

## Archive Biography Roger Malengreau

### From the Form 540 Operations Records Book of 609 (West Riding) Squadron

1941

Biggin Hill. May 6<sup>th</sup>. At 12.13 the Squadron went to sweep the coastline to Southwold and back. Off Clacton they sighted a convoy 5 miles long. Warned that there were enemy aircraft, dodging in and out of cloud, the C.O. ordered the Squadron to break up into sections and search. Emerging above cloud 2 Me.109's sighted. These were pursued, but escaped into cloud. F/O. Bisdee and P/O. Malengreau hearing that convoy had been bombed, took a vector and came out directly over it. Seeing only a Beaufort and a pair of Hurricanes patrolling, they courteously added their strength while their petrol lasted. In the afternoon the C.O., G.C. Soden and others enjoyed flying a curious little aircraft, called a Signet, with tricycle undercarriage, twin tails, and the two occupants sitting in line abreast. The day was also notable for visit of A.O.C., Air Vice-Marshal Leigh Mallory. P/O. Comte du Monceau de Bergandael and Sgt. Palmer flew the Maggie to Liverpool to collect a Leopard Moth for the Station Commander.

May 7<sup>th</sup>. A busy and lucky day, though hardly satisfactory. First, in the early morning 2 pilots went to search for an A/C in the drink, next came a convoy patrol, and after lunch "A" Flight, led by the C.O. took off for Hawkinge. There it was to refuel and escort a Defiant detailed to spot for the heavy guns of Dover shelling Calais. Meanwhile "B" Flight was to protect the guns themselves and act as rear support. As there was no R/T communication between the Defiant and its escort the C.O. appointed P/O. Malengreau to broadcast any visual signals the Defiant might make. It was not long before the latter signalled that it was going home, whereupon a Blenheim took its place without waiting for the escort to pick it up. The Blenheim and Malengreau were attacked at sea level by Me.109's, and the former was shot down. At the same time the C.O. was attacked head on by 4 other Me.109's. Pulling up the nose of his Spitfire he fired at the leading one until he was quite inverted. The others dived, and throttling back he fired again as they overshot. One descended at a steep angle emitting white and black smoke and shedding small fragments. He saw a splash, thought it was the 109, but it was the Blenheim. - With no top cover "A" Flight were lucky to get back unscathed: S/L. Robinson said he expected to get back with 3.

Enemy Casualties:- 1 Me.109 damaged (S/L. Robinson)

The day concluded with dusk patrols by Sgts., Boyd and Palmer. - Headache for the Intelligence Officer, who thought the C.O. had flown to Calais with the whole plan of the night defences of London in his pocket. (Appendix "A").

June 10. Rain. Visit of Hugh Gibson, American. While awaiting his arrival, I.O. lectured on forthcoming Fighter Nights and "Escape" to a bored audience. Squadron thereafter released. 2 or 3 selected English Pilots accompanied P/O. du Monceau and P/O. Malengreau to London to dine at the Dorchester with the Belgian Air Attaché. Returning at 0500 hours they were met in the hall by F/Os Ziegler and Tidswell, the latter's wife and P/O. Hill, who, disappointed re squadron transport, had hired Station transport at 5d a mile, driven to Bromley Station, changed their minds and gone back to the 'Jail' where they remained till 0400. With F/O. Tidswell yelling wild instructions from atop the canopy of the Sergeants van which they had requisitioned, the party then visited Southwood, where they were met by a very grave caretaker in pyjamas. With no purpose whatever, except that P/O. Hill felt that he had imagined the C.O. in bed, they then made a perambulation of the manor, illuminated solely by a cigarette lighter, Southwood's light having failed. F/O. Tidswell, rising from bed later that morning, fell flat on his face.

June 12th. Two sections patrolled a convoy in the morning, P/O. Malengreau being indignant at a balloon which loomed up near him when he was crossing the Thames at 15,000 feet. The Intel. Officer tried to persuade him that it was one of the little balloons with boxes of food that are said to have been mysteriously floating in from the direction of Holland lately, but Malengreau denied this. At 13.00

hours the Squadron was released for Fighter Nights, and at 21.50 took off for West Malling. There being no enemy activity, it got a good nights rest, the C.O. very considerably deciding that it was too fine for practice night flying, which might interfere with operational patrols.

June 30th. The last day of the month saw a full 12 A/C (at last) take off, experience no cannon stoppages, and shoot down 3 109s, with a probable and a damaged in addition. The Circus (27) had a powerhouse at Lens for target. Biggin Hill taking off at 17.37 hours as Target Support Wing, 609 at 20,000 feet in fours. Many small formations of Me.109, mostly 'Es', menaced them from target area onwards without seriously attacking, and whenever they did, our A/C used their superior manoeuvrability to assume an attacking position themselves. S/L. Robinson, after chasing two down to 5,000 feet over Merville aerodrome, got behind five which were stalking Blue section, and damaged one before they made off. It was probably the same lot with which Sgt. Hughes-Rees became involved, and one of which he managed to shoot down from below during a vertical climb. Over the Foret de Nieppe the squadron was following the Wing Commander down to investigate, when Yellow section saw 4 Me.109E on their port quarter, Yellow section pulled up and each selected a victim. Yellow 2 (P/O. Ortman) attacked his with quarter, astern and finally deflection attacks as it climbed and dived and skidded till at last it disintegrated. F/Lt. Richey got astern of his, and despite its evasive action caused it to go down in a spiral, covered with oil and flaming from its engine. Yellow 3 (P/O. Malengreau) followed it in a steep dive down to 9,000 feet, also firing and finally losing sight of it as its dive exceeded the vertical. Meanwhile F/Lt. Richey, joined some other Spits at 16,000 feet, saw 6 Me.109E coming down behind. After an ineffective engagement with one, he found himself again alone, and dived for a patch of cloud at 800 feet near the Foret de Clairmarais. At ground level he saw 2 Me.109E diving on his tail with a third opening fire from his starboard quarter. A violent climbing turn and side-loop brought him on the latter's tail, and after two longish bursts E/A dived at full speed from 1,000 feet. After eluding the other 2, also accurate light Flak from St. Omer, F/L. Richey flew home, at times below treetop level, taking a look at France. He reports no cars on the roads, no cows or sheep in the fields, but only horses and horse-carts. One of our A/C was slightly hit by Flak over Dunkirk. (Appendix "J").

Enemy casualties:- 3 Me.109E destroyed (F/Lt. Richey D.F.C. P/O. Ortman, Sgt. Hughes-Rees)

1 Me.109E probable (F/Lt. Richey and P/O. Malengreau)

1 Me.109E damaged. (S/L. Robinson, D.F.C.)

Our Casualties:- Nil.

July 6th. A Roadstead in the morning, a Circus in the afternoon. In the former 609 and 74 accompanied 3 Blenheims to attack shipping reported to be steaming N.E. from Gravelines. No shipping seems to have been sighted by the Blenheims, though one or two 609 pilots reported some small, stationary, destroyer-sized vessels which were left unmolested. Circus 35 was again directed at Lille this time with 6 Stirlings, with whom the Biggin wing was instructed to remain. About 20 pairs of 109s were seen on the way to the target, and these attempted their usual trick of trying to decoy our fighters away. The bombers were seen to register hits on or about the target. 609 had various ineffective engagements on the return journey, and between St. Omer and Gravelines P/O. Malengreau and P/O. Offenbergh were the last pair of the formation, the former about 500 yards behind. P/O. Offenbergh saw him attacked from astern, saw the Spitfire shed glycol and its engine stop. He called 'M'Aidez' and summoned the rest of 609 to assist. With these in close attendance, P/O. Malengreau then performed the feat of gliding all the way back across the Channel, crossing the English coast at 2,000 feet, and crash landing downwind in a hayfield. Before 609 Squadron left him, he was seen waving his reassurances. The worst aspect of his trip, he says, was the oil and glycol in the cockpit. (Appendix "D").

Enemy casualties:- Nil.

Our Casualties:- 1 Spitfire Cat. 2, P/O. Malengreau (Belgian) uninjured.

The A.O.C. appeared today and gave a pep talk at 92 Dispersal before the wing took off. A number of 609 pilots, pie-eyed from night at the Suivi, listened as he said, "Keep fit, take lots of exercise and sleep". He did however congratulate them on their efforts, and pointed out that whereas they were healthy and happy through two out of the three squadrons being released after the completion of each day's Circuses, the Jerry pilots had to remain at constant readiness. Except for 4 A/C., which had to go

and escort a Calibration Blenheim of 75 Wing, 609 were in fact today released at 5. F/Lt. Richey was seen to get straight from his aircraft and fetch his bathing costume from his office.

July 10th. Circus 42, 3 Stirlings raiding Chocques. On this occasion the Biggin Hill wing was instructed to sweep the coast between Hardelot and Le Touquet, then fly with the bombers half way to the target, and finally break away to sweep to seaward off Gravelines and Calais. Shortly after take-off, however, Controller vectored 72 Squadron (who had replaced 74, and were on their first "show" on to an 'enemy raid' - which turned out to be friendly. 72 never found the wing again, and landed at Coltishall, minus a section of 3, all of whom were shot down. As for 609, it sighted a loose formation of 15-20 Me.109F's immediately on crossing the French coast. Both formations began circling, and our, showing greater manoeuvrability, succeeded in getting behind. S/L. Robinson reported that the enemy seemed inexperienced and showed little inclination to fight. Some dived away inland and others pulled up in to the sun. He himself, after missing with a deflection attack on the nearest, followed it down in a dive of great steepness, about 1,000yds behind. He fired at this range, and E/A poured black smoke. He continued to follow till he was 30 miles inland, at an indicated speed of no less than 450 m.p.h. Suddenly E/A increased its angle of dive and both wings came off. F/L. Richey, leading Yellow section, got on the tails of 3 E/A. One broke away, and he pursued the other two in a fast shallow dive. After three long range bursts at one of them, it emitted slight black smoke which he took to be 'boost'. He fired again as E/A turned to the right, but broke away on sighting many A/C (which proved to be friendly Spitfires) above. 2 other 609 pilots however report that the airscrew of this E/A nearly stopped, and as smoke from 'boost' is thought to be white in the case of the 109, it is claimed as damaged. Later Yellow section saw 3 other Me.109F's 3,000ft. above and behind them, showing considerable signs of tactical experience. First one would dive, then, when this had climbed up again, all three would come down below and behind our A/C in an effort to climb up beneath their tails. After the completion of each manoeuvre, E/A would regain their height advantage. Their efforts were foiled by turning. P/O. Malengreau, P/O. du Monceau and Sgt. Bramble were all involved in dogfights without results. The bombers again distinguished themselves by flying straight over the Boulogne Flak defences, and the sight of a great Stirling turning on its back and plunging into the sea was not a pleasant one. It is said, incidentally, that they fly to their target entirely by instruments, without picking their course visually at all, and that the pilots are not usually very experienced. F/L. Richey says that the Stirlings don't look 'British', but like some Russian monster. Well, Russia is our ally now. (Appendix "H").

Enemy Casualties:- 1 Me.109F Destroyed (S/L. Robinson D.D.C.)

1 Me.109F Damaged. (F/L. Richey. D.F.C.)

Our Casualties:- Nil.

Note. S/L. Robinson has been leading the Biggin Wing a lot lately, W/C. Malan having been given a rest.

The post-Circus conference today took place in the anti-room of the Officers' Mess, the Intelligence Office having become like an oven. After the Squadron was release. Pilots having become thoroughly dispersed off the aerodrome, there was immediately a 'flap' about 8 A/C required to stand by for Fighter Night, which had been officially cancelled this month due to the lack of hostile activity. Presumably someone thought, however, that the Jerries might suddenly be provoked into a retaliatory raid. After a fruitless attempt by the Intell. Officer to trace pilots of 609 left. on the Station, F/L. Richey persuaded Ops. to persuade Group to let 609 off, and 4 pilots 92 Squadron stood by instead. The only two pilots of 609 left. on the Station, plus the I.O., then attended a W.A.A.F. Officers' housewarming party at Keston - in a charming garden, with band playing and a W.A.A.F. corporal sweetly singing.

