Two experienced pilots arrived: Flying Officer Drobiński returned to flying duties with 303 Squadron after having served his ‘resting’ time at No. 58 OTU, and Flying Officer Władysław Gnyś returned as an Ops Room controller. He had switched places with Ostaszewski at 302 Squadron. There was a scramble on the 13th, and two convoy patrols on the 14th.

SUMMER ACCIDENTS AND INCIDENTS

As regards flying safety, summer 1942 was an unfortunate time for the squadron. Between 24th June and 11th August there were no less than thirteen accidents in which about as many aircraft were damaged. This kind of statistics was devastating for the unit, and it was only thanks to efforts of the maintenance crew that many of these were repaired without formal notice to higher authorities.

It seems that Flying Officer Wyganowski was the least fortunate pilot during this period, suffering three accidents within a fortnight; in BL670 RF-K on 7th July, AR318 RF-L on the 11th, and BM540 RF-I on the 19th. Even though none of the aircraft was seriously damaged it is little wonder that Squadron Leader Zumbach had him posted away to 288 Squadron RAF to gain more general service flying experience before returning to an operational squadron. Wyganowski had been an engineering officer in pre-war Polish Air Force who volunteered for pilot’s training in Britain.

While such accidents of newly trained fighter pilots could be blamed on their inexperience, seasoned pilots also had their bad moments. The first mishap in that series happened to Flying Officer Horbaczewski, when he forgot to lower the undercarriage in AA882 RF-G during a night landing at 1 a.m. on 24th June. Flying Officer Lipiński had a similar accident on 21st July in AR371 RF-B, albeit at midday. The accident report said:

Forgot to lower u/c. Pilot has been on continuous operations for 12 months and needs rest from flying.

In fact, 21st and 27th July were the worst days in this respect, three Spitfires being damaged on each day (including a Spitfire VB of 453 (RAAF) Squadron, hit on the 21st at Matlaske by Sergeant Karczmarz taxiing in AD383 RF-Y).

303 Squadron

Above: Officers of 303 Squadron and the 94th Fighter Squadron at Kirton-in-Lindsey in August 1942. Left to right: Pilot Officer Zbigniew Wojda (back), Lieutenant Earl Hill (front), Lieutenant Everett Humphrey (back), Lieutenant Robert Williams (front), Flying Officer Longin Majewski (behind Williams), Lieutenant George Sutchiffe (front), Pilot Officer Tadeusz Powierza (behind him), Lieutenant Wesley Pringle (back), Pilot Officer Mirosław Szeleckowski (behind), Lieutenant Donald Starbuck (front), Lieutenant Norman Widen (behind), Pilot Officer Stanisław Socha (back), Lieutenant Jack Kille (front), Flying Officer Michał Kolubicki (back), Major Glen Hubbard (front, commanding the 94th FS), Lieutenant Robert B. Wilson (behind him), Lieutenant Richard McWherter (further behind), Flying Officer Zbigniew Zarebski (back, next to Wilson), Flying Officer Maciej Lipiński (behind Zarebski), Lieutenant Lewis Murdock (rearmost, in the open door), Jan Zumbach (front, next to Hubbard), commanding 303 Squadron, Flying Officer Bolesław Drobiński (rearmost, next to Murdock), Lieutenant Robert Neale (behind Zumbach), Lieutenant Sidney Pennington (further back), Lieutenant Clifford Malzahn (front), Lieutenant Clark Jennings (by the wall), Lieutenant Newell Roberts (second row), Flight Lieutenant Jerzy Palusiński (front, Ops Room controller for 303), Lieutenant Jack Ilfrey (back), Lieutenant Clarence Rimke (in front of Ilfrey), Józef Ostrowski (303 Squadron Adjutant), Flight Lieutenant Zygmunt Wodecki (303 Medical Officer), Lieutenant James Harman.

12 – 14 August 1942

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Body language says it all: Warrant Officer Kazimierz Mozół, 303 Squadron ground crew chief had a particularly hard time during summer 1942, over a dozen Spitfires being damaged in all sorts of accidents in less than 50 days! Sergeant Aleksander Rokitnicki (seated further back and at Warrant Officer Mozół) was one of the unfortunate pilots, suffering the last accident in the black series, when he undershot a landing in AR318 RF-L on 11 August.

Previous page and below: Ground personnel (including at least one man in American dress) inspect Spitfire VB AD198 RF-W after the accident of Pilot Officer Zbigniew Wojda, also on 27 July. This had earlier been the personal aircraft of Wing Commander Stefan Janus at Northolt (see photos on p. 66), coded RF-J at the time, hence the traces of repainted code letter on the fuselage. Once recorded RF-W it became the usual mount of Flight Sergeant Mieczysław Adamek, one of the leading aces of 303 Squadron at the time, who had it adorned with his score.

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Left: A self-explanatory form on the wall in 303 Squadron’s dispersal hut on 15 August 1942. The heading in Polish: ‘I crashed through my own fault’, is followed by a listing of Spitfire code letters and pilots’ names. The pamphlet entitled ‘Pilots READ THIS, THINK ABOUT IT’ was directly connected with the listing. Note also the Spitfire recognition photos on the left and the diagram comparing the Focke-Wulf 190 and the Hawker Typhoon to avoid friendly fire.

Left: A mural in the hangar at Kirton-in-Lindsey with an ironic image of the Maintenance Flight’s efforts.

Below: Spitfire VB W3948 RF-C was damaged on 27 July when Pilot Officer Stanislaw Socha had a landing accident after a night training sortie.

