TIGER FORCE

WITH ITS TASK OVER IN EUROPE, BOMBER COMMAND WAS ALREADY ADDRESSING ITS NEXT OBJECTIVE – JAPAN. **GRAHAM PITCHFORK** DESCRIBES THE FORCE THAT NEVER WAS

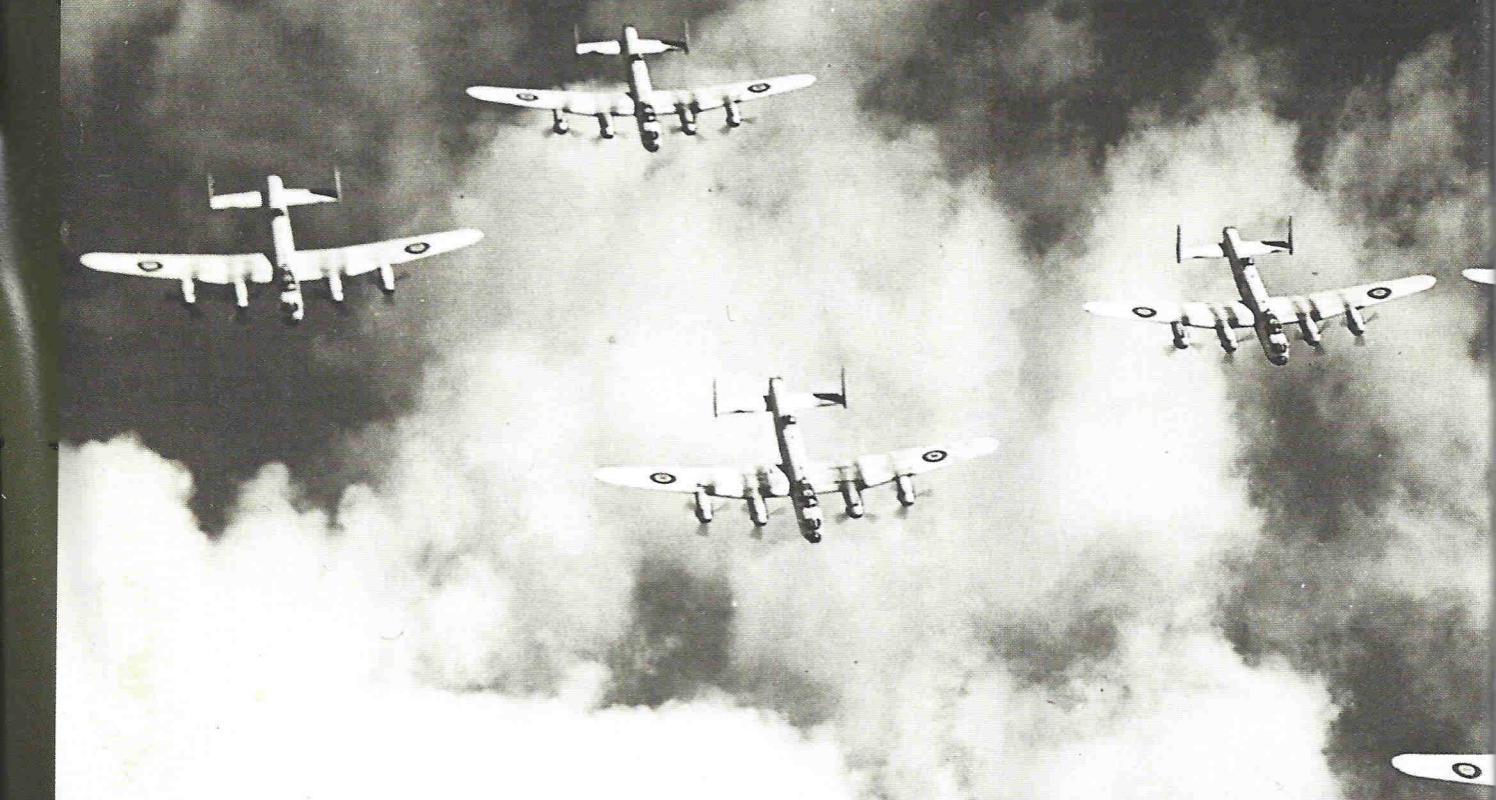
Consideration had been given to using RAF Lancasters in attacks against Japan in late 1943 but it was not until the Quebec Conference held in September 1944, when the Allies were firmly established on mainland Europe, that the idea was raised formally.

