NO 460 SQUADRON: STRIKES AND RETURNS

From 1 July 2010, Air Force elements within the Defence Imagery and Geospatial Organisation (DIGO) will be formed into No 460 Squadron—the new unit will be an Air Intelligence Squadron and will form part of Air Force's Information Warfare Wing, alongside No 87 Squadron, No 462 Squadron, Joint Electronic Warfare Operational Support Unit and the RAAF Aeronautical Information Service. No 460 Squadron's roles will include the provision of target intelligence to the wider air targeting process and support to military operations. During World War II, No 460 Squadron flew bombing missions in the night skies over Germany and occupied Europe—the most dangerous and demanding of all the Allied theatres of war—where it established a reputation for courage and excellence second to none. Thus there are very clear links between the old No 460 Squadron as a heavy bomber unit and the new No 460 Squadron as a targeting unit. The decision by the Chief of Air Force, Air Marshal Mark Binskin AO, to reconstitute this squadron will open a new chapter in the service of one of the Air Force's most renowned combat units.

No 460 Squadron was first formed in England on 15 November 1941 under the auspices of Article XV of the Empire Air Training Scheme (EATS) agreement between Great Britain and the Dominions (see *Pathfinder* 132). No 460 Squadron was one of seven 'RAAF' heavy bomber squadrons that served with RAF Bomber Command during the strategic bombing campaign against the Axis powers in Europe. Despite the squadron's designation as a RAAF unit, its Australian members served alongside men from across the British Commonwealth throughout the war. Initially equipped with Vickers Wellington medium bombers, the squadron

was briefly assigned to No 8 Group of RAF Bomber Command, before moving to No 1 Group in January 1942.

Following four months of intensive training, five aircraft were assigned to the squadron's first operation on 12 March 1942 against the city of Emden. Bad weather impeded the effectiveness of the bombing, but all the squadron's Wellington bombers and their crews returned safely. The squadron's first major raid was on 30 May, when 18 aircraft and crews participated in an attack on Cologne. This was the very first of RAF Bomber Command's 1000 bomber raids and it marked a significant milestone in the intensification of the strategic bombing campaign against Germany.

G for George—the Avro Lancaster on display at the Australian War Memorial—served with No 460 Squadron

In September 1942 the squadron was withdrawn from combat operations for conversion onto the aircraft with which it is most famously associated—the Avro Lancaster. The four-engined Lancaster heavy bomber was larger (increasing the crew compliment from six to seven), could carry a greater payload, and had a far longer range. The new aircraft also meant a redesignation from a medium to a heavy bomber squadron and increased the scope of the missions the squadron would be called upon to perform.

In March 1943, the squadron participated in the Battle of the Ruhr—attacking targets in Germany's industrial heartland. The crews of RAF Bomber Command referred to the Ruhr Valley as 'Happy Valley' due to the intense anti-aircraft fire and large number of German night fighters. The squadron flew on 46 nights, making 597 bombing sorties, and a further 20 on mine laying operations. The intensity of operations came at a

considerable cost with the loss of 29 aircraft and their crews.

RAF Bomber Command then turned its attention to targets deeper inside enemy territory—conducting raids on Berlin and Hanover, and other cities in Germany, Czechoslovakia and Italy. At the conclusion of this offensive in October 1943, the squadron had flown missions on 28 nights for the loss of 18 aircraft and crews. It was at this stage of the war that No 460 Squadron earned the distinction of being the first squadron in the RAF to fly 1000 sorties in the Lancaster.

Between November 1943 and March 1944, Bomber Command launched a major campaign against the capital of Nazi Germany. During the Battle of Berlin, No 460 Squadron flew more sorties than any other squadron in RAF Bomber Command. On 22 March, the squadron dropped 131 tons of bombs on Frankfurt, a record for the highest tonnage of bombs dropped in one day. The ferocity of the German air defences over Berlin imposed a high toll on the squadrons of RAF Bomber Command— No 460 Squadron lost a total of 36 aircraft and their crews during the course of the battle.

As part of the preparations for the Allied invasion of mainland Europe in mid-1944, RAF Bomber Command turned its attention to Occupied France. No 460 Squadron conducted attacks against rail lines, marshalling yards, coastal defences and German troop concentrations. No 460 Squadron also played a role in the direct support of the land battle following the D-Day landings, bombing German defences and troop formations throughout Normandy. As the Allies pushed the Germans back across France, No 460 Squadron continued to bomb German positions and during the month of August it dropped a total 1867 tons of bombs—a record for No 1 Group.

From October 1944 until the end of war, the squadron returned to bombing raids on German cities. On 7 March 1945, the squadron became the first to fly 5000 sorties. The squadron's last attack was on Adolf Hitler's private retreat at Berchtesgaden in south-eastern Germany on 25 April—ANZAC Day.

In the final days of the war, the squadron was involved in Operation MANNA, a food drop to hungry Dutch citizens. The squadron's first humanitarian flight occurred on 1 May and involved 19 unarmed Lancasters. German troops still occupied the Netherlands, and although both sides were instructed not to fire upon each other, several aircraft returned to base with bullet holes from small arms fire. It is estimated that Operation MANNA saved over 1000 people a day from starvation. The squadron's last operation in the war was returning allied POWs to Britain as part of Operations EXODUS and DODGE. Between 28 April and 16 September 1945, the Squadron returned 1404 Allied servicemen from POW camps in Belgium and Italy.

By the end of the war, No 460 Squadron had flown 6264 operational sorties totalling 30 526 operational flying hours, and had dropped 24 856 tons of bombs, the most of any unit in RAF Bomber Command. Members of the squadron were awarded nine DSOs, 228 DFCs (including 14 Bars), one GCM, 101 DFMs and one DCM. During the course of the war the squadron lost 1018 aircrew (589 of whom were Australian) and had 181 aircraft destroyed.

No 460 Squadron Badge

- No 460 Squadron played an important part in the strategic bombing campaign against Nazi Germany—dropping the highest tonnage of bombs in RAAF Bomber Command.

- The squadron was the most decorated Australian unit of World War II.

- No 460 Squadron suffered the highest casualty rate of any unit in the entire history of the RAAF.

'460 Squadron's record stands high in the annals of Bomber Command, and will remain so as long as there is a Bomber Command.'

Air Chief Marshal Sir Basil Embry