

MARKINGS



During the Stirling's service with Bomber Command the squadron codes painted on the fuselage generally conformed to a regulation size and colour. When squadrons were transferred to 38 Group and they were re-equipped with the Mk IV in 1944 – and later when they came under Transport Command – codes varied considerably in size, positioning and character spacing.

620 Squadron was alone among the Stirling transport units in adopting small unit code letters and a large individual identity code letter displayed on the rear fuselage sides in a single three-letter sequence, not divided by the roundel as was the official format. This was its solution to displaying the squadron code letters after they had been covered by the invasion stripes.

This is LJ930, QS-A, delivered to 620 Squadron on 16 May 1944, flying four trips to Arnhem where it was badly damaged by flak on 23 September and sent to SEBRO, (Short Bros Repair Organisation at Cambridge), for repair, before passing to 190 Squadron with whom it was lost in a flying accident on 20 April 1945. Note the recesses on the wing leading edge for balloon cable cutters (A) and the Mk IV's new tubular style formation lights on the rear of the wingtip, which replaced the clear perspex segment seen on early Stirlings.

Below: In another local variation of squadron markings, 196 Squadron's EF248, ZO-V, displays the standard Dull Red full-size squadron code 'ZO', but the individual identity letter 'V' is very much smaller and superimposed on the second black stripe, possibly in white or medium sea grey. The serial number 'EF248' has been partially overpainted, leaving only '48' fully visible. Underneath the pilot's window is a cartoon of what could be a sword-wielding warrior with the legend 'To Victory' in script beneath. Note, also, the patched rudder and tailplane. EF248 was lost to flak over Arnhem on 19 September.



Above: No 295 Squadron's LJ951, 8E-C, shows yet another variation, with smaller, flattened bold letters in the standard Dull Red, with wider spacing between the number and characters. The aircraft carries cut-off invasion stripes beneath the rear fuselage and an indication that those under the wing have been painted out. The rudder and fin also show evidence of repair. LJ951 displays 12 dagger op symbols beneath the pilot's window.

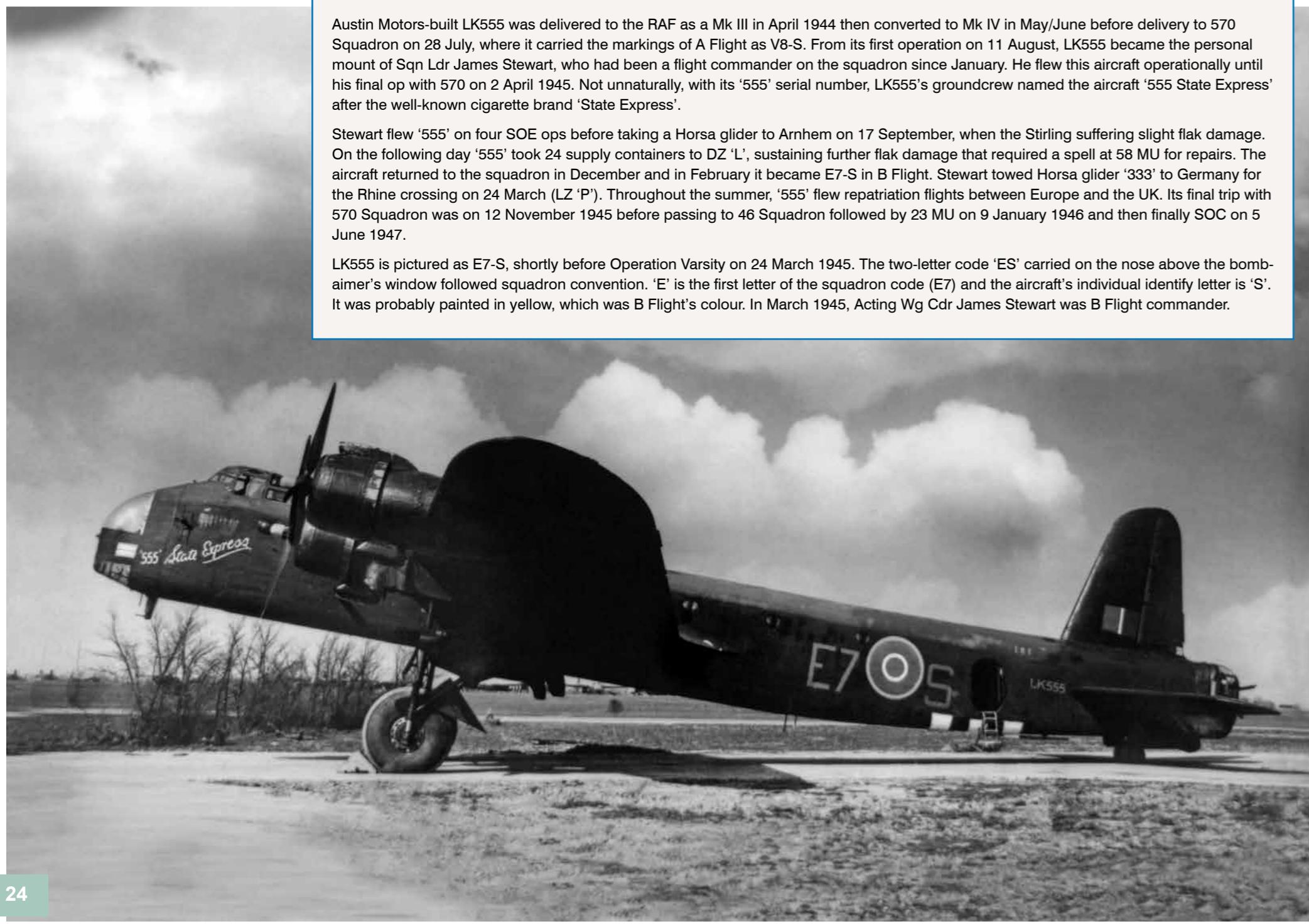
Below: However, No 570 Squadron's Mk IVs used the same flattened letter style, but in a lighter Roman font with regular character spacing. LK270, E7-W, has no invasion stripes but shows lingering signs of them on the rear fuselage around the crew entrance door and serial number.