Ever aware of the enormous contribution of the USA in the struggle against Germany, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill was determined that the UK should contribute to the war against mainland Japan. Allied war strategy had always been to defeat Germany first and then concentrate on Japan so a Pacific venture was recognised as a so-called 'Phase II' project to be implemented upon the surrender of Germany.

On October 27, 1944 US Chiefs of Staff accepted in principle Churchill's offer to send around 40 Lancaster squadrons to the Pacific area once the war in Europe was over. The chiefs made it clear that the deployment would be governed by the availability of airfields within effective range of Japan. Detailed planning to place a British Commonwealth bomber force in the Pacific to participate with the Americans in the direct attack against Japan began immediately.

An initial proposal was produced by November 23, 1944 under the title Operation Mould which on February 24, 1945 was renamed Tiger Force. The intention was to create 12 heavy bomber and six long-range fighter squadrons.

With the offensive against Germany still the priority, the huge task was tackled by a Nucleus Planning Staff working directly to the newly appointed Tiger Force commander, Air Marshal Sir Hugh Lloyd. He summed up the size of the undertaking as: "A small Bomber Command, but with the many implications inherent in it being based upon a small island



in the Pacific 14,000 miles by sea away from its home base.

"It had to take the equivalent of Maintenance Command, Civil Repair Organisation, Signals Groups etc. Everything, in fact, had to be taken with it, and except for a few spares by air, it would have been two and a half months away by sea from its sources of supply."

LONG-RANGE SCHEME

A key issue was to consider likely bases for such a large force but the unpredictability of US military progress in the region created the need to consider numerous options. It was clear that any operations in the Pacific area would inevitably involve very long-range sorties and development work was already in hand to increase the range of the Lancaster - see the panel on page 40.

In the New Year, the Air Ministry decided it was more practicable to allow Lancasters to take off over-loaded so the in-flight refuelling option was abandoned. Also, the successful attack by Lancasters against the warship *Tirpitz* in November 1944 had highlighted that the removal of the mid-upper turret and some armour enabled a bomb load of 4,000lb (1,814kg) to be carried over a range of 1,500 miles (2,413km). This could be achieved without the need for complex additional fuel tanks.

Difficulties increased in early 1945 when the US announced that the RAF would have to develop its own bases "from tide-water to aircraft". Logistic implications were enormous and soon became more difficult when it was suggested that the RAF would have to fly from North Luzon in the Philippines, between 1,000 and 1,700 miles distant from the main targets. Operationally this was almost impossible, but at this stage of the war in the Pacific it remained the only option.

Below left
Had things gone differently, this might have been a sight in the skies over Okinawa and ultimately, Japan: Lancasters of 35 Squadron. KEY COLLECTION

Bottom right
Air Marshal Sir Hugh Lloyd, Commander of Tiger Force.

Above
AVM Hugh Constantine, Air Officer Commanding 5 Group.

Below
Lancaster I(FE) PA417 newly prepared with the Tiger Force finish.
KEY COLLECTION

Over the next few weeks, during which time AM Lloyd made several visits to the USA and to Canada, the composition of the force was changed and a large airfield construction party was added with the RAF providing 2,500 men for this crucial task.

The fighter element was dropped by the end of February and Canada expressed a wish to make a considerable contribution. Australia and New Zealand also wanted to be represented. By April it had been decided that Tiger Force should constitute the following squadrons: 20 heavy bomber, one Pathfinder, one photo-recce/meteorological and one air-sea rescue. Four transport squadrons and army and RAF ancillary units would provide support.

It was estimated that 106,000 men would be required until the completion of the major construction tasks. This was a huge commitment, not least because there remained a priority requirement to maintain force levels in Europe until the defeat of Germany.

