

7, Egerton Road

Padstow

Cornwall

PL28 8DJ

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29th November 1978

Squadron Leader G.R. Spate, RAF
Officer Commanding
No.202 Squadron
Royal Air Force
Finningley
Doncaster

Dear *Squadron Leader Spate,*

I enclose a copy of the recent 'Aviation News' containing the history of No.202 Squadron. I hope that the article, if not the paper it is printed on, meets with your approval.

I am a little concerned about the photograph album and 'History of the RAF at Gibraltar' which I borrowed from you. I sent them through official channels (from 236 OCU St Mawgan) addressed to you at Finningley, together with a covering letter and the Hastings photographs I promised you. I have not heard whether they arrived safely and would be grateful for reassurance on this point. I also had a few queries on the Squadron's war-time submarine 'kills', but this was a very secondary point compared with the safe arrival of your material.

Thank you for your help with the article. I am hoping to 'work up' a couple of supplementary ones, one on the West African cruise by the two Scapas, and the other on the development of Gibraltar (North Front) as an airfield. I hope that the Sea King is settling down well in squadron service, and that the crews enjoy flying it.

Yours sincerely,

R.C.B. Ashworth
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24th August 1978

Officer Commanding
No.202 Squadron
Royal Air Force
Finningley
Doncaster
Yorks

Dear Squadron Leader Spate,

I have pleasure in returning the material you loaned me for my researches into the history of 202 Squadron. I can assure you that both the booklet 'Flying from the Rock' and the photo album have proved very useful indeed and I am grateful for your help.

I have enclosed a number of photographs of 202 Squadron Hastings which I hope will be useful for your Squadron Records.

I also enclose a rough draft of the article I intend to submit for publication, once it has been cleared by PCB(Air). Unfortunately it has had to be cut down severely from its original length and much interesting (to me anyway) information removed. However I hope the story has been retained in its essentials and the highlights brought out. You will see that I have left the final detail of the arrival of the Sea Kings on the Squadron open until it is published elsewhere.

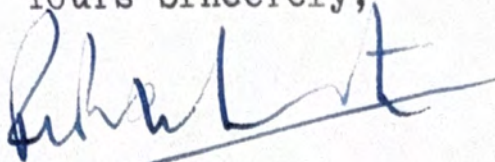
The problem of photographs of aircraft used by the squadron during the war is still with me, and I am particularly anxious to obtain a copy of the Catalina photograph published in J.J. Halley's 'Famous Maritime Squadrons of the RAF' at the top of Page 55. This photograph, of two Catalinas flying over a Lough in Northern Ireland is credited as coming from '202 Squadron album' and I wonder if it is possible to have a copy made?

I have not had the opportunity to get to the Public Records Office to study the wartime Form 541s, which I would have liked to have done to tie up the details of the Squadron's

successful attacks on submarines. I have a list of the attacks
dates and take the liberty of enclosing a copy in the hope
you can get someone to fill in some of the missing detail,
assuming that you have a copy of the relevant F.541s on
Squadron.

This seems to have developed into another list of 'wants'
hope when the article is finally published you will feel that
was worth the effort.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'R.C.B. Ashworth', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

R.C.B. Ashworth

No. 202 Squadron, Royal Air Force

In October 1975 it was announced that the Royal Air Force was to give a batch of Westland Sea Kings for search and rescue duties and that they would be in squadron service in 1978. The squadron chosen to operate the aircraft is No. 202, a unit with a long history during which it has had many roles, all of them associated with the sea - very fitting for one of the famous '200 series' units taken over from the Royal Naval Air Service on the 1st April 1918.

The first No. 2 Squadron, RNAS formed on the 17th October 1914, but was disbanded when the Navy adopted the Wing as its basic flying unit in June 1915. It was not until another change resulted in 'B' Squadron, No. 1 Wing being re-designated No. 2 Squadron on the 5th November 1916 that the real forerunner of No. 202 Squadron emerged. Initially it operated an odd mixture of aircraft types from airfields in the Dunkirk area, but in March 1917 the first D.H.4s to join the RNAS reached the squadron, and by the end of November the unit was at St. Pol completely equipped with this powerful de Havilland biplane bomber/reconnaissance aircraft.

Operations in France

The Squadron's main tasks were two-fold; reconnaissance and gunnery spotting. The Belgian ports of Ostend and Zeebrugge and the submarine base at Bruges were frequent photographic targets while a German long-range gun at Leugenboom was a regular customer for the squadron when spotting for naval monitors (a barge-like vessel carrying a very large gun). Despite many attempts this gun was never silenced and it continued to lob shells into the Dunkirk area, a distance of 29 miles, until its position was overrun late in 1918. Because of the almost nightly shelling the squadron was forced to move from St. Pol to Bergues (an airfield 16 miles inland) early in 1918.

The Germans made determined efforts to stop the reconnaissance flights over Belgium, and the D.H.4s were often attacked by German scouts. The RNAS tried to provide Camel escorts but the short endurance of these scouts made continuous cover difficult and so a special Escort Flight of D.H.4s was formed on the squadron. At the same time the expertise in the two main roles of gunnery spotting and photography was concentrated by forming specialist Flights. The squadron was thus divided into three sections, 'A' Flight (Photo), 'B' Flight (Wireless) and 'C' Flight (Escort) each with six aircraft. Some of the machines in 'C' Flight were very heavily armed, carrying double-yoked Lewis guns for the observer, and two Vickers for the pilot.

