

# INTRUDER

## The history of No. 418 Squadron

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It is one of perhaps a thousand nights on which Bomber Command operated during the Second World War. The vanguard of a bomber stream bound for an industrial centre in the heart of Germany crosses the Dutch coast. Air gunners scan the darkness for signs of an enemy who, sooner or later, is bound to be there.

Farther inland, many thousands of feet below, aerial gunfire resounds, punctuated by a pinpoint of flame which blossoms into a ball of fire. Presently a black-crossed night-fighter lies broken and burning on the edge of its own airfield. Nearby a winged phantom bobs and weaves at tree-top height among bursts of flak. Though seemingly in an altogether different sphere of operations, the low-level drama is very much a part of the main show up above. Its leading performer is a breed of aerial fighter whose battlefield is the enemy aircraft's very own back-yard — the intruder.

Not all the work of the intruders was in concert with Bomber Command's. More often than not, in fact, their sorties had no connection with bombing operations. Their bomber-co-operation did, however, have a double significance in that it enabled them not only to assist in the all-important strategic bombing campaign, but also, through their own direct assault, to cut down the Luftwaffe's strength and dislocate the enemy's air effort generally.

One of the truly outstanding of all such units was the original intruder squadron of the RCAF and the second to be formed in Fighter Command — 418, which, in the war's late stages, became the RCAF's only nocturnal close support unit. This is its story.

Near the English village of Debden, Essex, there began to assemble, on 15 November 1941, members of a newly authorized RCAF squadron assigned to No. 11 Group, Fighter Command.

The first to arrive knew nothing of what lay ahead. Having simply volunteered for "special work", they had not the slightest notion that they were the nucleus of the first Canadian intruder squadron. They could not then foresee that theirs was to become the highest-scoring unit of the RCAF and indeed one of the top combat organizations of the Allied Air Forces.

The squadron's original aircrew personnel were a heterogeneous group of young and inexperienced Canadians, fresh from OTUs in Canada, and Englishmen with operational records dating back to the Battle of Britain. The pilots were predominantly RAF, whereas most of the observers and wireless-operator air gunners were RCAF. Included in the non-Canadian aircrew element were a sprinkling of New Zealanders and Americans and a citizen of Mexico.

Backing up the aircrew on the ground with the brand of technical know-how indispensable to any flying squadron's efficiency was a band of aero-engine and airframe mechanics, armourers, and radio and radar mechanics, whose ranks included alumni of the first RCAF squadron to see service overseas. Each of the air and ground components was therefore built around a nucleus taught by experience.

Charged with drilling this assemblage of individuals into a cohesive combat unit was W/C G. H. Gatheral, RAF. Assisting him as flight commanders were S/L P. S. A. Anderson and S/L F. C. Hopcroft, DFC, both RAF. The three were trebly handicapped almost from the very beginning. First, because of an accommodation shortage, the aircrew and ground-crew were situated for two-to-three weeks in two widely separated camps, the former at Debden and the latter at Martlesham Heath, nearly 50 miles away. Secondly, the English weather was as unfavourable for flying as it could get. Snow, sleet, low "clag",

fog, and ground frost — in fact, every one of Nature's dirty tricks except the hurricane and the hailstorm — precluded flying training (day and night) on 20 days of December, 15 days of January, and 16 days of February. Thirdly, the degree of aircraft unserviceability was abnormally high, the lack of spares being largely responsible.

With the weather dictating terms, it was not until the middle of February that an intensive night-training program got under way. Then, within two weeks, there were two serious flying accidents, four aircrew fatalities and two wrecked *Bostons* resulting there from.

After some five weeks of concentrated training the unit was declared operational. At 2000 hours on 22 March 1942 it was placed at readiness, but, as visibility was below the limit prescribed for take-off, it was released at an early hour. This frustrating procedure was repeated twice more in the next three days. Meanwhile 72 aircrew (two-thirds of whom were RCAF) stood by, waiting for action. Supporting them were 254 groundcrew. At dispersal stood nine intruder-type *Bostons* (MK III), fuelled, armed, bombed-up, and ready to go.

### THE REAL THING

In the evening of 27 March came the real thing. The squadron was ordered to bomb oil refineries and tanks at Ertvelde, near Ghent, Belgium. At 2035 hours F/O J. D. W. Willis, with observer Sgt. J. E. C. Pringle and air-gunner Sgt. B. F. Filliter, made 418's first operational take-off. Willis and crew would normally have been the first of 418 to attack the enemy, but they were dogged by misfortune in the form of "hang-ups" \* that defied two attempts to bomb. The honour therefore fell to the crew of Sgts. G. W. C. Harding, R. P. Shannon and R. G. Dusten, who attacked at 2150 hours from 3000 feet. All seven crews, whose bombs (four-250-pounders each) behaved, claimed to have bombed in the target area. As many as eight fires visible from 40 miles away were started, and one skipper counted about ten large orange flashes occurring after his attack; all of which would suggest that 418 had "struck oil" on its very first attempt. Complete tactical surprise appeared to have been achieved, for neither flak barrages nor searchlights were experienced during the actual attack. In point of fact, throughout the entire operation the enemy's defences were surprisingly inconspicuous.

\* Bombs which remained in their racks when the bomb-release button was pressed.

Although the operation had to be adjudged a success, it was, for an intruder unit, somewhat out-of-character. Considering the strategic nature of the target, it would have been a much more likely objective for heavy bombers. Moreover, during 418's "intruder" period this was by no means to be the only variation from the dominant theme of operations.