July 19th. Circus 51, Stirlings raiding Lille, Biggin Target Support. On this occasion, the squadrons were to act independently, 2 to fly via Gravelines, to Gheluwe, the third via St. Inglevert to St. Omer, all at 25,000 feet, converging on their target if not engaged. As it happened, the bombers were five minutes early, so 609 accompanied them to the target area and (with the exception of Blue section) back, the whole formation getting swept farther east than intended by a strong 220 degrees wind. S/L. Robinson reported a number of determined attacks made on the Stirlings by pairs of 109's diving from either flank and behind, in some cases right through the formation. He managed to fire at one, which

pulled up emitting black smoke. A formation of 20-30 109's refrained from attacking, only odd pairs waiting for stragglers. A number of other 609 pilots had combats - P/O. de Spirlet afterwards joining a formation of 5 E/A. flying along the Belgian coast - but no results of these were observed, partly owing to the heavy cloud. A Stirling was seen going down in flames, hit by Flak from Dunkirk or Nieuport. (Appendix "L").

Enemy Casualties:- 1 Me.109F damaged (S/Ldr. Robinson, D.S.O., D.F.C..)

Our Casualties:- Nil.

In the evening a representative group of 609 Officers gathered informally round a table and drank quantities of port in celebration of the C.O's new award. Temporary formality was assumed when a number of people made speeches, including one by P/O. Baron Baudoin de Hemptinne in French. It was announced that today he and P/O. Malengreau had been conceded the rank of Capitaine in the Belgian Air Force. Many an old squadron story was then retold in masterly style by the Adjutant, speeches were made by P/O. Wade and F/O. Wiese (Intell.) both of 92 Squadron, after which both squadrons more or less swore eternal brotherhood, the C.O. declaring 92 as the only squadron 609 had ever liked. After this there was a move to the bar, which the C.O., as acting Station Commander, took the opportunity of keeping open beyond the usual hour. Happy days of the now defunct Drone were recalled as he told how once he took off with it in the dark, got lost and landed in a hayfield, where he woke up next morning covered with dew; how the Drone used daily to race an express train, the pilot endeavouring to hand the evening paper to the driver; and another occasion, in another aircraft, when he (the C.O.) 'quite stinking' took off from Middle Wallop in a heavy mist, and came out 200ft. over Le Touquet.

Gravesend - Biggin Hill. Sept 1941. Continued bad weather during September caused many operations to be cancelled, and also contributed to the comparatively small degree of contact with the enemy during the operations that did take place. 609's score for the month was 2 enemy fighters destroyed, 2 probably destroyed, and 1 damaged. And the squadron's luck continued to hold: P/O. V. Ortmans was rescued unhurt from the 'drink' for the second time in five weeks, P/O. Atkinson was also rescued, while P/O. Sanders miraculously survived from an appalling crash. The last and P/O. Muller (Belgian) were the only postings from squadron strength during the month; added to it were P/O. Smith (New Zealand), P/O. de Selys Longchamps (Belgium), P/O. Van Aerenbergh (Belgium), Sgt. Lallemand (Belgium), Sgt. Galloway (Canada), Sgt. Lawrence-Smith, Sgt. Doig and Sgt. Greenfield. 3 Belgians - Malengreau, Dieu and V. Ortmans - advanced in rank to F/O, while the last and Sgt. Rigler were awarded well-deserved decorations, a D.F.C. and a D.F.M. respectively. On the 24th of the month the squadron moved back to Biggin Hill.

Sept 4<sup>th</sup>. Circus 93, Biggin acting as Escort Cover Wing to 12 Blenheims raiding Mazingarbe. More 109s (all 'F') are seen than for some time, and these come down and attack in 3s and 4s. W/C. Robinson is leading the squadron, S/L. Gilroy Yellow section, which bears the brunt of the attack, and gets split up. S/L. Gilroy expends all his cannon ammunition in defensive warfare and considers himself lucky to get back. Sgt. Palmer causes one E/A to go down seemingly out of control with its airscrew stopped, and P/O. Dieu is unfortunate in having another Spitfire flying right between him and a 'sitter' just as he has got it nicely lined up. Blue section are also attacked, P/O. Sanders suffering damage to the tail unit of his a/c and landing with some difficulty at Detling. One Blenheim is seen to suffer a direct hit from Flak, and a Spitfire (probably 92 Squadron) going down in flames. Mist causes one or two pilots to get a bit lost returning to base. (Appendices A, A1)

Enemy Casualties: 1 Me.109F probably destroyed (Sgt. Palmer D.F.M.)

Our Casualties: Nil

P/Os Malengreau and V. Ortmans today promoted to F/O.

Sept 17<sup>th</sup>. A change in the weather produces no less than 3 'shows'. The first is a Roadstead directed against alleged shipping variously reported as off Gravelines and Ostend, with 609 and 615 (cannon Hurricanes) protecting 3 Blenheims. No shipping is seen and the trip is eventless. Flying to Biggin for lunch, the wing takes off as Escort Cover to 24 Blenheims raiding Mazingarbe (Circus 95). They have to dive to catch up the bombers, and owing to this haste have no time to wait and engage some 20 109s which appear immediately on crossing the French coast, except F/O. V. Ortmans and Sgt. Palmer.

These two are mightily assailed, F/O. Ortman's aircraft is hit, and Sgt. Palmer has to lose altitude owing to trouble with his oxygen equipment. One of F/O. Ortman's assailants is what he describes as a '109 with a radial engine', and this later turns out to be one of the first times the new German fighter, the Fw.190, has been encountered. Chief impression of Vicki: its ability to change from the horizontal to the vertical without engine cutting. The rest of the squadron accompanies the bombers to the target, and are not molested until they recross the coast. F/Lt. Offenbergh then hears Controller say: "Your friends are in trouble over Boulogne". He investigates, sees two splashes in the sea. F/O. Malengreau calls 'M'Aidez', and immediately afterwards the section contacts 4 109s approaching the coast below. One of these separates itself from the others and is immediately shot down by S/Lt Chorou. F/Lt. Offenbergh, separated from the others, is attacked 4 times by 2 other 109s, the last time within 10 miles of Dungeness, and his aircraft is also holed. (Appendices B, B1).

Enemy Casualties: 1 Me.109F destroyed (S/Lt Chorou - French)

Our " Nil.

Pilots are not long back at Gravesend before they are ordered off again on Circus 96, Biggin this time acting as Target Support Wing to 6 Hampden's raiding Marquise. 609 flies about in the St. Omer area, and though many 109s are seen in formations up to 12, none are contacted except by P/O. Atkinson, leading Yellow section. After diving on some 109s, he is turning to rejoin his section when 2 aircraft, which he takes to be Spits, are seen behind. One begins firing at him, but as the deflection is not nearly enough, P/O. Atkinson merely tightens his turn. Suddenly his A.S.I. blows out, and it seems another a/c has been firing from above. Half-rolling and diving, he crosses Boulogne beach at 2000ft, and his engine begins to fail. Flames then appear beneath the engine cowling. Calling 'M'Aidez', he struggles up to 2000ft. and bales out in the middle of the Channel. After about an hour he is picked up by a naval launch - none too soon, as it is getting late, with visibility reduced by haze. Officers who pick him up at Dover the same evening, find him in excellent form, thanks partly to having consumed a benzedrine tablet in his dinghy.

Enemy Casualties: Nil

Our " 1 Spitfire Cat. 3 (P/O. Atkinson rescued uninjured).

Oct 1st. At 10.10 hours 609 is at 30 minutes available when Group suddenly required the wing to take off in 15 minutes on a Sweep. After some frantic dashing about, the thing is postponed for an hour as pilots reach their cockpits. When they do take off, instructions are altered to a Sweep of the Channel, 609 above cloud, the other 2 squadrons below. No one expects to see anything, and most of 609 return without having done. It is discovered, however, that F/O. Malengreau's section, which remained below cloud, saw 25 109s, and that F/Lt. Kasinsky and F/Sgt. Kingaby of 92 Squadron have each got a destroyed and a probable. Over lunch W/C. Rankin and F/Lt. de la Torre (Intell.) accordingly go into a huddle and plan some clever strategy for the Biggin wing in the afternoon: 92 will sweep in 'Rhubarb' formation below cloud, and the other 2 squadrons will lurk above cloud, ready to swoop down as soon as 92 signals the presence of Huns. Permission from Group is obtained, and squadrons are all lined up for the take-off, when red rockets are fired, and it is found Group has changed its mind, and wants the wing to help 91 Squadron search the sea for 2 of the latter's pilots shot down escorting a rescue launch too close to Calais harbour. But the search is fruitless.

Oct 3rd. Newhaven - Dieppe part of Channel out of bounds until the 10th, on account of the exchange of prisoners scheme - which comes to nothing. Visit of Shaw Wildman, M.O.I. photographer, who wants a picture of a French and an English pilot together for a leaflet. S/Lt Chorou is on leave, so F/Lt. de Spirlet and F/O. Malengreau (Belgians) deputise, with P/O. Barnham representing England. In the middle they have to fly to Ostend and back on Circus 105B, in which Biggin is Escort Cover Wing to 6 Blenheims attacking the power station. After making landfall at Nieuport, the bombers, instead of flying along the coast, proceed some 15 miles inland and approach their target from the rear, with the result that 609, some 8000ft. above 92 as top cover, loses sight of the formation, only sighting the bombers again over Ostend thanks to the intensive Flak. 92, mistaking a formation of 109s for 609, is bounced and loses another 2 pilots for 1 109 shot down by Kingaby. 609 sees nothing except some unusually effective bombing. Representative of Yorkshire press again present today, but as usual find no Yorkshire pilots. 8 a/c 609 detailed for Fighter Night.

Oct 14th. Squadron 'released for training', as in the old days of April, but not before 2 sections have been on convoy patrol. F/O. Malengreau browned off at not being allowed to go and intercept 6 109s plotted off Gris Nez. In the evening a number of pilots enjoy themselves in tow.

Oct 19th. Squadron sees a film about Gas at the Station cinema., prefixed by a short talk by F/Lt. de la Torre on Do's and Don'ts in France. F/O. Malengreau and Lt. Choron escort Schiletto's Blenheim.

Oct 21st. At 11.16 hours Biggin takes off to act as Rear Support Wing off Boulogne in connection with a mammoth Sweep (now known as a 'Rodeo'). Everyone expects this to be a 'stooge' job, and no one dreams it is to end sadly with the loss of 2 of the squadron's best pilots, F/O. Vicki Ortman and Sgt. Palmer - the only time this year that more than one has been lost in a day. W/C. Rankin is leading the squadron, with S/L. Gilroy in charge of Blue section, in which P/O. Christian Ortman is flying as his No. 2 on his first operational flight, with Vicki Ortman and Sgt. Palmer as a strong 3 and 4. Suddenly the C.O. sees 15-20 109s coming down, and calls that he is going down too, as there are too many to deal with. The order is either not heard or misunderstood, for the rest of the section does not follow, and by the time the C.O. has climbed back to rejoin them, Blue 3 and 4 are already in the thick of it. Sgt. Palmer, hit with a deflection shot, is seen to spin down, recover, then make a good landing on the water. But he does not get out, and his aircraft sinks upside down. No one sees at all what happens to Vicki. (Appendix B).

Enemy Casualties: Nil

Our Casualties: 2 Spitfires Cat. 3 (F/O. V. Ortman D.F.C. - Belgian - Missing; Sgt. Palmer D.F.M. Missing, presumed killed).

