battleships *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* as well as the heavy cruiser *Prinz Eugen* and a flotilla of destroyers, torpedo boats and E-boats. The Battle of the Atlantic was at its most intense, and the German U-boats, operating from their massive concrete pens at Brest, Lorient, St Nazaire, La Pallice and Bordeaux, were devastating the convoys that comprised Britain's only lifeline with the rest of the free world. The resources of the Royal Navy were

stretched to the utmost in all theatres of war, and the threat posed by the German battle fleet was not only against the Atlantic convoys but against the ships carrying troops and supplies to our hard-pressed forces in the Middle East and Far East. Thus Brest remained the main target in Europe for the RAF, and Bomber Command rained thousands of tons of bombs on the unfortunate town, whilst Coastal Command made low-level attacks on the port and mined the harbour entrance.

The attacks by the RAF did not sink the German ships but caused sufficient damage to render them unseaworthy for long periods. Eventually, Hitler became impatient with their role as a target instead of an active fighting force, and directed the German commander, Vice-Admiral Ciliax, to bring them back to home waters to assist in the defence of Norway, where he thought that the Allies were likely to mount an invasion.

In late 1941, it had seemed obvious to the British that the Germans would bring back their fleet up the English Channel, protected by a strong umbrella of fighters, and the crews of 217 Squadron had been warned to prepare to make a torpedo attack on the warships. The Germans had prepared their move in conditions of great secrecy, but there was adequate warning from French Resistance Forces and from the evidence brought back by the Photograph Reconnaissance Units of the RAF. However, an uncanny luck favoured the Germans when the fleet slipped out of Brest on the foggy night of 11th February 1942. The patrolling British submarine in Brest Estuary had been bombed by a Dornier and forced to retire from its station; the two Hudsons patrolling the area developed faults in their ASV (Air to surface vessel radar) and returned to St Eval; the Spitfires which spotted the fleet in the Channel obeyed standing instructions and maintained strict radio-telephone silence; and the operators on the radar stations along the English coast, progressively jammed by the Germans in the preceding few days, suspected nothing untoward.

In this extraordinarily well-executed 'Channel Dash', the German fleet steamed at the remarkable speed of 26 knots or even more at times. Adolf Galland, the commander-in-chief of the Luftwaffe's fighter force, organised a continuous air umbrella of night fighters and day fighters, flying at first just above the water, mainly on the port of the warships, keeping under the radar screen. Employing in total some 200 aircraft, at least twenty-five German fighters protected the fleet at any one time, the pilots landing and

refuelling in aerodromes in France, Belgium and Holland to keep pace with the progress of the warships.

Incredibly, the German fleet had steamed in broad daylight almost to the Straits of Dover before the British began to attack with their pitifully inadequate and ill co-ordinated forces. Four little motor torpedo boats, with wooden hulls, put out from Dover harbour in an attempt to penetrate the destroyer screen, but they fired their torpedoes without success. The untrained crews of the coastal batteries at Dover fired their 9.2" guns, but their shells were hopelessly off target. Six Fairey Swordfish bi-planes flew from Manston in Kent and heroically tried to make a torpedo attack whilst inadequately escorted, but all were shot down by German fighters or the intense flak. Bomber Command flew 242 sorties but very few of the crews located the target in the low cloud and rain and no hits were scored, whilst fifteen bombers were lost. Destroyers from Harwich dashed to attack but were outclassed and outgunned. Immense courage was displayed by the British forces but all to no avail, and the whole episode was later described as a fiasco.

The main threat to the battle fleet should have come from the torpedo-carrying Beauforts, seven of 217 Squadron based at Thorney Island, twelve of 86 Squadron with three of 217 Squadron based at St Eval, and thirteen of 42 Squadron ordered to fly from Leuchars near Edinburgh to Coltishall in Norfolk. The crews were incredulous when they learned that not only was the German battle fleet out of the harbour but that it had passed through the Straits of Dover. Such was the absurd secrecy surrounding the breakout that the first four Beauforts of 217 Squadron at Thorney Island were sent off without being told the true nature of their target or its correct position. Of the seven Beauforts at Thorney Island, one was shot down and two were damaged, but no torpedo hits were scored. Nine of the thirteen Beauforts at Coltishall managed to take off, rendezvous at Manston in Kent and set off for the Dutch coast; eight of them located the battle fleet and dropped their torpedoes without success, and several Beauforts were hit but all returned.

The last hope remained with the force at St Eval, where there were twelve serviceable Beauforts of 217 Squadron, and a decision had to be made as to the best crews to fly in them. One of the pilots was Pilot Officer Alan Etheridge, who had joined the squadron with his crew in October 1941. Etheridge was a tall, well-built young man of twenty-four, with remarkable piercing eyes that were

the outward sign of his exceptionally fine vision, both by day and night. He had entered the RAFVR in July 1940 from his home at Eastbourne, and had trained on Avro Cadets and Tiger Moths at Watchfield near Swindon, and then on Oxfords at Shawbury in Shropshire, before taking a course on Blackburn Bothas at the School of General Reconnaissance at Squire's Gate in Lancashire. At the Operational Training Unit at Chivenor in North Devon, he had converted to Bristol Beauforts and formed his crew.

The navigator was Sergeant Stanley Clayton, a 22-year-old Londoner who had joined the RAFVR as a pilot in July 1940 but had been remustered as a navigator, following which he had trained at Prestwick in Scotland before taking his bombing and gunnery course at Penrhos in North Wales. Clayton was an intelligent and meticulous navigator who would carve out a fine career for himself after a war which he did not expect to survive, for he had weighed up the statistical chances against him in a squadron which suffered an abnormally high casualty rate.

The remaining two crew members were wireless operator/air gunners, both sergeants. Frank Hutchinson, another Londoner and the only married man, was called the daddy of the crew at the age of thirty or so. Frank Williamson came from Manchester and was the baby at a mere nineteen years. The two men alternated as gunners in the dorsal turret or as wireless operators at the powerful Marconi set. Every member of the crew was torpedo trained, having passed through a course together in this difficult art at Abbotsinch, near Paisley in Scotland.

Although Etheridge and his crew had flown in 217 Squadron for barely four months, they were already a highly experienced and well integrated crew. In many ways they had been lucky to survive in a squadron where the average expectancy of life was very low, for they had a propensity for attracting trouble. On his first operational flight, a bombing attack on the port of Nantes, the inexperienced Etheridge had failed to close his engine gills fully when flying with a full petrol and bomb load and had turned back with what he regarded as engine trouble; despondent at his error, he had been haunted by the fear that he would be branded as a coward. On another trip, a mine-laying operation in Brest estuary, the crew arrived slightly too early, in daylight instead of last light, for it was a bright and cloudless evening, and had run the gauntlet of accurate flak fired at them from the shore. Later, when attacking a long convoy off the Dutch coast, they had flown between two lines

of ships looking for a suitable target before dropping a torpedo that had passed directly under the hull of one vessel, before a cannon shell had scored a bullseye in the roundel on their fuselage, so that Etheridge had to make an emergency landing in Norfolk with a faulty undercarriage mechanism and damaged rudder trimmer controls.