The first genuine intruder assignment came less than 24 hours later, when the destination was that traditional haunt of the night prowler — the enemy airfield. Four crews were detailed to patrol fields at Lille and Vendeville, France, and at Gilze-Rijen, Holland, while two more, flying from Tangmere in co-operation with 23 Squadron, were to cover Rennes, Le Touquet, and Abbeville aerodromes. One of these sorties led to the squadron's first sighting of an airborne enemy. Sgt. Stone spotted an E/A \* (enemy aircraft) approaching to land on an illuminated flarepath of an unspecified aerodrome. He closed on it and was about to open fire when a double-red intruder-warning signal was fired from the field. Then, almost simultaneously, two things happened: the enemy pilot doused his lights and the flarepath lights went out. His erstwhile quarry lost, Stone could now only circle and wait. In a few minutes the flarepath lights re-appeared, whereupon he went in and deposited three 250-pounders along a stretch of the runway-in-use.

Frustrations similar to Stone's were to be experienced by many a crew of 418. They came to be accepted more-or-less as occupational hazards. Nevertheless partial compensation could be had by dropping explosive calling-cards on Jerry's doorstep. S/L Anderson, for another example, bombed Le Touquet airfield after being balked at Abbeville, which was completely blacked out. F/O Caldwell,

having seen no activity while circling dromes at Gilze-Rijen for 40 minutes, dropped incendiaries on a rail junction near Tilburg.

So far the squadron had avoided casualties on operations, but in its training during the period it was a different story. In the three days after the above operation there were two serious training accidents. One was fatal to three aircrew carrying out a night-flying test. The other occurred when a *Boston* overshot on landing, crashed into a fence, and burst into flame. Its crew scrambled away unharmed, but then some bombs aboard began to explode. Within range of the shrapnel were W/C Gatheral and P/O J. H. A. Muirhead, squadron signals officer, who had rushed to the aircraft to render assistance. Both were injured seriously enough to require hospitalization, the CO with a broken eardrum, being lost to the squadron for a month. Acting CO for the period was recently-promoted W/C Hopcroft.

The squadron's third aircraft loss in four days came on 2 April and also involved its first personnel losses on operations. Two *Bostons* were sent out that night to intrude over Poix and Beauvais airfields, one failing to return. Heading 418's Roll of Honour were the names of an all-RAF crew — F/L A. T. Love, FS H. E. D. Tilby, and FS M. N. Bunting. They were buried in a military cemetery at Montdidier, 25 miles equidistant from Poix and Beauvais.

## DUMMY AIRFIELD

On this operation the squadron was introduced to the dummy enemy airfield. The other crew intruding that night, skippered by P/O P. K. White, spotted one at Nivillers which probably functioned to decoy our intruders away from Beauvais, some three miles to the south-west. It had a short flare-path with a wood at one end. To heighten the illusion of reality and entice the *Boston* to waste its bombs, some intrepid individual fired off a green flare at the leeward end of the "runway in use". At certain dummy fields elaborate methods were used in an effort to simulate the genuine article. Fake taxi-strips led from phony aircraft-shelters to a spurious perimeter track, all this being encompassed by a make-believe boundary lighting system. In at least one case Jerry even "grew" a small wood off one corner of a dummy field to make it look like a real aerodrome nearby. The dummy-airfield device was part of a fantastic game of deception between the enemy and our night-prowlers. As will be seen, the latter occasionally reciprocated.

On eight more nights before the middle of April the intruders were at work. They bombed Lille marshalling-yard, airfields at Vendeville, Eindhoven, Gilze, and Haamstede, and a factory at Nijmegen; they identified as dummies three other airfields; they were forced by coastal fog to turn back from Abbeville; they were coned by searchlights over South end; and they saw no sign of an enemy aircraft. They also suffered their second operational loss, the team of F/O Willis, RAF, and Sgts. Pringle and Filliter, both Canadians, failing to return on the 13th. The trio were the first members of 418 to sign the guest-book of a prisoner-of-war camp.

On the morning of 14 April the unit undertook a move to bleak Bradwell Bay, on the Essex coast. Despite the confusion that accompanied the move, only two nights' operations were missed.

By 26 April the unit had logged 45 operational sorties without as much as firing at anything airborne, let alone shooting it down. Number 46 broke the goose egg. Shortly after one o'clock in the morning of that April day a *Boston* manned by Sgts. G. W. C. Harding, R. P. Shannon, and H. J. H. Irving began a patrol of Evreux airfield and district. The weather, featuring rain showers and a ragged cloud base sagging below 2000 feet in spots, was not conducive to good hunting. Harding first made two wide circuits of the field and then went in for a closer look. Presently a bright-yellow horizontal beam, pointing north-east along the NE — SW runway, came on for a few moments, suggesting that something of an aeronautical nature was about to happen. It happened. An unidentified enemy aircraft burning navigation lights crossed the *Bostons* track at right angles. Harding banked steeply and positioned himself directly behind it. Closing the gap to a quarter of a mile, he opened fire with his four machine-guns. Three two-second bursts found the range and the E/A's lights went out in a hurry. Though hits were seen, nothing more materialized and the enemy disappeared. Nevertheless, to Sgt.

Harding, whose crew had been the first of 418 to bomb the enemy, also went the distinction of fighting 418 Squadron's first air-to-air action. It was not conclusive but neither was it inconsequential, for it led to a valid claim of "one enemy aircraft damaged".