After lunch the squadron (15 a/c including W/C. Rankin, leading an extra section) sets off with 4 a/c of 91 Squadron to search the Channel. The search is fruitless, but leads to a number of tragi-comedies which help to dispel the gloom. P/O. Malengreau, instead of taking Ops.' vector home, flies off on a reciprocal, leading his section straight to France. After much anxious R/T Conversation, his followers decide to desert. The flight has, however, led to petrol shortage, and mist makes ground visibility practically nil. All pilots need a homing, and the R/T log contains priceless examples of excited French. Lt. Choron force lands in a field near Rye, F/O. Malengreau lands with 7 other pilots at Hawkinge (smugly referring to the amount of Flak he experienced over Boulogne), Sgt. Rigler lands at Lympne, others at Manston, and only 4 at Biggin, these including Sgt. Evans with 6 gallons of petrol after 2 hours and 20 minutes in the air.

Dec 8th. Improved weather, and some practice flying in morning. F/Lt. Offenbergh, F/O. Malengreau, P/O. du Monceau and Sgt. Nash take off on dusk patrol. Fog immediately closes in, and F/Lt. Offenbergh gives order "Prepare to bale out in formation". Considerable difficulty in finding aerodrome and landing.

Dec 11th. Wing practice by 609, 92 and 412 (Canadian). Examination in recognition of 11 pilots, with aid of epidiascope, produces results which should satisfy the A.O.C. Pilots then look at their practice combat films. Dusk patrol by F/O. Malengreau and Sgt. Nash.

Dec 12th. F/O. Dieu, P/O. Morai and P/O. Barnham rushed into the air at 08.05, though flight only supposed to come to readiness at dawn, namely 08.20. Purpose: to search for a ship reported as sinking. 2 sick ships are sighted, one being said to have been in that condition for some days, the other merely to have hit a wreck. P/O. Barnham sees a lot of oranges floating around it. Intell. Officer takes the opportunity to write only report of the month. Later F/Lts de Spirlet and Morgan (supernumerary) are scrambled to intercept an X-raid (a Church Fenton pilot who has given the tally-ho on this bales out and is not seen again). The raid disappears, nor does a sea sweep by W/C. Blatchford and F/O. Malengreau find it. Afternoon: air firing practice and visit to dispersal of Group Captain Wann (Chief Fighter Command Intelligence) and S/L. Lord Waleran (Chief of 12 Group ditto). Intell. Officer then tries to fly the Maggie, fails. In the evening some Officers attend a dance at Petwood Hotel, Woodhall Spa. Posting if Sgts. Lawrence-Smith, Doig and Wilkinson to Middle East, P/O. Van Aerenbergh to C.F.S. Upavon. F/Sgt. Hughes-Rees, Sgt. Rigler and Sgt. Van Schaick gain their commissions, soon to be followed by Sgt. Nash, and P/O. Atkinson becomes F/O.

Dec 17th. Continued good weather. Squadron formation practice led by F/Lt. Morgan, about to be posted as Flight Commander. Object: to give gunners of a Hampden and a Wellington some shooting practice. Dusk convoy patrol by F/Os Malengreau and Atkinson, Sgt. Evans and another. Conditions difficult, with showers in places, and Sgt. Evans flies off with 3 other Spitfires by mistake.

Dec 18th. Convoy patrol by F/O. Wilmet and P/O. C. Ortmans, 08.30-10.10. No R/T contact made. F/O. Atkinson and Sgt. Evans wait at advanced base, Manby; F/O. Malengreau and his No. 2 are waiting to take off and intercept Sgt. Dickson who is aloft. at 35,000ft. - G.C.I. co-operation, and take off prematurely owing to a confusion of signals. A bogey is suddenly announced. F/O. Malengreau's pair, in good position, is not used; another pair is scrambled; F/O. Atkinson's pair is scrambled from Manby, and Sgt. Dickson, already flying for 40 minutes, is ordered 40 miles out to sea. F/O. Malengreau protests at this last, and F/O. Atkinson and Sgt. Evans are vectored out to sea, revectoring and told to 'Gate'. After 15 minutes of hurtling over the sea, F/O. Atkinson asks for information. Reply: "Sorry, we forgot about you; the raid was friendly; you can pancake". Before the acting C.O., F/Lt. Offenbergh, there is a big tramping today as 13 airmen plus escort march into the office, left wheel, about turn and halt. Charge: a technical infringement of the blackout. Punishment: 3 days detention 'retrospective from day of the offence'.

Dec 27th. Despite the night before, squadron is called by tannoy to a lecture at 09.30 about 'Elsie'. For this and the succeeding day and night 609 finds itself doing the whole work of the sector, owing to the fact that 92 is on the point of going overseas (F/Lt. Morgan is now reposted to this squadron), and 412 sets off for South Wales owing to a clerical error, instead of 312. Consequently convoy patrols, dusk convoy patrols, searchlight co-operation and standing by for Fighter Night - not to mention training of new pilots - succeed each other with nary a break. In return the deputy Commander of B Flight (F/O. Malengreau) is threatened with court martial for landing the other day with his wheels up.

1942

Jan 1st

609 Squadron's Order of Battle

Pilots 'A' Flight:-

F/Lt. de Spirlet (Belgian),	F/O. Atkinson,	F/O. Dieu (Belgian)
F/O. Wilmet (Belgian)	P/O. Morai (Belgian),	P/O C. Ortmans (Belgian)
P/O. Hughes-Rees D.F.M.,	Sgt. Evans (Canadian)	Sgt. Lallemand (Belgian)
Sgt. Haddon,	Sgt. de Saxce (French),	Sgt. Wilson (Canadian)
Sgt. Young.		

Pilots 'B' Flight:-

F/Lt. Offenbergh D.F.C. (Belgian),	F/O. Malengreau (Belgian),	P/O. de Selys (Belgian)
P/O. Rigler D.F.M.,	P/O. Van Schaick D.F.M.,	P/O. Nash
P/O. Osborn,	Sgt. Dickson (N.Z.)	Sgt. McConnell (N.Z.),
Sgt. Patterson,	Sgt. Stock (Canadian),	Sgt. Moore.

Adjutant:- F/O. Tidswell.

Intell. Officer:- F/O. Ziegler.

Engineer Officer:- P/O. Yates.

Doctor:- F/O. Scott.

Senior N.C.O.s (Ground Staff) :-

F/Sgt. Abrahams (B Flight), F/Sgt. Rabbidge (A Flight), F/Sgt. Bushby (R/T) F/Sgt. Bray (Discip), Sgts. Payne and Ingall (A Flight) Sgts. Fitzgerald and Walling (B Flight) Sgt. Andrews (Discip), Cpl. Simpson (Orderly Rm.), Cpl. Hainsworth (Armoury).

Jan 2nd. Blue section takes off in darkness and bad weather at 08.20 to patrol a convoy in Kirton waters, Kirton having wisely declared themselves weather-bound. Followed at 08.56 by Green section. The two leaders (Offenberg and Malengreau) land at Manby, whence they are scrambled in aid of a bogey threatening another convoy. Only 6 ships seen, and vectors fail to contact bogey, weather conditions being now much worse. - C.O. receives letter from Air Commodore Peake, pleading for return of Savoy's Black Cat, he being unable to lunch there for the fuss. Adjutant gets it as far as repair shop. - F/Lt. de Spirlet makes discovery he has written letters to 2 girl friends and put them in wrong envelopes.

Jan 6th. Cold, frosty weather, and quite a lot of practice flying. At 08.28 2 sections go and patrol a convoy. Later Blue section (Malengreau and Dickson) are scrambled in aid of a bogey threatening same, now north of Humber. Convoy tells them about it too, but they see nothing. Visit of gay 'froggie' Maurice Choron by Spitfire from Heston. He has been invited to go to U.S as A.D.C. to French General, alternatively to Tangmere as NO. 2 again to W/C. Robinson, now leading that wing, and he can't decide. Evening sees session at Musicians' Arms in honour of him and Nitelet.

Jan 23rd. A thaw begins, with continuous sleet and rain. I.O. takes opportunity of submitting more pilots to recognition test in morning, to an exam. in S.D.158 in afternoon. "What is S.D.158"? most of them say, and the ignorance of some proves lamentable. F/O. Malengreau goes to Group to have strip torn off by A.O.C. for his sans-undercarriage landing. His logbook is annotated, and he is threatened with job of drogue-towing if he does it again.

Digby. Feb 1942. Though a month of bitterly cold weather, with much snow, February saw a lot of flying, and on two days, while fulfilling their usual mission of convoy protection, members of the squadron were engaged with the enemy, the first bomber since 1940 being destroyed, and three more damaged. On the 12th - the day the Scharnhorst and the Gneisenau escaped through the Channel - 609 returned momentarily to Biggin Hill to reinforce 11 Group. Otherwise the month was chiefly notable for the move of Officers from the Mess to Ashby Hall. F/O. Malengreau continued to act as Commander of 'B' Flight, and there were less postings than usual. 92 Squadron at last departed overseas.

Feb 6th. A day of sudden activity, including 4 convoy patrols, 4 scrambles and at least 6 Dorniers fired on - first bombers to be engaged by 609 for a year. Cause of activity: an exceptionally large convoy passing through Digby waters, and another passing it. White and black sections left. Digby at 11.51, and after patrolling the convoy for 20 minutes Black 1 (P/O. de Selys - Belgian) saw a Dornier believed 217 emerge from cloud and make diving attack on convoy, while two others disappeared into cloud. He attacked all three, exhausting his cannon ammunition, and got so close to one of them that he shut his eyes expecting a collision. But he saw no results other than an absence of return fire, and was unlucky at the most lethal moment to have been attacking with M/G only. Black 2 (P/O. Ortmans - Belgian) fired on another Dornier, but after his first burst his reflector sight failed. He then became involved with a 4-engined machine which turned out to be a Halifax. Later, at 14.00, Red and Yellow sections took off to patrol same convoy. After 45 minutes Red 2 (P/O. Van Lierde - Belgian) drew the attention of Red 1 (P/O. Morai - Belgian) to a Dornier. The latter opened fire in a beam attack at 5/600 yards, but was unable to close range before E/A went into cloud. He then pursued another into cloud, firing, but again failed to get within an effective range. P/O. Van Lierde was busy firing at another Dornier 217 when his attention was caught by 2 others diving to attack the convoy, and is to be highly commended for breaking off his original attack and successfully going to the rescue of the convoy. He claims 1 Do.217 damaged. Though no other results were seen from any of the attacks, the job of convoy protection was successfully carried out, and it may be mentioned that the pilots were considerably hampered by the appearance of friendly bombers over the convoy, especially difficult to identify because operations were taking place in and out of cloud base. F/O. Malengreau, through no fault of his own, was misled into firing an infinitesimal burst at a Hampden, for this reason. Altogether it was a good thing for the squadron to have a little activity for a change. (Appendices A, A1, B, B1).

Digby - Biggin Hill. Feb 12th. At noon the tannoy suddenly calls the whole of 609 to Readiness, and by 13.00, despite several flaps, 11 aircraft. are airborne for Biggin Hill to reinforce 11 Group. Why, no one can say, the weather being singularly murky. And it would of course be the squadron's fate that on such a day the C.O., F/Lt. de Spirlet, F/O. Malengreau (acting Flight Commander of 'B' Flight), F/O. Dieu and P/O. du Monceau should all be away, all of them, except F/Lt. de Spirlet (on leave) attending a Belgian ceremony at Northolt. No one at Digby knows much about anything till the following morning, when the early morning news announces the wholesale attack on the Scharnhorst and the Gneisenau in the Channel. It also appears no one at Biggin or 11 Group knew very much about what exactly 609 (and 412, who followed them) were supposed to do; directions were simply to make rendezvous over Southend about 15.30 with other squadrons that they would find there. They duly found the other squadrons, followed them east out to sea at zero feet, with cloud at times down to 500ft. And then they went back to Biggin. F/O. Atkinson thinks he saw a 109, P/O. Evans a battleship. Digby meanwhile was reinforced by 133 Squadron (American) from Kirton, one of whom was shot at by a convoy. This squadron then occupied 609's beds while the latter remained the night at Biggin.

