



## 570 Squadron Royal Air Force

**Badge: A Winged Chariot**

**Motto: Impetum Deducimus (We Launch the Spearhead)**

During the Allied liberation of Europe in the second half of World War 2 the invasion forces were usually spearheaded by Allied airborne troops. From small beginnings in the invasion of Sicily, within a year, a whole airborne army was being launched against 'Fortress Europe'. One of a huge number of squadrons formed to deliver this airborne army was No 570.

As part of the expansion of transport command in preparation for the invasion of Europe, on 15<sup>th</sup> November 1943 elements of No's 295 and 296 Squadrons combined at Hurn to form No 570 Squadron. Commanded by Wing Commander J M Bangay, the new squadron was equipped with Armstrong Whitworth Albermarles for airborne duties as part on No 38 group. The Squadron immediately began a heavy programme of training in the para-drop and glider towing roles and was soon participating in airborne forces exercises with the Army.

570 Squadron made its first operational sorties on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1944 when three aircraft dropped supplies to Special Operations Executives (SOE) Resistance forces in France. These sorties continued into March, keeping the Maquis supplied with weapons and equipment. The squadron lost just one aircraft and crew in 57 sorties.

On 14<sup>th</sup> March, No 570 moved, with No 295, to Harwell, together with a large number of Horsa gliders. With these, both squadrons duly participated in 'Exercise Dreme' on 4<sup>th</sup> April. On the following night the squadron despatched ten Albermarles on 'Nickel' (leaflet) raids over France, seven more aircraft being sent on 10<sup>th</sup> April. During the month, No 570 maintained an attachment at Ayr for training SAS troops. The remainder of the squadron was also kept busy on SOE drops and in taking part in 'Exercise Posh' on 16<sup>th</sup> April. For this, two Albermarles acted as pathfinders by dropping 20 paratroops at Winterbourne Stoke; three more Albermarles carried out a similar evolution at Tarrant Rushton. Other similar exercises, but on a larger scale, were held April and May and by the end of that month No 570 was declared ready for its vital contribution to 'Operation Overlord' – the invasion of France.

At 2300h on June 5<sup>th</sup>, three of No 570's Albermarles (with three more from No 295) took-off from Harwell to spearhead the airborne phase of the invasion – 'Operation Tonga'. Each aircraft dropped ten paratroops whose task it was to set up the navigation beacons to guide the main force of troop-carrying aircraft and gliders onto the Drop Zones (DZ) and these were, in fact, the first Allied troops to reach Normandy. The main assault force included another 12 aircraft from the Squadron, some carrying paratroops and some towing Horsa gliders. One of these carried the commander of the 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division, Major General Richard Gale and his headquarters.

The tow on two gliders parted, however, and they were forced to ditch off the coast. Later on into the day the squadron provided 20 aircraft towing gliders to the DZs near Caen on 'Operation Mallard' – the airborne resupply. The following day, 7<sup>th</sup> June, came 'Operation Cooney' when SAS troops were dropped over the Brest Peninsula in order to sever railway lines and cut off Brest and Western Brittany from the rest of France. After these heady events No 570 then returned to supporting SOE forces in France, dropping supplies in various regions at the cost of the loss of another crew. The Albermarle was of somewhat limited use for the airborne role and so it was decided to re-equip the squadrons with the heavier four engined Stirling IV. No 570's first aircraft arrived on 1<sup>st</sup> July and the squadron began to convert to the new type whilst the Albermarles continued flying some special operations over France. The squadron's first operational sortie with the Stirling took place on 27<sup>th</sup> July when supplies were dropped over the Brest Peninsula. From then on no 570 used only the Stirlings on operations and it lost its first, LK133 on 29<sup>th</sup> July when it failed to return from an SOE drop 'Hermit 15' to Dijon. SOE duties occupied the squadron throughout August and into September when, early in the month, it was warned to stand-by for a major airborne operation. After several false starts this evolved as 'Operation Market Garden'.

The airborne phase of the of this ambitious plan, 'Operation Market', envisaged the dropping of three airborne divisions (one British, two US) in Holland to capture and hold vital bridges until relieved by an armoured thrust from Belgium by XXX Corps. 'Operation Market' began on 17<sup>th</sup> September when a huge aerial armada of transports and gliders, closely escorted by fighters, set off for Holland. No 570 was committed to the lift of the British 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division to the furthest objective – the bridge over the Lower Rhine at Arnhem. Shortly after 1100h No 570 and 295 left Harwell in the van of the huge airborne force; 12 of No 570's Stirlings towed Horsa gliders to the DZs at Wolfheze, just west of Arnhem. The AOC No 38 Group, Air Vice-Marshal Hollinghurst, flew as an observer in the CO's aircraft. This element was followed half an hour later by another seven Stirling / Horsa 'combinations', carrying the Divisional HQ to the DZ. All the gliders were successfully delivered and all the Stirlings had returned safely to Harwell by mid-afternoon.