WAYS TO INCREASE THE 'LANC'S' RANGE

1. Create an in-flight refuelling capability using Lancaster tankers. Flight Refuelling conducted a series of trials, some at night, and advance plans were drawn up to convert 600 Lancasters as either receivers or tankers.
2. Produce a very long-range Lancaster carrying an increased fuel capacity and a reduced bomb load. Two aircraft were modified to carry a 'saddle tank' on the spine behind the cockpit, which involved the removal of the mid-upper turret.
3. Accelerate the production of the more powerful Lancaster IV and V, later renamed the Lincoln I and II respectively.

"Tiger Force would be a small Bomber Command, but with the many implications inherent in it being based upon a small island in the Pacific 14,000 miles by sea away from its home base"

OKINAWA BASE

After a meeting in the USA, it became clear that American progress in the Pacific war allowed planning on the basis that Okinawa would soon be occupied. Organised resistance on the island was finally overcome in June.

A very large USAAF force had to be accommodated and a great deal of reconstruction was needed in addition to the building of new airstrips. When fully developed the Americans would have 22 airfields on Okinawa with total holdings of 2,552 operational aircraft of which 1,020 would be heavy bombers. These figures excluded Tiger Force for which no allocation of airfields had been made at that stage.

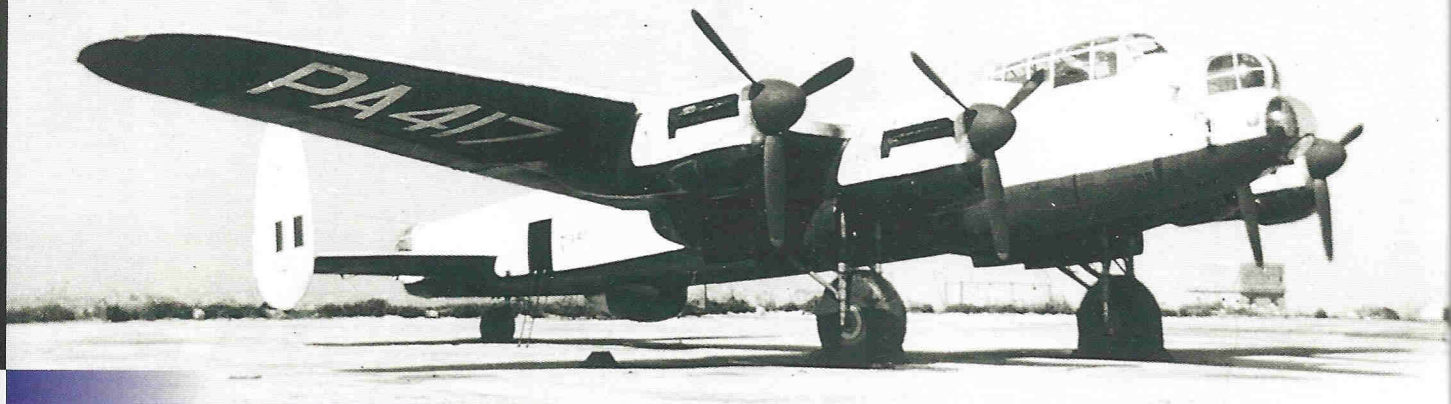
Following negotiations with the US authorities, the US Chiefs of Staff offered a base on Okinawa but it would, in the first instance, only accommodate ten of the proposed RAF squadrons. The British accepted the offer and to share the logistical and engineer requirement and a signal was sent to Washington on June 4 to confirm the Prime Minister's approval.