Feb 15th. Starting at 08.00 (half an hour later than scheduled, owing to mist) and ending at 13.50, 609 protects several large convoys near the mouth of the Humber. Altogether no less than 22 a/c are involved, 2 of them being scrambled. Addressing themselves to one convoy named 'Attempt', pilots are almost invariably answered by another called 'Attaché', which is even heard more or less abusing the former for not answering. One convoy is reported as 6 miles long, and as it is bad form to cross over the ships, protection becomes rather difficult. As usual F/O. Malengreau is vexed by 'friendly' - this time an Anson - which comes from S.E. and gets between him and the convoy; F/O. Dieu thinks the convoy's balloon should be painted blue to match the sea. Meanwhile P/O. Hughes-Rees and P/O. Lallemand set off in the Tiger to fetch a Spitfire from Brize Norton, but are turned back at Rugby by increasing fog. At 13.00 B Flight is released.

Feb 16th. Much practice, including firing into the Wash and ZZ landings. At 17.18 Blue and Green sections - Malengreau, Osborn, Hughes-Rees and Roelandt - take off for a dusk sweep of the 'outer channel', and are followed at 17.36 by Red and Yellow - Dieu, Van Lierde, Evans and Ortmans. These patrols are uneventful but for the Hampden that Hughes-Rees sees disappearing into cloud at 1000-2000ft. Some homings are required, and the C.O., returning from Group, is kept circling in the gloaming while other pilots land.

Feb 18<sup>th</sup>. Most Officers awake at Ashby feeling very cold. F/O. Atkinson is miserable, says 'You needn't think I'm going to wash, you needn't think I'm going to shave'; but he does spend a full five minutes massaging his scalp, an anti-baldness precaution that takes place 3 times daily. Then his bootlace breaks, and it is the last straw. Breakfast however is an improvement on that usually served in the Mess, though it takes a long time to serve owing to the batmen's insistence on making the beds at the same time. No doubt as a result of his physical ill-being, P/O. Evans is seen by the Wing Commander taking off and landing down-wind, and is told he is an awful clot. P/O. Ortmans is then observed roaring round the aerodrome with his throttle stuck open. He attempts to land, overshoots, takes off again and is seen charging in the direction of some trees. But he is successful in the end. Meanwhile 412 Squadron at Wellingore have been suffering from engines cutting owing to water getting in the petrol. 609 are therefore called to Readiness before their time, and at 12.08 Black and Green sections (Malengreau and Osborn, Hughes-Rees and Van Lierde) take off on Convoy patrol. The convoy reports a bogey at 3 o'clock, and 4 bombs drop out of the cloud across it, without hitting. Black section rushes about in answer to the convoy's signals regarding bandit's whereabouts, sees an E/A or two, but is always at the wrong end of the convoy, and fails to get within range. Red and Blue sections (Atkinson and Evans, du Monceau and Roelandt) take off at 13.13 to relieve them. Convoy immediately reports bandit at 3 O' clock, and after a while the Duke sees a Dornier disappear into cloud. He goes above it, sees nothing, then comes down again. Then he sees this or another Dornier diving, and being slightly above manages to close the range and turn inside it before it levels out after sighting him. He fires a short burst at 300-400 yards, sees port engine smoke, starboard emit a 'brilliant spray'. Soon afterwards convoy reports enemy aircraft. shot down by fighters, and the Duke finds a patch of oil. Meanwhile Joe Atkinson has seen an a/c, he thinks a fighter, plunge into the sea.

Supposes this is the Duke. Then he meets a Dornier 217 of his own, shoots at it head-on, and the Dornier jettisons its bombs and dives to sea level, then climbs to cloud with Atkinson and Evans both shooting off the rest of their ammunition at it from somewhat distant range. The former however sees a plume of white smoke from its wing before it disappears. Evans has already seen a near miss by a bomb, and now, crossing a smaller convoy to the west on his way home, he sees bombs fall amongst the convoy, and another Do.217 diving on it. Though out of ammunition, he performs the feat of driving it away with mock attacks, thus emerging from his early morning disgrace into a blaze of glory, with press liaison Officers ringing him up from Air Ministry and Group. Meanwhile White and Yellow sections have taken off to relieve Red and Blue, W/C. Blatchford pinching F/Lt. de Spirlet's aircraft. and taking part. He and P/O. Ortman are also warned by the convoy about an aircraft, which is stated to be approaching at zero feet. On sighting them, this also jettisons its bombs and beats it for cloud, and by the time the W/C. has identified it and taken evasive action from the bomb explosions, he is sitting in a stream of fire from the Dornier's dorsal gun. Both pilots chase it at pretty distant range, and after a while the W/C. sees a flash on the fuselage, followed by a cessation of return fire. P/O. Ortman then chases it into cloud, and gets within 50-100yds. as the Dornier appears to throttle back and turn. But alas! By this time he has only a few rounds of M/G left, and no cannon. The final patrol by Green section sees nothing, but it is estimated that 8 Do.217s have operated without scoring a hit - quite a good job of convoy protection by the West Riding Squadron. (Appendices C, C1, C2, C3, C4).

Enemy Casualties:

1 Do.217 destroyed (P/O. du Monceau de Bergandael - Belgian)

1 Do. 217 damaged (P/O. Atkinson and P/O. Evans - Canadian)

½ Do. 217 damaged (P/O. C. Ortman - Belgian - shared with W/C. Blatchford D.F.C.)

Our Casualties: Nil.

Note. The above is the first enemy bomber destroyed by 609 since 1940. P/O. du Monceau was only willing to claim it as damaged on his own evidence, and for a while there was some doubt as to who had done it. As F/O. Atkinson had however definitely seen an a/c at which his section was not firing go into the sea, and no British aircraft. were missing, the Intell. Officer had no doubts in awarding it to the Duke., who now has 3 E/A destroyed, 1 probable and 2 damaged to his credit. Arrival today of Sgts. Sabourin and Dolan (Canadian) from O.T.U.

Feb 27<sup>th</sup>. F/O. Atkinson, transferred to 'B' Flight as temporary Commander in the absence of F/O. Malengreau, who has tooth trouble, is roused at dawn for the 2nd morning in succession. At 0726 2 sections begin convoy patrol - a convoy of 42 ships beneath 10/10 cloud at 1000ft. At 10.08 Green section is scrambled after a supposed E/A in Skegness area, but see nothing. Squadron is released at 1300 hours, but owing to obligations of the legendary Fighter Night, several aircraft. have to be tested. Later there is some dusk landing practice, but night flying is mercifully called off, though the C.O. is believed secretly to have done some. S/L. Brown today terminates his attachment to the squadron on being posted as C.O. of 616 Squadron, Wittering. He takes with him Sgt. Bromhall. P/O. Etienne (Canadian) leaves on posting to 79 Squadron. Some Officers attend dance at Lincoln Assembly Rooms, taking the beautiful W.A.A.F. corporal from the Mess as partner.

March 8<sup>th</sup>. The weather has cleared. A programme of air firing has already been drawn up when 609 and 412 are ordered south to West Malling. F/O. Dieu is Orderly Officer. The tannoy calls him to 609 Dispersal just as the padre is starting his service. With 'God' at 609 Dispersal, the congregation wonders whether it is any good praying. As of yore maps and tin boxes are dished out by the I.O., and at 12.10 hours a strong team, practically all Belgians and all officers, performs a splendid take-off in two flights, with the Maggie barking at their heels on its way to Scampton. F/O. Malengreau has trouble with his undercart, has to land at a drome of Stirlings near Duxford, is very furious. At 1535 the 2 squadrons take off from W. Malling to act as rear support wing, off the French coast on a line Dunkirk-Calais, for Boston's returning from a raid on Comines power station (Circus 112A). P/O. Osborn fails to get away owing to a flat tyre, Sgt. Blanco returns at once with engine trouble (his request for a homing brings a chorus of conflicting vectors from all sorts of Stations, even Digby replying!). With W/C. Blatchford leading with 412, the wing patrols eventlessly from 1605 till 1625, and is turning for home when S/L. Gilroy, flying at 25,000ft, spies a formation of about 12 Fw.190,

slightly below and proceeding north. He informs W/C. Blatchford and manoeuvres to attack them from upsun. Presently the Wing Commander sees them also and turns to port. 412 however lose him in the sun, and the whole squadron turns the wrong way, and returns to England without seeing any E/A at all. For 609 a merry series of dogfights ensues. Following the leading section of Fw, which climbs to gain height, the C.O. damages one with a deflection attack, and has begun to attack another when he sees tracer flashing past. But P/O. Ortmans has once again successfully protected his tail. No.3 of Red section (P/O. de Selys) presses his camera button from force of habit, instead of his gun button, and takes a jolly little picture of a Fw. He gets a burst later on, and is useful in helping to substantiate the claims of P/O. du Monceau, but finally he gets engine trouble and nurses his Spit to Manston, fortunately unseen by two Fw. passing above. P/O. Morai (Yellow 4) dives for 10,000ft. after another and damages it, but is then assailed by 3 others from different directions. He manages to escape after getting a bullet in his aileron and another in his airscrew. The most successful outing, however, is again enjoyed by P/O. du Monceau, who as Blue leader owes his success largely to gaining height before attacking, and then good shooting. In all he attacks 3 different E/A. The first goes into a dive for at least 10,000ft, but is not claimed, and it is during the same attack that Blue 2 (F/O. Dieu) gets in his burst. This E/A flick rolls with such violence that Dieu overshoots. Coming round again, all he can find is an expanding patch of oil on the water. After this the Duke joins up with the C.O., and together they attack a pair, the C.O. from head on, the Duke from astern. Despite exhaustion of cannon ammo., the latter first produces black smoke from No. 2 E/A, and then, firing again at the same one, astonishes himself by producing black and grey 'spray' from No. 1, which also sheds pieces. Finally, he fires again at No.2, the black smoke turns to red. At this moment the C.O. says, "Don't follow them all, come home now, damn you"! The Duke obeys, but unwilling to be baulked of his prey, glances behind and is rewarded by seeing a splash off the Calais beach. As for No.1, de Selys returning to Digby 2 days later, says he saw it diving vertically for 12000ft. with a long trail of whitish grey smoke. De Selys also sees an aircraft. burning on the water east of Manston, but the I.O., unable to reconcile this with any action undertaken by 609, lets this go. The luckiest pilot is the Wing Commander. Deserted by his squadron, he attacks an E/A below him, only to be attacked himself from above. He is hit, and when he lands at W. Malling, he finds an explosive incendiary cannon shell lodged in his aileron. It has not exploded, but when he recovers it as a souvenir, behold! it is British. After many amendments, the final casualties are:- (Appendices F, F1, F2, F3, F4).

Enemy Casualties:

- 1 Fw.190 destroyed (P/O. du Monceau de Bergandael - Belgian)
- 1 " probably destroyed (P/O. du Monceau de Bergandael - Belgian)
- 1 " " " (F/O. Dieu - Belgian)
- 1 " damaged (S/L. Gilroy D.F.C.)
- 1 " " (P/O. Morai - Belgian)

Our Casualties: Nil.

With the exception of F/O. Malengreau, P/O. de Selys, Sgt. Blanco and the C.O., 609 arrives back at Digby just before dark. The C.O. sets off later and is overtaken by darkness, poor visibility and R/T failure. Overshooting, he lands at the mouth of the Humber. Taking off again without refuelling, he finds all lights have been dimmed owing to the presence of Jerries, overshoots again, lands at Wittering, and is only deterred from resuming his search for Digby by rain. Next morning he is in excellent form. Asked why, he replies: 'What makes me so happy is to see all the boys RETURN!' They were, however, nearly all experienced pilots, and their score was more than that claimed by the whole of 11 Group, who also incurred some losses. The same night a Beaufighter of 409 sqdn. has shot down an He.111, so it was a good day for Digby.