Austin Motors-built LK555 was delivered to the RAF as a Mk III in April 1944 then converted to Mk IV in May/June before delivery to 570 Squadron on 28 July, where it carried the markings of A Flight as V8-S. From its first operation on 11 August, LK555 became the personal mount of Sqn Ldr James Stewart, who had been a flight commander on the squadron since January. He flew this aircraft operationally until his final op with 570 on 2 April 1945. Not unnaturally, with its '555' serial number, LK555's groundcrew named the aircraft '555 State Express' after the well-known cigarette brand 'State Express'.

Stewart flew '555' on four SOE ops before taking a Horsa glider to Arnhem on 17 September, when the Stirling suffering slight flak damage. On the following day '555' took 24 supply containers to DZ 'L', sustaining further flak damage that required a spell at 58 MU for repairs. The aircraft returned to the squadron in December and in February it became E7-S in B Flight. Stewart towed Horsa glider '333' to Germany for the Rhine crossing on 24 March (LZ 'P'). Throughout the summer, '555' flew repatriation flights between Europe and the UK. Its final trip with 570 Squadron was on 12 November 1945 before passing to 46 Squadron followed by 23 MU on 9 January 1946 and then finally SOC on 5 June 1947.

LK555 is pictured as E7-S, shortly before Operation Varsity on 24 March 1945. The two-letter code 'ES' carried on the nose above the bombardier's window followed squadron convention. 'E' is the first letter of the squadron code (E7) and the aircraft's individual identify letter is 'S'. It was probably painted in yellow, which was B Flight's colour. In March 1945, Acting Wg Cdr James Stewart was B Flight commander.



STIRLING Mk IV LK555, E7-S, '555 STATE EXPRESS', 570 SQUADRON, MARCH 1945



Modeller's notes

Aircraft:

- Early style Perspex nose cap.
- Rebecca transmitter and receiver aerials.
- Single pitot tube mast.
- Longer Mk III/IV engine air intakes.
- Oil coolers under engine nacelles.
- Un-treaded smooth mainwheel tyres.
- Parachute strop guard and glider-towing bridle.