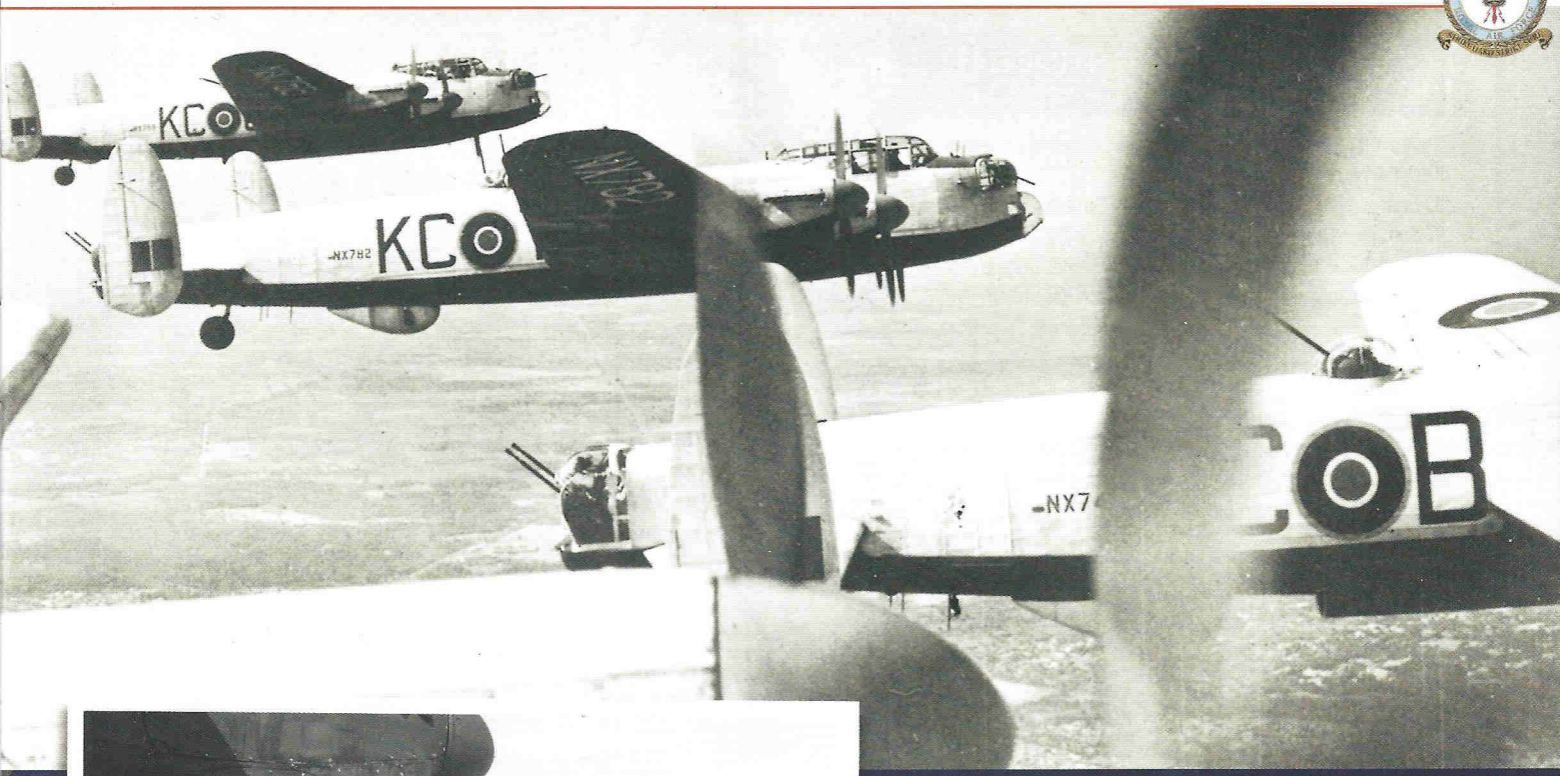
Despite the uncertainties of basing, it was decided to sail a convoy, codenamed Shield, to the Pacific without waiting for the US instructions on the destination. On board were 3,000 RAF personnel, the majority from 5358 Airfield Construction Wing, and elements of the Tiger Force headquarters staff. Cargo included 15,000 tons of construction material and 522 vehicles and trailers.

Shield sailed at the end of June from Liverpool for the Panama Canal and then on to the Marshall Islands and the Admiralty Islands. A second convoy, Vacuum, left on July 23 with a further 3,000 men, stores and equipment.

FORCE SELECTION

Once the war in Europe was over, squadrons and personnel could be allocated and prepared for Tiger Force. Lancasters drawn from 5 and 6 (Canadian) Groups were to make up the 20 squadrons. Under the command of AVM





H A Constantine, 5 Group was selected as the first to deploy with ten squadrons. Lincolns, once available, would steadily replace the Lancasters but there were delays in developing the Merlin 68 engine.

Initial planning was based on a force of about 400 Lancasters and 627 Squadron with Mosquitos. The first contingent, codenamed Hurst was announced on May 16, 1945 - see the panel on page 42.