The first kill came only eleven nights later and in a most unexpected way. A *Boston*, manned by a crew of P/O A. ("Al") Lukas (RAF), Sgt. W. S. Randolph and Sgt. H. Haskell, reached its patrol airfield at Gilze just as the field's lights went out. For an hour and ten minutes Lukas orbited in wide circuits, keeping the field just within visual range. Then Gilze's visual lorenz\* came on again and a single green rocket was fired, indicating "all clear" to pilots intending to land. Lukas made his bombing run immediately, releasing three 250-pound H.E. and 90 four-lb. incendiary bombs at an oblique angle across the N.E.-S.W. runway. In the centre of the long line of incendiary bursts there appeared almost instantaneously a vivid yellow fire which eventually glowed brightly enough to light Randolph's navigation compartment. It was later learned that the incendiaries had set fire to an aircraft which had just touched down. This information was supplied by a P/O Scott, a *Hurricane* intruder pilot of 3 Squadron, who had gone in low to apply the finisher only seconds after Lukas' bombing. The kill had therefore resulted from the combined efforts of an RCAF and an RAF intruder, one bombing from 5000 feet and the other strafing at low level. The official wording of the claim as it exists today in 418's records is, "One U/I E/A destroyed, shared with No. 3 Squadron".

\* The visual aid-to-night-landing system of a Luftwaffe aerodrome.

This was only the fourth E/A reported seen by the squadron. For each sighting there had been something like seventeen fruitless patrols involving orbiting for as long as an hour-and-a-half over defended areas. Crews were learning that in the science of aerial intrusion one of the prime virtues was indeed patience.

Ever more alert to the intruder threat, the enemy was making things hot for those who dared to interfere directly with the operations of its Luftwaffe. This was evident in the unit's losses, which were occurring more often than might have been expected. Out of 28 sorties despatched in the 23-day period ending on 20 May, for example, five led to non-returns. One of the missing captains was S/L Anderson; another was Sgt. Harding.

Near the end of the above period the squadron permanently lost the services of W/C Gatheral, who was posted on medical grounds. His successor was W/C A. E. Saunders (RAF), a veteran of three years' operations over India's north-west frontier.

## CANNONS ARRIVE

Almost simultaneous with Saunders' arrival was the delivery of a *Boston* armed with cannon (under slung on the fuselage), an event indicative of a general strengthening of the unit's armament. *Boston* aircraft so equipped had shattering fire-power, with four 20-mm. cannon and four machine-guns spewing a concentrated cone of fire from the bottom half of the nose. Two more machine-guns in the dorsal position guarded the tail.

Two weeks after taking over 418 W/C Saunders led the unit on its most important operation yet undertaken. That was in support of Operation "Millennium" (30/31 May 1942), the first thousand-bomber raid in history, target of which was Cologne. The intruders, like the crews of "Millennium," were briefed to bomb, their targets being Leeuwarden and Soesterberg airfields. En route to the target one *Boston* was shadowed by two pairs of searchlight-equipped night-fighters, but violent corkscrew action threw them off. Four of five Soesterberg raiders scored hits on the airfield, and three out of four bombed Leeuwarden, but only after considerable periods of circling for purposes of identification.

Twice more, on 1/2 and 25/26 June, the squadron supported "Millennium" operations, and again its targets were airfields in Holland. The more successful of the two operations was the first, which saw Deelen and Leeuwarden A/Fs effectively bombed. Enemy pilots at Leeuwarden must have had a nasty surprise, when, while still on their landing runs, their aircraft were bombing targets for a pair of

intruders. The attacking pilots were P/Os Al Lukas and H. D. Venables, who had waited for the opportune moment to bomb. The raiders came under heavy ground fire, and in three cases it was not of German origin. Over Clacton-on-Sea F/L L. H. Wilkinson's aircraft was the object of an intense barrage of light ack-ack. Quick use of the Very pistol and the "colours of the day" halted the fire, but not before the *Boston's* wing had been hit. Two other aircraft managed to avoid the fire of convoy escort vessels off Harwich and Orfordness. This sort of thing was just another of the hazards of night intruding.

Bomber Command's overall losses on the three thousand-bomber raids (approximately 4 percent) were considerably lower than expected, and most of the missing aircraft succumbed to flak. On "Millennium I" night watchmen of 418 and other squadrons kept up their vigil over night-fighter airfields in France, Belgium, Holland and Germany itself until well after the last bomber had unloaded over Cologne.

Between the second and third "thousand-bomber" raids the unit operated thirteen times, their targets on all but three occasions being Luftwaffe stations in Holland. As no good opportunities to attack E/A were presented, crews had to be content with dropping bombs. A favourite target of the period was Amsterdam's Schipol (squadron wags pronounced it "ski pole") aerodrome. A lone 250-pounder dropped one night by P/O B. E. Williams found its way to one of Schipol's ammunition dumps and made an awful mess of it.

By official definition, "intruder" meant "an offensive night patrol over enemy territory intended to destroy hostile aircraft and dislocate the enemy flying organization". In theory it meant that; in practice it often meant more. For 418 the broader interpretation applied at least four times in July, when assignments more varied than before were undertaken. The first deviation from normal activity since the squadron's operational debut was on the night of 8 July, when P/O R. S. Patterson's crew was detailed to bomb a large ship near Boulogne. A near miss was scored in an inferno of naval and shore-based flak. Somehow or other the *Boston* was not hit. Inactivity at Chievres, Cambrai and Brussels airfields on the 26th led to attacks on alternative targets and the unit's first successes in train-busting. Freight trains in a Brussels marshalling-yard attracted P/O White, whose one-second burst caused a locomotive to explode in a smother of steam and sparks. Two half-second bursts missed, but a fourth made a steam-cloud of another engine. In a matter of seconds White had destroyed two locomotives, while his gunner, Sgt. Fields, also got in some good bursts at freight cars. The squadron's original train-buster, however, was P/O Williams, who had beaten White to the punch by an hour or so, having blasted into a steaming hulk a freight engine on the Mons-Valenciennes line. Some premeditated train-busting was carried out two nights later; P/O Venables' cannon disabling a loco at Hazelbrouck, Belgium. Before this attack the same skipper had authored another on a factory at Douai. He scored hits on cylindrical tanks beside the factory but was disappointed to see, instead of the expected glorious explosion, a spouting of something that looked like milk!