March 10<sup>th</sup>. 2 1-section convoy patrols, leaders F/O. Malengreau and P/O. du Monceau, and beginning 06.58. The Duke is asked to do practice attacks on the escorting destroyers, and obliges. Practice includes Army co-op, G.C.I. co-op, Formation, Camera Gun, Drogue towing and firing, aerobatics. F/Lt. David Crook D.F.C., 609 pilot during the Battle of Britain, pays a visit in a Maggie. He is shortly publishing his diary kept while with the squadron. 3 New Zealand pilots, Sgts. McConnochie, Morrison and Payne arrive from Heston O.T.U. At 20.00 hours at Ashby P/O. de Selys Longchamps finds 4 Officers eating poached partridge. Refused a share, he startles the company by firing a blank

cartridge from a shotgun. Not to be outdone, P/O. Rigler follows suit, but with the difference that his is a real cartridge, involving some damage to the shutters and window sash.

March 20<sup>th</sup>. The final day of Warships Week sees the Belgian Barouche return in time for two of its occupants - F/Lt. de Spirlet and P/O. de Selys - to take part, with the C.O. and P/O. Osborn in a clay pigeon shoot at Blankney. The C.O. wins a prize of 10/-, being only defeated by the keeper, but de Spirlet goes away to soon for the final. Evening sees the Officers of the squadron at almost full strength rallying to a concert at Scopwick village hall, also sponsored by the Countess. Each Officer omits to pay for his seat, but several careless ones are let in for heavy expenditure on auctioned apples. A vast pumpkin is won by F/O. Malengreau, who generously puts it up again, and it is finally carried off by P/O. de Selys. Sir Arthur Longmore, parliamentary candidate for the district, makes an uninspiring speech about the Navy and R.A.F., forgets to mention the army. Afterwards 609 partakes lavishly of food and drink at Blankney Hall, and P/O. Wade of Cranwell is persuaded to sing his fish song. F/Sgt. Stock (Canadian) is posted to 124 Squadron, Biggin Hill.

March 28<sup>th</sup>. With the party pending in the evening, it has been arranged with 412 that 609 do Readiness again this morning, so as not to have to fly again till the afternoon of the 29th. F/O. Malengreau and P/O. Rigler (whose first operational flight it is since January Rhubarb) are thus scrambled early in the morning - after an E/A alleged to have Italian markings. But they don't see it. Otherwise the day is mainly spent in last-minute preparations - to which some officers, notably the Int. Officer as P.M.C., P/O. Osborn as his secretary, P/O. Evans as floor and decorations supervisor, P/O. de Selys as drinks Officer (chief duty: keeping the drink in his bedroom) have already devoted considerable attention. The Adjutant proves himself an adept at building bars (two), while F/O. Atkinson finds himself saddled with the task of finding accommodation for an unknown number of male guests from conceivable Group Captains downwards. As to female guests (number also unknown) the I.O. has performed the unprecedented feat of obtaining the Station Commander's permission to arrange a female dormitory at Ashby. For this a cheval glass is borrowed from the Countess, who also provides (and arranges) flowers and loose covers for the anteroom. Food has been taken care of by the W.A.A.F. catering officer, Mrs. Swanland. F/Lt. de Spirlet, who is detailed for transport duties, takes her to Lincoln to collect the last of it, and unfortunately gets her and himself into such a cheerful and carefree condition that the afternoon's timetable becomes dislocated. But nothing much matters now that the booze has at last rolled in. To get enough - i.e. half a bottle of spirits each for a possible 70 people (quite apart from 3 18-gallon barrels of beer) no stone has been left unturned. P/O. de Selys has got some from the Belgian Embassy, a friend of the C.O. (F/Lt. Moreton D.F.C.) has flown down in a Boston with 6 bottles from Acklington, F/Lt. Cotes-Preedy has flown to Cumberland and got a friend to fly to Northern Ireland, F/Lt. de Spirlet has mysteriously obtained 5 bottles through his girl friend Carole, the Adj, has procured 6 sotto voce from the N.A.A.F.I., individual bottles have turned up from individual sources, and some Officers have done nothing at all. Though the final accounting and apportionment of expenses is going to give someone a headache, things will be helped by the £25 grant obtained from the Mess and the £5 donated by the C.O. At 1700 hours a party is sawing wood in the park when Lieut. Choron comes up complaining that in the course of beating up 60 Dispersal in the traditional manner, after arriving from Heston in a Master, he has been seen by the Station Commander, who promises to have him court-martialled. At 1900 hours the 'balls of fire' arrive, with Col. Wouters, and their disappointingly small number shows that here again certain Officers have failed lamentably to P. their F.O. The I.O., who has asked any number up to six, is however rather relieved when only his wife arrives. Most of them are taken and given dinner in the Ladies' Room at the Mess, where it is reported that W/C. Robinson and S/L. Richey have found their way to the Sergeants' Mess. With considerable difficulty, organisation by this time having completely broken down, enough members of the squadron get back to Ashby in time to receive the first guests, and the first drinks are taken from the 2 bars manned by L.A.C. Hinchcliffe and his men. Two beautiful W.A.A.F.s, handpicked by the Adjutant and I.O. from the Officers' Mess, have already been on duty at the groaning buffet for hours. For another hour the band plays lustily to an audience of disinterested batmen, then the P.M.C. at last succeeds in getting all available women on to the floor, for the look of the thing. A number of unexpected ones have turned up from somewhere, and once begun, the dancing goes with a swing. There is an interval for eats, and after that the party

never looks back, and memories are vague. F/O. Atkinson and the I.O. recite 'He Had To Go & Prang 'Er In The Hangar', F/Lt. William de Goat is led in to consume his usual large quota of cigarettes, Lt. Choron persuades the Station Commander that it would be a good thing to say no more about the court martial, and it is arranged with W/C. Robinson and S/L. Norris of Ops. that in the morning there will be 609 Old Boys formation of Beauty aircraft, called by Binto, as at Biggin Hill of yore. By S/L. 'Cocky' Dundas of 56 Squadron (brother of the late J.C. Dundas of 609 fame) this is dubbed sentimental nonsense, and needless to add the formation never takes place. Last recollections are of the Station Commander playing dreamily on the piano at 0600 hours, of Col. Wouters flat on his back, and of S/L. Dundas paling visibly on sighting a goat coming down the stairs. Old Boys present: W/C. Robinson, S/L. Richey, S/L. Bisdee, F/Lt. Barnham, Lieut. Choron and P/O. MacKenzie. Almost an Old Boy is Flight Lieutenant du Monceau de Bergandael, who appears tonight with two stripes, pending his departure on the morrow to take up his new Flight Commandership in 350 (Belgian) Squadron. While at Digby, he has been more lethal to the enemy than the rest of the squadron put together.

April 5<sup>th</sup>. For the first time since 1940, 609's 2 flights are today separated. 'A' Flight this morning move off to Coltishall, escorted part of the way by F/O. Malengreau. The move nearly has to be made without the co-operation of the Adjutant, who today, for the second time, is all but sent on a 3-weeks course on Admin. With his usual astuteness he manages to evade it at the 11th hour. With the Eng. Officer really on a course, the I.O., somewhat inexperienced in matters of Admin., is much relieved. His joy is somewhat damped, however, on finding that all his shirts, underwear and pyjamas have been sent to Coltishall with the kit of F/O. Atkinson, making a trip in the Maggie necessary to retrieve same. 'A' Flights kit is found piled high in the passage, with mystified strangers gazing at a tasselled Belgian cap on the top. While the I.O. and P/O. de Selys are there, a preliminary air raid warning is given, and it is learnt later that at 17.44 Sgts. Blanco and Dickson have been scrambled from Duxford - 'Bury St. Edmunds 10,000ft.' 'B' Flight has at the moment just 5 pilots, Sgt. Dickson being later today sent away to 601 to join his buddy McConnell from N.Z. - a sacrificial act of charity on the part of the C.O. Readiness for 'B' Flight now becomes an all day affair, and even night flying is arranged, but mercifully cancelled - especially as the Adj. has gone to Cambridge with the night flying cards in his pocket. Despite the pilot shortage, the usual demands for the morrow roll in from different sources, and it seems 609 is considered a sort of candle, which however much consumed, never wasteth away. (Sgt. Blanco is tomorrow despatched on an Army Liaison course). At Coltishall P/O.'s Evans and Van Lierde go on dusk patrol, landing 21.45. (Appendix A).

April 6<sup>th</sup>.

Duxford. 'B' Flight. Continuance of windy weather. More pilots go to Fowlmere to train 154. F/O. Malengreau and Sgt. Innes escort the Duxford Ju.88. The C.O. flies to Digby to collect his laundry, thence to Coltishall, which is also visited by pilots of 'B' Flight. P/O. Morai, flying from Coltishall to Duxford, gets lost, is abused on landing by the Duty Pilot, whose language suggests he is at least a Squadron Leader. "Yes, sir", "No, sir", P/O. Morai obediently answers. "Anyhow it was a good show getting here in the end", says the D.P. "Thank you, sir", replies P/O. Morai. "Thank you, Red 1", says the D.P., who is none other than P/O. Rigler, having fun (he is D.P. for a week as a punishment for flying recently to Biggin with insufficient authorisation).

Coltishall 'A' Flight. (Notes dealing with 'A' Flights activities have been compiled from those kept at Coltishall by F/Lt de Spirlet, to whom thanks are due). "We have 7 aircraft and a very good Dispersal. Yesterday we met G/C. Lees, D.F.C. & Bar, a very charming person, who gives us some drinks. In the afternoon he gives all the gen about the job. This afternoon we have some sector reccos. We are Readiness in the morning, and again at 20.15 till 21.20. Then we go and have some drink in the Sergeants Mess.

April 8<sup>th</sup>.

Duxford. 'B' Flight. Today reduced to 3 pilots. The C.O. becomes Flight Commander, makes a 4th, sits patiently at Readiness most of the day. F/O. Malengreau has to attend the Court Martial in Scotland, P/O. de Selys has to go to a funeral. P/O. Rigler and Sgt. Innes have to go to the Daimler works, F/Lt. Cotes-Preedy is on leave, Sgt. Blanco at his army liaison course. Readiness is dawn till dusk every

day, with 2 Sections at dawn. F/O. Dieu of 'A' Flight, recalled from leave, flies in the Maggie to pick P/O. Lallemand, who has force landed in a Master at Horsham St. Faith. Thence he goes to Sutton Bridge for a protracted air-firing course under W/C. Malan. Flying at Duxford consists of a practice interception by F/Sgt. Andrews, some aerobatics by P/O. Osborn.

Coltishall. 'A' Flight. "Spirlet and Wilson on dawn patrol at 06.40. Wilmet and Van Lierde on take off at the same time on convoy patrol, followed on this by Evans and Morai, then by Spirlet and Wilson again. At 11.00 Wilmet and Van Lierde, and Evans and Morai are scrambled for an unknown reason. In the afternoon some air to ground firing, and the flight at teatime is again brought to readiness. Two sections (Wilmet and Lallemand, Evans and Morai) take off at 20.20 for a dusk patrol, land at 21.20.

