

**ROBERT HUNTER DAVIDSON  
HIS WAR SERVICE**

**A Reconstruction**

**By: Robert Michael Davidson, his son.**



**A Reconnaissance photo of Cologne, 1945.**

**Introduction**

This document is an attempt to construct a record of the war service of my father, Robert (Bob) Hunter Davidson, and is based largely on his logbook of flying time as a gunner in the Royal Air Force (RAF). A few additional details have been obtained from his RAF "Service and Release Book" and personal file held by the RAF. Attempts have been made to incorporate things that he told me or other members of the family which, however, cannot be directly ascertained or confirmed from his logbook or RAF personal records. In particular, there are some more or less long gaps in his flying record when, clearly, he was involved in other activities, and these are the subject of speculation on my part.

## Early War Service

My father told me that he joined the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve about 1938 or 1939, after Neville Chamberlain's infamous pronouncement on his return from a meeting with Hitler in Munich. Like many others, he thought that war with Germany was going to happen, nevertheless. War between UK and Germany was declared in September 1939.

Bob was called up for service on 30 May 1940 to the Recruitment Centre at Padgate, England. I know that he put his name forward for pilot training but apparently, he was told that he was too old for that (he would have been 27 years old in May 1940) and was assigned instead to the occupational class of Aircraft Hand/ Wireless Operator/ Air Gunner.

On 01 June 1940 he was recommended for training as a wireless operator/ air gunner. On 09 Aug 1940 he was transferred to No. 10 Signals at Blackpool, England. As at 31 Dec 1940, his occupation was a wireless operator.



**Bob is 4<sup>th</sup> from left front row  
Photo taken at Blackpool, late 1940 early 1941**

On 08 January 1941 he was placed on general duties until 28 February when he was transferred to No. 9 Reserve Command and then, on 21 Mar 1941, to No. 59 Operational Training Unit (location unknown). His logbook starts in April 1941, presumably whilst at this OTU. Evidently, he received initial training as a gunner at this unit, as his personal record shows that he was classified as an Air Gunner as from 23 May 1941. On 05 June 1941 he was transferred to No. 10 Bombing and Gunnery School at Dumfries, Scotland, where he attended a gunnery course which started on 7 June. His first recorded flight was on 13 June 1941.

During the course, he recorded a total of 12 hours 35 minutes of flying time, all of it on Whitley bombers. He qualified from the course on 28 June 1941 and was retained as a gunnery instructor.



**Bob 5<sup>th</sup> from left back row**  
**Date and locality uncertain – possibly Dumfries, June 1941**

On 08 July 1941 he was assigned to Air Armament School (AAS), Manby, Lincolnshire, England and on 23 July, was picked up from Dumfries by a Wellington bomber and flown to Manby for training as an air gunnery instructor. His airtime at AAS was in Wellington bombers. He qualified as a gunnery instructor on 14 August 1941.



**Bob is 1st on left back row.  
 RAF Manby, Lincolnshire, 14 August 1941**

### **His time as a Gunnery Instructor**

On 16 August 1941, Bob was posted to the No. 8 Air Gunners School (AGS), Evanton (near Dingwall, in Scotland). There he trained successive groups of men as air gunners in Whitley bombers and Blackburn Botha aircraft. The latter aircraft were apparently very unstable and underpowered and were not used in operations (except for a very brief period of about three months). Instead, they were assigned for training, where they were responsible for many casualties. My older sister, Pat, can remember Bob going to funerals of several colleagues and friends who were killed in training accidents.

There is something of a gap in Bob's flying record, of about 5 weeks, from mid January until the third week of February 1942. It is not known what he did during this period. He may have been on leave some of the time and maybe there was a temporary interruption in the flow of new trainees. He was at Evanton until about mid June 1942 (his last flight there that month was on 16 June 1942).

