

over the target area. As the Banff Wing got closer, they fired their very pistol, launching pre-determined colours into the air. If my recollection is correct, on this occasion they were red and green. At first I thought the Norwegian piloting the outrider plane was wishing some of his relatives a Christmas greeting.

Ejdsfjord provided a fairly secure harbour for the ships, as it was inland about twenty miles from the North Sea and nestled in a range of mountains that provided many excellent anti-aircraft sights.

The attack on these vessels, because of the high hills, meant we would have to approach from the southeast at approximately five thousand feet. We would then dive down in formation in groups of three aircraft and attack the vessels as one unit.

The Mosquito's machine guns, cannons and rockets were synchronized with the gun-sights. For an effective strike a number of sequences had to be religiously observed by the pilot in order to guarantee good results when attacking ships.

As a general rule the attack commenced from a distance of 2,000 yards with the aircraft assuming a 10-degree dive at a speed of 240 knots. The pilot was required to control his aircraft so that he maintained a safe position relative to his attacking companions. To do this he must keep his angle of attack and airspeed reasonably close to the established criteria.

Wing Commander McHardy, DSO, DFC and Bar, was leading a follow-up group of five 143 Squadron Mosquitos. To illustrate the Wing Commander's tenacity, when he overshot his rocket projectile strike at three coasters, he did a follow-up attack on the coasters firing only cannons and machine guns, his eight rockets having been dispensed in his first attack. He made three attacks against this vessel and left it a blazing mess.

Flying Officer Chamberlain attacked another three island coasters with rocket projectiles, scoring two possible hits. Flight Sergeant McCall claimed eight probable underwater hits on a barge. All our aircraft on this assignment returned safely to Banff.

It took a great deal of concentration and no small lack of courage for a pilot to carry out a successful attack against a group of ships. They were firing substantially more armament at the pilot than he was able to fire at them. After all, a ship, or for that matter more than one, had

a much larger base on which to mount guns with an endless amount of ammunition, more so than an aircraft.

When our cannon shells were hitting the ship and the reflecting gun-sight was showing the target in its centre, our aircraft were 600 yards away from the target. The pilot counted two seconds and pressed the "tit," the button that causes the rockets to release. If this sequence was completed properly and the pilot had not been distracted by the gunfire and rockets coming toward him from the ships, then the rocket projectiles accelerated to approximately 3,000 miles per hour before hitting the target either above and/or below the water line in a pattern, and almost assuredly destroyed the vessel.

It is hard to imagine the feelings of the gunners on the ships as a flock of aircraft comes bearing down on them at 300 miles per hour, each firing its four cannons, four .303 machine guns and letting loose eight armour-piercing rockets that travel almost too fast for the eye to follow.

If the pilot can press his attack without deviating, maintaining his firepower against the ships, the gunners have to seek shelter, thus improving the chances for the attacking aircraft's survival. It might seem paradoxical, but the more resolutely and boldly the pilot conducts his attack the better his opportunity to survive becomes. If the pilot breaks off his attack when he first releases his rockets, he is left without the distraction his firepower provides against the aim of the gunners on the ships. The closer we took our planes to the ships we attacked, the safer we were.

After passing the target ship the pilot, having broken low and close to the ships, is subject to the fury of the ships' gunners unless there is another vic of aircraft following in on a second wave. This was often the case in an attack of this kind. The "Mossie" only has a sting in front and is impotent when leaving the scene. As our aircraft completed its attack against the ships, we took violent evasive action and with luck most of us escaped without injury or damage.

It was a difficult matter to teach newly arrived members of the squadron that they had a better chance of surviving if they pressed home their attack. Many couldn't accept it. Judging from their actions and their shyness in attacking, it often caused their demise.

Although I had been on the squadron for only five months, by the time we got to Banff I regarded my survival as a divine right. This was something my “superior” flying abilities qualified me to do, whereas the safe return of “other crews” was due to skill, courage and in many cases pure bullshit luck. At that time and age I hadn’t yet convinced myself that a bullet was unaware of my “divine rights.”



Montage “Ships Under Attack” Banff Wing.
November 1944 – May 1945.