Colours:

- Standard camouflage and national markings.
- Serial and thin lettering of squadron codes 'E7-S' in Dull Red placed lower down in relation to the roundel on the rear fuselage.
- Squadron code 'E7' and yellow propeller hubs denote 570 Squadron's B Flight.
- Squadron leader's 'class flag' motif on the nose, with horizontal stripes of dark blue/RAF blue/narrow red/RAF blue/dark blue. The RAF albatross is depicted in dark blue in the top left-hand corner of the upper RAF blue stripe.
- Nose art "555" in un-stylised numerals and 'State Express' in a curvy script (possibly in yellow).
- Ops log – 8 daggers, one glider (Arnhem),
- Invasion stripes prominent on underside of rear fuselage only.
- Partial overpainting in black of fuselage windows behind the wing.
- Worn paintwork on air intakes and engine cooling gills.
- Wheel chocks with aircraft's individual letter 'S'.



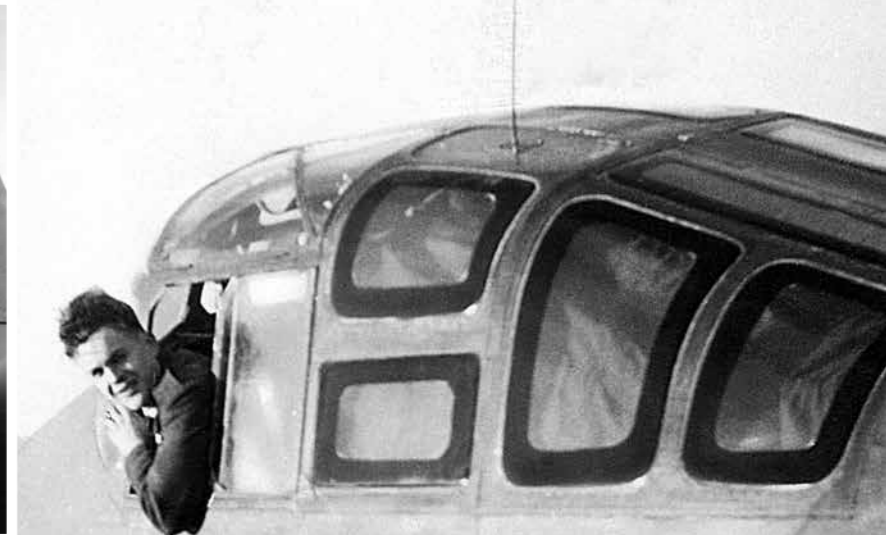
In a scene oft repeated at 38 Group airfields, the pilots of these Stirling Mk IVs gun their Hercules engines with short bursts of throttle as their charges follow a stately progress around the perimeter track on an unidentified English airfield. Judging from the absence of invasion stripes on the wings and the fact that they're still present on the rear fuselage, the photograph was probably taken around the time of Arnhem in September 1944. The view is from out of the cockpit starboard side window looking back over the fuselage, with the DF loop, astrodome, invasion stripes and tail fin visible. Behind can be seen Stirlings 'E' and 'F' fitted with the early-type Perspex nose caps, with signs of internal bracing.



Above: As if to emphasise the size of the Stirling's main wheels, bomb aimer Flt Sgt J.H. 'Junior' Bryce and wireless op Plt Off J.C. 'Joe' Martin from Flt Off Ron Clement's 620 Squadron crew pose against one of the squadron's Mk IVs at Fairford in the late summer of 1944. In the background can be seen a busy servicing area with one Stirling undergoing engine maintenance while another is inside an open T2 hangar. Note the tight clearance inside the hangar above the cockpit coupé – the clearance height of a T2 was 25ft, while the height of a Stirling tail-down was 22ft 9in, leaving a headroom of just 2ft 3in.

Right inset: With 161 Sqn pilot Stan Sicklemore for scale, the Stirling's slab-like tailfin was some 10ft high and 7ft 10in across its base, with an area of 77.4sq ft, while the rudder had a range of 22° 30' each way. Note the worn paint, three visible rudder hinges and Kilfrost anti-icing paste on the inner edge of the rudder. The pilot has placed his flying helmet and mask on the horizontal stabiliser in the foreground.