On an even more dangerous occasion, Etheridge had courageously flown his Beaufort into La Pallice at night, at 200 feet under a great arc of intense light flak. Jinking up and down, banking steeply from side to side, blinded by searchlights, with the daemonic voice of Williamson warning him of steadily nearing tracer, Etheridge had somehow contrived to put his Beaufort in a position for Clayton to drop the bombs on a ship in the harbour, when the rudder and fin were hit by 20 mm cannon shells. With the rudder trimmer tab jammed to port, the aircraft began to fly in wide circles before Clayton realised that the compass was turning, and Etheridge had to fly all the way home with both legs strained at full length against the opposing rudder bar, to make the perfect landing that he somehow always achieved in emergencies.

On the day of the break-out of the German fleet, Etheridge and his crew were flying on a training exercise. Their aircraft was a new Beaufort II, serial AW252, equipped with the new twin Wasp engines instead of the old Taurus engines. The new aircraft had the ability to fly on one engine and also possessed much better acceleration than the Beaufort I, and Etheridge was demonstrating the controls to a sergeant pilot of 22 Squadron. As soon as he landed he was approached by the sergeant navigator to Squadron Leader G.A. Pickett, the officer commanding the detachment of 217 Squadron.

'You are to report to Operations Room,' said the navigator. '*Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* are up the Channel.'

Etheridge's heart jumped. 'Not me,' he said, 'I've only just landed.'

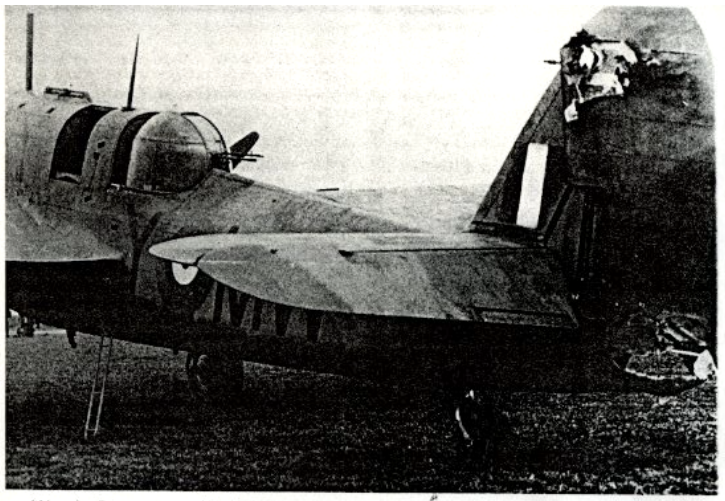
'Your orders are to report immediately,' said the navigator, importantly.

Etheridge went to the Operations Room to receive the dreaded news.

'Why me?' he said to the briefing officers.

'You are the most experienced pilot on torpedoes,' he was told. 'And you must get off without delay.'

Etheridge walked back to his crew. Naturally pale, his face had



(*Above*) Damage to Alan Etheridge's Beaufort I after raid on La Pallice.

(*Right*) Beauforts of 86 Squadron armed with torpedoes.

turned chalk-white, or 'green' according to an Australian friend. He had proved that he was no coward, but truly brave men are not without fear, and Etheridge hoped and expected to survive the war. To Clayton, who did not share his pilot's optimism, the news came almost as a relief, a breaking of the intolerable tension after weeks of waiting, for now the issue could be settled for good or ill. Twelve aircraft were to take off, led by Wing Commander Charles Flood of 86 Squadron, and fly direct to Thorney Island to receive further orders. They set off in formation and landed an hour later, at 14.30 hours.

Thorney Island was humming like a beehive, but some of the Beauforts had to be racked up for torpedoes and after briefing the crews were sent to their respective messes, to eat a meal which must have been difficult for some of them to swallow. The delay was frustrating for the crews since, if they had to attack such a powerful target, the Germans were slipping nearer their home waters all the time, increasing the risk of the operation for the RAF.

At last the racks and the torpedoes were fitted, and the twelve Beauforts took off at 16.00 hours. They flew north-east in formation, skirting round the west of London, heading for the aerodrome at Coltishall in Norfolk, where they arrived an hour later expecting to rendezvous with a squadron of long-range Spitfires. In that day of muddle and confusion, the Spitfires were not there, and Flood turned his formation without escort due east to the Dutch coast. Etheridge felt his fear mount again as they crossed the English coast north of Great Yarmouth, for he was under no delusions about the opposition that could be expected if they located the German battle fleet.

The Beauforts flew in four vics of three aircraft apiece, but one Beaufort was forced to return with electrical trouble. The remaining eleven flew on, and Etheridge was part of the vic on the extreme left, tucked behind the starboard wing of Flight Lieutenant 'Mac' White of 22 Squadron, with Sergeant Fricker behind White's port wing. The formation was flying at 1000 feet and the weather, dull and overcast when they left England, deteriorated steadily as they headed eastwards. An area of low pressure, centred over the Faeroes, was bringing a warm front, with low stratus cloud and westerly winds, over the North Sea. Rain began to spatter Etheridge's windscreen and gradually the horizon disappeared as evening twilight descended on them. In the perspex nose, Clayton tried to keep a check on his dead-reckoning position, no easy task

when flying in formation and the intended course and airspeed of the leader were not accurately known. The Beauforts possessed only a rudimentary radio telephone called TR9, and in any event R/T silence was desirable. Clayton checked his drift through the bombsight and found that it was nil, for they had a following wind, increasing steadily in strength.

In the leading aircraft, Flood's wireless operator was the only crew member in the formation equipped with the new ASV Mark II. This radar set, called Air to Surface Vessel, was first installed in some Beauforts in the latter part of 1941, and crews were trained in its use at Chivenor in North Devon. Its purpose was primarily to detect surface vessels, by day or night, and at first the equipment was considered so secret that crews were under orders not to fly over enemy coastlines in case the Germans recovered sets in crashed aircraft.

The ASV operated on a wavelength of 1.7 metres and comprised a directional transmitting and receiving system. In the Beaufort, the transmitter was positioned under the nose and looked like a modern television aerial on the ladder principle, arranged in a forward and horizontal direction. It was called a 'Yagi array' and it scanned the surface of the sea forwards at an angle of about 35 degrees on both sides of the line of flight. Two receiving aerials of similar appearance were fitted beneath the wings, also protruding forward horizontally. These picked up any echoes and displayed the results on a screen in the wireless operator's compartment. The signals from each receiving aerial appeared on either side of a central line in the screen and a comparison of the amplitude of the echo on each side gave the operator a good indication of the direction of the ships. A repeater screen was usually fitted beside the pilot's position, to assist the navigator or pilot in homing on to the target.

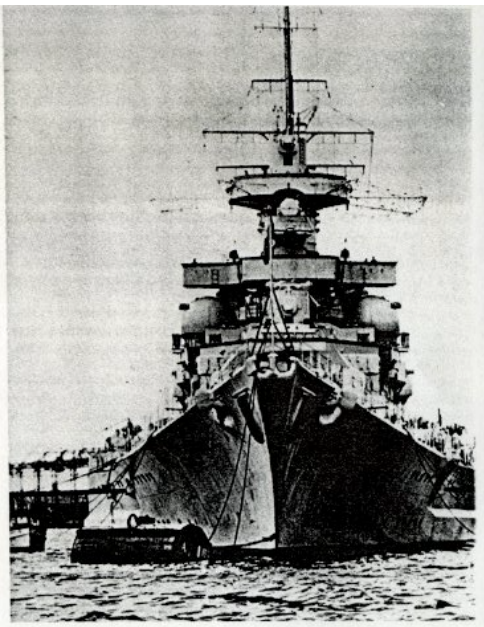
The range of the scan of the ASV could be varied to represent either 9, 36 or 90 nautical miles. Of course, the effective range also depended on the curvature of the earth, and a coastline could sometimes be detected from 80 miles away provided the Beaufort was flying above 5,000 feet. The small blips of surface vessels could show up within a range of ten miles, but unless the Beaufort flew above about 1000 feet, these could be obscured by signals from the surface of the sea.