The month's final departure from typical intruder activity was on the 31st, when four crews made the squadron's second attempt in four nights (the first had been abortive) to bomb the Philips Radio Works at Eindhoven. P/O Lukas went in first, bombing plant "X" from 600 feet after circling the town once. His four 500-pounders scored direct hits on factory buildings, from which came clouds of smoke. Next to bomb was S/L J. Brown ("A"-Flight Commander since the non-return of S/L Anderson), whose bombs started a fire in the heart of plant "Y". The third *Boston* to attack (captain, FS Stone) did so an hour after Brown, its bombs slamming into the Works' south block of buildings. The fourth aircraft (captain, F/L Van Riel) had to turn back with a faulty compass. Photo reconnaissance proved the bombing to have been a big success, and a message of congratulations was soon forthcoming from the "back-room boys".

## FIRST GONGS

In July two members of crews dispatched on the above operation were awarded the unit's first decorations for valour. Receiving the Distinguished Flying Cross were W/Os F. E. Hogg (RNZAF) and K. S. Thompson (RAF), navigators with F/L Van Riel and S/L Brown, respectively. The accompanying

citations made mention of the persistence, unusual courage and navigational-bombing skills displayed by both on numerous intruder operations against enemy aerodromes.

So far in its war against Nazi Germany's air force the squadron had come off second best. In its first four months or so of operations eleven of its crews had been posted missing. As against that, it could show only one "kill" shared and one "damaged". The unfavourable imbalance was to continue for about another year-and-half.

Crew reports indicated that the Luftwaffe was doing considerable stalking of its own. In one instance intruder seemed to be pitted against intruder. Over the North Sea only 40-odd miles due east of Lowestoft F/L Peter Caldwell's *Boston* was attacked twice in four minutes by a *Junkers* 88. To shake off the attacker the *Boston* had to be spiral-dived down to 300 feet, at which height Caldwell crossed the Dutch coast to continue the operation. Off the Hoek of Holland a week later another *Ju. 88* got on the tail of S/L Wilkinson's aircraft. Wilkinson shook it off with a series of sharp, diving turns and then scooted up the coast, but in a few minutes the persistent enemy reappeared and had to be shaken off again. A third attack was reported by Sgt. W. L. Buchanan, whose aircraft was fired at by a *Ju. 88* during a patrol of the Gilze-Eindhoven region. The enemy's fire overshot the mark. The *Boston's* gunner replied with a two-second burst but missed. On at least two other occasions in the period 418 aircraft had been shadowed by searchlight-equipped night-fighters operating in pairs.

No less dangerous were the enemy's ground defences. Time and again flak and searchlights would be encountered almost steadily throughout the patrol over enemy territory, from the coast to the target and back to the coast. Then there were the flak ships to contend with. A flotilla of these pesky things showed extreme displeasure when P/O Lukas made hostile overtures toward a big freighter which they were guarding. Their combined fire scored on the *Boston*, one shell seeming to burst inside the rear of the port engine nacelle. Gunner Sgt. Haskell suffered a leg wound and the port tire was punctured, but the port engine and the aircraft's controls continued to operate as if unaffected. Lukas replied in kind, his cannon shells chewing up the deck of one flak ship.

In their own hunting for things airborne 418's crews had been having wretched luck. Through May, June and part of July 1942 hardly a shot in anger was fired from their guns, the enemy being too alert and the *Bostons* a trifle too slow to allow follow-ups of what few sightings were made. Finally, on 13 July, there came the first opportunity for air-to-air action since Sgt. Harding's combat of eleven weeks before. Peter Caldwell tried out his cannon on an E/A approaching to land at Gilze. Though not positive that hits had been made, the crew did see a red glow near the tail before the enemy disappeared. A few minutes later Caldwell's gunner opened up with a three-second, full-deflection burst at another E/A, but all to no avail.

## FIRST SOLO KILL

The squadron's next crack at something airborne took another five weeks to come. Briefed to patrol Chartres airfield, Caldwell and company were fortuitously diverted to the drome at Creil. This was a good thing for our side, as Creil was found all lit up and wide open for business. A succession of green flares sent up from the field was followed by the turning-on of navigation lights of an aircraft approaching to land. As it crossed the outer cross-bar of the "funnel", Caldwell made his move. He closed to a range of 150 yards, identified the quarry as a *Ju. 88*, and fired two quick bursts. The first set fire to the port engine and the second cut the *Junkers* in two, the aft fuselage section parting company with the rest. By this time the field's lights were turned off and a red warning flare was fired. Caldwell circled just within visual range until he saw the lights re-appear and an E/A quickly land. Twice he attempted to intercept aircraft approaching to land, only to be balked by the enemy's light-dousing measures in the air and on the ground. The enemy then tried decoy tactics to attract the *Boston* to an illuminated aircraft well away from the approach leg while blacked-out aircraft were landing. This worked once, but thereafter the decoy was ignored. Now, however, aircraft seemed no longer interested in landing at Creil, which was as good a time as any for Caldwell to pack up the patrol and go home. This he did, having achieved 418's first unassisted aerial victory and spoiled Creil's landing pattern for three-quarters of an hour.