Below: The Stirling's impressive height above the ground could be readily appreciated from the cockpit, where the experience was akin to riding in the upstairs front seat of a double-deck bus. This 161 Squadron Stirling Mk IV named 'Sugar' with Stan Sicklemore in the pilot's seat, shows to advantage the cockpit coupé with sliding window at the pilot's position, blackout blinds inside the rear cockpit over the navigator's position, with black-painted edging to the windows to reduce any light spill from inside at night. The two windows in the fuselage below the cockpit are located opposite the navigator's chart table – the forward one has a convex observation blister while the second is flat and appears to be slightly recessed within a black fitting. The whip aerial on top of the coupé is believed to be the vertical antenna for Gee, while at lower left is the receiver aerial for Rebecca.

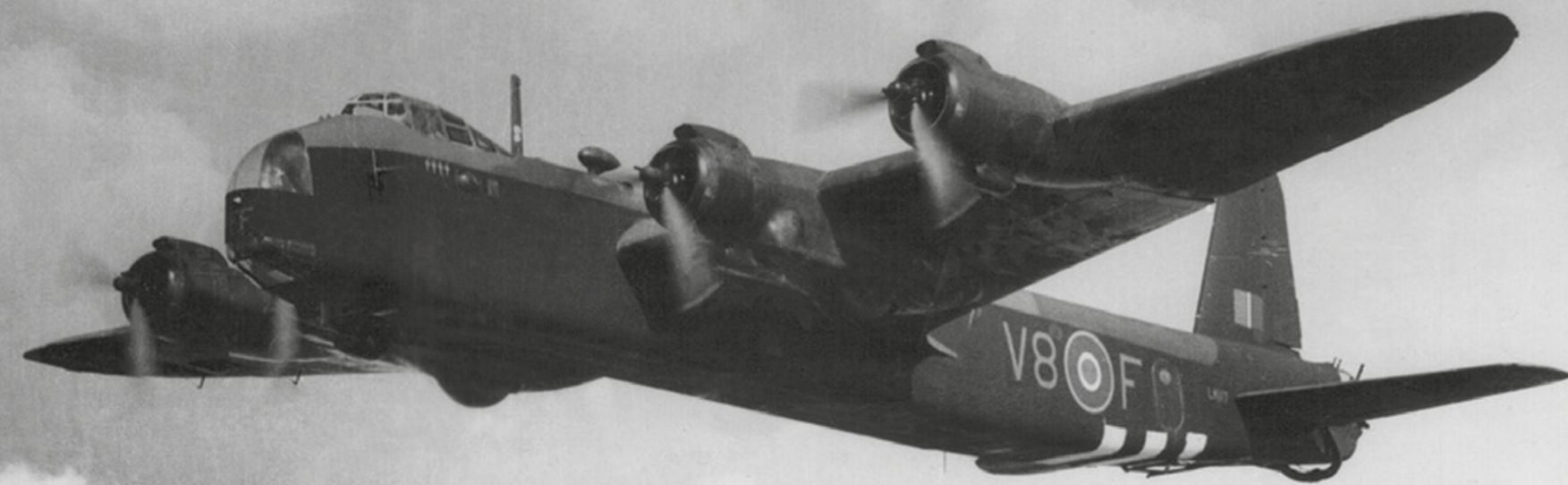




LK292, E7-V, of 570 Squadron's 'B' Flight, displayed a striking piece of nose art depicting a witch towing a Horsa and dropping supplies from her broom. Note the later style nose fairing with the extra windows, the yellow propeller hubs and the blanked blister window under the cockpit. This aircraft was originally delivered to 295 Squadron on 29 September 1944 (note the overpainted 8Z code on the fuselage) before being reallocated to 570 Squadron with which it shared the airfield at Rivenhall on 21 December. It was scrapped in June 1947. Some sources claim the code letter was W, which would tie in with the witch nose art, but official records show it as E7-V.