Although Flood's formation was flying at 1,000 feet, the ASV picked up nothing on this occasion, for the major part of the

German fleet was about fifteen miles north when the Beauforts reached the Dutch coast at 17.35 hours. Flood had to guess whether to turn to port or starboard, and he wheeled to starboard, hunting down the coast away from the main fleet, whilst the ten following aircraft tried to maintain formation in the failing light and gathering murk, until visibility was reduced to under 300 yards. Some fifteen minutes later, a red rocket rose in an arc from the sea below. The signal could have been fired only from a German ship, and the Beaufort formation broke up, each crew seeking a quarry in the grey mist below.

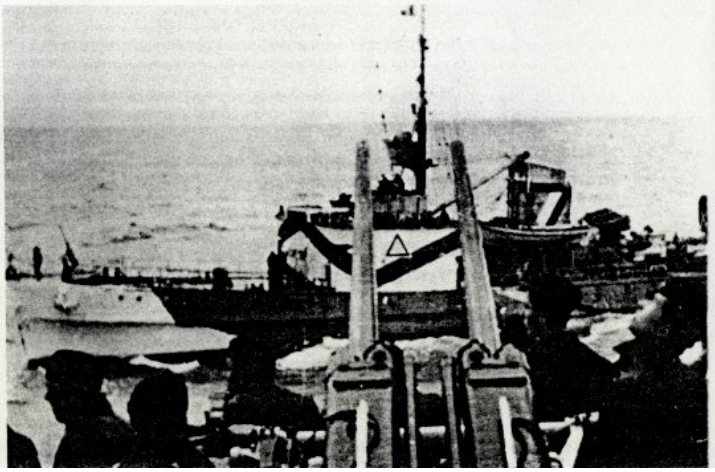
Two and a half hours before, at 14.31 hours, the crew of the *Scharnhorst*, flagship of the German fleet, had been congratulating themselves on their successful defence against the British, when a massive explosion rocked the battleship. Just north of the Franco-Belgian border, she had struck a mine. This was not of the horned and floating variety, moored with an anchor and a chain, but an electro-magnetic mine dropped from an aircraft. These mines, which the RAF code-named 'cucumbers', rested on the seabed and exploded when the steel hull of a ship passed above them, the force being concentrated by the density of the sea water, so that the bottom could be ripped out of a merchant ship. The explosion was sufficient to bring even the powerful *Scharnhorst* to a halt, and a large gash was discovered in her starboard side, flooding two of her double-bottom compartments, so that for half an hour she lay motionless in the sea. Admiral Ciliax transferred to the escorting destroyer *Z-29* in order to catch up with the main battle fleet, whilst four torpedo boats were detailed to protect the crippled *Scharnhorst*. These torpedo boats, *T-13*, *T-15*, *T-16* and *T-17*, were of a type for which there was no exact equivalent in the British navy; they were each 850 tons, 269 feet long, and mounted 105 mm, 37 mm and 20 mm flak guns. Tentatively, the *Scharnhorst* restarted her engines and began to move ahead again, with her escorts. By 18.00 hours, she was off the Hook of Holland, exactly in the position where the Beauforts saw the red rocket.

A strong wind had blown up off the Hook of Holland. Backing to the south-west, it sent high waves crashing against the sides of the *Scharnhorst* and low clouds and rain scudding overhead, protecting the ships from the straining eyes of the RAF crews. Etheridge had parted from his leader, 'Mac' White, who was never seen again and must have been shot down into the turbulent sea by the flak that was increasing in accuracy and intensity around the hunting



(*Right*) The *Scharnhorst*.

(*Below*) Torpedo Boat *T-11* alongside the *Scharnhorst* immediately after the battleship had struck a magnetic mine dropped by the RAF. In the foreground, twin-mounted 37 mm flak guns without armoured shields.



torpedo bombers. Orange tracer snaked up towards Etheridge, and yellow flashes with white and black smoke burst around him. Now that the action was upon him, his fear had slipped away, and for a few moments he thought how attractive was the display that the Germans had put on for his benefit. A shout came over the intercom from Williamson, standing with his F24 camera alongside the Vickers K guns that he had mounted in the port and starboard waist positions.

'Skipper, there's a big ship down there! It looks like the *Scharnhorst*!'

At this moment, Etheridge's phenomenal eyesight saved the crew from extinction. He could see another aircraft streaking towards them from the starboard, directly on a collision course. Etheridge pulled up the nose of the Beaufort and banked to starboard, and the other aircraft flashed beneath them. It was a Messerschmitt 110, and Etheridge could see the twin engines and the German crosses on the wings and fuselage. There was no time to turn, aim and fire, for in an instant the Messerschmitt had disappeared, the pilot probably blissfully unaware of his narrow escape.

During this unnerving episode, Clayton had been clambering up from the perspex nose to sit in the co-pilot's seat, carrying his log and his 1:500,000 topographical map, which was the best he had been able to find before taking off from Thorney Island. A scale of 1:250,000 would have been better, but such maps were not available. Etheridge, infused with his usual determination at times of crisis, shouted to Clayton.

'We'll head for the Dutch coast, and make a torpedo run from there! Maybe they won't expect us to come in from that direction.'

The Beaufort, flying at 300 feet, headed east to the flat and featureless Dutch coast, only a minute or two away. Here another reception was awaiting them. Clayton thought he saw a lightship, but Etheridge's keener eyesight identified the object correctly. It was a flak tower, mounted on legs, and there was another further up the coast, about 500 yards away. Moreover, the gunners could see the Beaufort and began to fire at it, tracer whipping past again and shell bursts, probably from 37 mm guns, exploding uncomfortably close.

Etheridge turned hastily and flew back towards the ships, which were lost in the gloom, their position denoted only by the flak that continued to pour into the skies above them. He settled down to his torpedo run, ready to drop from a height of about eighty feet and a

speed of 140 knots, prepared to aim off to starboard to allow for the speed of the battleship, hoping to drop from about 1,000 yards away from the target. It was a tricky enough manoeuvre in ideal conditions on the dropping range at Abbotsinch, but here in the murk of a gale with steadily decreasing visibility, not even Etheridge could see his target.

The flak followed him round as he began circling again, trying to position himself for a torpedo drop. It was useless to drop nearer than 600 yards, for the nose pistol of the torpedo did not arm itself under that distance, and in any case Etheridge was unable to see the ships. Around and around he circled, peering through the mist and trying to line up on the elusive battleship. Eventually a shout came from Williamson over the intercom:

'Skipper, I can see the *Scharnhorst* again! I'm going to try to get a photograph!'

As he spoke, there was a crash and the noise of an explosion. The Beaufort juddered and Williamson's words ended in a long drawn-out groan.

Hutchinson backed out of the dorsal turret and found his younger friend Williamson sitting on the step by the port waist hatch.