Above and following page: A series of air-to-air shots of a flight formation (BM540 RF-I, AB183 RF-A, BL594 RF-G, BL589 RF-T, AB371 RF-B, and BM44 RF-D) taken in the first half of August. These were publicity shots for the forthcoming Squadron Day celebrations on 1 September 1942. Many of these have entered general circulation and are nowadays often mis-captioned as Battle of Britain period photos! BM540 was coded RF-I, but the aircraft letter was expanded into a girl’s name (believed to be ‘Irka’), which in some photos makes it look like an ‘L’.

Below: After AD198 was damaged, BL748 became the new RF-W with Flight Sergeant Adamek’s kill markings under the cockpit.
CHAPTER 5

Right and below: BM44 was last flown by Squadron Leader Zumbach (believed still coded RF-D as above) on 22 August, and two days later Flight Lieutenant Bieńkowski flew it as RF-H for the first time. Subsequently the Spitfire was resprayed with a completely new coat of camouflage, with the number, codes, and national markings left as they were (the narrow portions of the earlier roundel and fin flash can still be discerned!).

The code letters and national markings were then retouched, their edges having been oversprayed when the new paint was applied.

On 15th August a major operation was forecast: fifteen 303 Squadron Spitfires moved south, to Redhill, accompanied by the air party of ground personnel and the rest of pilots in Handley Page Harrow transport aircraft. The rest of the maintenance staff arrived at Redhill by road.

The 16th was spent on ground preparations, followed by first test flights at the new location on the 17th. There was no flying on 18th August and all pilots attended a briefing by Squadron Leader Zumbach.

While the squadron was at Redhill, three Sergeant pilots, Roman Brygider, Józef Dąbrowski and Tadeusz Szymkowiak arrived at Kirton on 18th August from No. 58 OTU.

For 303 Squadron the operation commenced at 09.30 hours when the unit departed for its first patrol as part of a combined wing, which included 317 Squadron from Northolt and the 307th Fighter Squadron USAF, also on Spitfire Vs. German bombers were engaged over the landing area and then the squadron was attacked by Focke-Wulfs. In the ensuing combat a Junkers 88 and a Dornier 217 plus two fighters were claimed destroyed, and five more fighters probably destroyed for no loss, although the Spitfire VB BL567 RF-T of Sergeant Karczmarz was slightly damaged.

Another patrol was flown between 13.00 and 14.30 hours, together with 302, 308 and 317 Squadrons. Focke-Wulfs attacked 303 Squadron and in the combat two and one shared of these were claimed destroyed. Flying Officer Majewski's Spitfire VB EN912 RF-M had its flaps shot up, and was further slightly damaged on landing when it overshot.

The third mission of the day was flown at 15.30 hours, together with the entire Northolt Wing. This time the aim was to protect ships returning to Britain. Two Heinkel 111s were claimed destroyed, one shared with 317 Squadron, but the Poles were attacked by Focke-Wulfs again, and this time the Luftwaffe had the upper hand: the squadron made no claims against them, but Pilot Officer Adam Damm in Spitfire VB BL574 RF-F was shot down and killed, and Sergeant Rokitnicki's Spitfire VB AR366 RF-C was badly shot-up.

The day was closed with another patrol, flown at 18.30 hours by 303 Squadron alone. No enemy aircraft were seen.
Above: Finally a cup of coffee or tea and a cigarette. In the foreground, left to right: Pilot Officer Tadeusz Kolecki, Flight Sergeant Kazimierz Wünsche and Flying Officer Eugeniusz Horbaczewski. Note that Flight Sergeant Wünsche is not wearing the German life-vest but a standard RAF one (however, it bears the name of Pilot Officer Czesław Mroczyk!).

Altogether, during Operation Jubilee 303 Squadron was credited with seven and two shared destroyed and five probably destroyed, losing one pilot killed, and one Spitfire destroyed plus three damaged. According to an Air Ministry communiqué that was the best result among all allied fighter squadrons during the operation.

The following day the squadron returned to Kirton-in-Lindsey.

Above left: When 303 Squadron arrived at Redhill on 15 August in preparation for Operation ‘Jubilee’, it took over the premises vacated by 611 Squadron RAF which had moved to Kenley for the same operation. The label ‘611 AUXILIARY SQUADRON’ can be seen at the hut door. Squadron Leader Zumbach looks into the camera, and behind him is Pilot Officer Adam Damm. The latter would be 303 Squadron’s sole casualty in Operation ‘Jubilee’, which otherwise proved very successful as far as the Polish unit was concerned.

Above right: More outdoor eating by Pilot Officer Czesław Mroczyk (left) and Squadron Leader Jan Zumbach in the foreground and Flight Sergeant Wünsche in the distance, while Flight Lieutenant Bieńkowski seems engaged in a serious discussion behind his commander’s back.

When 611 Squadron made the temporary departure from Redhill it left behind its own trophies: a fin panel from a Junkers 88 (quite similar to the one owned by 303) and a black cross panel from a Dornier 215 adorned with the unit’s badge and scoreboard. Pilot Officer Damm is seated on the ground leaning against it, Flight Sergeant Wünsche and Pilot Officer Mroczyk sit on the stairs, while Flying Officer Horbaczewski seems about to step on their knees to leave the hut.

Below: 303 pilots and ground crew gather around Squadron Leader Zumbach at Redhill. Zumbach’s distinctive hairdo can just be made out in the middle of the group, behind the forage cap of the officer in the foreground. Sergeant Włodzimierz Chojnacki can be seen, wearing his Mae-West. Note the absence of any white bands on the upper engine cowlings of squadron Spitfires lined-up in the background (such markings being often incorrectly associated with the Operation ‘Jubilee’). The nearest Spitfire VB, BL574, RF-F was flown by Sergeant Józef Stasik during the midday mission, when he was credited with a Focke-Wulf destroyed. The Spitfire was lost in the afternoon, Pilot Officer Damm being killed.