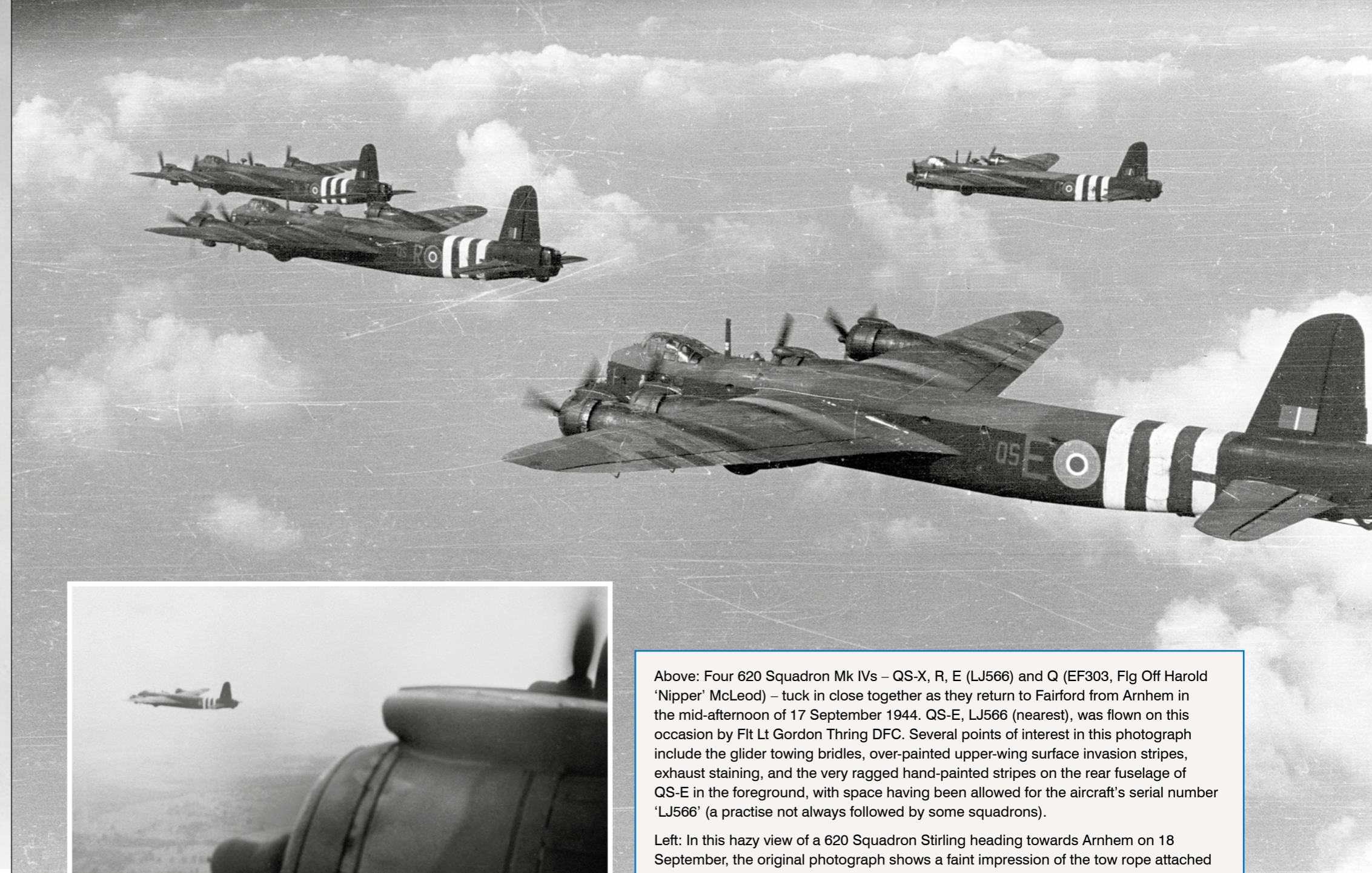


An atmospheric study of a pair of Stirlings from 570 Squadron above the clouds on their way to Arnhem on 19 September for a supply drop to the beleaguered 1st Airborne Division. The long, slender fuselage and relatively short wings of the Stirling are evident in this photograph. Note also the towing bridle and its single stabilising strut that was anchored to the fuselage underside forward of the tail undercarriage doors. Nearest the camera is LJ883, V8-K, flown by Flg Off William Kirkham, while the other aircraft is V8-W, skippered by WO Parker RCAF. LJ883 met its end four days later when it was hit by flak and brought down in flames at Planken Wambuis, northwest of Arnhem. Only the rear gunner survived.