Each Lancaster squadron was to be established with 20 aircraft and on an overseas basis. A maintenance wing was to be formed to proceed with each party: 242 Wing at Woodhall Spa and 243 Wing at Strubby, both in Lincolnshire.

The second contingent – Peace – was to be provided by eight Lancaster squadrons of 6 Group RCAF. At the end of the European war these units started to fly back to Canada to be prepared for the Far East and would eventually move to the operational area via the USAAF reinforcement route in early 1946.

To meet the requirement that Tiger Force should be a Commonwealth commitment 75 (RNZAF) Squadron was transferred from its base at Mepal, Cambridgeshire in 3 Group to replace 44 Squadron at Spilsby, Lincolnshire.

A letter from HQ 5 Group addressed to all its squadrons detailed the need to maintain crew efficiency and how training should continue. On May 30, HQ 5 Group issued Tiger Force Instruction 1/45 listing the units to be deployed for overseas service and these included 9 and 617 Squadrons, which would form a third contingent with 44, and 156 or 189 Squadrons along with a maintenance wing and two signals wings.

AIRCRAFT PREPARATION

With delays in Lincoln development, a revised Lancaster production programme was produced with the first eight squadrons equipped with Lancaster Is and VIIs with Merlin 24s and modified for operation at 72,000lb all-up weight and designated Mk.I(FE) and VII(FE).

Conditions in the Pacific theatre would be very different from those in Europe and it was decided that the camouflage was unnecessary and upper and side surfaces would have heat-reflecting white while under surfaces would retain the black anti-searchlight finish. Unlike Bomber Command squadrons, the Lancasters would carry a crew of six.

The standard of preparation included the fitting of tropical powerplants, Lincoln undercarriage, a Frazer-Nash FN.82 rear turret, 8,000lb capacity bomb doors, a bomb bay fuel tank and the removal of the mid-upper turret and fitting of blanking plate. The aircraft were also to be fitted with special radio and navigation equipment suitable for the Pacific theatre.

At a meeting held at Austin Motors, Longbridge in the Midlands, on May 23, 1945, the delivery programme was formulated although it did not meet the Tiger Force requirement in full. The schedule ran as follows: By July 15 a total of 30 Lancaster VIIs were to be fitted retrospectively by Austin at Elmdon (now Birmingham Airport) with Lincoln undercarriage, air cleaners for the existing powerplants and as many other

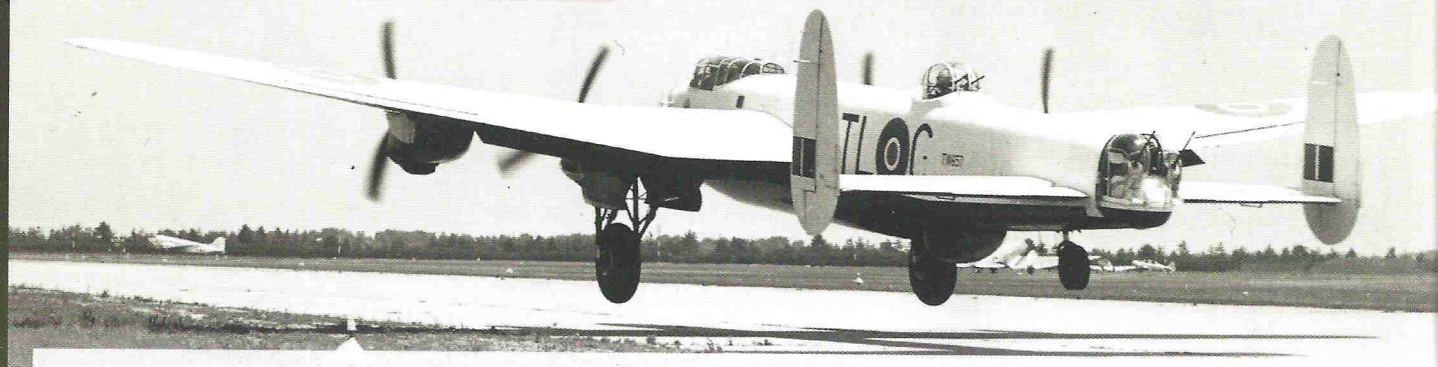
Above
Lancaster VII(FE)s of 617 Squadron on a visit to India in 1946.
VIA ROBERT OWEN