April. 12<sup>th</sup>. At a wickedly early hour pilots (some of them dispersed) drag themselves and their hangovers from their beds on receipt of the news that they must be at Readiness by 09.30 preparatory to taking off again for W. Malling. Shortly before they do so 2 pitiable groaning figures in the shape of F/Lt. Cotes-Preedy and F/O. Atkinson crawl into Dispersal, allege that they have been poisoned, are allowed to go back to bed. 12 aircraft, including one or two borrowed from 154, duly leave at 10.27. At 12.50 they take off again with 412 and 616 Squadrons as one of two Rear Support Wings for 12 Boston's raiding Hazebrouck marshalling yards (Circus 122). The instructions are to approach Gravelines on a broad front, with 609 top squadron at 22/23,000ft, but by the time they have done so, 609 is somewhat depleted. P/O. Osborn has returned with engine trouble, P/O. Evans has been left behind with the same, and F/O. Malengreau's electrical system has packed up. Turning for home, most of the remaining Blue Section follow him, leaving P/O. de Selys to cruise alone at 25,000ft. At that height he spies a little white balloon on a cable, wonders how he can bring it home. Yellow Section see one or two Me109s in the distance, but the only section to be engaged is Red, reduced to the C.O. and Sgt. de Saxce (French), who clings to his leader like a sensible leech. Crossing the French coast. of Dunkirk on the way home, the C.O. turns and makes a head-on attack on a Fw190 coming down behind, but is too late to inflict damage, and one of his cannons fails. Returning across the Channel at 20,000ft, he sees the same or another 190 fire at a pair of Spits, climb into the sun, get on his own tail, and remain just out of range. Three times the C.O. turns towards it, 3 times it turns away, then reappears, and is only got rid of 5 miles from Dover. Other E/A have been seen glinting in the sun, suggesting the first one was a decoy. All pilots are back at W. Malling by 14.25. They wait there for a possible second show, then reach Duxford in time for dinner. The C.O. gets back at 20.00 hours, after attending a conference at 11 Group, where a Polish Flight Commander emphatically maintained that after 2 turns a Fw190 was on his tail. It appears losses today were considerable, chiefly owing to the disorganisation caused by the bombers going the wrong way. After some agitation 'A' Flight is excused from returning to Coltishall this evening. The 2 patients, whose plea of poisoning does not go down well with the S/L. Doc, who is also P.M.C. (with the result that they get no medicine,) are detailed to go on an army liaison course, and to prevent further poisoning the C.O. puts them on the 'waggon' for a week.

Duxford. April 15<sup>th</sup>. A perfect day, with exceptional visibility. At 10.42 the two flights are accordingly not surprised to quit their respective stations & Coltishall. again for West Malling. Thence they took off at 13.50 hours as top squadron of the Escort Cover Wing (leader: W/C. Jameson) to 8 Hurricane bombers delivering a Ramrod attack on Desvres.

Order of Battle:

Yellow	Red	Blue
F/Lt. de Spirlet	S/L. Gilroy	F/O. Malengreau
Sgt. Haddon	Sgt. de Saxce	P/O. Roelandt
F/O. Wilmet	P/O. Ortman	P/O. de Selys
P/O. Morai	P/O. Osborn	Sgt. Blanco

West Malling. Owing to a delay in receipt of instructions from 11 Group, the wing is late for rendezvous, and does not find the bomber or high cover wings. Crossing the French coast N. of Le Touquet, at 20,000ft, the C.O. sees the bombers already withdrawing towards Gris Nez. The other 2 squadrons (411 and 616) do not appear to do so, and orbit inland of 609. S.S.W. of St. Inglevert the C.O. sees 2 Fw190 proceeding in the opposite direction 2,000ft below and downsun. He leads Red

Section down in a following dive of 10,000ft, and gets to within 300 yards of rear E/A, which then sees him and rapidly increases its speed. At 250 yards he opens fire, and though only one cannon works (and that for only 20 rounds), and 2 of his 4 M/G suffer stoppages, he sees de Wilde strikes around the cockpit, whereupon E/A smokes black and white and catches fire. Sgt. de Saxce, again clinging like a leech ..... his first 2 bursts at the Germans while firing at the other E/A. P/O.'s Osborn and Ortman meanwhile have become conscious (thanks to their boost smoke) of two more Fw190 following, and as the section breaks away, one of these fires at Osborn. Ortman makes a steep climbing turn and fires a long burst at each of them from 400 yards. The shots are difficult ones, but have the effect of scaring the E/A away from Osborn's tail. The C.O. gets one 'sitting' in his sights, but has no ammo left. Meanwhile Yellow and Blue Sections have remained up at 20/22,000ft, and Blue (the higher) is attacked from 2 directions by 2 pairs of a formation of about 12 Fw190 some 1500ft above. Blue Section consists now of only 3 a/c, P/O. Roelandt having retired with oxygen trouble, and Sgt. Blanco has become Blue 2. Blue 3 (P/O. de Selys) is decoyed 4/500 yards away from his comrades by a 190 which turns away each time he turns towards it, then comes on again each time he tries to rejoin his section, its idea presumably being to create a nice target for the other E/A above. These fortunately do not take advantage of the situation, and de Selys returns to the fold when the 190 is turned away from him and cannot see. Later 2 Me109s come down on Blue Section from upsun, but disappear when the Spitfires turn towards them. Meanwhile "Yellow Section is weaving like hell", writes de Spirlet, "as instead of having Debden as high cover, they got a whole squadron of Jerry. Yellow Section then orbits off Gris Nez, F/Lt. de Spirlet having heard a 'M'Aidez', which results in a pilot of 616 Sqdn being picked up. All 609 reach West Malling safely by 15.30. (Appendices B, B1).

Enemy Casualties: 1 Fw190 destroyed (S/L. Gilroy D.F.C.)

Our " Nil.

This brings the C.O.'s victories to double figures, his first (shared) being the first Jerry of the war destroyed over Britain. 609's victories are now 164, plus 59 probable and 90 damaged, and it is hoped soon to get H.Q.F.C. to agree these figures.

Duxford. Coltishall After the squadron has passed over Duxford in beautiful formation, 'A' Flight carries on to Coltishall, where it is put at 15 minutes available. This makes it very hard for the I.O. to get his report. F/Lt. Cotes-Preedy and F/O. Atkinson today complete their military 'course'. The first they drove many miles to look at a Bren gun carrier, then many more miles to look at an anti-tank gun. But today they are allowed to drive tanks, after a lot more motoring.

April 17th.

Coltishall. 'A' Flight. "Red Section airborne at 10.00 hours on Jim Crow, but are recalled few minutes later and 'A' Flight takes off for W. Malling once more."

Duxford. 'B' Flight begins the day with some local flying and formation, and at 12.48 it too leaves for W. Malling, where it meets 'A' Flight and 411 and 616 Sqdns. Following is 609's order of battle:-

West Malling.

Yellow	Red	Blue
F/O. Atkinson	S/L. Gilroy	F/O. Malengreau
Sgt. Haddon	Sgt. Innes	Sgt. Blanco
F/O Wilmet	P/O. Ortman	P/O. Lallemand
P/O. Rigler	Sgt. de Saxce	P/O. Roelandt

At 14.45 the 12 Group Wing takes off to sweep via Berck fairly far inland to Hesdin and Lumbres, then home via St. Omer and Gris Nez. No opposition is encountered until, over the Channel, the C.O. sees a Fw190, and is beginning to chase it when 3 others come down and fire at Red 4 (Sgt. de Saxce). Weather is 10/10 cloud at 23,000ft - i.e. only 500-1,000ft above them, and E/A make use of this to shadow our a/c, while sending down the first as a decoy. Red Section turns towards them, Red 4 less sharply, and sees tracer in front, Fw having fortunately not given enough deflection. Sgt. de Saxce goes into an 'evasive' spin.

Duxford & Coltishall. Meanwhile F/O. Malengreau owing to oxygen trouble and the congestion of aircraft just below cloud, has had to lead Blue Section down, and F/O. Atkinson, short of petrol, has led Yellow Section on. By 18.20 all 'B' Flight, plus the C.O., are back at Duxford, less F/O. Malengreau, delayed with a punctured tyre. 'A' Flight returns to Coltishall. P/O. Osborn today flies a Master from Duxford to Coltishall and Gloucester on various errands.

Duxford. April 18<sup>th</sup>. Stung by the report of yesterday's operation sent from W. Malling, the C.O. causes the following signal to be despatched to 11 Group, 12 Group, W. Malling, Biggin Hill, Digby and Wittering:- "S/L. Gilroy takes very grave exception to the phrase "keeping an eye on his mirror". S/L. Gilroy attributes his longevity as a fighter pilot largely to the fact that he has never relied on his mirror at all, except for taxiing, and considers the above statement to be most misleading to other pilots".

'B' Flight has a fairly quiet day. 2 a/c do formation and dogfighting, P/O. Osborn and Sgt. Featherstone escort the Jerry flying circus back from Snaith. The big event is the flying, by the C.O., F/Lt Cotes-Preedy and F/O. Malengreau, of 609's first and only Typhoon - a modified one with extended perspex, which arrived yesterday and probably won't last very long. Nervous though they are, they bring it back safely, and their reactions are even favourable, except for the lack of control during the take-off.

Coltishall. 'A' Flight. At 06.10 F/O. Atkinson and F/Sgt. Wilson go on dawn patrol, and at 07.55 Atkinson, Wilson, Morai and Haddon are scrambled 10 miles N. of Yarmouth. At 10.05 Ortman and Lallemand go to search for a pilot lost in the sea 20/30 miles off Yarmouth. F/O. Atkinson, to give practice to the guns, later stages a low-flying act over this town, which much impresses the citizens. There is also some air firing.

West Malling. April 25<sup>th</sup>. At 13.14 the squadron, led by F/Lt. de Spirlet, takes off once more for W. Malling, after prior instructions to proceed to Castle Camps have been cancelled. At 15.35 they take off again, with 411 and 412 Sqdns, as top sqdn of the Escort Cover Wing to 6 Boston's raiding Abbeville marshalling yards (Circus 137). Order of battle:-

Yellow	Red	Blue
F/O. Atkinson	F/Lt. de Spirlet	F/O. Malengreau
Sgt. Blanco	Sgt. Haddon	Sgt. Innes
P/O. Evans	P/O. Ortman	P/O. Rigler
P/O. Van Lierde	P/O. Lallemand	P/O. de Selys

Making rendezvous at Redhill and crossing the French coast S. of Berck, Red and Yellow Sections proceed at 18,000ft to Abbeville and are not engaged, though several Fw190 circle round them, and one makes a feint attack at Van Lierde. While turning towards this, F/Lt. de Spirlet catches a glimpse of an Me109E suddenly half-rolling in front of him. Blue Section does not fare so well. Blue leader loses the formation while watching aircraft glinting in the sun, decides to patrol off the coast between Le Treport and Le Crotoy till the bombers return. Smoke trails seen to the north resolve themselves into 6 Fw190's diving down from the south. A dogfight develops, in the course of which 1 E/A is seen to be attacking Sgt. Innes, and the latter is not seen again. F/O. Malengreau is involved with another Fw, while a third surprises P/O. de Selys by suddenly assuming a vertical position and firing at him from below. He is too late to avoid the stream of tracer he sees in front of him, and one projectile makes impact with a flash at the side of his cockpit, then lodges in his tank, a splinter grazing his knee. Not knowing the state of his own or his aircraft's injuries he calls 'M'Aidez several times, but though this might have helped Innes, it is not heard. 3 Me109F's next come down, and one engages P/O. Rigler, who however succeeds in getting on the inside of the circle and firing three short bursts, as a result of which the 109 dives vertically. P/O. Rigler follows down to 1,000ft, sees E/A still diving at 700ft, unable to pull out. (Appendices C, C1).

Enemy Casualties: 1 Me109F destroyed (P/O. Rigler D.F.M.)

Our " Sgt. Innes (Rhodesian) missing.

This was 609's first casualty due to enemy action since Sgt. Laing on November 5<sup>th</sup>, 1941. It is evident that tactics suitable for 109's are no good for 190's. In a letter to his brother from Germany, F/O. V. Ortman D.F.C. reports to the I.O. that he was shot down by 5 190's in 40-60 seconds, and that these aircraft could turn in any direction better than any other he had met. The squadron returns to Duxford by about 19.00 hours.

