

RAF No. 550 Squadron History

100 Squadron had been almost wiped out flying the obsolete Vickers Vilderbeest biplanes from Malaya and Java against modern Japanese fighters. They were reformed as a Lancaster Squadron at Waltham in January 1942. In November 1943, 550 Squadron was formed from 'C' flight.

From Waltham, 550 visited Berlin (seven times), Leipzig and Frankfurt. 550 Squadron moved to the new, almost completed, airfield at North Killingholme on 3rd January 1944. Elsham Wolds was the Headquarters and major servicing centre of 13 base which included Kirmington and North Killingholme. After a group stand-down due to the full-moon period 550 flew their first mission from North Killingholme on 14th January 1944 - 11 Lancasters to Brunswick.

550 grew to two flights and later to three. With a core of experienced crews 550 became one of the most efficient squadrons in Bomber Command, topping the 1 Group bombing league table on a number of occasions. They were also to carry out tests as to the absolute maximum bomb/fuel load a Lancaster could lift. Losses were, relatively, low as were aborted sorties - a sign of the high morale of the squadron.

Lancaster LL811 J-Jig (Bad Penny II) was to be credited with opening the D-day attack when they dropped the first string of bombs at 23:34 on 5th June 1944. The French awarded the 'Croix de Guerre' to mark the role played by the aircraft in operation Overlord - also commemorated by a plaque in St Denys Church.

Three 550 Lancasters were to exceed 100 operations:

- BQ-F *'Press on Regardless'* ED905
- BQ-V *'The Vulture Strikes'* PA995
- BQ-B *'Phantom of the Ruhr'* EE139. Best known, she flew 32 operations with 100 Squadron before becoming part of 550 where she went on to clock up a total of 121 operations. As of 2007 BQ-B is the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight Lancaster.

25 April 1945 saw 550's last raid - 23 Lancasters to Berchtesgarden. With the cessation of operations against Europe Australian and Canadian crew were drafted away on 25 May 1945. 550 continued to fly in both operation 'Manna', dropping food to the Dutch and operation 'Dodge', repatriating troops from Italy.

31st October 1945 550 was officially disbanded and North Killingholme airfield closed - they had existed for just under two eventful years.

194	raids
3,485	take offs
- 122	early returns
- 188	'Ordered to Return'
= 3,175	successful sorties
14,271	night operational hours flown
4,988	day operational hours flown
16,195	tons of bombs dropped
56	aircraft and crews 'missing'
14	aircraft crashed