There occurs then a hiatus of about ten weeks when he did no flying. What he was doing during this time is unknown. Possibly he was undergoing advanced instructor training for night time operations because, though his next flight on 1 September 1942 was at Evanton, he seems to have been there this time for only about two weeks before he went to No.75 (New Zealand) Squadron, on 16 September 1942. The squadron at that time was based at Mildenhall<sup>1</sup>. Bob was engaged in night flying tests, in Wellington bombers. During his time with the squadron, Bob went on his first and only night time war operation, to the Frisian

<sup>1</sup> From the History of No. 75 Squadron, found on the Internet.

Islands, probably the North Frisian Islands, as I recall him mentioning it being near Denmark. They were laying mines in the sea in that area. His time with the New Zealand squadron was significant in his later life because one of the reasons he chose to come to New Zealand was that he had liked the New Zealanders whom he met during the war. Some New Zealand gunners were also trained at No. 8 AGS (*Images for No. 13 OTU: Reference found on the Internet*). His time with No.75 (NZ) squadron was a brief two weeks approximately (the latter half of September 1942) after which he returned to No.8 AGS at Evanton, on 02 October 1942. Bob continued his training duties at No.8 AGS, Evanton, until about the middle of October 1943.

There then occurs a very long period of time, about five months, until mid March 1944, when he did no flying. I remember him telling me that, for a time, he was the adjutant of an RAF station (location unknown)<sup>2</sup> and that he was a Warrant Officer. This probably explains the gap in his flying log.

In the middle of that period, on 16 December 1943, he was transferred to the officer corps and commissioned as a Pilot Officer on 17 December (confirmed by Gazette Notice dated 22 February 1944). He was on general duties, probably still as the adjutant of the station. On 25 January 1944 he was back again at Evanton but did no flying until March.

From 16 March until 19 April 1944, Bob flew many hours in Wellington bombers during the number 77 gunnery leaders' course at the Central Gunnery School (CGS) at Catfoss, Yorkshire. He qualified as a Gunnery Leader, Category B, on 19 April 1944. Bob returned to duties at No.8 AGS at Evanton in late April 1944 and was there, flying now on Anson aircraft, until early July 1944. During this time he was promoted to Flying Officer. His promotion was with effect from 17 June 1944 and confirmed by Gazette Notice on 21 July 1944.

There is then another rather lengthy gap in his log book, between 7 July 1944, when he had his last flight at the Evanton gunnery school, and when he went to an operational training course that started on 10 October 1944. During this period he went to an Air Crew Officer School (ACOS) course from 02 August 1944 until 31 August 1944<sup>3</sup> and there is a photograph taken at this time. However, there is some confusion here. His rank in the ACOS photograph is that of Pilot Officer. Yet his personal file records he had been promoted to the rank of Flying Officer on 17 June 1944 (and this promotion was confirmed by Gazette Notice dated 21 July 1944) some time before the ACOS Course even started. It also records that he was assigned as a (supernumerary?<sup>4</sup>) air gunnery instructor with No. 2 Air Gunnery School (at Dalcross, near Inverness)<sup>5</sup> with effect from 20 August 1944, that is, while he was actually part way through the ACOS course.

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<sup>2</sup> I recall that he told me that the station was in England.

<sup>3</sup> The course would have been held at the racecourse there (this information was received from the web site "The Wartime Memories Project").

<sup>4</sup> His personal file has the abbreviation "AG.I.Sup'y" against the date.

<sup>5</sup> Perhaps No. 8 AGS was absorbed into No.2 AGS, as geographically, the two stations were very close to each other.



**Bob is 3<sup>rd</sup> from left, 2nd row from back**  
**Photo taken in Herefordshire, probably 31 August 1944**

It is not known where he was during September that year. He did no flying but possibly he was at No.2 Air Gunnery School in Dalcross. He was posted to the No.13 Operational Training Unit (OTU) at Finmere, Buckinghamshire, England on 10 October 1944. The squadron at Finmere was equipped with American Mitchell B25 bombers and his flying time resumes on 25 October 1944 with a conversion flight (familiarisation with Mitchell bombers). This was followed by various exercises including conversion to night time flying, until the end of the course on 29 November 1944.