Squadron is born

In preparation for the formation of the Royal Air Force the naval squadrons were all renumbered by adding 200 to their current designation. Those operating over the Belgian coast became Nos. 201, 202, 210, 213 and 217 Squadrons and formed the 61st Wing RAF, permanently attached to the Dover-Dunkirk Command of the Royal Navy. At least this was the intention, but hardly had the re-organisation been established when an unexpected German offensive caught the Allies off balance and a serious situation developed further inland. Vice Admiral Sir Roger Keyes, Commanding the Dover Patrol, immediately placed the 61st Wing at the disposal of the Army and Nos. 201 and 210 Squadrons were moved to the Western Front where fierce fighting was in progress, leaving No. 202 (Recce), 204 (Fighter), 213 (Fighter) and 217 (Anti-submarine) Squadrons under naval control.

Early in April Squadron Commander B.S. Kemp handed over command of the squadron to Major R. Gow but the task remained the same, efforts being concentrated on naval operations against Zeebrugge and Ostend, and gunnery spotting for naval monitors. Unfortunately many of the attempts to direct the fire of the monitors proved abortive due to problems with the weather and communications. The spark transmitter/crystal receiver 'wireless' was very easy to jam, and while it was feasible to pass messages on the Aldis ^{light} up to ranges of 10 miles at 17,000 feet, cloud cover and poor visibility rarely allowed such distances to be achieved. Other difficulties were provided by the enemy! On the 8th April Sub Lt Penred and Lt Pickup went to Ostend to spot for a one hour shoot by naval seige guns. They were immediately attacked by 12 Albatros scouts, but outstripped them in a long dive for home. On the 3rd May the same pilot was escorting another D.H.4 on a spotting mission, but with a top cover of Camels. Five scouts were seen taking off from Ostend and watched during their climb. They were not deterred by an attack by the Camels and the situation was looking very unpleasant when the monitor cancelled the shoot and the two D.H.4s quickly left the area.

Meanwhile 'A' Flight was involved in the ambitious plan to block the entrance to the Bruges ship canal at Zeebrugge together with the approaches to Ostend, and thus bottle up a large German submarine fleet in the naval base of Bruges. Hundreds of photographs were taken by 'A' Flight of 202 Squadron during the first three weeks of April, enabling an accurate model of the objectives and defences to be constructed.

The naval operation took place during the night of 22/23 April 1918 and at 0655 hours the following morning Lt. R. Coulthard and Lt. J.D. Fysh of 202

Squadron were airborne to check the effectiveness of the block ships. Bad weather made the reconnaissance difficult but by flying at 50 feet they were able to provide a valuable report of the situation, enabling the crews of 213 and 217 Squadrons to be accurately briefed for their bombing attack which took place later that day. The results of this were likewise photographed by two D.H.4s of 202 Squadron, clearer weather enabling them to use their 40-inch lehs cameras from 18,000 feet.

After this exciting start the Squadron settled down to routine operations on the very static Belgian coastal front. Four D.H.9s were received during May but were soon returned to the Depot, the crews much preferring their D.H.4s. The wireless-equipped aircraft, which had been suitably embellished with a 'lightning-flash' by the RNAS became nondescript under RAF control, while the photographic machines sprouted a fairing around the camera aperture under the fuselage to prevent oil and dust coating the lens - a problem which has remained with photo recce units up to the present day.

A series of night bombing raids by the Germans during June resulted in one officer and four men being killed on the 6th, two more officers dying the following night. The airfield was also badly cratered, but the most damage was done on the 27th June, during the last attack of the series, when two hangars were burnt down and 14 aircraft destroyed on the airfield.

Enemy scouts also remained active, Lt Pearson and 2nd Lt Darby in A8025 being attacked by five aircraft on the 27th June and badly shot up. The same crew were photographing ammunition dumps at Engol on the 14th August when they were intercepted by two monoplanes but managed to drive them off, one apparently going down out of control.

What was to prove the final offensive of the War began at 0230 hours on the 28th September with an attack on the German lines between Dixmunde and Ypres. No. 202 Squadron was involved in a diversionary attack near the coast, spotting for ^{the} monitors HMS 'Terror' and 'Erulus' and coastal seige guns, in appalling weather. Thick cloud and heavy rain forced the D.H.4s to fly low and they met accurate ground fire, five aircraft being forced down by weather or 'flak'. With the risk of being cut off and increased pressure along the front the Germans started to evacuate the Belgian coastal strip which they had held for nearly four years. Almost continuous recce was flown by 202 Squadron on the 17th October to check the position of the forward troops, and to draw fire by flying low over Zeebrugge, Bruges and Blankenbergh. A few days later a similar foray brought no answering fire - the area was clear of Germans.