Shortly after dawn on 19 August the squadron took part in a tactical operation that was at one and the same time a rehearsal and a live performance. The combined raid on Dieppe was a tune-up for something bigger to come, a test of the West Wall's defences, and an attempt to draw the Luftwaffe into a big aerial brawl. Two crews represented 418 in this, the unit's first operation in other than darkness. They were detailed to lay a smoke screen. One had to turn back because of engine trouble but the other carried out the assignment as briefed. Only seconds later, however, the *Boston* was attacked by a *Focke Wulf 190*. A burst set fire to the starboard engine and gravely wounded the observer, P/O Paul C. McGillicuddy. The gunner, Sgt. C. G. Scott, had his seat shot from under him but returned the fire. The aircraft was forced down onto the water, the impact breaking the fuselage in two just forward of the gunner's position. Scott, minus his dinghy, was thrown into the water. The front half of the aircraft sank; Buchanan and McGillicuddy, although unconscious, rose to the surface. Scott inflated Buchanan's life jacket and put the still-unconscious pilot in his dinghy, then swam to the observer and extricated him from his parachute, which was dragging his head under water. As McGillicuddy's dinghy was torn and useless, he had to tow him to the pilot's dinghy and put him aboard. He stayed in the water, the dinghy being too small for three. He had started a three-mile marathon to Dieppe when a friendly aircraft appeared overhead and began to circle, encouraging him to return to the dinghy. Inside of an hour he and his companions were picked up by a rescue launch, but McGillicuddy succumbed to wounds the following day. Scott, who had sustained a sprained ankle and a deep cut over one eye, was awarded an immediate DFM. Part of his official citation read: "In the face of extreme danger this gallant airman displayed conspicuous courage and determination in his resolve to save his comrades, both of whom were injured and in great distress."

DURING the autumn of 1942, No. 418 Squadron's operations were divided almost evenly between aerodrome surveillance and train-hunting. The airfield patrols were strangely quiet, it being left to the anti-train attacks to produce the fireworks and the claims. In many instances train-busting was not the primary assignment; some of 418's most productive work in this field was done when trains were being attacked as alternative targets.

A lengthy string of train-strafting successes began on 22 August. Detailed to patrol Chievres airfield, P/O White was unable to find it in heavy mist, so started looking for ground targets to strafe. Near Valenciennes he found a train. One burst of cannon exploded the engine, as the *Boston* swept over it, so low that a shower of cinders fell into the cockpit. A couple of nights later Sgt. R. R. Jackson was on a train safari covering the Paris-Dieppe run. Very quickly he scored hits on the engines of two trains, forcing both to stop. Then he spotted an extra-long freight, with one locomotive pulling at the front and another pushing at the rear. The double-header took hits in the boiler of each engine and was brought to a halt spouting steam from both ends. Light flak from Pontcise holed the *Boston's* centre section and damaged the hydraulics, but Jackson landed safely. In the Douai-Valenciennes area on the 27th P/O Lukas damaged two more locomotives to the point of making them stop. One of them uncoupled after the first burst and, free of its encumbering rolling-stock, puffed along at a much faster clip. It was clobbered and halted by a second burst which produced a red flash and a gushing of steam.

One of several other train-busting attempts to pay off during the period was made by W/C Saunders and crew late in October. They scouted airfields in the Orleans-Chateaudun and Blois-Tours areas as planned, seeing no E/A activity but noting the positions of a dummy field west of Bricy and a genuine field under construction near LeMans. Then Saunders turned his attention to rail traffic. North of Tours he caught up with a train which he promptly proceeded to derail. His success was confirmed the following day in an enemy broadcast from Zeesen radio station. If attacks as much as forced trains to stop, they were worthwhile even if they caused no great damage, for they were at least upsetting Jerry's schedules and were quite possible delaying delivery of vital war materials.

## PEACEFUL INTERLUDE

During this period there was one 18-day stretch (20 September-7 October) in which, for no known reason, the squadron flew not a single operational sortie. The peaceful interlude did, however, see several events of more than passing interest affecting unit personnel. Late in September S/L M. E. Reid

was posted in to replace S/L Caldwell as A-Flight Commander. Before leaving, Caldwell, hereunto the author of 418's only unqualified kill, was awarded the DFC, earned by virtue of his skills as an intruder pilot and flight commander. The DFM was awarded at the same time to FS C. L. M. Forsyth, who had recently completed his 50th sortie as a gunner. Posted shortly after Caldwell were FS Randolph and Sgt. Haskell, who had flown with P/O Lukas the night he scored 418's first (shared) kill. Both were transferring to the USAAF and their skipper followed soon after.

September and October were the sixth and seventh consecutive months in which losses were incurred on operational or training flights. Two crews were missing on operations in September and four members of two others perished in training accidents in October.

In the last six weeks of 1942 well over half the unit's sorties were devoted to a new and more subtle type of warfare — "nickelling", or the dissemination of war information. Targets were mostly Belgian towns and cities such as Liege, Mons, Ghent, Namur, Charleroi, Tournai, Ypres, Huy-Hannut and Menin; also "informed" were the French towns of St. Lo and Armentieres.