**Bob is 4th from right, back row.**

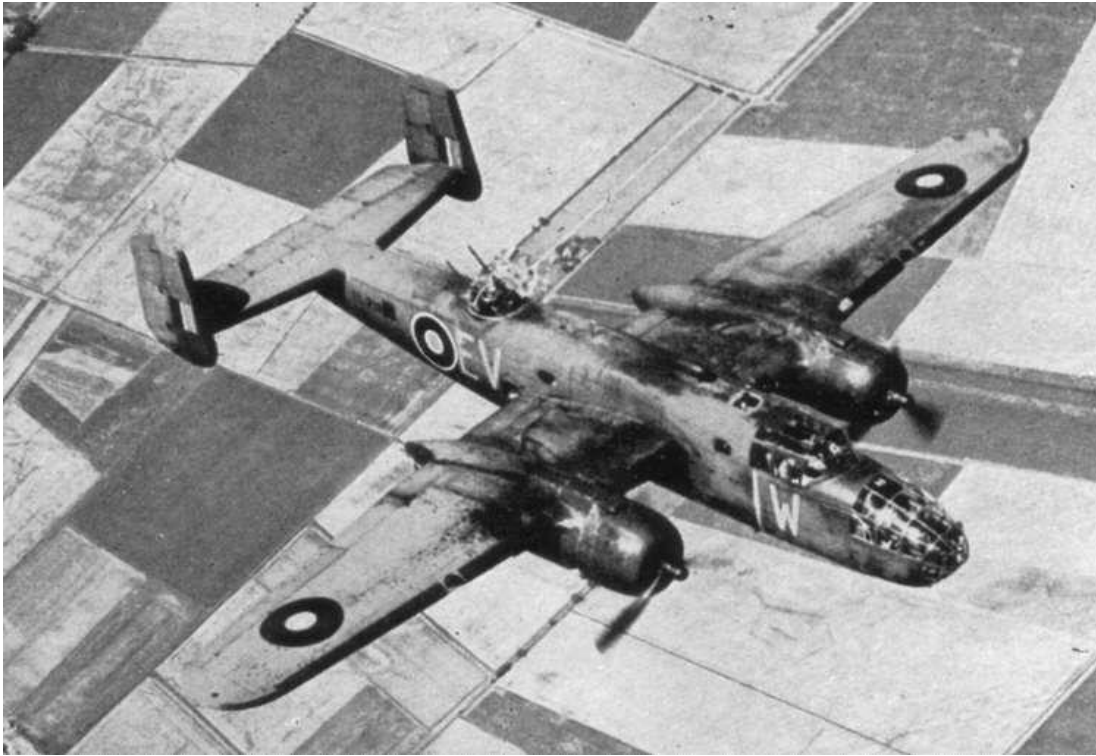
**Photo taken possibly at Fimmere OTU, Nov 1944**

On 16 December 1944 he was posted to Number 2 Group, first at RAF Swanton Marley and soon after (on 27 December) to RAF Fersfield.

### **His operational service**

On 03 January 1945, Bob was posted to an operational squadron (No. 180) on the European mainland, based at Melsbroek, near Brussels in Belgium. The squadron was part of 139 Wing, No. 2 Group of the Second Tactical Air Force, Allied Expeditionary Air Force and carried out tactical air strikes in support of ground troops moving through Western Europe. It was equipped with American Mark III Mitchell Bombers. Bob was a mid gunner.

“No. 139 Wing crews were respected for their accuracy. By 1945 they were permitted to bomb within 500 yards of the front lines, a thousand yards if aiming with radio aids. Mitchell tactical bombers tended not to catch the public imagination which was accorded to rocket-firing Typhoon fighters or hill-hugging strafing Spitfires. The war against bridges and marshalling yards was nevertheless vital to infantry operations, minimizing enemy mobility and opposition”. (*Quote from: Halliday, Hugh A, 2013 - Mitchell Men: Medium Bombers At War: Air Force, Part 56*).