Within days of the Armistice No.202 Squadron moved to Varssenaere, five WSW of Bruges and long a target for their bomber colleagues. Here they operated under No.5 Group monitoring the latest positions of German forces retreating over the Meuse. Early in December they were detached for work with the Grand Fleet, before going to Castle Bromwich late in January 1919 where they were reduced to cadre (skeleton unit without aircraft). After a short spell at Dover the remnants of the squadron moved to Eastburn (later renamed Driffield) on the 24th March and finally disbanded on the 22nd January 1920.

Egypt

The immediate post war era was a period of turmoil for the Royal Air Force, while the size and scope of the air arm, and indeed its very existence was questioned. In the Mediterranean, ^{AREA} wholesale cuts were made in the number of units and by the end of 1919 both sea reconnaissance units in Egypt, Nos 269 and 270 Squadrons had been disbanded, leaving a few Short 184s at the Alexandria Seaplane Base.

The Royal Navy was anxious to keep a seaplane presence in Egypt however and when the number of units authorised for the peacetime RAF was finalised in 1920 the plan called for the Flight at Alexandria to be raised to squadron status. The unit was reformed as No.202 Squadron on the 9th April 1920 under the command of S/Ldr W.G. ~~Sitwell~~ Sitwell. But it was a squadron in name only, having just one Short 184 on strength in June, and never becoming fully effective before another change of policy resulted in its disbandment on the 16th May 1921.

Malta

No.267 Squadron, based at Kalafrana on the south-eastern tip of Malta now became the sole permanent sea reconnaissance unit in the Mediterranean. During the Chanak crisis of 1922 it was temporarily transferred to the Dardenelles, and on the 1st August 1923, while embarked on HMS 'Ark Royal' became No.481 Flight. The ship left Turkey on the 24th August and disembarked the personnel, Fairey IIID floatplanes and equipment of the Flight at Kalafrana. Most of the Flight's time was spent co-operating with the ships of the 4th Battle Squadron and 3rd Light Cruiser Squadrons which were based on Grand Harbour, Valetta, but goodwill tours of French air stations in North Africa, the unlikely experience of being inspected by the Queen of Roumania, and carrying His Grace the Archbishop of Malta on a flight to Syracuse, provided some light relief and excitement.

On the 1st January 1929 the existing flying boat Flights in the RAF were all raised to squadron status and although still equipped with floatplanes, No.481 Flight became No.202 (Flying Boat) Squadron under the command of

Lieutenant C. Boumphry, DFC. It was to be another 6½ years before the flying boat appeared, a serious handicap, for heavy swell and the lack of shelter in Calafrana Bay often prevented seaplane operations.

The squadron was able to put five IIIDs in the air for a display in May however and spent the next year exercising with the Fleet whenever possible. In the summer of 1930 the first of five Fairey IIIF mk.3Ms arrived as much needed replacements for the old IIIDs. After settling down on their new mounts the squadron set off on their first 'cruise', an event which was to become the highlight of each years' activities until the threat of war put a stop to such pleasantries. Leaving Malta on the 14th July 1931 the squadron visited Italian and Greek harbours before making for Aboukir in Egypt. It was an eventful trip, two aircraft suffering engine trouble, one of them being ignominiously towed back to Malta by the sloop 'Aberdeen'. The following year four IIIFs went to Khartoum, reached in nine days and in 1933 the squadron went north into the Adriatic visiting Kotor and Split in Yugoslavia.

These were the highlights, but nearer home things had not been uneventful, and as early as the 16th February 1932 the Squadron had started its now familiar role as an air-sea rescue unit, when the crew of a Dornier Wal of the Italian airline SANA put out an SOS call ~~when~~ some 50 miles south of Malta. Flying Officers C.W. Grannum and J.A. Rutherford were despatched in SL384 on a search and soon sighted the flying boat on the water. HMS 'Brilliant' was homed in and the Wal was towed to Malta. The drama was not over however, for just outside Marsa Scirocco Bay the Wal capsized and had to be cut loose. The wreckage was again located by 202 Squadron and was later towed into Calafrana.

This was just the start of the Squadron's involvement with the SANA company for on the 7th November 1933 SL385 collided with Wal I-AZDZ while landing in Calafrana Bay, and a week later another was found 'ditched' between Sicily and Malta. In March 1934 S/Ldr A.H. Wann located ^{yet} another to the south of the island; even by pre-war reliability standards surely something of a record for an airline.

The squadron strength had risen to 10 Fairey IIIF floatplanes when the first Supermarine Scapa arrived on the 1st May 1935. Perhaps the most elegant of pre-war biplane reconnaissance flying boats used by the RAF the Scapa was a development of the trusty Southampton, and had a crew of five and a range of over 1,000 miles. The last of five Scapas arrived on the 3rd August that year and the unit was fully equipped with flying boats ~~at last~~.

The Abyssinian crisis, caused by the invasion of that country by

Mussolini's forces in the autumn of 1935, resulted in an increase of activity, the Scapas starting anti-submarine patrols around Malta on the 9th October. They also started operating from dispersed moorings, an indication of the serious consideration given to the possibility of an attack from Sicily, only 50 miles to the north. Other units were stationed in Malta during the crisis and when the new Governor, His Excellency Sir Charles Bonham Carter, KCB, arrived off the island on the 5th April 1936 aboard the SS 'Strathmore', a formation of nine Demons of 74 Squadron, nine Vildebeeste of 22 Squadron and three Scapas met the ship and dived across it in salute.