Although the primary purpose of these operations was the dropping of leaflets or "nickels" on specified towns, in most cases pilots were not content to disperse their literature and call it a night. Oft-times, when opportunity knocked, they elected to work in a little train-strafting. If unable to find any trains, they would occasionally carry out useful reconnaissance and collect tidbits of information for the "spies" back at base. Train-busting was, however, the more popular supplementary activity, as the targets were vulnerable and relatively easy to hit.

One of the most fruitful forays on trains was that following a leaflet expedition to Ghent by F/L Z. Van Riel, DFC. On the town's outskirts was the Meirelbeke marshalling-yard, which was jammed with dozens of locomotives. He expended every cannon and machine-gun round he had in a glorious spray-job on more than 30 engines. The gunner, Sgt. J. H. D. Higgins, also opened up with his .303's. In all, at least 15 locos were damaged. For the Belgian skipper it was the 35th sortie and the ideal way to wind up a tour of operations. For his observer, WO Francis Hogg, DFC (RNZAF), a third-tour man, it was sortie number 65.

### **OPPOSITION STIFFENED**

The enemy was not taking lightly the belabouring of his *lokomotiven*. Proof of this came one late-November night when a *Boston* experienced opposition from an unexpected source. While attacking a train near Armentieres it was surprised by return fire which gave it a punch in the nose. This was the first indication to 418 that Adolph was arming his trains. As later learned, westbound trains, probably carrying precious war material to points along the "Atlantic Wall" such as Dunkirk, Calais and Boulogne, were usually protected by flak wagons. There seemed to be no end of hazards in this business of intruding. With all its low flying at night over strange territory it would have been risky even without enemy action.

The war's toll continued. Two crews were lost in November and one in December, all on "nickelling" operations. In addition, a *Boston* crashed in the Blackwater River when returning from operations, its captain, S/L Lawrence H. Wilkinson, being killed. The other crew members were only superficially hurt and for the observer, F/O Keith Reynolds, it was the second experience of walking away from an aircraft that had just been written off. The gap in B-Flight left by the loss of S/L Wilkinson was filled by an RAF officer, S/L P. R. Burton-Gyles, DSO, DFC.

### **1943 BEGAN QUIETLY**

A new year was begun under a new commander, W/C Saunders having departed on posting in mid-December. Now in command was an English lawyer-pilot with an American educational background, Harvard-bred W/C J. H. Little, DFC.

Operations of 1943 got under way on 3 January, two *Bostons* covering airfields at Melun and Bourges-Avord. Neither crew saw a vestige of enemy activity of interest to them. Such was to be the pattern of all too many sorties throughout the first month-and-a-half of 1943. On 15 January P/O Tony Craft shot up and damaged two locos at Creil, while his gunner, Sgt. J. S. ("Kelly") Davis, raked another at Abancourt. On no other operation in January did any member of the squadron as much as press a firing button. Three times E/A were seen, but three times it was the same old story — the sightings could not be followed up quickly enough.

The first fortnight of February was devoted largely to propagandizing, 13 of 16 sorties involving leaflet-dropping. One of the 13 led to the fourth successive crew-loss sustained on nickel-ling operations. On the other three sorties attacks on trains were either made or contemplated and damage to two trains resulted. FS B. G. Henderson's aircraft delivered its attack despite having taken a direct flak hit amidships. S/L Burton-Gyles was about to shoot up a locomotive at Amiens when his aircraft was plastered by flak from Glisy airfield, over which he had unintentionally passed. The airspeed indicators of both of the above aircraft were rendered useless, meaning that on the return trip and during the critical approach-to-land phase each pilot had to gauge his speed by the seat of his pants.

Largely because of the ten-day fog, the squadron operated on only four more nights in the remainder of February. One of these operations led to the first air-to-air action seen in more than six months. On a lone-wolf intruder to Melun F/L Dick Bennell surprised an E/A over the field and put several cannon slugs into its fuselage before losing contact. He deservedly claimed a "damaged". Meanwhile train-strafting continued to pay off, F/L Venables extensively damaging two engines and P/O Craft one. Thus, although the score against enemy aircraft was discouragingly slow in building up, the count of enemy locomotives destroyed, disabled or damaged was assuming impressive proportions. Evidence of 418's growing reputation as a train-wrecking organization was seen in an entry made in the unit diary on 16 February 1943, which read as follows:

"During the morning F/L Venables went to Coltishaw for the purpose of passing on his knowledge of intruder operations to 12 and 13 Group pilots detailed for a mass train-busting intruder in the evening. From reports which he brought back it is evident that without his assistance many of these pilots would probably not have returned."

## MOSQUITO DEBUT

The 18th of February was notable in a non-operational way as the date of a major event in the squadron's history, to wit, the arrival of 418's first *Mosquito*. The honour of being the first in the squadron to fly the aircraft, a Mark III (trainer) with dual controls, fell to W/C Little, but he earned it practically over the dead bodies of his flight commanders, who very nearly got it into the air without his knowledge. Although commencement of Mosquito-conversion training was delayed five days by bad weather, four pilots had been checked out before the precious *Mossie* was tucked into its hangar for the night on the 26th. The unit's first operational *Mosquito*, a MK.II, was not acquired until 28 March.

As if in protest of the *Mosquito's* intrusion, the *Boston* put on a show of its own. On the night of 3 March it took Dick Bennell and crew, among others, to airfields in Holland. Bennell found Deelen open for business, all its lights aglow and several aircraft orbiting in the circuit. He joined them. At 1300 feet he rode up the slipstream of a *Dornier 217*, opening fire at 100 yards' range and pulling up at the last split-second to avoid collision. Smoke poured from the *Dornier* and in a matter of seconds it sideslipped into the deck just beyond Deelen's boundary lights. Independent kill number two for 418 had been almost too simple, no flak or searchlights having interfered.