April 27<sup>th</sup>. F/Lt. de Spirlet, F/O. Atkinson, F/O. Malengreau, and P/O.'s Van Lierde, Lallemand and Ortman all become successfully initiated or re-initiated on the Typhoon, while P/O. Evans and Sgt. Featherstone perform preparatory flights in A.F.D.U.'s Hurricane. There is also some more bomber 'affiliation'. F/O. Malengreau flies to Debden to see F/Lt. du Monceau, only to find the latter has come to Duxford in a van. Mr Eric Kennington, top artist, has arrived on the Station for the purpose of

making portraits of such notable pilots as F/Lt. de Spirlet, F/O. Malengreau and F/Lt. du Monceau; also W/C. Gillam.

April 29th. A lot more Typhoon flying, with the result that by the end of the day most pilots have successfully completed their baptismal flights. P/O. de Selys ends a loop at 5,000ft, is grounded by the W/C. for a week, and an order is promulgated establishing 8,000ft as the minimum height for such antics. 609 is now the proud possessor of 15 Typhoons. But the most startling feature of the day (or rather night) is 609's first take-off on a Fighter Night patrol. This is by no means unexpected: the Jerries, after concentrating the previous night on York, tonight return to Norwich. At 22.00 hours the 6 pilots - F/Lt. de Spirlet, F/O. Malengreau, P/O. de Selys, P/O. Ortman, P/O. Rigler and P/O. Evans - are called to Readiness and begin their game of poker. At 23.25 hours they take off. The night is clear, with a full moon. Their heights range from 11,500ft to 14,500ft (including 3 reinforcing aircraft of 154 Sqdn). As it turns out they are too high: the Jerries dive from the north, from 16,000ft down to below 5,000ft; and though F/O. Malengreau and P/O. Ortman momentarily see a/c flash past them, all most of them see is plenty of fires and tracer apparently being fired towards the ground. Several complain of being illuminated by searchlights, especially W/C. Gillam, who patrols down to 6,000ft. S/L. Green and F/Lt. Johnston of 266, freelancing, are luckier, follow E/A down to 2/3,000ft, and the latter has a squirt at a Ju88, observing strikes. All 609 are safely down by 00.40 hours, and earn praise from Ops. for the rapidity and ease with which they have taken off and landed, despite the fact that P/O. Rigler's transmitter has been constantly in the 'on' position. Pilots then feed on bacon and eggs which the I.O. has sent to Dispensary, and wait hopefully for another sortie. Jerry has had enough however, and after some more poker, pilots are released at 04.15.

May 1st. Early in the morning the sad news comes through that P/O. Osborn has been killed the night before in a motoring accident, while on leave. He is the third pilot lost this year - only one owing to enemy action. Total pilot strength is now 19, the lowest for a year. The days flying is of a routine nature. The C.O., with F/O. Malengreau in the turret, flies a Defiant to Aston Down O.T.U., there to earmark some new pilots for the squadron, and they return in A.F.D.U.'s Oxford, piloted somewhat dangerously, and for the first time, by a Polish Flight Sgt. F/Lt. de Spirlet takes Sgt. Featherstone to Matlaske, where the latter and Sgt. Spallin (today promoted to F/Sgt.) are attached to the air firing course under W/C. Malan. F/Lt. de Spirlet reports weather closing in, and the Fighter Night pilots are accordingly not surprised (though disappointed) to be put from 15 minutes to 60 minutes, at 23.45 hours, except for 2 at 30.

May 10th. Day begins with 609 and 266 Sqdns viewing Fighter Commands latest combat films (mainly v. Fw190) and the anti-shipping films in which W/C. Gillam prominently features. Former include films by such former 609 pilots as S/L. Nowierski D.F.C., F/Lt. de Monceau, F/Lt. de Hemptinne and P/O. Muller. The latter 2 are now missing, but it is not long before a telegram is received from P/O. Muller saying he is on the way back.. Flying thereafter continues. F/Lt. de Spirlet and P/O. Lallemand do bomber affil. with a Wellington. At lunch time F/Lt. du Monceau rings up from Debden to say M. Gutt is flying himself over to Duxford for tea. By 18.00 hours he has still not arrived. In the Belgian official circular sent out by the Belgian Staff it is announced that F/O. Malengreau has been awarded his Croix de Guerre - richly deserved - and that P/O. Roelandt has been promoted Capitaine in the Belgian Army. In a bogus circular sent by P/O. de Selys to M. Gutt, the latter receives the usual citation of a pilot when missing, and the Minister sends a reply in kind. (He had lost his way).

May 12th. No flying again owing to adverse weather, except that P/O.'s de Selys and Ortman fly in the Maggie to Newmarket, there to attend the 2,000 Guineas. The day is notable for the pinning of the Croix de Guerre on the breast of F/O. Malengreau by M. Rolin, Belgian Under Secretary of War, and the addition to squadron strength of P/O. Wells, P/O. Dopere and P/O. Creteur from O.T.U., the latter two (Belgians) having been the subject of protracted competition by 609 and 350 (Belgian) Squadron. All three have flown an average of 1,500 hours, making 15 609 pilots with an average of over 1,000 hours - probably an all-time high.

May 15th. Routine flying, in the course of which F/O. Malengreau is nearly knocked out when the hood of his Typhoon opens, then falls back on his skull, and the C.O. tactfully becomes party to the first Typhoon Prang when one of his brakes binds, causes an oleo leg to fail and some damage to the aircraft. According to standing instructions he puts himself under open arrest, interviews himself sternly, finds himself not guilty of neglect, and releases himself. F/Lt. de Spirlet, P/O.'s Roelandt and Dopere, and Sgts. Haddon and de Saxce today visit the Rolls Royce works at Derby, are very impressed with the amount of testing each one of 17,000 engine parts undergoes. Sgt. Featherstone posted to 616 Sqdn.

Aug. 4<sup>th</sup>. This morning the W/C. Flying feels rather offensive, and taking a look at the weather decides on a prompt Rhubarb against Bruges aerodrome. Hustling S/L. Richey from his breakfast, he marshals his team - himself, the C.O., F/O. Malengreau and P/O. Creteur - in the Intell. office, and after some swift. briefing, announces the take-off will be immediate. Engines start up, and they are just about to start taxiing, when the operation is cancelled by Group. Meanwhile F/Lt. Atkinson has led a team of Typhoons to intercept other Typhoons of 56 Sqdn, but is baulked by his R/T becoming U/S, after which routine flying continues as usual with some air firing and cine gun. F/O. Wilmet flies F/O. Symonds (Intell) to Digby by Station Maggie, P/O. de Selys does a cross-country. At 1301 a section comes to Readiness, and at 1855 8 a/c take off on another eventless sweep below cloud off the coast from Ostend to Calais. Participants: C.O., Atkinson, Dopere, Lallemand, Wilmet, Malengreau, de Saxce, Van Lierde. Aim is to fly at 0ft. and intercept any E/A that 4 a/c of 56 entice out by climbing overland; but the latter cannot fulfil their intention owing to rainstorms. All 609 see are some little white balloons over the North Sea - Operation 'Outward'. They land again at Duxford by 2007, except F/O. Wilmet, who has trouble with his engine and hydraulics system, and lands with Sgt. de Saxce at Manston. They do not however break away in time for P/O's Roelandt and Creteur, who have accompanied the formation to the coast as reserves, to replace them, and the latter two come flying back in beautiful wing-tip formation - this, and a high speed salute by P/O. Creteur to the Officers Mess being prompted by the erroneous theory that his Estonian girl friend is in the Ladies Room. 1915 till dark sees another section at Readiness.

Aug. 5<sup>th</sup>. Day begins at 0445 when 7 pilots (also the W/C. and IO) get up for a Fighter Roadstead. After coffee in the kitchen, take-off, delayed owing to the W/C. having to eject Van Lierde from his a/c on finding his own U/S, occurs at 0601, in 2 sections of 4. Weather again consists of low cloud, take-off is with the aid of the flare path, and in the dim light F/O. Malengreau fails to find the others owing to oil on the sides of his perspex, and returns early. The rest fly straight over the North Sea at 0ft. all the way to Walcheren Island, then all the way down the coast to Calais, without sighting so much as a fishing smack, though the C.O. complicates the report by 'possibly sighting what may have been 2 large cargo vessels' in the straits off Flushing. They land at Manston at 0655, return to Duxford in time for breakfast. At 1115 there is a lecture by a Naval Commander on convoys, and some quite useful suggestions are given to him to take up with HQFC. With a section at Readiness from 0900 till 1309, and again at 1745, remaining serviceable a/c do section formation and cine gun practice, also bomber affiliation at Downham Market and Marham - Sgt. Blackwell distinguishing himself by failing to find former and asking on the R/T "Where does Downham Market aerodrome lie in relation to Downham Village"? P/O. Evans flies to Ternhill in the Hurricane, P/O. Dopere gives innumerable rides to ATC boys in the Station Maggie.

Aug. 8<sup>th</sup>. Another big drogue-firing programme is frustrated by the weather, and only 2 a/c perform, F/O. Malengreau successfully hitting the target. F/Lt. Atkinson and Sgts Haddon and de Saxce are marooned at Matlask all day. Eventually returning at 1852, they then spend from 2000 till 2215 at Readiness. Earlier (at 1751) P/O's Wells and Skett have been scrambled and patrol the Buckingham area at 5000ft. just above cloud after getting off in 4 and 4½ minutes. The X-raid turns out to be a couple of Blenheims, and the real Hun on to which they are diverted is engaged by a Beaufighter. In the evening the Station Commander celebrates the putting back of the clock an hour by taking part in Operation Ceiling. P/O. Wells has today returned from a trip on a convoy, during which a Halifax is reported to have dropped a bomb, being smartly engaged by the guns as a result.

Aug. 22<sup>nd</sup>. Section formation and camera gun. F/O. Malengreau and P/O. Creteur fly in a Maggie to Northolt, 2 sections come to Readiness at 1300. At 1500 all pilots come to Readiness for another visit of Lord Trenchard, who finally arrives by air about 1630 and talks to them at the Intell. office. Sgt. Blanco, asked by the Marshall whether he thinks the Typhoon has got over its teething troubles, astonishes everyone by replying in the affirmative. Later the AOC arrives.

Aug. 29<sup>th</sup>. Today is allotted to 609 for more drogue-firing at Matlask, and this goes on from 0730 till 1320, F/Lt. Beamont this time scoring easily the best results, followed by P/O's Roelandt and Ortman. At 1300 F/Lt. Atkinson and P/O. Wells are scrambled. Though they only take 3 and 4 minutes respectively to get off, they are half an hour too late, Group not having permitted an earlier take-off on account of the presence of other fighters. P/O. Raw, however, airborne on local flying from Duxford in one of the experimentals at 1320, asks for a vector and after 20 minutes or so sights an E/A SE of Braintree at 33000ft, about 2 miles away. He himself reaches 27/28000ft, and is somewhere near Southend, when his engine gives trouble and he has to abandon the chase. This E/A, like others lately seen high-flying over England, is believed to have been a Ju 86P. After this F/Lt. Atkinson lands at Duxford to have a bath. Readiness continues at Bourne, and air firing at Matlask is resumed from 1527 till 1821. At Duxford F/O. Malengreau and the I.O. go bathing, accompanied by a Red Cross Commandant, a W.A.A.F. Officer and a Wren officer. At Cambridge F/Lt. Beamont suffers a fall which is thought to have resulted in a fractured pelvis, but is later diagnosed as not quite so serious. However he will be off flying for a long time, and thus automatically leaves 609, which is a great loss to that squadron.