With the immediate threat of war receding in 1936 No. 202 Squadron could think again of the 'annual cruise', the first with the Scapa taking them around the Eastern Mediterranean in October 1936. Two months later two 'boats' left Malta on an ambitious West African 'safari', going along the north coast to Gibraltar and then down the west coast to Freetown. Here one Scapa was delayed by engine trouble and the other continued on alone to Takoradi and Lagos; both returning to Malta late January 1937 having surveyed many potential bases en route.

The Scapa's time with the squadron was comparatively short for on the 24th September 1937 the first two replacement London 1's arrived in Malta. ^{THEY WERE} just in time to start the 'Nyon' patrol, a combined British and French anti-submarine operation designed to deter Italian submarines from sinking merchant ships suspected of carrying supplies to the Communist-backed forces in the Spanish Civil War. The last Scapa patrol was flown on the 22nd November, the Londons continuing until the 20th December when the operation was stopped, 202 Squadron having flown 111 Scapa/London sorties.

An urgent call for the Governor of Malta's presence in London resulted in Sir Charles Bonham Carter being flown to Berre, near Marseilles by the squadron on the 12th March 1938, but by June work was concentrated on the more mundane but very necessary fleet exercise training during a test of the air defences of Malta.

The German invasion of Czechoslovakia in the late summer of 1938 resulted in the RAF being placed on a war footing and 202 Squadron moved to Alexandria in September, the ground crew travelling in the depot ship 'Maidstone' which then acted as the squadron headquarters and accommodation ship. The immediate crisis faded away on October and on the 10th the 'Maidstone' returned to Malta, followed by the six Londons currently on strength.

Publicly there was much relief that the threat of war had been lifted but throughout the RAF the respite was used to raise the tempo of exercises, and

Squadron was given the task of up-dating the photographic cover of Mediterranean ports in North Africa during November 1938. An alternative wartime base for the Mediterranean Fleet was Gibraltar and in February 1938 four Londons were detached to the 'Rock' to make a practical test of operating from the harbour. Moorings and accommodation were sorted out and several exercises flown before the 'boats' returned to Malta.

A fresh outburst of tension in April 1939 resulted in the squadron starting another move to Alexandria but this was cancelled before the sea party left Malta. In the same month the squadron learnt that it was to be equipped with Sunderlands and two Londons left for Calshot on the 30th for the crews to receive their initial training. Satisfaction soon turned to dismay however, for within a week the plan was changed and the Sunderlands re-allocated to 228 Squadron.

Two Londons had paid a short visit to Athens at the end of March 1939, and in June Greece and the Aegean were the goal for the annual cruise, four Londons touring various Greek bases. At Phaleron the squadron renewed its acquaintance with the Dornier Wal when K9684 was hit by a Greek Navy machine while at its moorings.

Tension in Europe again mounted in August and plans were made for the dispersal of No.86(GR)Wing, which ^{now} comprised Nos.202 and 228 Squadrons. Following general mobilisation on the 27th the squadron aircraft and personnel were dispersed to St.Pauls Bay and Comino Island on the north-west side of Malta to prevent an attack on Kalafrana wiping out the whole Wing.

With the declaration of war with Germany on the 3rd September the strong possibility of German submarines concentrating in the Straits of Gibraltar and using Spanish port facilities loomed large in Admiralty thinking, and at 0300 hours on the 9th No.202 Squadron was ordered to Gibraltar. The first aircraft was airborne at 0900 hours, loaded to the gunwales with equipment. An overnight stop had to be made at Bougie, some 120 miles east of Algiers, but all the aircraft arrived safely on the 10th.

Gibraltar

The bulk of the squadron personnel arrived on the 13th September aboard HMS 'Shropshire' but the first operational sorties had already been made by then, an anti-submarine patrol taking off at 0700 hours on the 11th, less than 24 hours after the aircraft had reached Gibraltar.

No.200 Group, RAF was formed on the 26th September to control the operations of 202 Squadron and an operations room was set up in the naval headquarters

the dockyard. Sorties were just about equally divided between anti-sub shipping escorts, work which was to be the squadron's bread and butter for the next five years!

Three merchant ships were sunk in the approaches to the Straits during October, and though a London made an attack on a U-boat it was unsuccessful; like all maritime units No. 202 Squadron had to learn the difficult task of destroying a submarine the hard way - by bitter experience. Greater success came in the search for German merchantmen attempting to run the blockade. The freighter 'Glucksberg' was sighted leaving Cadiz harbour on the 26th December and was shadowed until the destroyer 'Wishart' was in contact. Ordered to stop the merchantman made a run for it but was forced aground on the Spanish coast.