**A Mitchell bomber of No. 180 Squadron**

His first operations with the squadron were on 5<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> of January. On the 20<sup>th</sup> of that month he and his pilot, Squadron Leader Danby (and probably other senior crew of No 180 squadron) went back to England for the No.1 Bombing Course at Fersfield, Norfolk, England. That course finished on 23 February 1945.

Bob flew back to Melsbroek with Danby on 25 February 1945. Together they flew another 21 missions against various tactical targets, through to the end of April 1945. Squadron 180 then relocated to Achmer, Lower Saxony, in western Germany. Bob's last operational mission, over Lubeck to disperse German jet fighter aircraft, was on 01 May 1945. The war, in its European theatre, ended a few days later.





**Bob is on the right**  
**Photo taken probably at Achmer, Germany, 1945**

Bob continued flying (with his long time pilot and I believe by then friend, Danby) in Belgium, France, Germany and England, throughout June, July and August 1945. What they were doing is not clear. I think that it may have been connected to the establishment of the occupying forces in Germany (their squadron, number 180, later became part of the occupying force in West Germany). On 09 July 1945, Bob was promoted as an acting Flight Lieutenant (Gunnery Leader).



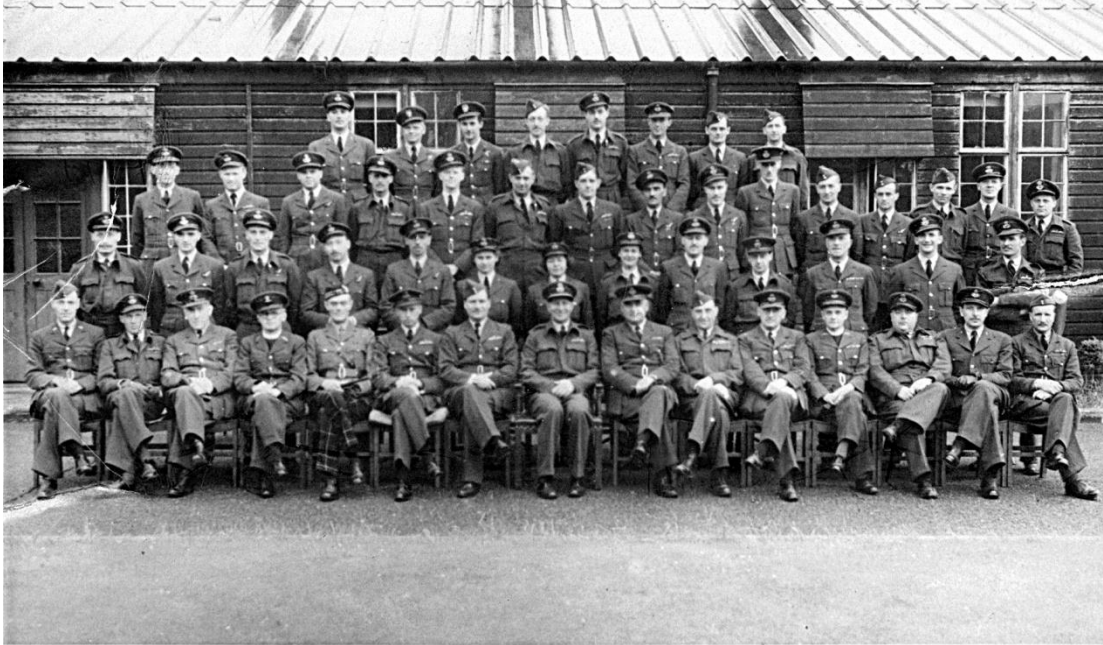
**Bob is in the centre of the photo (with pistol on his belt)  
Photo probably taken in Germany in 1945**

Bob flew back to England on 14 August 1945, and his last recorded flight, a short 20-minute journey between the RAF stations at Blackbushe in Hampshire, and Little Rissington, Gloucestershire, England, was on 30 August 1945. Fittingly, Danby was the pilot and they flew in a Mitchell bomber.

