

DAYS OF ANGER – action packed encounters by Flying Officer B. E. H. Layne RNZAF (seconded to R.A.F – 201 Squadron).

Introduction

When it comes to featuring service in World War II, the Society has largely concentrated on publishing the efforts of New Zealand airmen in the Pacific war. Included were E. St. J Spicer who we featured in “One man’s war” 1977.

Many other New Zealand airmen either joined or were seconded to the RAF during World War II. We featured B. E .H. Layne in the August and December 1990 Journals covering his Sunderland delivery flight from Scotland to New Zealand in late 1944.

By coincidence, both Spicer and Layne were on the same F.T.S. course, 2C, at RNZAF Blenheim (August - December 1940) and, although it is not known if they ever met again, both men became members of the Aviation Historical Society of New Zealand.

Photo of Course 2C here

A sobering observation of the course members’ photograph, which is autographed on the back and comments for most of the men recorded thereon; of the twenty-one men, less than a third of them came through the war unscathed, (including both AHSNZ members). The others were taken PoW, posted missing or killed. Wilfred Emmett and Brian Layne were the only members to join 201 Squadron. Emmett was posted missing in the crash of Sunderland W3988 at Doonbeg, Ireland, on 3 December 1941. His name is entered on panel 63 of the Runnymede Memorial, Surrey, England.

Society member Peter Layne recently re-read his father’s 1941 and 1943 diaries and realised that by timely coincidence the 70th anniversary of his Ju-88 attack and his attack of U-Boat U-518 would coincide with publication of the June 2013 Aerolegacy.

*Brian Layne sailed on the Empress of Russia on 6 January 1941 to Canada, escorted by H.M.N.Z.S. Achilles as far as Honolulu from where his ship sailed unescorted to Vancouver. From Vancouver, he journeyed across Canada by Canadian Pacific Railway to Halifax where he joined the Johan Van Olden Barneveldt to continue the journey to England. **Insert the photo of the J V O here***

On arrival in England Brian reported to No (3) S of G R, Squire’s Gate, Blackpool for navigation training on Bothas. In June 1941 he transferred to No (4) O.T.U. operating at both Invergordon and Stranraer where he initially flew its namesake, the Stranraer, before adding the Catalina to his logbook. On one occasion he flew the rare and dubious Saro Lerwick flying boat. Training completed, he transferred to Sullom Voe in the Shetland Islands where he joined 201 Squadron, flying Sunderlands and Catalinas.

Typically, flying in Coastal Command was long and dreary however Brian was to have a good share of action including engaging a couple of unidentified motor vessels while on convoy duty. In all, he engaged U-Boats on three occasions. The first

occasion was on 13 April 1942 aboard Sunderland W4000 with Flt Lt Powell in command on the 11 hour 40 minute flight. No visible damage was confirmed and the U-Boat remains unidentified. Unfortunately no 1942 diary has been found to expand on the logbook account of the flight.

From Brian's diary we can reveal first hand accounts of two exploits aboard Sunderland W6005, of which he was skipper.

Saturday 26 June 1943

“Was duly called on at 2245 on Thursday and airborne 2 hours later (Friday 25 June). The task being to escort a convoy of troop (or tank) landing craft enroute for Africa. Met them just after dawn in a position about 400 miles west of Brest. All went as normal until just before 9, when suddenly a Ju-88 dived on us out of the cloud. The first I knew of it was the announcement by Sgt Ball in the front turret that we had just “flown over some splashes in the water.” He appeared at such short range that Sgt Campbell in the rear turret had to open fire before he could let me know what went on. The Ju-88 broke away over the top of us, flying round to port to make an attack on the port quarter. Steve gave me a good commentary from the astrodome, so that I was able to turn into the attack, and at the same time make for cloud cover. When he saw us turning into him, the enemy turned away, just after which we entered cloud. Campbell saw him a few minutes later low down on the water, presumably making for home, as he must have been fairly near his extreme range from base. Saw nothing and landed back at 1530.

Insert the group photo here. Officers of 201 Squadron Castle Archdale with Sunderland W6014“S”.

Monday 28 June 1943.