By the end of 1939 the squadron had carried out 95 anti-submarine patrols, 56 convoy escorts, 13 recce patrols and six photo sorties, a total of 1027 operational hours. Maintenance problems associated with working on the 'boats' moored out in the harbour were partly resolved by the arrival of the RAF Depot Ship 'Dumana', but 60-hour inspections still meant a transit flight to Malta and the search for better facilities went on. Early in 1940 the Navy agreed to allocate a piece of newly re-claimed land north of the dockyard and work began on a slipway, hangar and administrative buildings. Improvements were also carried out on Gun Wharf where Swordfish floatplanes of No. 3 AACU were accommodated in a Bessoneau hangar and a steam crane was used to lift the Londons out of the water for some of the inspections.

Problems caused by lack of spares and the deteriorating state of the aircraft were accentuated in June 1940 by the declaration of war by the Italians and the capitulation of the French, which meant that Gibraltar was completely surrounded by hostile, or potentially hostile, countries. If the weather prevented a landing in the harbour there was no longer a friendly 'bolt-hole' in North Africa. In addition aircraft from Gibraltar now became responsible for the patrol area previously covered by the French from North Africa, and two Sunderlands from 228 Squadron joined the Londons to help out.

Surprisingly the weather didn't cause any aircraft losses, but mechanical failure did, and during the attempt by the Free French to capture Dakar in September 1940 (Operation Menage) a London, flown by F/Lt MacCallum was shot down by Vichy forces off Casablanca.

Hours of patient searching with little to show for it were finally rewarded on the 18th October when two Londons, captained by F/Lt N.F. Eagleton and F/Lt

Field sighted oil bubbles and dropped depth charges which forced the Italian submarine 'Durbo' to the surface. ~~and~~ It was subsequently captured by Royal Navy destroyers. Nine days later the Swordfish of 3AACU already carrying out patrols in the Straits, were taken over by 202 Squadron as 'B' Flight and continued on operations, initially on floats but later on wheels, from the new airstrip built on the racecourse.

Another winter was faced with both Flights ^{Sqn} flying obsolete biplanes, but more modern equipment was on the way. Two Catalina flying boats were taken over in the UK on the 24th April, the first, W8410, arriving at Gibraltar on the 7th May flown by Sqn. Ldr G.A. Harger. Nine days later it was carrying out a long range convoy escort over the Atlantic when it was attacked by Fw 200 Condors, but managed to fight them off.

The last London patrol was flown on the 4th June 1941 and the Swordfish aircraft were also relinquished soon afterwards. Patrols well out over the Atlantic were now routine and on the 25th October S/Ldr Eagleton and crew were on a search ahead of Convoy HG75 when a submarine was sighted. Two depth charges were dropped but failed to explode. An escort was called in and the submarine, which proved to be the Italian 'Ferraris', was finally scuttled by her crew.

On the 21st December No. 200 Group was disbanded and Air Headquarters Gibraltar formed as part of Coastal Command. This was a prelude to a build up in the strength of the air forces on the 'Rock', now recognised as a key base in the Battle of the Atlantic. A small number of Sunderland I and IIs joined the squadron at this time and were operated alongside the more numerous Catalinas.

No. 202 Squadron made few sightings during the early months of 1942, but on the 2nd May F/Lt Powell and crew in Catalina 'C' caught U-74 and dropped a complete stick of depth charges. ~~and~~ This submarine was sunk by two destroyers which answered the sighting report. A major task became the Malta convoys which re-started in March 1942, and for a while the unit was supplemented by detachments from other Catalina squadrons, notably 209, 240 and 413, and Sunderlands from No. 10 (RAAF) Squadron. While on escort on the 18th May a Catalina of 202 Squadron was attacked by two Vichy French Dewoitine D.520 fighters off Algiers and forced down onto the sea. A destroyer rescued the crew, but a Fulmar acting as top cover was promptly shot down by the D.520s, and it was left to a Sunderland of 10 (RAAF) Squadron to drive them off.

For the most important convoy of all a tremendous effort, ~~'Operation'~~ ~~Keweenaw~~ was made to clear the way and units at Gibraltar (Hudsons at North

ent and flying boats in the harbour) flew 105 sorties and 848 hours on duty during 'Operation Harpoon'.

Despite such sustained operations it was not until the 14th September 1942 that 202 Squadron scored a complete success against a submarine. This was when Sunderland 'R', W6002, flown by F/O E.P. Walshe and crew attacked and sank the Italian 'Alabastra' with six depth charges. Six days later the Sunderlands flew their last patrol with the squadron, the three remaining aircraft returning to the United Kingdom.

An early instance of a U-boat fighting back occurred on the 19th October when the crew of Catalina 'G' sighted one on the surface. As the aircraft dived to attack the submarines' crew opened fire with machine guns and cannon. Slight evasive action was taken before a stick of eight 250-lb Torpex DC's was dropped straddling the U-boat. When the spray settled the submarine had disappeared leaving a large patch of oil and two pieces of wreckage. The attack was classified as 'damaged'.

A different type of sortie was made on the 24th October when a Catalina picked up Brigadier General Mark Clark, Eisenhower's deputy, from a submarine after his clandestine trip to Algiers where he met the French General Mast and other leaders of the Resistance. A similar flight was made to pick up General Giraud on the 7th November, after he had been smuggled out of France. Although successful this operation was not without incident for the General fell into the water during the difficult transfer from submarine to aircraft.