'Willy, what's happened? Have you been hit?'

Williamson was as white as a sheet. A 20 mm cannon shell, probably fired by the *Scharnhorst* or one of the torpedo boats, had punched through the fuselage just behind the trailing edge of the starboard wing and had exploded, severing the hydraulic line and spraying some forty small splinters into his right arm and leg. He was numb and shocked, but still realised where salvation lay for his crew and himself.

'Go back, Hutch,' he said. 'I'll be OK. Get back in the turret.'

Clayton, scrambling back over the seat beside the pilot, arrived a moment later and was also motioned away by Williamson.

'I'll be OK, Stan! Don't worry about me. Go and sort things out with Ethy.'

Fortunately Williamson had been wearing his fur-lined Irvin jacket, which had afforded some protection from the blast, but there was nothing he could do except sit and wait for the pain to start. His wireless set had also been hit by splinters and was useless. Clayton went back and reported to Etheridge. The pilot and navigator talked quickly. Etheridge decided to turn for home. If there had been a chance, he would have gone into attack again,

but it was now almost dark and the weather was abominable. He had a wounded man aboard and was not sure about the controls of his Beaufort.

'We'd better head for Norfolk,' he said to Clayton. 'There must be plenty of emergency aerodromes there. If we head for Thorney, we run the risk of the balloon barrages over the Thames and over Dover.'

Clayton dived into the nose and began to work on his chart table. He had several problems. Firstly, he was not quite sure of the position of the Beaufort after their circling, and had not obtained an accurate fix since leaving the English coast. Secondly, he did not have a map which showed all the recently built aerodromes used by Bomber Command. And lastly, he had only a rough idea of the wind speed and direction, that most vital factor that every navigator needs. Nevertheless, he did his best and gave Etheridge an approximate course for Bircham Newton in Norfolk. Etheridge had already turned away from the flak.

'The turret won't traverse, skipper,' said Hutchinson. 'I think the hydraulics have gone.'

The Beaufort was still flying well, but without flaps or undercarriage, Etheridge faced a major problem in landing. But he had brought back crippled Beauforts twice before, and he was calm and assured as he headed for England. He thought he could fire down the undercarriage with the emergency cartridge, if they could find somewhere to land. Briefly, he thought of the torpedo, still protruding from the bomb bay, and wondered if he should try to get rid of it. But torpedoes were valuable and he had a careful nature that detested waste. Anyway, the release mechanism was probably damaged, and he might create another problem if he pressed the button. He had better leave it alone. Then he forgot about it, concentrating on his flying.

Clayton looked down the drift wires on his bombsight at the white caps on the sea. There was too much drift, ten degrees to starboard. The wind must be backing or freshening. He gave Etheridge an alteration of course, seven degrees to port. The English coast was about 50 minutes away.

After fifteen minutes, Etheridge reached down and switched on the IFF. This radar device, 'Identification Friend or Foe', enabled ground control to differentiate the Beaufort from an enemy aircraft, and was still on the secret list. There was an additional control panel by the co-pilot's seat. Clayton, sitting beside Etheridge again,

asked, 'Had I better turn it to "distress"?'

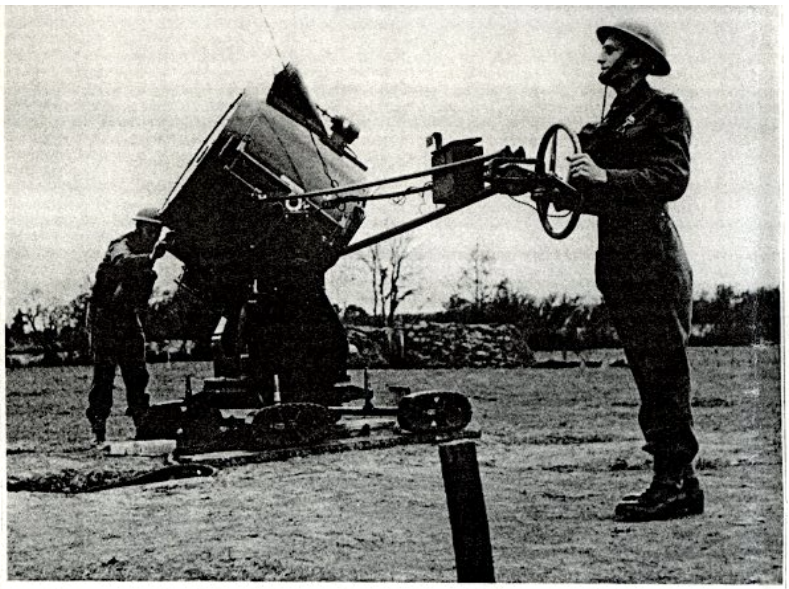
Etheridge nodded, and Clayton turned the control knob to number three of its six settings. Number one was 'normal', to be switched on 100 miles from the English coast, number three was 'distress', and the other four positions were not used at the time. Clayton did not know what good the device would do, but it was worth trying.

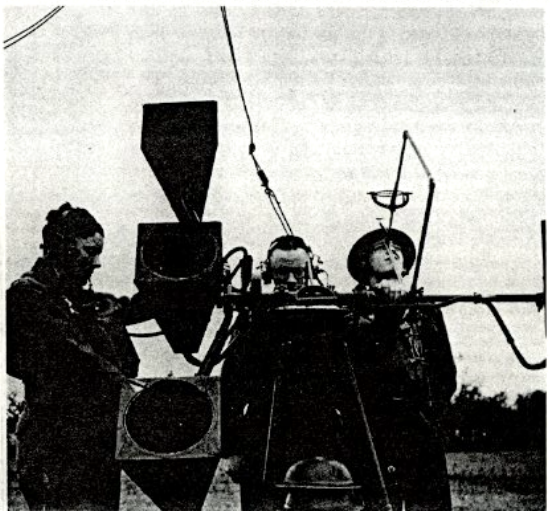
At 19.03 hours, when the English coast should have been in sight, Clayton wisely gave Etheridge a course due west. He rightly guessed that they were starboard of track, but now must pick up the coast somewhere. A few minutes later, it came into view and they turned south, trying to identify a landmark with their inadequate map. Ahead, Etheridge saw a coastal town, which he recognised later as Lowestoft. He began flashing his navigation lights, on-off, on-off, on-off. This was what he had been told to do when in difficulties, but no one in the crew knew how help could come. But help did come, from the British Army. To their starboard, a searchlight beam shot vertically up into the sky and, as they watched it in surprise, it moved, beckoning to them.

Below the crippled Beaufort, seven miles south of Lowestoft, a young gunner of 330 Searchlight Company, Royal Artillery, was on duty at Wangford, in Suffolk. He was J. Robin Goodman, a volunteer in the pre-war Territorial Army and now called up 'for the duration'. Even after forty years, he can still remember that cold evening of 12th February 1942:

'We were stationed on the estate of the Earl of Stradbroke. The searchlight had a 90 cm (36 inch) lens and, of course, it was the carbon-arc variety, with a beam that widened to 256 yards across at 30,000 feet. It was powered by a generator, a three-cylinder Lister diesel engine, or sometimes by a lorry. In those days, we did not have Automatic Remote Control, but handled each searchlight with a ten-man crew. My job was to put on and douse the searchlight and to clean the lens. The remainder of the crew consisted of the sergeant in charge, two men on swivel chairs with binoculars trained up the searchlight beam, one man who walked around with the lever and wheel of the searchlight, a lance-bombardier connected by telephone to two men on the paraboloid sound locators, a man on the generator, and lastly the most important of all – the cook.