Above: Flown by Flg Off David Campbell, 570 Squadron's LK117, V8-F, is seen returning to Harwell from Arnhem on 17 September after the initial drop of Market Garden. The aircraft suffered flak damage on a further sortie to Arnhem on 23 September, which wounded the rear gunner and resulted in LK117 being sent to SEBRO at Cambridge for battle damage repair. Note the invasion stripes under the rear fuselage only, the rounded '8' in the squadron code (later, the '8' was more flattened), retracted strop guard, towing bridle, four operational symbols painted on the nose, Rebecca aerials, and double identification letter 'FF' above the bomb-aimer's window.

Left: LK280, an almost identical replacement V8-F, is seen at Rivenhall, Essex, in early 1945. Delivered to 570 Squadron on 23 September 1944, it flew a number of SD sorties as well as towing a Horsa on Operation Varsity (LZ 'P') on 24 March 1945, also flown by Flt Lt David Campbell. This later aircraft has the extra glazing in the nose, and red propeller spinners denoting a B Flight aircraft.

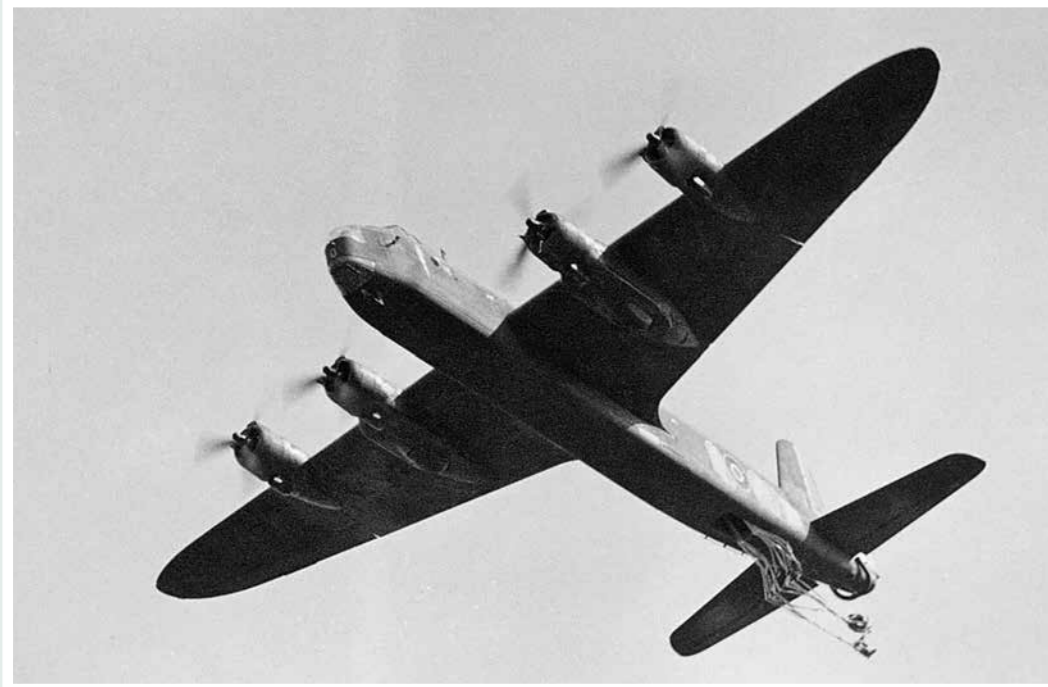


Above: Four 620 Squadron Mk IVs – QS-X, R, E (LJ566) and Q (EF303, Flg Off Harold 'Nipper' McLeod) – tuck in close together as they return to Fairford from Arnhem in the mid-afternoon of 17 September 1944. QS-E, LJ566 (nearest), was flown on this occasion by Flt Lt Gordon Thring DFC. Several points of interest in this photograph include the glider towing bridles, over-painted upper-wing surface invasion stripes, exhaust staining, and the very ragged hand-painted stripes on the rear fuselage of QS-E in the foreground, with space having been allowed for the aircraft's serial number 'LJ566' (a practise not always followed by some squadrons).