Duxford. Aug. 31<sup>st</sup>. The last day of the month sees P/O. de Selys becoming acting Commander of 'B' Flight owing to the injury of F/Lt. Beamont and the approaching departure of F/O. Malengreau, due for a rest. It also sees a visit by Sgt. Dickson (NZ - ex-609), whom most of the squadron thought had been killed in Malta. He confirms that his buddy Sgt. McConnell did lose his life, but refutes the rumour that S/L. Bisdee did likewise. The latter and F/Lt. Barnham were both shot down their first day in Malta, but now the first has moved on to the Middle East, the second returned to England. 609 today supplies Readiness from 1300 onwards, there are one or two practice interceptions (F/Sgt. Spallin sustaining a burst tyre) and some cloud flying. At 1810 F/Lt. Atkinson and P/O's Dopere, Evans and Raw go on dusk patrol, landing 1930 and reporting one mine. P/O. Creteur performs an experiment in Security by going to Bourne by road, entering the 'drome through an unguarded gate in the barbed wire, and taking off unaided and apparently unseen by the remaining 609 ground crews in the one remaining Typhoon. He then startles Ops. by announcing on the R/T that he might be a German taking a new Typhoon to France, while the Adj. startles the S/L. Admin, at Bourne by ringing up to ask where 609's Typhoon is. New pilot today in shape of Sgt. Bryant from OTU.

F. Ziegler F/O

APPROVED -

S/Ldr

Commanding 609 (West Riding) Squadron

Duxford. Sept 1<sup>st</sup>. At 1515 the routine dawn patrol is cancelled on account of weather, but 2 sections go to Readiness at 0530. At 1440 11 a/c take off for a squadron formation practice, during which the C.O. has a momentary hope of catching a Hun, which however becomes friendly. And there is local flying, chiefly by PR 1, 2 and 3. F/O. Malengreau flies to Bourne to collect the squadron's Mess Bills, and is not allowed to leave till he has paid them.

Sept. 4<sup>th</sup>. F/O Astbury and F/O. Wells indulge in bomber co-op, others perform section formation, camera gun and cloud flying practice. S/L. MacLaghlan, D.S.O. etc, and S/L. Heywood, both now of A.F.D.U., take advantage of escort needed for the Jerry Circus to have a flip in 2 of 609's experimental Typhoons, and F/O. Malengreau and P/O. Evans fly in the Maggie respectively to Bourne and Northolt. Readiness is from 1300, and at 1756 F/O. Wells and P/O. Payne are scrambled, but land again at 1812 on being recalled. F/Lt. Atkinson tests 609's one remaining Spitfire after its protracted convalescence in the hangar. This Spit has been in the sqdn since pre-Gravesend days, was flown by P/O. MacKenzie, inherited by P/O. de Selys.

Sept 17<sup>th</sup>. Usual Readiness 0550, early morning show as usual cancelled. The I.O., returning from London at 0030, is told by F/Lt. Atkinson on waking of the arrival of a signal instructing 609 to change its base tomorrow from Duxford to - mirabile dictu! - no other place than Biggin Hill. Such a sudden reaction to his paper astonishes even the C.O., and somewhat piques Duxford, who think that if any squadron goes, it ought to be 266. But of course it pleases 609, and after lunch the C.O. delivers a pep talk on the right method of pilot-comportment at the new/old Station, and gives some idea of the squadron's probable role. 8 pilots remain who have been with the squadron at Biggin before: the C.O., Atkinson, Malengreau, Wilmet, Ortmans, de Selys, Evans and Lallemand; also the Adj, I.O. and EO. In order to maintain maximum serviceability for the move tomorrow, there is no serious flying today, despite an attempt to make it do some co-op job. In the evening there is some celebrating in both the Officers and Sergeants Messes, and the walls of the former are next morning found covered with the figures 6 0 9. On the Readiness board, opposite 609, the C.O. writes the state for the morrow: "Tally Ho! Gone away".

Sept 29<sup>th</sup>. Standing patrols at 0647 and 0738, after which the weather greatly deteriorates, and the only other flying is a lone patrol by F/Lt. Atkinson at 1723. The first new pilots since 609's return to Biggin arrive in the shape of P/O. Amor and Sgt. Davis, both from Spitfire OTU. And today all 609's Typhoons are painted with a foot-wide yellow band running round the wings in the hope of distinguishing them from Fw 190's. The I.O. goes to Duxford to continue enquiries about F/Lt. Wm de Goat. He finds that the day after 609's departure the Sta. Adj. ordered his immediate disposal or destruction. The service police, used to arresting him, then gave him to a farmer who sold him for meat. Great efforts are now being made to rescue him before he reaches the butcher, for it is felt that the sqdn will have no luck till its mascot is retrieved. Duxford is found to be a morgue, with no operational sqdns, 266 having gone to Warmwell. - 609's transport, cherished since Digby days, is today all confiscated except the CO's car and a commar. Drive for bicycles commences. C.O., Malengreau, Evans and Ortmans attend an Air/Sea Rescue party at Kenley.

Biggin Hill. October 1942. October saw 609 continuing to carry out perpetual standing patrols against the combined opposition of the weather and 'friendly' Ack Ack, each of which claimed one Typhoon destroyed. Two offensive operations were carried out in the early part of the month, but attempts to get permission for Rhubarbs were as yet unfruitful. On only 2 occasions were enemy aircraft sighted, and no guns were fired. The month also saw the leadership of the squadron pass from S/L. Richey to S/L. Beamont, the departure of three veteran Belgians (F/Lt. Malengreau, F/O. Wilmet and P/O. Ortmans, and of the E.O., F/O. Yates, and the death of another Belgian, P/O. Dopere. Several new pilots arrived.

Oct 9<sup>th</sup>. At about 0600 609 sallies out to Dispersal, ready to take off on the operation for which they have been briefed the night before. The ground crews have been warming engines since 0500. There is accordingly some bad language when it is found that the operation was cancelled about 2000 hours the previous night, but 609, retiring early to bed without visiting the bar, had thus failed to find out. No less than 9 sections, however, take off for the each - Rye patrol between 0645 and 1237, after which the sqdn relapses to 30 minutes, and there is some formation practice. P/O. Amor and Sgt. Davis, who have already performed their first flights in Typhoons, have an opportunity of resuming same. Meanwhile there has been a scramble from Hawkinge, but so far from making use of the R/T battery set (which they themselves instituted) Ops. seem unaware of its existence and scramble the a/c by the primitive method of sending a runner from the Watch Office. This vexes F/O. Astbury. Weather is very bad, and the scramble degenerates into a normal patrol. In the evening a party develops in the Mess to celebrate the departure of F/Lt. Malengreau and F/O. Wilmet on their attachment to 171 Army Co-Op Squadron, the intention being for them to acquire experience on that sqdns Tomahawks preparatory to proceeding to the Belgian Congo to help form a new Belgian Squadron there, also equipped with these aircraft. Other grounds for celebration are the acquisition by P/O. de Selys Longchamps of a second stripe (thus confirming him in his command of 'B' Flight) and the W/C's birthday. To obtain the participation of the C.O. and Adj, seated with their wives in the Ladies Room, requires a human chain to pass through that room, first erect, then on all fours, singing 'come and join us!' Further singing follows, also a performance of the I.O.'s feat of balancing a mug of beer on his

head and picking up a coin from the floor with his teeth done this time on a small table. In Malengreau (who has recently been acting as liaison Officer and PA to Colonel Wouters) and Wilmet, the squadron loses the 2 remaining survivors of the original batch of Belgians who joined it in April 1941. The others were de Spirlet, Vicki Ortmans, Seghers, Van Lierde I and du Monceau. Time marches on.

Oct 14<sup>th</sup>. Final arrival and departure of W/C. Paul Richey, D.F.C. and Bar, after several prior attempts to depart with all his kit. Final Form 658 takes him by car to his wife's family at Farnham, Surrey. The Adj. at once retires to bed with flu, and the faces of the rest of the squadron are wrapped in depression - a thing that their departed C.O. would never have countenanced for long. F/Lt. Atkinson is looking after the squadron pending the arrival of a new CO. Readiness today begins at 0845, but this is only stooge readiness for a section for Station defence. There are only 2 patrols, at 1027 and 1041 - Hastings - Rye - and there is thus an opportunity for lots of cine gun practice and firing of guns, both unavoidably neglected of late. The Tiger Moth goes to Duxford, Redhill and Gatwick, the last to fetch F/O. Wilmet, who with F/Lt. Malengreau (now sick) has already achieved the requisite number of hours on Tomahawks, largely over Biggin Hill.

Oct 15<sup>th</sup>. More air firing off Beachy Hd. and a record number of patrols, starting at 1122 with Dover - Dungeness, and following with Selsey Bill to Shoreham and Newhaven to Beach, concurrently - Group having signalled that in future Typhoons will protect the coast all the way from Ramsgate to Selsey Bill. Last section takes off at 1800, making a total of 14. Surprisingly enough there are still 10 a/c serviceable at the end, 6 in 'B' Flight, 4 in 'A'. F/Lt. Atkinson draws up a new list of Officers duties for SRO's. Arrival of a new Polish pilot, Sgt. Turek, who boasts to the other sergeants that he once consumed 8 teas at a sitting. In the evening many of the squadron attend an enjoyable Ops. Dance at a large pub called the Crooked Billet, this side of Bromley. Bar closes at 1100, dance about 0100, when Officers and Waaf's crowd into buses and sing their way home. Hit of the evening is the squadron's MO. W/C. Richey continues to ring up about twice a day, asking for more and more things to be sent to him, e.g. copies of all last years combat reports to aid in the writing of another book. F/Lt. Malengreau and F/O. Wilmet now posted to 57 O.T.U. to get some instruction on how to instruct.

Jan 25<sup>th</sup>. At 0900 F/Lt. de Selys is sent on a weather recco off Dunkirk, and during the morning there is only 1 patrol. At 1200 the whole sqdn is brought to Readiness for about an hour for an eventuality that does not mature. Afternoon sees 2 or 3 further patrols. On the last of these F/O's Creteur and Renier orbit Dungeness on instruction for  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an hour. Bandits are then reported and Creteur, who is at 4000ft, dives down, only to have his cockpit door fly open. Renier sees two 190's and chases them across the coast, but is prevented from closing by AA fire which opens up at him from battery after battery, despite all recognition signals. Finally, after a warm reception from the ground defences, he lands at West Malling - "a very difficult Rhubarb" he states afterwards. (The Observer Corps is alleged on this occasion to have described a new German fighter "with 4 projecting cannons, a large radiator and wings painted black and white beneath". Today the first Croix de Guerre Belge the sqdn has had since F/O. Malengreau's departure appears on the breast of F/O. Lallemand.

### From the Diary of F/Sgt Bob Walling.

Aug 7<sup>th</sup>. Lots of action today. 6 a/c of 'B' Flight went escorting Lysander's, who were looking for a bomber crew in the drink. Crew were located, and then ME's engaged. P/O Malengreau in 'L' got a probable; Lt Choron in 'X' damaged two more. During a sweep at 10:30 Sgt Nash in 'X' got a probable, and Tom Rigler in 'R' also did. There was another sweep at 17:00 hours, which ended up with the a/c lobbing down all over the South Coast. All returned OK.

Dec 18<sup>th</sup>. Since the last entry in this 'journal' very little fresh news has come in. There has not been any action of any sort, and the only crashes have been when one of 'A' Flights pilots taxied into the night - flying taxiing post and wrote off his prop and spinner. Then Malengreau flying 'N' landed his aircraft without dropping his wheels and wrote the a/c off, which was a great pity. On both these

occasions the pilots were unhurt. We received several new additions to the squadron, all Sergeant pilots. Sgt's McConnel, Dickson, who are two fine lads and come from New Zealand, and Sgt's Young and Patterson, and the 'Babe' who looks about 15 years old. Sqdn Ldr Gilroy went on leave and F/LT Offenberg took command and was a very hard man. However, tomorrow night is the night of the squadron dance / binge and old Offenberg had better put the boat out tomorrow or we shall sink him. Tom Rigler and Van Schaick became Flight Sergeants and they and David received their commission, which is a darned good show. I only hope tat Peter Nash gets his too. Bill Doig and Micky Smith were both posted to the Middle East and departed sobbing, but not before Micky had told 'Bill' Holroyd the SWO just what he thought about him and his station.