Operation 'Torch', the invasion of North Africa, produced another tremendous effort by everyone at Gibraltar. The strength of 202 Squadron was increased to 12 aircraft and No. 210 Squadron arrived from the United Kingdom while the detachment of 233 Squadron at North Front was joined by the rest of the squadron, and Nos 500 and 608 Squadrons, all flying Hudsons.

On the 2nd November the convoys transporting troops and equipment to North Africa came within range of air cover from the 'Rock' and during the first fortnight of the month Nos 202 and 210 Catalina squadrons flew 1311 hours, more than double the average. Despite this effort, and continued operations covering the follow-up convoys, there were few sightings and no attacks until February 1943 when U-620 was located ahead of a convoy on the 13th and sunk by F/Lt H.R. Sheardown and crew, and five other U-boats were attacked by other crews during the same month.

It was to be a whole year before the next success which came on the 24th February 1944 ~~conducted~~ ^{And Geyants} a combined assault on U-761 by two US Navy PBX-5

Malinas, a Lockheed PV-1 Ventura, two destroyers and Catalina 202/G which was shot in the U-boat blowing up. By April 1944 the Intelligence authorities were convinced that all U-boats had been withdrawn from the Gibraltar area and apart from a sudden flurry of activity in May they were proved right. During June there were no contacts or sightings and it was decided to reduce the scale of operations. No.202 Squadron started flying long-range meteorological sorties, called 'Nocturnals', in place of No.520 Squadron, and also carried out a fine air-sea rescue operation when they searched for a 19 Group Halifax crew reported to have ditched some 350 miles west of Cape Finisterre, a position 750 miles from Gibraltar. The squadron found the dinghy and kept it in sight for two days before a US destroyer finally reached the spot and rescued the crew.

The next, and as it subsequently proved, final submarine sighting from Gibraltar was on the 19th August when the crew of 202/K obtained an ASV mk.VII radar contact at night in very bad weather. The second flare dropped ^{quickly} revealed the stern and wake of a large U-boat. ~~monstrous~~. An attack was made but no result, not even the explosions, were seen.

On the 3rd September 1944, No.202 Squadron was ordered to the United Kingdom. The first three aircraft left on the 5th, and by the 8th all but one Catalina had departed Gibraltar, the final one getting away early in October.

Castle Archdale

No.202 Squadrons' new task was to strengthen the maritime forces operating over the North Atlantic. It was sent to Castle Archdale on the shore of Lough Erne in County Fermanagh, Northern Ireland. The squadron collected 16 new Catalina IVAs, equipped with up-dated radar ^{on top of the fuselage} and a Leigh Light under the starboard wing. Operations began immediately, the first sortie being made on the 16th September, three days before the arrival of the groundcrew, and built up quickly, the squadron flying as part of Wing, with Nos.201 and 423(RCAF) Sunderland squadrons.

Appallingly bad weather throughout the winter of 1944/45 brought its toll, Catalina 202/P crashing in the hills to the west of Lough Erne on the 20th November, followed a month later by 202/F hitting mountains near Tralee. A submarine sighting was made during December but activity in the inshore areas generally assigned to the Catalinas was slight and no attacks were made by the squadron during their stay in Northern Ireland. The weather did not relent until February 1945; for a whole week in January no flying was possible from Lough Erne because it froze solid and ^{the wing} ~~many~~ boats ~~was possible~~ had to be beached to prevent the hulls being crushed in the ice.

Patrols did not stop completely with the end of the war in Europe because

was uncertain whether all the U-boats commanders would respond to the surrender instructions. It was with considerable relief that a Catalina sighted U-1058 flying the black 'surrender' flag on the 9th May, the first of many U-boats seen making for ports in Northern Ireland and Scotland. The last patrol was flown on the 2nd June and with plenty of Sunderlands available for the reduced maritime force planned for operations against the Japanese, No.202 joined the rest of the Catalina squadrons in quickly disbanding, officially on the 12th June.

The squadron was credited with destroying three submarines unaided, and shared in the destruction of three more.

'Bismuth' Flights

No.202 Squadron was not long out of the active list for on the 1st October 1946 No.518 Squadron was re-numbered, thus maintaining the tradition of keeping the older and more famous squadrons alive. The unit was based at Aldergrove flying modified Halifax mk.6 aircraft fitted with special instrumentation for meteorological work.

Compared with the war years the need for meteorological reconnaissance was much reduced now that there were many more reporting agencies available but there were still significant gaps in the coverage and 202 Squadron was responsible for filling them by flying 'Bismuth' sorties from Aldergrove and 'Nocturnal' operations from Gibraltar, where a detachment was maintained.

The Met Air Observer was accommodated in the nose of the Halifax surrounded by his instruments which consisted of an Aneroid mk.IIB, a Psychrometer mk.VIA, an mk.14 pressure altimeter and a radio altimeter as basic equipment.

The daily 'BISMUTH' was flown over a triangular route, going approximately due west for 500 miles at a constant pressure level of 950 millibars (approx 1800 ft), descending at four points to check sea level pressure and temperature. Turning north-east, the aircraft then climbed to the 500 millibar level (approx 18,000 ft) checking the temperature and weather conditions at every 50 millibar level during the ascent. At the end of this 400 mile leg the aircraft again descended to sea level checking conditions at each 50 millibar change in height, making the return leg at the 950 millibar level, the whole flight taking approximately 10 hours.