Left
Lancasters of 431 Squadron RCAF at Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, shortly after arrival from the UK in June 1945 to be prepared for Tiger Force.
VIA ANDREW THOMAS

TIGER FORCE FIRST CONTINGENT 'HURST'

Squadron	Location	Assembly Station
First Party		
83 Sqn	Coningsby	Coningsby
97 Sqn	Coningsby	Coningsby
106 Sqn	Metheringham	Metheringham
467 (RAAF) Sqn	Waddington	Metheringham
627 Sqn	Woodhall Spa	Woodhall Spa
Second Party		
44 Sqn	Spilsby	Spilsby
57 Sqn	East Kirkby	East Kirkby
207 Sqn	Spilsby	Spilsby
460 (RAAF) Sqn	Binbrook	East Kirkby

"Gen Spaatz asked for two 'Tallboy' squadrons to be operational on Okinawa by October 15 as the USAAF would have no similar units before 1946. The 12,000lb, so-called 'earthquake' weapon would be required before the assault on Kyushu..."



Above *The top turret gives Armstrong Whitworth-built Lancaster I TW657 of 35 Squadron away as not destined for Tiger Force. The white upper and black under surfaces were ultimately adopted throughout post-war Bomber Command Lancaster units.* KEY COLLECTION

Right *Austin Motors-built Lancaster VII(FE) NX612 shortly after allocation to Aston Down-based 1689 Flight following the disbandment of Tiger Force.*

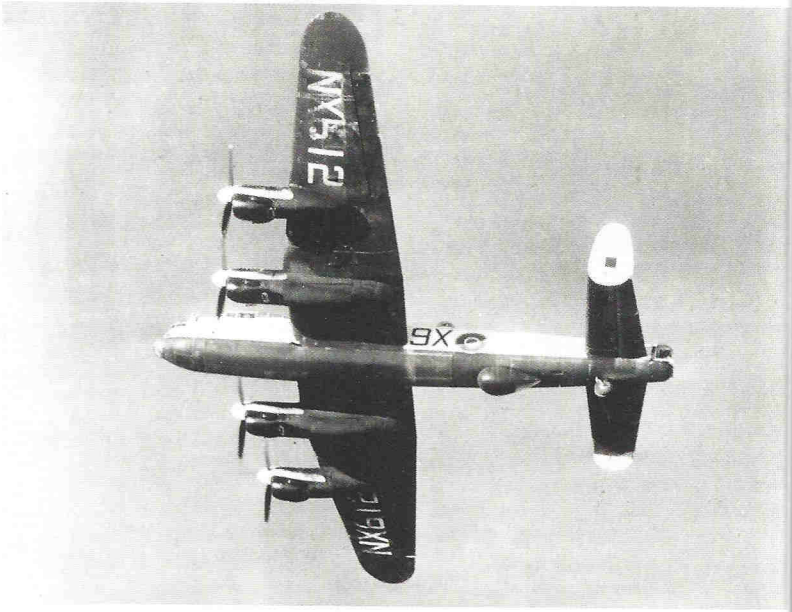
modifications as possible and delivered to units.

By August 15, another 50 Mk.VIIs were to be prepared. By September 30 more Mk.VIIs were to be similarly fitted, along with 70 Mk.Is and IIIs which were to be fitted retrospectively with Lincoln undercarriage, FN.82 turrets and tropical powerplants. Sixty Mk.Is, IIIs or VIIs fitted to the full Tiger standard were to be ready by October 31.

After that a monthly target of 40 Mk.Is. IIIs or VIIs were to be delivered to the full Tiger standard until the planned supply of 450 tropical powerplants was exhausted.

The aircraft would have to be delivered to 32 Maintenance Unit at St Athan in south Wales two weeks earlier to give sufficient time for the incorporation of the necessary radio fits and modifications to the H2S radar.