What he did in the period between the end of August, and 18 December 1945, when he left the RAF, a period of about four months, is not known. Presumably he had to hang up his flying boots, because the squadron was re-equipped with Mosquito fighter bombers (Mark XVI) in September 1945. These aircraft did not have gunners as part of their crew. I can remember him telling me that he flew in Mosquitoes on a number of occasions and was most impressed with the aircraft. There is no record of such flights in his logbook and I imagine that they were “unofficial” flights.

According to a history of the squadron it was stationed at Achmer (with Mitchell bombers) until September 1945 and then relocated back to Melsbroek where the re-equipping with Mosquito aircraft took place. It was still stationed there when Bob left the RAF in December 1945. From his log book it could be inferred that Bob was in England from September through December 1945, because there is no record of him returning to Europe. It is possible he went back to Melsbroek in September (as a passenger, as there is no record of him flying there in his log book) and it is there that he might have flown in Mosquito aircraft. An alternative possibility is that he did indeed remain in England, in which case he was probably at RAF Fersfield, in Norfolk. Fersfield was the location of both the No. 2 Group Disbandment Centre (from 01 August until 31 December 1945) and also the No. 2 Group Training Flight until 31 December 1945. Bob could have been associated with one or other or maybe both these units.

I know that Bob had the opportunity to stay on with the RAF as part of the occupation of Germany but told me that he opted out because of the “bullshit” and heavy drinking that went on in peacetime. There is a photo (below) of Bob at what was almost certainly a peacetime base, as there are women (WAAFs), chaplains and an army officer (of the Highland Light Infantry) also in the photo.



**Bob is 2nd from left 2nd row from front  
Almost certainly late 1945  
Location uncertain, but possibly Fersfield, England**

His Service and Release book shows that his application for discharge was processed at Uxbridge on 18th December 1945 which would have been his last day with the RAF. The effective date of release in his discharge papers was 23rd February 1946, presumably made up from accumulated leave owing to him. He was still attached to No.180 Squadron at the time of his discharge and his rank as Flight Lieutenant was confirmed. He was released from his commission in the RAFVR on 09 April 1958.

### **His promotions through the ranks**

On joining the RAF on 30 May 1940 his rank was that of AC2 (Air Craftsman class 2, the lowest rank in the RAF). On 09 February 1941 he was promoted to AC1. As far as is known, he would have been in No. 10 Signals at that time, stationed at Blackpool (near Liverpool), England. On 08 June 1941, the day after he commenced the basic gunnery course at No.10 Bombing and Gunnery School at Dumfries, he was promoted to Leading Aircraftsman (LAC). The day he completed the course (28 June 1941) and was retained as an instructor, he was promoted to Sergeant. On 01 September 1942, the day he apparently recommenced training duties at Evanton after an absence of about 10 weeks, he was promoted to Flight Sergeant.

There was a long gap in his flying service, from mid October 1943 to mid March 1944, when I think he may have been the adjutant of an RAF station. I definitely remember him telling me that he had been an adjutant for some months and that he was a Warrant Officer. His

personal records show that he was promoted to Warrant Officer on 02 June 1943 and at that time his log book shows he was still on training duties at Evanton. During this period too he was promoted to the commissioned rank of Pilot Officer with effect from 17 December 1943. He was further promoted to Flying Officer with effect from 17 June 1944. He was promoted to Acting Flight Lieutenant on 09 July 1945 and this rank was confirmed on his discharge from the RAF on 18 December 1945. I remember him telling me that, towards the end of his service, and probably while “grounded” at Melsbroek or Fersfield, he was an acting squadron leader. He was disappointed that this rank was not confirmed before he left the RAF.

### **His Service Number**

His Service Number, before he became an officer, was 1050880. On promotion to the officer corps, his personal number was 170258.