The weather encountered on the 'Bismuth', especially in winter, was often very bad and the poor heating on the aircraft was very apparent on the 18,000 ft leg. The detachment at Gibraltar had, by comparison, a pleasant time

most of the year, the 'Nocturnal' sorties requiring a flight due west low level for 700 miles, climbing then to ^{THE} 500 millibar level for 400 miles on the reverse track before letting down slowly into the Straits, and back into Gibraltar.

On the 1st May 1948 part of the unit became the nucleus of 224 Squadron which subsequently moved to Gibraltar and took over the 'Nocturnal' sorties. The Halifax was already displaying shortcomings in the role. In addition to the problem of basic comfort, the wartime standard Hercules 100 engines gave a lot of trouble and resulted in a number of very nasty incidents, and a call for a newer aircraft. It was decided to use the Hastings I, and the last five aircraft on the production line, TG620-624, were retained at Radlett and modified for the meteorological role, replacing the Halifax in October 1950. The instrumentation was much the same as that carried on the Halifax, but the readings were taken from the cockpit or cabin in reasonable comfort. The 'Bismuth' tracks were modified to cover the area most interesting to the 'weather men' and soon ranged from the southern end of the Bay of Biscay up to Icelandic waters.

In 1961 the squadron was tasked for 275 hours a month which included 45 hours transport flying for units of Coastal Command, enabling it to boast that Transport Command hardly ever had to be called upon for logistic support during the 14 years that the Hastings remained in No.18 Group. During the early 1960s a considerable amount of updating of the Hastings was undertaken, the most welcome change being the replacement of the Hercules 106 by the 216 series, which considerably increased reliability.

The task of meteorological reconnaissance was gradually taken over by weather satellites and by the mid-1960s they had made the specialist aircraft obsolete. The squadron was disbanded on the 31st July 1964.

Search and Rescue

Again the squadron was not out of the limelight for long because on the 1st September 1964 No.228 Squadron at Leconfield was re-numbered 202. With its sister squadron, No.22, it was responsible for operating detachments of Whirlwind HAR 10 helicopters dispersed around the coasts of the United Kingdom. No.202's 'parish' was the East Coast, the flights being based at Coltishall, Acklington and Leuchars, as well as ^{Alongside the Harriers at} Leconfield.

The primary task of the search and rescue helicopter units was, and still is, the recovery of RAF aircrew but in practice most of the call-outs are for merchant seamen, yachtsmen or holidaymakers. Their activities are not confined to the sea however, they also carry out rescues of climbers and

lift emergency cases to hospital from remote areas of the country. Increasingly the North Sea task has involved oil rigs and one of the most hazardous of the early rescues by the Squadron followed the collapse of the oil rig 'Sea Gem' during a gale on the 27th December 1965. A Whirlwind from Leconfield battled its way to the scene and three survivors were sighted. The crewman, Sgt John Reeson, managed to hook one man onto the cable and direct his lowering onto a nearby ship. Despite injury he repeated the procedure with a second man, but had to allow the navigator to retrieve the last survivor. For his determination and courage Sgt Reeson was awarded the George Medal.

Over the years there has been a certain amount of chopping and changing in locations of the Flights, usually to try and rationalise the distribution of the detachments between the two Squadrons. In February 1973 'E' Flight was formed at Lossiemouth from 'B' Flight of 22 Squadron which had earlier moved up to northern Scotland to provide SAR cover for the Jaguars of the Conversion Unit. In four months the new Flight rescued five people and carried out three casualty evacuations. The balance was restored when 202 Squadron relinquished the Coltishall detachment to 22 Squadron on the 2nd April 1973, the handover ceremony being interrupted by a distress call from the collier 'Amberley' which reported that it was drifting helplessly off the coast. A combined effort by the new 22 Squadron Flight and a 202 Squadron Whirlwind from Leconfield successfully rescued the whole crew.

When Acklington closed down 'A' Flight moved ten miles north in October, 1975 and took over a specially designed operations block and hangar on the Master Radar Station at RAF Boulmer. During the final three years at Acklington the Flight had carried out more than 300 rescue sorties, including a difficult winching from a Lake District cliff face of two injured climbers, a night-time casualty evacuation from an oil rig, and assistance to a motor vessel on fire at night.

In January 1976 the Headquarters of the Squadron moved to Finningley, leaving 'B' Flight at Leconfield, and joined No. 22 Squadron to form the SAR Helicopter Wing. 1975 had proved the busiest year so far for 202 Squadron with 424 calls for help, nearly double the number received in 1974. For eleven years the Squadron had been carrying out rescues, often in appalling weather and gallantry awards included three Air Force Crosses and five Queen Commendations for Valuable Services in the Air.

