

AOC-in-C Bomber Command - Air Mshl Jack Baldwin

January to February 1942



A CRANWELLIAN IN COMMAND - A Sea Change

As historian Dr Robert Owen recounts in the IBCC's booklet "Our Story Your History", January 1942 marked a sea change for Bomber Command in respect of leadership, strategy and equipment.

Former RAFC College Commandant, Air Marshal Jack Baldwin, temporarily replaced Air Marshal Peirse and was given the directive to focus operations on the morale of the enemy civilian population and the industrial workers. Peirse had fallen foul of the political fallout from the Butt Report, which criticised the effectiveness of Bomber Command missions to date. That said, ACM Arthur "Bomber" Harris, Baldwin's replacement, was the first to admit that the Command seriously lacked bomber aircraft and efficient navigation aids in sufficient numbers to be effective.

Baldwin's tenure was marked by the arrival of the iconic Lancaster four-engine bomber to replace the unreliable Manchester, and a new radio navigation aid, GEE, but it would be some time until the Command had sufficient numbers. Baldwin's new strategy focused on the German industrial heartland - the primary targets of Essen, Duisburg, Dusseldorf and Koln; secondary targets of Bremen, Emden and Wilhelmshaven. Berlin, beyond the range of GEE, would be attempted in suitable weather conditions. As the Strategic Bomber Offensive unfolded, Bomber Harris would evolve this fundamental strategy as he wrestled with the flood of counter-directives from the Air Ministry and the changing defensive tactics of the Luftwaffe.

It is not clear precisely when Air Marshal Baldwin handed over command to Bomber Harris, but we have found reference to Baldwin still in charge on 11-13 February when Bomber Command aircraft were involved in the Channel Dash, the attempt to stop the Gneisenau and Scharnhorst making good their escape from the port of Brest in Brittany to German ports such as Wilhelmshaven and Brunsbutell. The Gneisenau had attempted to leave port in April 1941, but on the 6th was attacked by four Coastal Command Beauforts as she lay in open water. The first three aircraft couldn't break through the heavy defences, but the fourth, piloted by Cranwellian Flying Officer Kenneth Campbell, pressed on and successfully torpedoed its target. Taking flak from the defences, Campbell's aircraft crashed and all crew were killed; he was to receive the VC for his efforts. The *Gneisenau* returned to dock and was out of commission for the next six months.



Scharnhorst



Gneisenau