The reinforcement and resupply lift on the following day was initially delayed due to poor weather, but later in the day the squadron despatched another ten 'combinations' and 15 supply droppers to the Arnhem DZs. However by now the Germans had recovered from their initial surprise and resistance both on the ground and against the resupply sorties was intense. No 570 lost three aircraft: LK 594 with its Horsa was hit by flak at Overflakkee and crashed near Breda, Lk121 was also hit at Overflakkee and crashed near Opheusden whilst another suffered engine failure on take-off from Harwell and was written off.

By the 19<sup>th</sup> the enormity of the problems facing the 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne at Arnhem were beginning to become clear and the transport squadrons continued their supply drops in the face of increasingly heavy opposition and losses. The 19<sup>th</sup> cost 570 three more Stirlings: LJ647/V8-U was badly hit by flak over the DZ and crashed near Grave, LJ944 had both port engines shot out and crashed near Ghent and EH897/E7-Z was also lost over Arnhem. The following day mercifully all 16 of 570's aircraft returned safely from their re-supply sorties which were repeated on the subsequent two days, again without loss. The squadron flew its final sorties to the doomed Paras, fighting desperately within the perimeter at Oosterbeek, on 23<sup>rd</sup>. This final sortie cost No 570 four aircraft - LK191, LK991 and LJ883/V8-K were all shot down over the DZ whilst LJ991 was severely damaged by flak and crashed at Nijmegen. Arnhem was a disaster for No 570 as well as the 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne, and its 22 glider tug and 58 resupply sorties had cost it 11 aircraft lost and many others damaged.

In late September the squadron began SOE drops to the Dutch Resistance and on 7<sup>th</sup> October it moved to Rivenhall, Essex, where it licked its wounds and rebuilt its strength in aircraft and crews. 570 Continued its work from there operating SOE sorties to the Resistance in Norway for the first time on 8<sup>th</sup> November when seven aircraft operated. SOE duties together with large scale training exercises occupied the squadron throughout the winter together with some training in tactical bombing and an occasional ASR search. Although outmoded for Main Force bombing attacks, the Stirling still had a bombing capability and it was realised they could be used in conditions of air

superiority close to the front line for tactical bombing at night. No 570 made its first bombing attack on 1<sup>st</sup> February 1945 five aircraft successfully bombed Grevenboich in direct support of the ground forces. A similar operation was mounted two days later and the squadron continued to mount tactical bombing sorties throughout the month. Experiments in medium level supply dropping techniques were also conducted by the squadron during February as were some SOE sorties.

On 24<sup>th</sup> March 1945 participated in the last great airborne operation of the war when 30 Stirlings towed Horsa Gliders carrying men of the 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division to DZs near Wesel to establish a bridgehead across the Rhine. 'Operation Varsity' was an outstanding success and 570 delivered all its gliders onto the DZ and all aircraft returned safely.

On 7<sup>th</sup> April 570 'Operation Amherst' when eight aircraft dropped Special Forces blind at night onto Groningen. These troops then captured bridges and assisted the advance of the armoured spearhead of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Army. SOE supply operations continued throughout the month and cost the squadron two Stirlings. On 12<sup>th</sup> April LJ368 failed to return from 'Nico 1' over Holland and LJ645 was lost on 'Table jam 172' to Denmark on the 23<sup>rd</sup>; this was in fact No 570 Squadron's last operational loss of the war.

Immediately following VE Day, on 11<sup>th</sup> May, No 570 took part in 'Operation Doomsday' when 23 aircraft formed part of the force carrying the reformed 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division to Gardemoen near Oslo to accept the surrender of the German forces in Norway. Reinforcement flights were mounted on subsequent days. After this the squadron began troop transport flights from the continent flying ex POW's and troops home.

Having commanded the squadron since its formation Wg Cdr Bangay handed command to Wg Cdr K R C Slater on 17<sup>th</sup> June by which time the squadron was flying a regular Transport command shuttle to the continent and Norway. Wg Cdr R E Young DSO DFC became CO in August, and during the month No 570 extended its continental route as far as Prague.

The following month No 570 began a scheduled mail and newspaper run to Brussels, Handorf and Cologne and also began a mail service to Cairo and India. In addition to all this the Squadron also maintained training in the glider towing role, albeit at a greatly reduced rate. Wg Cdr J Blackburn DSO DFC assumed command on 15<sup>th</sup> December but with the great rundown of the RAF beginning to take effect, No 570 was disbanded at Rivenhall on 8<sup>th</sup> January 1946.

Throughout its short existence No 570, a little known element of Transport Command, had flown with great gallantry and, at times, suffered severe losses. Members of the squadron had been awarded seven DFCs and two Dutch DFCs during its time on operations which in no small part helped establish the tactics (and traditions) for the large post-war RAF transport force.

Initially the Albermarles wore no squadron identity code letters. Just before D-Day the squadron was allocated two sets of code letters for concurrent use because of the large establishment of aircraft. These codes E7 and V8, were worn on the Albermarles and Stirlings until disbandment.

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