'The searchlights were arranged on a grid system, 4,000 yards apart, and we were all connected to the RAF at Debden in Essex.





(*Above*) 90 cm carbon-arc searchlight.

(*Left*) Sound detectors.

We had been told about the German ships and warned to expect to help returning bombers. The way we did it was to put the beam up vertically, then to drop it down to nearly horizontal, along a path marked out by a stake pointing towards the airfield or the next turning point. Then we would douse the searchlight and repeat the procedure twice. The bombers seemed to understand.'

Although Etheridge and his crew did not realise it, the system had a name. It was called 'Darky-Darky', and it was already in operation for Bomber Command crews in that area, although it was not introduced into Coastal Command areas until late in 1942. It could be activated by the crew switching the IFF to 'distress', which then sent out a broad pulse instead of a sharp pulse to the radar receiver on the ground, or by the pilot shouting 'darky-darky' into his R/T. The RAF at Debden worked in liaison with the Royal Artillery, and instructions were telephoned to each Anti-Aircraft Company Headquarters and thence to the searchlight crews.

To Etheridge and Clayton, the searchlight and its beckoning finger seemed a near-miracle. They turned along the narrow track of the beam but suddenly it was extinguished, and there was consternation in the Beaufort for a moment until another beam cut vertically into the sky ahead. Relief and understanding flooded into Clayton's mind. The British Army *knew*, and they were helping. The second beam pointed three times and then lay still, whilst Etheridge turned along its path. A third searchlight shot upwards ahead of them, indicating yet another change of course. They were picking their way around the outskirts of Norwich, to a relief aerodrome beyond the town. The third searchlight was the last. Etheridge found himself in darkness, peering ahead for an aerodrome. His keen eyes detected what he thought was a runway, to starboard, but for once he was wrong. As he made his approach, Clayton shouted to him that the 'flarepath' was moving, and that what he had seen was a convoy of vehicles, their dimmed headlights shining on the wet road. Etheridge climbed again and saw in the distance a glow like a candle. It was the 'chance-light' at the end of a runway lit by gooseneck flares.

The crew of the Beaufort had been flying for most of the day, under great strain for much of the time. Agony was pulsing through Williamson's arm and leg. The three uninjured men were young and physically fit, but by now Etheridge was nearly exhausted and in no mood to tolerate delays. As he circled the unknown airfield,

flashing the letter of the day with his navigation lights, he was furious when his reply was a succession of red lights directed at him from below by an Aldis lamp.

'Nothing but reds for me,' he thought. 'To hell with it, I've got a wounded man on board. I'm going in.'

Etheridge fired the emergency cartridge to force down the undercarriage and tried to pump down his flaps. Sitting beside him, Clayton could hear the hissing of escaping oil and gas above the roar of the engines, and could see the warning indicator for the hydraulics on the control panel.

Frantically he shouted to Etheridge. 'The wheels aren't locked down! Let's go round again and get rid of the torpedo!'

Etheridge said nothing. He was, according to Clayton, the personification of concentration and confidence. Clayton became resigned to the inevitability of the explosion of the torpedo warhead, but he braced his feet against the sides of the panel in front of him. At the last moment, a green light was directed at them from the Aldis lamp on the ground.

The aerodrome had no concrete runways, and the grass was frozen into a sheet of ice. The wheels of the Beaufort touched the ground so gently that the crew could hardly tell when they were no longer airborne, and gradually the undercarriage folded back until the torpedo was sliding along the grass. The weight of the Beaufort settled on the torpedo, and the two propellers of the aircraft whirred into the earth, bending back the tips of the blades whilst Etheridge switched off the engines. The aircraft skidded along, on top of the torpedo, until it came slowly to a halt. The faulty undercarriage and the torpedo had acted as brakes and had saved their lives. A few feet in front of the nose of the Beaufort was a crashed Wellington, which had failed to stop on the frozen ground and had collided with the boundary fence, with a full load of unexploded bombs on board. The duty officer had been flashing reds at the Beaufort for a very good reason.

An ambulance trundled over to the stricken Beaufort. The orderlies carefully helped Williamson to the ground, and drove him to Station Sick Quarters. The other three men wearily gathered up their equipment and climbed into the Operations Room van, driven by a young girl in WAAF uniform, who spoke with a welcome Cockney accent.

'Where are we?' Clayton asked her.

'Horsham-Saint-Fife,' said the girl, and Clayton closed his log

Left to right: Sergeant Stanley Clayton, Sergeant Frank Williamson, Sergeant Frank Hutchinson, Pilot Officer Alan Etheridge. Photographed at Abbotsinch.

Sergeant Stanley Clayton, Sergeant Frank Hutchinson, Pilot Officer Alan Etheridge standing by their damaged Beaufort II at Horsham St Faith, the day after their attack on the *Scharnhorst*. The torpedo is still underneath.

with this entry. It was not until later that he learned that the correct name was Horsham St Faith, just north of Norwich, which in later years became Norwich airport.

The aerodrome was an Operational Training Unit for Bomber Command, and the officers in the control room were not all accustomed to the arrival of strange aircraft such as Beauforts.

'What have you got underneath that thing?' Etheridge was asked.

'A torpedo,' Etheridge replied and consternation reigned amongst the staff, who protested that they had no idea how to deal with such a weapon. A van took the crew to their respective messes. The WAAF driver said to Etheridge.

'I'm new here, sir, can you direct me to the officers' mess?'

In spite of his tiredness, Etheridge could see the humour and irony of this situation. He made the girl stop at the next building and ask. The lady who answered the door turned out to be the Commanding Officer's wife.

The next day, the three men set off by train for their squadron headquarters at Thorney Island. Frank Hutchinson, a trenchant and determined man, went into their Beaufort and came out with Williamson's two Vickers K guns from the waist hatches, which he vowed were too valuable to leave behind. Wearing their flying jackets and carrying their machine guns, Mae West life-jackets and parachutes, they boarded a train for Liverpool Street in London. Hutchinson made straight for his home. Clayton rang up his mother and enquired about beds for the night. Of course, she would be delighted to have Stanley and his pilot to stay, although in the event she was a little puzzled about the flying clothes. The following morning, still in their strange attire, the crew travelled by underground to Waterloo Station, past military police who eyed them suspiciously but took one look at Etheridge's cap badge and his face, and wisely stayed clear. The three men reported back to 217 Squadron at Thorney Island.

Postscript

A storm burst in the British press. The public and the armed forces were humiliated by the success of the Germans in their Channel Dash. In an unprecedented move, a Board of Enquiry was set up, and reported that every conceivable thing had gone wrong. The Board concluded that high altitude bombing of fast moving enemy warships was impracticable and that torpedo bombing was the most effective method of destruction. It called for the creation of a more highly trained and larger torpedo bombing force. Later, tactics were worked out which enabled the torpedo carrying aircraft to swamp enemy defences; this involved detailed training schemes in synchronizing and co-ordinating attacks, with improved methods of sighting, and to some extent this was implemented at the expense of operational work.