Big stuff! pranged U/Boat yesterday (**Sunday 27 June 1943**). Took off at 0530 on a "sea-slug" patrol and when near the southern extremity (43.30N 12 W) Sgt Smithies, sitting in the first pilot's seat, sighted a wake. This turned out to be a U/Boat cruising on the surface on a westerly course. We were flying at 3000' at the time and must have been observed, for I was able to turn away to make my run in down sun. When about half a mile away, the U/Boat crash dived so steeply that the stern literally stuck up out of the water, and was still visible when I dropped my depth charges on him. I circled round, had a look at the disturbance caused by the DCs when suddenly the U/Boat popped up again, almost underneath. I was too close in to attack and had to turn away for a few seconds to get a run in. During these few seconds, about six or more of the sub's crew bounded out on deck to man the guns, which opened up on us for all they knew.

Insert the U-boat photos here. (Note the steep angle of the stern in as it dived to escape, only to surface again minutes later when the attack resumed).

I didn't expect to get away with it, as I could see the smoke from the guns and hear the explosions going off all round us. With bombs out, a Sunderland is no easy aircraft to throw around. Meanwhile Sgt Ball in the front-turret was blazing away as we ran in to drop our remaining two DCs across her bows. I could see the Jerries on deck quite clearly, and Flt Sgt Sweet, in the rear turret let them have it good and hard, and states

that they were quite disorganised, and did not fire on us after we had passed over. He also reports explosions which obscured the conning tower. It was then, to my horror, I learned that I still had two DCs left - they hung up on the first attack. I circled round to make a third run in but by this time they had re-manned the guns (casualties are almost certain) and were getting the aim and deflection pretty well with their big guns, their machine gun fire falling just short of us. I tried to get into the sun again, but the Jerries would not co-operate at all, for every time I turned in towards them to attack from their stern, they turned inside me, keeping their forward guns on us. It seemed as though the tactical advantage had passed to them with their heavy ack-ack now better organised. Meanwhile we got a signal to home other aircraft on to them and this procedure was carried out, while we continued to shadow. Two hours after the first attack we reached our prudent limit of endurance, and being 800 miles from base (and incidentally only 500 from Gib (Gibraltar) reluctantly had to set course for base, where we landed at 2130. Imagine our surprise when on entering ops we were calmly asked 'if we saw anything.' It appeared that Group hadn't passed the Gen on, a fine thing. It would have been a finer thing still if we had sunk her, but I think I should get a 'seriously damaged' assessment.

LATER: 17 December 1943 (when attached to the Receipt Test and Despatch [R.T.D.] Unit at Wig Bay); "one of the captains here is my old second pilot Stevens. He tells me that news of our U-Boat had reached the Squadron to the effect that it had returned to port, but damaged beyond repair for further ops., and that five of the crew had been killed.

NOTE, according to <http://uboat.net/boats/u518.htm> it states "Unlike many other U-boats, which during their service lost men due to accidents and various other causes, U-518 did not suffer any casualties (we know of) until the time of her loss." NOTE: The U-Boat was repaired and sailed again. <http://uboat.net/boats/u518.htm> also states "Sunk 22 April, 1945 in the North Atlantic north-west of the Azores, in position 43.26N, 38.23W, by depth charges from the US destroyer escorts USS Carter and USS Neal A. Scott. 56 dead (all hands lost)."

In July 1943 Brian was to have his final flight in anger on what was his penultimate flight with 201 Squadron. On that occasion he was commanding Sunderland W4036. Had he been successful it would have gone down as one of the most remarkable feats in Coastal Command in World War II. I have read that the destruction of two U Boats in the one flight was only achieved once by Coastal Command but in separate attacks.

The diary records, "Friday 30th July. Last Saturday we were put u/s for 24 hours on account of being inoculated but managed to get a little local flying on Sunday, with four or five of the crew who were reasonably fit. On Monday went on strike and took off on our first job in "W" at 1000 hours. **Wednesday 28 July** (on W4036) at 4pm flying in excellent visibility, my new second pilot, F/O Fernside spotted 2 subs on the surface about 10 miles away. (45N 12W). We turned into attack, but at the same time an American Catalina coming in the opposite direction made what appeared to be a bombing run over them and (we) turned away. But he flew right over them without doing anything so I turned into attack and at the same time we sighted another Sunderland, also coming from the south.