This courage and selflessness was recognised by the award of the 1975

Wilkinson 'Sword of Peace' to the Commanding Officer, Squadron Leader I.H.R. Evans, in the Culter's Hall, London. The Sword is annually awarded to a unit ^{from} each of the three Services for outstanding efforts in fostering good relations with the community in which it serves and no more worthy winners could be imagined than a full time rescue unit. Perhaps one of the rescues which clinched the award for the squadron was the winching to safety of the entire crew of a foundering Belgian trawler by two crews from the Squadron. F/Sgt G. Rodmell, who later received a Queen's Commendation, rescued the captain from the trawler's deck despite injuries received when he was twice dragged across the ship ~~and into the sea~~ as it pitched in a 30 ft swell.

The familiar all-yellow Whirlwinds continued their operations in 1976 and in severe winter conditions in the Scottish Highlands two pilots from 'C' Flight won Queen's Commendations for rescuing five stranded climbers during March. Flt. Lt. John Stirling flew five missions in three days, and during a night rescue had to be guided to the casualty by a climber holding a torch. Falling snow cut visibility to almost zero and the wind was gusting up to 60 knots but the pilot managed to hold the helicopter steady while the survivor was loaded. Flt. Lt. Richard Day ^s rescued a climber trapped by an avalanche near Braemar in conditions described by the mountain rescue team as the worst they had ever experienced. With visibility cut to a few feet and severe turbulence ~~threatening~~ threatening to dash the helicopter onto a massive rock outcrop, the pilot hovered the machine while the casualty was winched aboard. He then had to fly sideways down the mountain side with his rotor only a few feet from the rock face.

All these, and many other rescues were achieved with a helicopter which had severe limitations. The practical range ^{was only} ~~was limited to~~ 82 miles, and the power reserve in turbulence with the aircraft loaded was ~~only~~ marginal. Changes were on their way however; No. 22 Squadron started to receive the Wessex, and an order for Sea Kings was placed to re-equip 202 Squadron. To position the more powerful helicopter in the best locations a further change-over took place in April 1976, the Coltishall detachment becoming 'C' Flight of 202 Squadron, while the old 'C' Flight at Leuchars became 'B' Flight of 22 Squadron.

The lack of range of the Whirlwind was highlighted in the late summer of 1977 when Flt. Lt. D. Cardus and crew of 'A' Flight, Boulmer, went to get an injured seaman from a trawler and rush him to hospital. To enable the helicopter to reach the ship, ^{which was} some 150 miles out in the North Sea, it was necessary to refuel on an oil rig on both the outbound and return flights.

Bitter 80mph blizzards swept Scotland in January 1978 and all the rescue services were soon at full stretch. 'D' Flight, Lossiemouth with three ~~Winds~~ winds was reinforced by two more, one from Boulmer and the other from Wing HQ at Finningley. With a Shackleton acting as a radio link the helicopters patrolled the valleys looking for the occupants of cars, buses and trains marooned in drifts up to 20 feet deep, and later started distributing food to communities cut off by road.

The squadron started conversion onto the SeaKing HAR 3 at Culdrose during the Spring of 1978 and ~~at last the Royal Air Force had a helicopter capable of full day/night operation in all weathers~~ With sufficient crews worked up on the aircraft the first deployment was made to Lossiemouth where 'D' Flight received its two machines, XZ5 and 5 in 1978.

The Royal Air Force now has a helicopter specially developed for the search and rescue role, and with the range and weight-lifting capability to cover the whole of the British area of responsibility in the North Sea, by day or night in all weathers. No longer will it be necessary to call in the Norwegian or Belgian SeaKings, or the Danish S-61s to cover a rescue nominally in British waters; or to rely on the British Airways helicopters at Aberdeen. During the day the squadron is on a 15-minute readiness, while at night 45 minutes is the official response time for the SeaKing crews. It is a point of honour however that the crews will be airborne well within the stipulated time. They fully uphold the Squadron's motto 'Semper Vigilante' (Always Vigilant).

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U-BOATS SUNK/DAMAGED BY No.202 SQUADRON AIRCRAFT

<u>Date</u>	<u>Submarine</u>	<u>Aircraft</u>	<u>Serial</u>	<u>Letter</u>	<u>Captain</u>	<u>Result</u>
25/10/41	Ferraris	Catalina	AH538	A	S/Ldr Eagleton	Sunk shared with RN
6/12/41	U-332	Catalina		B		Damaged
2/5/42	U-74	Catalina	AJ162	C	F/Lt Powell	Sunk shared with RN
7/6/42	Veniere	Catalina		M	F/O R.M. Corrie	Sunk
13/6/42	U-	Catalina			S/Ldr Burrage	Damaged
14/9/42	Alabastro	Sunderland	W6002	R	F/Lt E.P. Walshe	Sunk
10/2/43	U-108	Catalina		N		Damaged
14/2/43	U-620	Catalina		J	F/Lt H.R. Sheardown	Sunk
8/7/43	U-603	Catalina		G		Damaged
8/1/44	U-343	Catalina		J		Damaged with Wellington R/179
24/2/44	U-761	Catalina		G	F/Lt J. Finch	Sunk shared with RN

I think this is a full list, but would welcome any additions or amendments. Any assistance in filling the gaps would be gratefully received.

R.C.B. Ashworth
7 Egerton Road
Padstow
Cornwall
PL28 8DJ