Although Hitler was jubilant at the success of his scheme, no practical results were achieved. The *Gneisenau* was put permanently out of action a fortnight later by Bomber Command. The *Prinz Eugen* was torpedoed by a British submarine and saw no more service. The *Scharnhorst* was destroyed in a sea battle off North Cape in December 1943.

Alan Etheridge received the immediate award of a Distinguished Flying Cross, sharing in a general citation for the Beaufort and Hudson crews which attacked the battle fleet. Stanley Clayton received a commission two months later. Frank Williamson recovered quite quickly, returned to the squadron and was commissioned later when serving on a Liberator squadron. These three men survived the war, but Frank Hutchinson was killed in a Liberator squadron. Robin Goodman was commissioned and ended the war as a major. Meeting these men now, it would be difficult to guess that they shared that desperate experience on the night of Tuesday, 12th February 1942.

ROY C. NESBIT
23 NEWHALL STREET
SWINDON
WILTSHIRE SN1 5QT
ENGLAND

4 May 1989

Monsieur Michel Mazeas
Maire
Hotel de Ville
29174 DOUARNENEZ
FRANCE

Dear Monsieur Mazeas,

Further to my letter of 28 April, I have now carried out some more research at the Public Record Office, but with very limited success.

In another reference, White is recorded as M. White, but there are no initials for the other crew members. At this stage of the war, these records were not very well kept.

I looked at the list of RAF prisoners in Germany in early 1945, but there is no reference to M. White, Hatherall, or Hannersley (which could be Hammersley). Wilson is such a common name that there is no point in looking for it without an initial.

It looks as though all the crew members were killed on 12 Feb 1942, but that their names have been omitted from the list of RAF War Dead in public records (there are sometimes omissions).

If you are particularly interested in finding out their fates, I suggest that Gordon Carter writes to the following, giving as many details as he can (squadron, ranks and date):

Commonwealth War Graves Commission
2 Marlow Road
Maidenhead
Berkshire SL6 7DX
England

I expect they will have "no known grave", but their should be details of their ages, addresses, and next-of-kin.

If Gordon wants to write to the Air Historical Branch (which may not be necessary) the address is now:

Air Historical Branch (RAF)
Ministry of Defence
3-5 Great Scotland Yard
London SW1A 2HW

PTO

Sorry I wasn't able to find out more, but I should be interested to learn of any reply from these official bodies.

Yours sincerely,

Roy C. Nesbit

Roy C. Nesbit
23 Newhall Street
Swindon
Wilts SN1 5QT
England

23 July 1989

Monsieur Michel Mazeus
Maire
Hotel de Ville
29174 DOUARNENEZ
FRANCE

Dear Monsieur Mazeus,

Further to my letter of 4 May 1989, I now have some further information for you,

The crew of the Beaufort aircraft of 22 Squadron at St Eval which tried to bomb the Hotel de la Baie on the night of 28/29 November 1941 were:

Flying Officer Matthew White, pilot.
Sergeant Leslie P.D. Fordham, navigator.
Sergeant Frederick S. Hatherell, wireless operator/air gunner.
Sergeant Basil W. Hammersley, wireless operator/air gunner.

The crew of the Beaufort aircraft at St Eval which was lost on the day of the "Channel Dash" of 12 February 1942 is wrongly recorded in the official records. They were 22 Squadron members, flying in an aircraft of 217 Squadron, and was:

Flight Lieutenant Matthew White, pilot, age 21, married, body washed up and buried at the General Cemetery, Hook of Holland.
Flight Sergeant Hedley A. Goldsmith, navigator, age 25, married, body washed up and buried at the General Cemetery, The Hague.
Flight Sergeant John A. Wilson, wireless operator/air gunner, age 21, unmarried, body washed up and buried at the General Cemetery, The Hague.
Sergeant Basil W. Hammersley, wireless operator/air gunner, age 22, unmarried, body not recovered and thus "no known grave".

Of the crew on the night of 28/29 November 1941, Sergeant Leslie P.D. Fordham, age 21, unmarried, lost his life when flying from Luqa, Malta, on 22 April 1942, and has no known grave.

This leaves Sergeant Frederick S. Hatherell, who I am glad to say is alive today. He does not bother to reminisce much about the war, but his son is a great air enthusiast and in fact manages a bookshop. He is:

Mr David Hatherell
The Aviation Bookshop
656 Holloway Road
London N19 3PD.

I saw David yesterday and he took copies of our correspondence, and I have asked him to write to you on this subject.

With all good wishes to you and Gordon Carter.

Yours sincerely,

Roy C. Hewitt

P.S. Please note that the recollection of White's name as "Mac" must be wrong - it should have been "Matt".

cc Dave Hatherell

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FRANCE

Dear Monsieur Mazeus,

Further to my letter of 4 May 1989, I now have some further information for you,

The crew of the Beaufort aircraft of 22 Squadron at St Eval which tried to bomb the Hotel de la Baie on the night of 28/29 November 1941 were:

Flying Officer Matthew White, pilot.
Sergeant Leslie P.D. Fordham, navigator.
Sergeant Frederick S. Hatherell, wireless operator/air gunner.
Sergeant Basil W. Hammersley, wireless operator/air gunner.

The crew of the Beaufort aircraft at St Eval which was lost on the day of the "Channel Dash" of 12 February 1942 is wrongly recorded in the official records. They were 22 Squadron members, flying in an aircraft of 217 Squadron, and was:

Flight Lieutenant Matthew White, pilot, age 21, married, body washed up and buried at the General Cemetery, Hook of Holland.
Flight Sergeant Hedley A. Goldsmith, navigator, age 25, married, body washed up and buried at the General Cemetery, The Hague.
Flight Sergeant John A. Wilson, wireless operator/air gunner, age 21, unmarried, body washed up and buried at the General Cemetery, The Hague.
Sergeant Basil W. Hammersley, wireless operator/air gunner, age 22, unmarried, body not recovered and thus "no known grave".

- Of the crew on the night of 28/29 November 1941, Sergeant Leslie P.D. Fordham, age 21, unmarried, lost his life when flying from Luqa, Malta, on 22 April 1942, and has no known grave.

This leaves Sergeant Frederick S. Hatherell, who I am glad to say is alive today. He does not bother to reminisce much about the war, but his son is a great air enthusiast and in fact manages a bookshop. He is:

Mr David Hatherell
The Aviation Bookshop
656 Holloway Road
London N19 3PD.

I saw David yesterday and he took copies of our correspondence, and I have asked him to write to you on this subject.

With all good wishes to you and Gordon Carter.

Yours sincerely,

Roy C. Nesbit

P.S. Please note that the recollection of White's name as "Mac" must be wrong - it should have been "Matt".

cc Dave Hatherell

SKOL-UHEL AR VRO
INSTITUT CULTUREL
DE BRETAGNE

Le 11 septembre 1989.

Correspondance à adresser à :

Monsieur Michel MAZEAS
Maire
Hôtel de Ville
29174 - DOUARNENEZ

M. MAZEAS
Maire de DOUARNENEZ
Vice-Président de la Section Histoire
de l'I.C.B.

à

M. ROY C. NESBIT
23 Newhall Street
SWINDON
WILTS SN 1 5 QT
ENGLAND

Dear Mister NESBIT,

Thank you very much for your very interesting letter of 23 July. I did receive a letter from David HATERELL, a week ago, I think, with your informations and his own, to be able to complete my tale.