Unfortunately the subs crash dived and I was over them too late to make an attack. Meanwhile the Cat had turned around and fired off a string of whatever missiles he carried without effect. Stayed in the area for three hours, but saw nothing more of the subs. Blast that Cat.

Tomorrow I am down for a 2.15pm take-off escorting (probably) one of the Queens. Monday 1st August. The job duly came off, (again in W4036) our task being to escort the Queen Elizabeth till dusk. Had an uneventful trip, the weather being pretty lousy on the way out and worse on the night journey back; landed at 0545.

That completed Brian's first operational tour with 201 Squadron and his log book records 877 hours 40 minutes. Brian took great pride in his 123 hours logged in his last month with 201 Squadron. Those eleven flights ranged between 1 hour 15 minutes and 17 hours 5 minutes. He then transferred to the R.T.D unit at Wig Bay where he tested and delivered new and repaired Sunderlands and Catalinas to their squadrons.

Sunderland W4036 was to come to a sad end on 18 November 1943, when it crashed on landing at Lough Erne with the loss of three crew members. A permanent memorial is in place near Lough Erne for those who lost their lives on that aircraft.

[Insert the W4036 memorial picture here.](#)

Days of anger – the sequel

At the end of the story in June 2013 Aerolog about Brian Layne's encounters with the enemy during World War II reference is made to research Peter Layne was conducting to identify the U-Boats involved.

Just after the Aerolog went to print Peter received an email, while visiting Kelowna, in Canada, from Gudmundur who lists identities of all the U Boats and the Catalina but not the Ju 88.

Research of these U Boats has revealed the names of the commanders at the time and the boats' and commanders' eventual fates.

Details are:

13 April 1942 Sunderland W4000 attacked U-406 type VIIC under command of Kapitänleutnant Horst Dieterichs. The U-boat was destroyed by HMS Spey on 18 February 1944 claiming Dieterichs' life.

27 June 1943 Sunderland W6005 attacked U-518 type IXC under command of Kapitänleutnant Friedrich-Wilhelm Wissmann. The U-Boat was destroyed by USS Carter and USS Scott near the Azores on 24 April 1945. Wissmann died in 1963.

28 July 1943 Sunderland W4036 attacked both U-262 type VIIC under command of Kapitänleutnant Heinz Franke and U-760 type VIIC under command of Kapitänleutnant Otto-Ulrich Blum. Although this attack was unsuccessful these two U Boats were together again when they were attacked by an RAF Wellington bomber of 179 Squadron on 8 August 1943. U-760 sailed to Vigo Harbour, Spain where it was interned until the end of the war and was finally sunk on 13 December 1945. U-262 was bombed at Gotenhafen in December and "stricken" at Kiel on 2 April 1945. Franke died in 2003 aged 87 and Blum died in 2009 aged 92.

Gudmunder adds, the U S Catalina was "L" of VP-63 USN.

Consequent research produced some most unexpected results. Page 486 of the Dictionary of American Naval Aviation Squadrons – Volume 2 makes an interesting comparative account of what happened on 28 July 1943. It states, "Lieutenant (junior grade) Samuel R Parker caught two U-boats on the surface while on patrol. Both remained on the surface putting up a fierce concentration of AA fire that prevented Lieutenant (jg) Parker from attacking. Two RAF flying-boats soon arrived on the scene, forcing the U-Boats to dive. Subsequent attacks by the combined aircraft were unsuccessful".

Further research shows that VP-63 was the first USN squadron deployed to the United Kingdom to attack U-Boats. The squadron arrived at Pembroke Dock on 23 July 1943 and the encounter on 28 July is the first recorded action. It may well be that this was the first simultaneous USN RAF assault on U-Boats during World War II.

<http://www.history.navy.mil/avh-vol2/chap4-4.pdf>

<http://www.navalaviationmuseum.org/archive/sfl/sflshow.php?id=12>