### **His Service Medals**

- (a) 1939-45 Star
- (b) France and Germany Star
- (c) Defence Medal
- (d) War Medal 1939-45

From his personal record it appears he was also awarded the Croix de Guerre with Etoile D'Argent (Division Aerieenne) on 21 October 1946.

### SERVICE TIME LINE SUMMARY

| <b>Dates</b>       | <b>Base</b>                        | <b>Type of aircraft</b> | <b>Rank</b>                 |
|--------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 30/05/40           | Padgate                            | N/A                     | AC2                         |
| 09/08/40           | Blackpool                          | N/A                     | AC2                         |
| 09/02/41           | Blackpool ?                        | N/A                     | AC1                         |
| 05/06/41-28/06/41  | 10 BGS, Dumfries                   | Whitley                 | AC1                         |
| 08/06/41           | 10 BGS, Dumfries                   | Whitley                 | LAC                         |
| 28/06/41           | 10 BGS, Dumfries                   | Whitley                 | Sergeant                    |
| 23/07/41-14/08/41  | No.1 AAS, Manby                    | Wellington              | Sergeant                    |
| 08/09/41-16/06/42  | No.8 AGS, Evanton                  | Botha/Whitley           | Sergeant                    |
| 16/06/42- 31/08/42 | <i>Unknown</i>                     | <i>No flying</i>        |                             |
| 01/09/42-11/09/42  | No.8 AGS, Evanton                  | Botha                   | Flight/Sergeant             |
| 19/09/42-29/09/42  | No. 75 (NZ) Squadron<br>Mildenhall | Wellington              | Flight Sergeant             |
| 19/10/42-02/06/43  | No.8 AGS, Evanton                  | Botha                   | Flight Sergeant             |
| 02/06/43-16/10/43  | No.8 AGS, Evanton                  | Botha                   | Warrant Officer             |
| 16/10/43-16/12/43  | <i>Unknown (Station Adjutant?)</i> | <i>No flying</i>        | Warrant Officer             |
| 16/12/43-16/03/44  | <i>Unknown (Station Adjutant?)</i> | <i>No flying</i>        | Pilot Officer               |
| 16/03/44-19/04/44  | CGS, Catfoss                       | Wellington              | Pilot Officer               |
| 28/04/44-16/06/44  | No.8 AGS, Evanton                  | Anson                   | Pilot Officer               |
| 17/06/44-07/07/44  | No.8 AGS, Evanton                  | Anson                   | Flying Officer              |
| 07/07/44-02/08/44  | <i>Unknown</i>                     | <i>No flying</i>        | Flying Officer              |
| 02/08/44-31/08/44  | Hereford (ACOS)                    | No Flying               | Flying Officer <sup>6</sup> |
| 31/08/44-10/10/44  | <i>Unknown</i>                     | <i>No flying</i>        | Flying Officer              |
| 10/10/44-29/11/44  | Unit 13 OTU, Finmere               | Mitchell                | Flying Officer              |

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<sup>6</sup> But see the confusion about his rank at the time of this course, as discussed above.

|                    |   |                  |                                      |
|--------------------|---|------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 03/01/45-20/01/45  | No.180 Sqdrn, Melsbroek                     | Mitchell         | Flying Officer                       |
| 21/01/45- 23/02/45 | Unit 2 GSU, Fersfield                       | Mitchell         | Flying Officer                       |
| 25/02/45-30/04/45  | No. 180 Sqdrn, Melsbroek                    | Mitchell         | Flying Officer                       |
| 30/04/45-08/07/45  | No. 180 Sqdrn, Achmer                       | Mitchell         | Flying Officer                       |
| 09/07/45-30/08/45  | No. 180 Sqdrn, Achmer                       | Mitchell         | Flight Lieutenant<br>(Acting)        |
| 30/08/45-18/12/46  | No. 180 Sqdrn,<br>Melsbroek (or Fersfield?) | <i>No flying</i> | <i>Squadron Leader<br/>(Acting)?</i> |
| 17/12/45           | Uxbridge Dispersal Centre                   | N/A              | Flight Lieutenant                    |
| 18/12/45           | Released from active service                | N/A              | Flight Lieutenant<br>(RAFVR)         |
| 09/04/58           | Released from Commission                    | N/A              |                                      |