I wait for the written memories of Frederick S. HATHERELL and, I hope, some unpublished photos !

I know how you worked hard for me during those last months, but I don't know how to say you thank you for your amability.

I have many friends in FALMOUTH an they know very well the way to my home. It is a very easy way : you look for a little white house just under the only bridge of the town, along the river !

I wait for you, one day.

Yours sincerly.

Michel MAZEAS,

Mazeas

Extracts from Public Record Office

St Eval AIR28/729

29/11/41 Aircrafts Q & A of 22 Squadron went out on strike Treboul. Both failed to locate target. Aircaft Q returned with bomb load but aircraft A bombed building believed to be hotel on east side of Douarnenez Bay in estimated position of Hotel de la Bair. Four bursts were seen and the rear gunner saw the incendiaries ignite, and a large building was enveloped in smoke.

22 Squadron AIR27/278

Daily return

28/11/41 Strike - bombs and incendiaries 20.55 - 00.40 hours

Aircraft A. F/O White
Sgt Fordham
Sgt Hatherall
Sgt Hammersley

Owing to poor visibility four runs were made up to the target at Treboul before bombs and incendiaries were finally dropped from 100 feet, at 22.54 hours. Four bursts were seen and also incendiaries ignite, and a large building enveloped in smoke.

Monthly return

28/11/41 Three aircraft detailed for bombing operation with mixed load of incendiaries and high explosives in Brest area, target assumed to be living quarters of U-boat crews. F/O White, aircraft A, located the building and dropped his load at a low level, rear gunner noticing four distinct flashes and the building was seen to be enveloped in smoke. Unfortunately Sgt Howroyd in aircraft Q failed to locate the target and P/O thornton in aircraft P experienced trouble with gills prior to taking off which resulted in his trip being abandoned.

There is a note later on:

On 12 February (i.e. 1942) three of the squadron aircraft took part in a shipping strike from which one aircraft failed to return. Crew F/L White Sgt Hatherall F/S Wilson Sgt Hannersley.

(Note: it seems that White had been promoted to Flight Lieutenant and Wilson had taken the place of Fordham, probably the air observer).

12 février 1942 = attaque du SCHARNHORST et du GNEISENAU dans le MANCHE (p 95-96 RAF pendant la guerre)

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Roy C. Nesbit
23 Newhall Street
Swindon
Wilts SN1 5QT
England

31 March 1989

Mr Gordon Carter
Ar Gouez
22620 Ploubazanec
France

Dear Gordon,

Further to my letter of 22 March I now enclose some notes taken at the Public record Office yesterday.

I don't know whether this crew lost their lives on 12 February 1942 or whether they were taken PoW. Without their initials, which are not recorded, it's difficult to check. Perhaps Lacon House will be able to check, if you want to pursue the matter further. They are moving to Great Scotland Yard on 16 April, if all goes to schedule.

Perhaps you would pass this on to Monsieur Michel Mazeas - it is probably easier if you explain the matter to him.

With best wishes,

Sincerely,

Roy

BEAUFORT AIRCREWS

Squadron Nos. 22, 39, 42, 47, 86, 217

Tel: 0793 615157

Roy C. Nesbit
23 Newhall Street
Swindon
Wiltshire SN1 5QT
England

22 March 1989

Mr Gordon Carter
Ar Goaez
22620 Ploubazlanec
France

Dear Gordon,

Thanks for you letter of 20 March. I did receive a letter yesterday from Monsieur Mazeas.

I'm replying on our association notepaper, so that you can see the squadrons which were equipped with Beauforts at some stage of the Second World War.

My squadron, 217, had moved to Thorney Island by 28 November 1941. At that stage , I was the squadron navigation officer. It is possible that there was a detachment back at St Eval, but I'm not sure without checking. It seems to me more likely that the Beaufort which delivered the attack was from 22 Squadron, but again I'm not sure. We all moved about the coast so much that one has to comb through the records to find the answers.

The records themselves are not at the RAF Museum or at Lacon House, but at the Public Record Office, Kew. It will require a visit to dig out the information, for the staff there will not carry out such research. In addition, it may be possible to find the results of the raid from German records, but this is yet another section, in London.

As regards the Beaufort itself, it is possible that you may not remember much about this machine. I've written a fair amount on this subject, since taking early retirement (I was 19 when I flew operationally on Beauforts) and a list of my efforts is enclosed, with the relevant ones starred. You may have some sort of library service out there, but the publishers would obviously charge if anyone wanted to buy the books.

Beaufort squadrons suffered the heaviest casualties of all RAF squadrons - only about 17 per cent chance of finishing a single tour - so it is probable that whoever carried out the raid is no longer around. But I'll see what I can dig out next time I go to the PRO.

It looks as though you had quite an interesting tour yourself. It may be that the AHB at Lacon House has your report after you got back. Things are in a bit of a mess there, by the way, for they are busy packing up and moving to Great Scotland Yard.

With good wishes.

Sincerely,

1. Bundesarchiv - Abt
   Militärarchiv
   Wiesenthal Strasse 10
   7800 Freiburg-im-Bresgau
   RFA

2. Marine Offiziere Vereignigung
   von Hassel Strasse 2
   5300 Bonn 1
   RFA

3. Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt
   Grünwilde Strasse 10-14
   7800 Freibug-im-Bresgau
   RFA

4. Archives du Marinegruppe Kommando West (Admiral Krancke)
   Série RM 35 II
   Service historique de la Marine
   Pavillon de la Reine
   Château de Vincennes

5. B.R. Hollis Esq.
   18 Gun Lane
   Sherington
   Newport Pagnell
   Bucks MK16 9PE
   GB

riennes n'accordaient d'importance qu'à l'offensive.

En 1941, la chasse allemande reçut une aide puissante avec l'entrée en service du nouveau *Messerschmitt*, le *Me-109F*, et avec l'introduction du nouveau chasseur *Focke-Wulf 190*. Le *Me-109F* était mieux profilé que le *109E*, donc plus rapide, et son canon avait une cadence de tir supérieure. Le *FW-190* était encore plus puissant avec ses quatre canons de 20 mm et deux mitrailleuses. En plus de sa vitesse de 640 km/h à 5 000 m, il se distinguait par sa superbe maniabilité. Le *FW-190* se révéla très nettement supérieur au *Spitfire Mark V* qu'il rencontra à son entrée en service, et la Grande-Bretagne dut développer de toute urgence une version améliorée, le *Mark IX*. L'arrivée du *FW-190* est assez semblable au « Fléau Fokker » apparu en 1915.