The squadron operated on seven more nights and then, on 14 March, moved back from bleak Bradwell to a base near the sunny Sussex coast. The new home was at Ford, about midway between Littlehampton and Arundel and in the very heart of the night fighter-intruder world.

## BLACKOUT TACTICS

For five weeks after Bennell's kill not a sign of the Luftwaffe was seen. Then things began to liven up a bit. Over Melun early in April F/L Bennell came upon two E/A lit up like Christmas trees and flying close together in the circuit. He went after the nearest one but overshot it when the enemy doused his lights. When next seen, the would-be target was touching down. Bennell then shadowed the other E/A around the circuit but was balked again by blackout tactics. This enemy also landed before it could be engaged. Two minutes after its touch-down Melun's lights went out. The lights of a third E/A soon appeared, but only momentarily. So ended a patrol fraught with possibilities but yielding only disappointments. There would be many more of the same.

A possible indication of protective night patrols by the Luftwaffe around its airfields was seen the same night by Sgt. Evans, gunner for F/O F. W. Hallwood. He spotted "a dark object believed to be an aircraft" tailing the *Boston* within 100 yards' range. Hallwood put the *Boston* into the steepest possible turn and kept it there throughout 360 degrees. That shook off whatever was following him.

The following night the squadron lost a trio constituting one of the veteran crews in point of service. Detailed to intrude over the Melun-Betigny area, S/L Hugh Venables, DFC (RAF), and his RCAF crew companions, WO Donald J. McKay and P/O Henry D. Baker, failed to return. Each had served with 418 since its inception and had flown on its second operation, logged more than a year before. All three perished (Boston W8325).

It took S/L Venable's opposite number in B-Flight approximately 48 hours to avenge the loss. Assigned to watch Beauvais aerodrome, S/L Burton-Gyles arrived to find everything in full swing; the S.E.-N.W. flarepath and the visual lorenz system were alight and several aircraft were joining the circuit. He positioned himself to intercept one as it turned onto the cross-wind leg at the field's southeast perimeter. A half-second burst blew it to pieces; its burning wreckage illuminated the entire aerodrome.

The unit's second kill in three days was made over the same airfield on the night of 14/15 April. The night watchmen this time were W/C Little and crew, who waited nearly an hour for the field to come to life and another ten minutes for a customer to show up. Possibly mindful of what had happened three nights previous, the enemy pilot flashed his lights only briefly and was lost to view. In five minutes another E/A was seen, but not soon enough to be intercepted. Within the next 20 minutes three more were sighted, but each time Little was unable to attack before the enemy disappeared into the darkness or landed. After an hour and 40 minutes of patience and perseverance, his observer, Sgt. Douglas Styles, DFM (RAF), saw enemy number six. Little lined it up in his sights just as it reached the outer cross-bar of the visual lorenz. He barely touched the firing button before seeing the E/A disintegrate in the air.

## OPERATIONS ON TWO TYPES

Despite the successes achieved on *Bostons* in this early spring of 1943, obviously their days with 418 were numbered. Foreshadowing their retirement from duty with the unit was the departure on 6 May of *Boston* K-for-Katy. Having joined the squadron very early in its history, she was now the first of her kind to leave it. Her destiny as an intruder had been interwoven largely with that of her first skipper, P/O Tony Craft, and his crew of P/Os Earl Morton and "Kelly" Davis, all of whom accompanied her 29 times over enemy territory. Every inch a lady, during her tour with 418 she gave no trouble, showed no outburst of temperament. In fact, her groundcrew declared that she left the squadron with her original engines and propellers.

At 2300 hours the next day Craft took off for his 30th and last sortie with the squadron. With him was Morton; no longer with him was Davis. The reason for the latter's absence was simply that there was no longer room for a third crew member. Craft and Morton were about to log the squadron's first *Mosquito* sortie.

It was a patrol of the Melun-Bretigny district. During the patrol itself all was quiet, and as the *Mosquito* was turned about for home it began to look as if the first trip on the new type was going to earn nothing more than the overworked adjective, "routine". Then, near Nantes, there chanced to stray into Craft's range of vision a *Ju. 88*. Craft gave chase for 12 minutes, approached close enough for positive identification, and put two bursts from 200 yards into the fuselage and port wing. The *Junkers* began to go down; it blew up before reaching the ground. That was the first and last victory for Craft and Morton, and a fitting way to wind up a tour. Coming during 418's debut on *Mosquitoes*, the victory certainly proved a good omen.

What manner of aircraft was this *Mosquito* which had dealt a lethal stroke on its first trip with the squadron? A revolutionary feature was its unique all-wooden construction and plywood skin. The Mark II flown by Craft, was the first fighter variant of the *Mosquito*, and compared favourably with the Mark VI, soon to be acquired by the squadron. The Mark VI was actually a fighter-bomber capable of carrying either a ton of bombs over short or medium ranges or a half-ton plus overload fuel tanks over longer ranges. Armament consisted of four 20-mm. cannon and four .303 mg.'s, all firing from the nose. Two Merlin engines gave it a top speed of 380 m.p.h. Its range was 1300 miles normally, and, with full overload tanks, 1770, giving it an edge of some 87 m.p.h. in speed and 300 miles in range (without extra fuel) over the *Boston*.