The Ministry of Aircraft Production was unable to give a firm forecast for the availability of the very long-range Lincoln II but assumed that the first squadrons would be available in February 1946. Within six months a dozen units would be in theatre bringing the RAF and Commonwealth contingent up to the 20, the initial target. From August, Lancaster squadrons would be withdrawn as more Lincoln squadrons arrived.

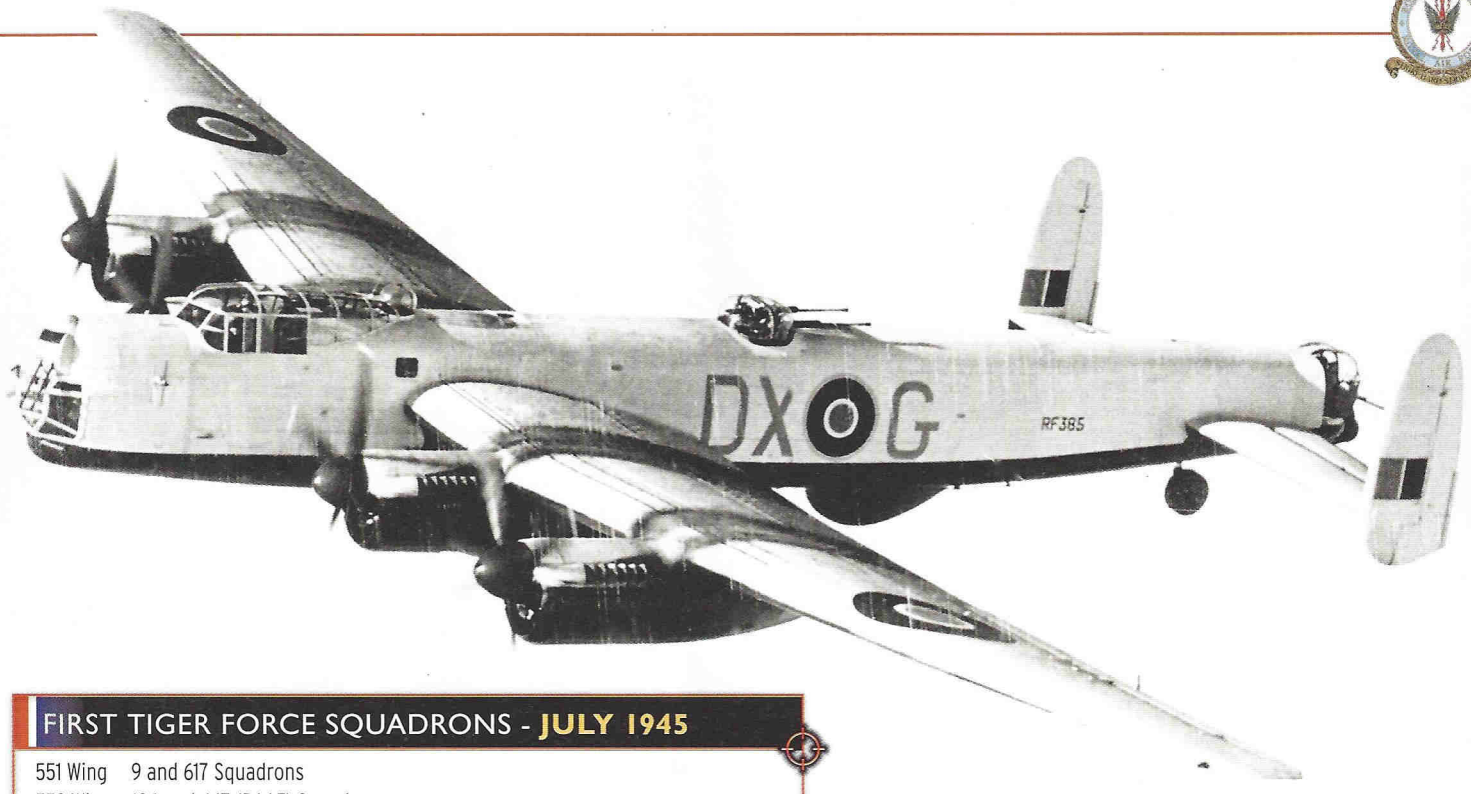


CALL FOR TALLBOYS

In early July AM Lloyd and key members of his staff visited the Pacific where they inspected the sites on Okinawa, the likely air staging posts and the port facilities. They carried out a detailed survey and were able to identify the essential needs and where duplication of effort with the Americans could save RAF capabilities, such as photographic reconnaissance.