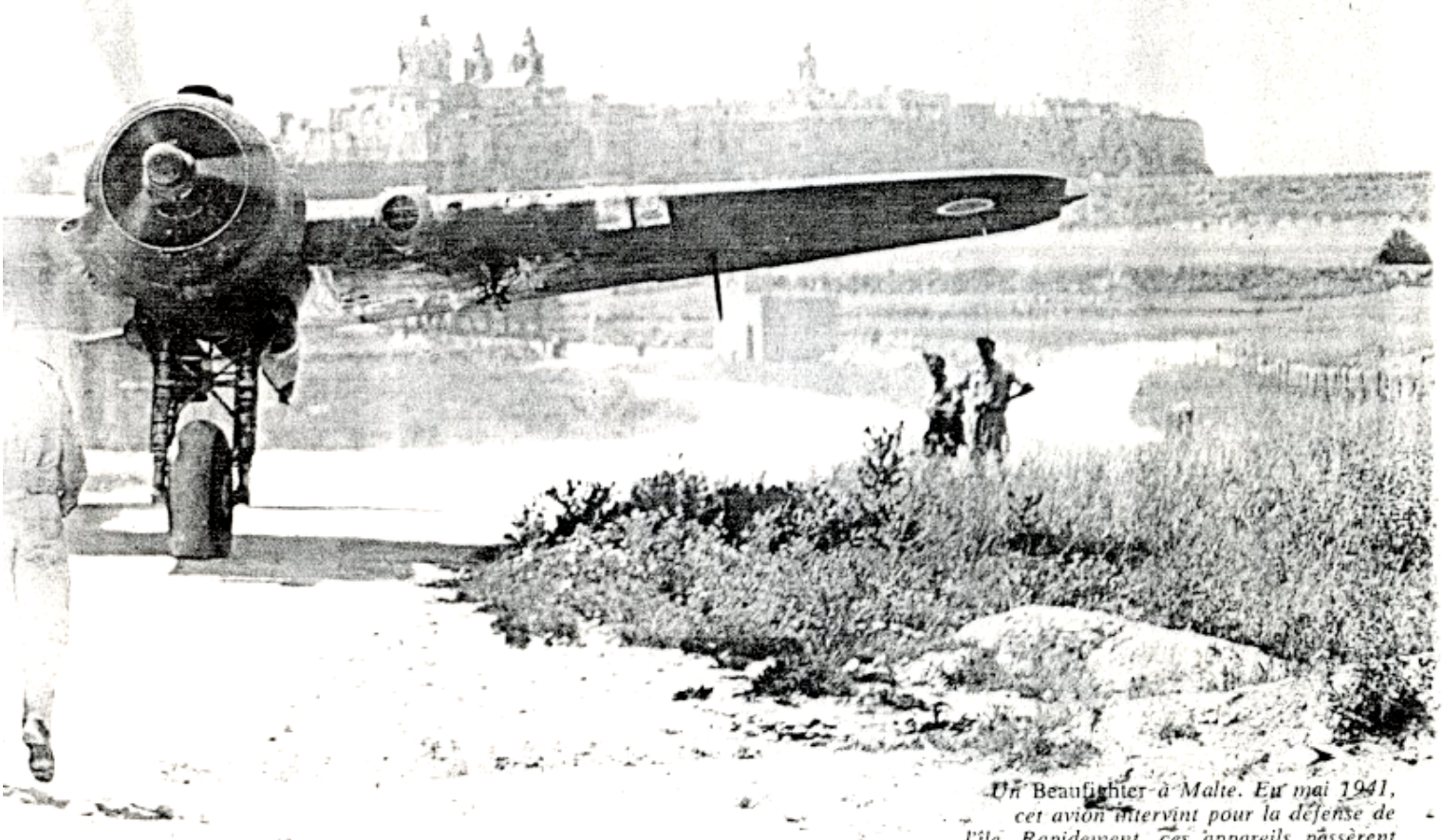
La couverture de Galland

Le *Me-109F* et le *FW-190* composaient la force qui amena l'une des plus grandes victoires tactiques de la deuxième guerre mondiale : la fuite des cuirassés *Scharnhorst*, *Gneisenau* et *Prinz Eugen* de Brest vers l'Allemagne, par la Manche, au nez et à la barbe des Britanniques. Cet exploit se déroula en février 1942. Galland commandait la phase aérienne de l'opération, qui détermina son succès. Il réunit tous les chasseurs disponibles sur la côte atlantique et leur demanda une couverture constante, qui ne fut jamais trop « courte », des trois navires. La bataille aérienne de Whirling détermina la maîtrise aérienne sur l'opération, et permit aux navires de passer les falaises de Douvres pour foncer vers le Nord. Pas une seule bombe, pas une seule torpille n'atteignit les navires grâce à la vigilance des forces aériennes menées par Galland. Malgré quelques avaries sans gravité du *Scharnhorst* et du *Gneisenau* qui heurtèrent des mines, toute la flotte gagna les ports allemands sans encombre. La supériorité aérienne allemande fut constante. Les *FW-190* évoluaient si rapidement que leurs pilotes devaient baisser volets et trains d'atterrissage pour attaquer les lents *Swordfish ;* ces derniers, interloqués, cherchaient des yeux d'imaginaires porte-avions !

Mais de tels succès ne pouvaient être que temporaires. La plus terrible menace restait l'offensive de bombardement alliée. Elle prit sa vraie dimension avec l'entrée en action des Américains, quand en 1942 apparurent les premières *Flying Fortress B-17*. Les Allemands devaient s'attendre à des bombardements de nuit et de jour, 24 heures sur 24 ; aussi les soucis de la *Luftwaffe* devinrent extraordinairement complexes. En été 1941, les chasseurs de nuit du général Kammhuber démontraient l'utilité du guidage-radar. Chaque station contrôlait et dirigeait l'interception à effectuer par un chasseur ; on pouvait ainsi contrer efficacement les attaques isolées. Le *Messerschmitt 110*, chasseur éprouvé, avait rapidement montré ses capacités extrêmement intéressantes dans les missions de chasse de nuit ; le *Junkers 88*, bon à tout faire, brillait également. Equipés des radars d'interception Lichtenstein à partir d'août 1941, les chasseurs en virent aussitôt leur capacité notoirement améliorée. Certains pilotes commençaient à se faire connaître ; bientôt la chasse de nuit eut ses as — Streib, Lent, Schnaufer (futur as des as avec 121 victoires de nuit), le Prince de Lippe-Weissenfeld, et d'autres.

Puis le système de Kammhuber fut sévèrement mis à l'épreuve avec les raids massifs de la *Royal Air Force* en 1942. Le problème était que le chasseur d'interception ne pouvait déborder la zone balayée par sa couverture radar au sol ; cette restriction fut impossible à observer pour mener à bien, dans nombre de cas, une interception tout à fait efficace. Mais la situation devint encore plus dramatique avec les raids massifs sur Hambourg, la dernière semaine de juillet 1943. Les Anglais aveuglèrent les stations radar au sol en jetant des feuilles d'aluminium ; protégés par ce merveilleux brouillage, ils purent opérer sans être gênés. Le choc causé par cette semaine d'attaques sur Hambourg poussa les Allemands à accélérer la production d'avions de chasse. Une tactique nouvelle, avec l'expérimentation de l'opération *Wild Sau* (« sanglier sauvage ») consistait à lancer des chasseurs solitaires dans la bataille, sans aide radar du sol, jusqu'à l'interception visuelle. Par convention, la défense anti-aérienne ne tirait pas au-dessus d'une certaine altitude. Dès que les avions de marquage alliés intervenaient, *Wild Sau* s'ébranlait ; à partir de mars 1944, on abandonna la tactique en raison de pertes de plus en plus élevées, malgré le succès initial.

Les parades astucieuses réussissent souvent au début, mais la science a généralement le dernier mot...



Un Beaufighter *à Malte. En mai 1941, cet avion intervint pour la défense de l'île. Rapidement, ces appareils passèrent à l'offensive ; cette version du* Beaufighter *est équipée de porte-bombes sous les ailes, en plus de ses mitrailleuses fixes.*

AIR27/278

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