Left: In this hazy view of a 620 Squadron Stirling heading towards Arnhem on 18 September, the original photograph shows a faint impression of the tow rope attached to a Horsa glider, which is out of sight behind the Bristol Hercules engine in the foreground belonging to LK127, QS-O, flown by Plt Off P.D. de Bone. (Noel Chaffey)



PARACHUTE STROP GUARD

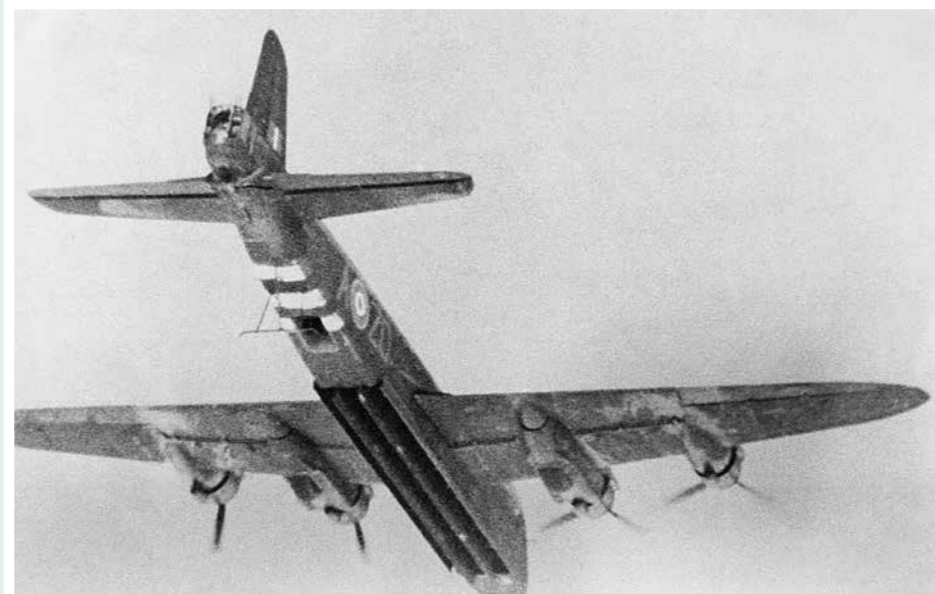


Above: This unidentified Stirling Mk IV, 'O', has its Joe hole open and strop guard lowered, doing the job it was intended for in holding parachute static lines clear of the tailplane. Also visible is the individual code 'O' repeated on the nose, single pitot mast, glider towing bridle and the offset Lorenz rail adjacent to the Joe hole.

Right: A 6ft x 4ft hatch was installed in the fuselage floor for paratrooper and supply dropping. A retractable tubular metal frame strop guard (or 'gate') was mounted underneath the rear fuselage behind the hatch, which was lowered and held in place by a strut and pin, its purpose being to trap the parachute static lines and prevent them from being whipped up by the slipstream and into the tailplane, causing damage. Once all the paratroopers had jumped, the static lines could be winched back on board by the despatchers using a pair of winches attached to the fuselage floor, and the guard retracted manually using a raising/lowering arm in the floor that passed through a hole in the under surface of the tail section just forward of the horizontal stabiliser front spar frame.

This photograph of 196 Squadron's Mk IV, ZO-A, was taken on 10 March 1945 during Exercise Ibrox in the French Alps and shows to advantage the open fuselage bomb bay revealing the three longitudinal bomb cells (used for dropping supply containers), the open paratrooper hatch or 'Joe' hole (so-called when used for SOE drops), and the fully lowered strop guard.

Below: Stirlings drop supplies by parachute to men of 6th Airborne Division at St-Aubin-D'Arquenay, in the Orne bridgehead on 23 June 1944. Thanks to the three-day-long gale that had raged in the Channel from 19 to 21 June, disrupting the supply of men and war materials through the Mulberry harbours, airborne troops were forced to radio for urgent supplies to be air-dropped to them.



Twenty fully kitted paratroopers with chutes and more than 60lb of equipment each sit on the floor of a Mk IV as they are flown to their DZ in Normandy on 5/6 June 1944. The men are wearing Oversmock jump suits over their Denison Smocks, and Type X Mk II parachutes. In this view looking forward, in the foreground can be seen the wooden door over the paratroop exit that also formed part of the fuselage floor. The paratroop exit had two doors – one in the floor and the other in the fuselage skin under the fuselage. The top (wooden) door was opened by undoing two fasteners, folding the port half onto the starboard half, and then both halves over to starboard; the bottom (aluminium) door was released by undoing five spring-loaded bolts and then opening inwards.