#### **Flying hours**

|                     |           |        |
|---------------------|-----------|--------|
| <b>Total:</b>       | Daylight: | 458.40 |
|                     | Night:    | 07.20  |
| <b>Operational:</b> | Daylight: | 65.50  |
|                     | Night:    | 03.40  |

## OPERATIONS

| <b>Date</b> | <b>Location of target</b>     | <b>Target type</b>      | <b>Hours</b> |
|-------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------|
| 26 Sep 1942 | Frisian Islands (Germany)     | Laying sea-mines        | 3hr 40min    |
| 05 Jan 1945 | St. Vith (Belgium)            | Road Junction           | 1hr 50min    |
| 14 Jan 1945 | Zaltbommel (Holland)          | Road/Rail Bridge        | 1hr 40min    |
| 26 Feb 1945 | Xanten (Rhineland)            | Gun Position            | 3hr 25min    |
| 27 Feb 1945 | Sonsbech (Rhineland)          | Road Junction           | 3hr 30min    |
| 01 Mar 1945 | Kevelaer (Rhineland)          | Communications          | 2hr 25min    |
| 02 Mar 1945 | Geldern (Rhineland)           | Communications          | 2hr 20min    |
| 03 Mar 1945 | Le Hague (Netherlands)        | V2 Rocket Site          | 2hr 20min    |
| 09 Mar 1945 | Dorsten (Rhineland)           | Marshalling Yards       | 2hr 30min    |
| 09 Mar 1945 | Maltern (?) (Rhineland) (?)   | Marshalling Yards       | 2hr 40min    |
| 10 Mar 1945 | Burgsteinfurt (Rhineland) (?) | Marshalling Yards       | 2hr 55min    |
| 11 Mar 1945 | Stadtlohn (Rhineland)         | Marshalling Yards       | 2hr 25min    |
| 13 Mar 1945 | Borken (?) (Rhineland)        | Marshalling Yards       | 2hr 20min    |
| 15 Mar 1945 | Dulmen (Rhineland)            | Road Rail Junction      | 2hr 55min    |
| ?? Apr 1945 | Dunkirk (France)              | Ammunition Dump         | 2hr 10min    |
| 04 Apr 1945 | Zutphen (Netherlands)         | Gun Concentration       | 2hr 30min    |
| 10 Apr 1945 | Cloppenburg (Lower Saxony)    | Troop Concentration     | 2hr 40min    |
| 11 Apr 1945 | West Zutphen (Netherlands)    | Gun Positions           | 1hr 45min    |
| 17 Apr 1945 | Oldenburg (Lower Saxony)      | (Recalled)              | 1hr 05min    |
| 17 Apr 1945 | Oldenburg (Lower Saxony)      | S.S.Barracks            | 2hr 45min    |
| 19 Apr 1945 | Dunkirk (France)              | Ammunition Dump         | 2hr 00min    |
| 21 Apr 1945 | Oldenburg (Lower Saxony)      | Marshalling Yards       | 3hr 10min    |
| 23 Apr 1945 | Bremen (Bremen)               | Factory Buildings       | 2hr 55min    |
| 25 Apr 1945 | Bremen (Bremen)               | Factory Buildings       | 2hr 40min    |
| 01 May 1945 | Lubeck (Schleswig-Holstein)   | Jet Aircraft Dispersals | 2hr45min     |

### **Sub Totals:**

One night operation, in 1942, with No.75 (NZ) Squadron (Wellington bomber).

Twenty-four daylight operations, in 1945, with No. 180 Squadron (Mitchell bombers).

**Total Operations:** 25