AM Lloyd and his party returned to the UK via Washington where he held talks with Gen 'Tooey' Spaatz, recently appointed Commanding General of the Strategic Air Forces in the Pacific. Final basing options had not yet been determined but Gen Spaatz indicated that the 5 Group squadrons would be based on Okinawa alongside their old wartime comrades of the USAAF Eighth Air Force and would operate directly under HQ Strategic Air Force. He also requested RAF representation on his staff of an air vice-marshal, three air commodores, three group captains and a wing commander.

It was at this meeting that Gen



FIRST TIGER FORCE SQUADRONS - JULY 1945

551 Wing	9 and 617 Squadrons
552 Wing	106 and 467 (RAAF) Squadrons
553 Wing	83, 97 and 627 Squadrons
554 Wing	75 (RNZAF) and 207 Squadrons
661 Wing	419 (RCAF) and 428 (RCAF) Squadrons

Note: As only ten squadrons were to be deployed in the first phase it was expected that 207 Squadron would deploy with the second contingent.

Spaatz asked for two Tallboy squadrons to be operational on Okinawa by October 15 as the USAAF would have no similar units before 1946. The 12,000lb, so-called 'earthquake' weapon would be required before the assault on Kyushu planned for November 1 when the targets would be large-span road and rail bridges and a tunnel. AM Lloyd accepted this request.

Gen Spaatz acknowledged the deployment of the second half of Tiger Force when a further ten squadrons would deploy early in 1946.

GEARING UP

The composition of the first force of ten squadrons had been revised numerous times and after AM Lloyd's Pacific visit it had to accommodate the two Tallboy squadrons. It was also decided to increase the Commonwealth contribution of the first deployment. On his return, AM Lloyd chaired a meeting on July 26 when the first ten squadrons to be deployed were decided - see panel above.

Immediate actions were put in hand to ready the two Tallboy squadrons for operations from Okinawa on October 15. The preparation of bombs, special cranes and trolleys, as well as the huge amount of equipment required by the two units was a task of the utmost urgency. A special fast ship, the *Chinese Prince*, was chartered and was to sail on August 25.

From the early days of identifying the composition of the force, it was envisaged that a Pathfinder Force would be required. The method adopted by 5 Group was preferred but only Mosquitos could carry it out and they had insufficient range to operate from the Philippines.

Once a base on Okinawa became available, the decision was taken to include 627 Squadron equipped with 30 Mosquito B.35s. All would carry H2S and Loran (long-range air navigation equipment) with one flight of ten aircraft equipped with the latest H2S, the Mk.VI. All the crews would have completed training by August 15 when the marking error was expected to be less than 150 yards (137m).

Following AM Lloyd's meeting with Gen Spaatz the first five squadrons were to be operational by December 1 with the remaining five being available two months later. By the beginning of August 1945, Tiger Force was very much up and running.

JAPAN SURRENDERS

On August 6, 1945 the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, followed three days later by a second on Nagasaki. On August 15 the Japanese accepted the terms of unconditional surrender.

The Shield convoy had arrived in Eniwetok and was due in Okinawa on August 24 but was diverted to Hong Kong where the men and their equipment gave essential support to the colony. They took a leading role in restoring many key services, including the building of a new airfield.

In the event Hong Kong was the main beneficiary of Tiger Force. Convoy Vacuum, consisting of eight cargo vessels, was diverted to Singapore. Steps were taken to reduce the force HQ and it was finally closed down on October 31.

The creation of Tiger Force was a massive undertaking and it is astonishing to reflect on what was achieved in such a short space of time. In his final despatch, AM Lloyd wrote: "The Japanese surrender naturally meant the end of Tiger Force. We had attempted something new in the history of the Royal Air Force, and it is unfortunate that the force never operated for the experience gained and lessons learned would have been most beneficial to posterity."

Above
Lincoln B.2 RF385 of 57 Squadron in the Tiger Force paint scheme. ALL VIA AUTHOR UNLESS NOTED