Notwithstanding the decline of the *Boston* as an intruder, its moments of glory with 418 were not yet over. Five nights after Craft's success F/L Massey Beveridge was manoeuvring a *Boston* within sight of Orleans airfield when he saw something guaranteed to excite the most phlegmatic of intruder pilots. "It was an amazing sight", he later remarked. "The place had all its lights on and Jerry aircraft were buzzing about like bumblebees." In short order five bursts of cannon inflicted damage on an unidentified E/A and a *Ju. 88* but also culminated in stoppages in all but one cannon. With his remaining armament he worked-over a third target, a *Stuka*, which was also damaged. The only return "fire" was experienced when the *Stuka* pilot pressed the panic button and shot off identification flares which almost scored on the *Boston*. Hostile aircraft, numbering from one to four per sighting, were seen on 11 of 33 sorties logged in the remainder of May, but only twice could attacks be delivered. Both led to claims of "damaged".

Meanwhile, in the latter half of May, ground targets were also getting their share of attention. Favourite targets were railway engines and Seine barges. At least four locomotives were damaged and forced to stop, while ten barges were damaged or left smoking. Prominent among 418's ground-strafters were two Canadians, F/O F. W. Hallwood and FS B. G. Henderson, and two RAF sergeant-pilots, G. "Chubby" Labram and J. L. James.

In June the unit's operational *Mosquito* strength, which, at the end of May, had stood at five, rose to 18. On the other hand its *Boston* strength fell from 18 to 12 as the *Bostons* began to be ferried away. Consequently the ratio of *Mosquito* sorties to *Boston* sorties increased sharply from approximately 1:9 in May to more than 1:2 in June.

## CHANGE IN COMMAND

The squadron's first casualties in more than nine weeks were sustained on 12 June, as *Mosquito* A-Able crashed during a non-operational take-off. Aboard were the squadron commander, W/C J. H. Little, DFC, and his navigator, FS Douglas H. Styles, DFM. Both were instantly killed. In his period of command lasting exactly six months W/C Little had, through his ability in the intruder field and through his kindness, thoughtfulness, and warm personality, earned the respect and affection of all those serving under him, from flight commander to humblest "erk". His loss was a particularly heavy blow and came at a time when the squadron was just beginning to hit its stride. With the death of FS Styles the unit lost its most operationally-experienced navigator, his forays over enemy territory having exceeded the century mark.

Reporting for duty on 15 June was the new C.O., W/C Paul Y. Davoud, DFC, formerly in command of 409 (Night-Fighter) Squadron.

Operations continued to be directed against airfields and railways. Shortly before midnight on 20 June a *Boston* manned by F/L Beveridge, Sgt. B. O. R. Bays and WO H. Anderson departed Ford and headed for St. Dizier aerodrome, there to watch and wait for an unwary Jerry. Some 80 miles west thereof Beveridge was distracted by the twinkling lights of an airfield. He circled, circled, circled . . . His patience was rewarded when an aircraft with winking navigation lights came out of the darkness and joined the circuit. He followed it down the visual lorenz system and opened fire at a point-blank range of 100 yards. A brilliant flash came from the starboard engine of the E/A, facilitating its identification as a *Dornier 217*. When last seen, it was falling out of the sky with smoke pouring from one engine. Beveridge claimed it as probably destroyed.

## EXIT THE BOSTON

That was 418's first "probable" and its last air-to-air victory in a *Boston*. Another "probable" was scored at Bretigny on the 26th by FS C. D. Ball, two nights after a "damaged" by FS J. H. Kingsbury. But the most profitable of nearly 600 sorties flown by 418 in exactly a year-and-a-quarter of operations was reserved for S/L C. C. ("Chuck") Moran, who had taken over B-Flight a month before upon S/L Burton-Gyles' posting. In the early hours of 27 June he and his navigator, Sgt. G. V. Rogers, arrived at their assigned airfield, Avord, and found it humming with life. He had his choice of five aircraft orbiting in the circuit. His first selection was a *Heinkel 111K*, which he sent crashing in flames. His second was a *Ju. 88*, which he blew up in mid-air. The feat of two E/A destroyed constituted in itself a solid night's work, but the *Mosquito* still had a load of bombs to get rid of and plenty of ammunition. At nearby Bourges a likely ground target, a radio mast, presented itself. Moran planted a bomb near the base of the pylon, then sprayed the masts with cannon and machine-gun fire. (While bombing Bourges airfield the night after, F/ N. H. Spencer noted the absence of lights on the radio masts. Moran had shattered them and rendered the masts a hazard to aviation!) As a parting gesture he shot-up a train near Mantes, damaging its engine. His double kill on one sortie was the unit's first and was not to be duplicated until 10 weeks and 260 sorties later.

Whereas Bourges' radio masts, lighted or unlighted, never inflicted any confirmed damage on 418's aircraft, something at St. Trond did. While orbiting the darkened airfield at low level, "Chubby" Labram's *Mosquito* hit an unseen obstruction. The severe shock set up vibrations in the port engine, which took fire. Labram cut the engine but had difficulty controlling the aircraft. Recrossing the enemy coast the *Mossie* was bracketed by flak and hit in the port wing. Homing assistance was obtained from Manston emergency field, where Labram made a safe wheels-up landing. The *Mosquito's* matchless single-engine performance was again displayed a few nights later when an engine of Dick Bennell's steed was inactivated by flak over the French coast; the half-powered aircraft covered the remaining 100 miles in a breeze. No respecters of rank, the enemy's flak merchants gave W/C Davoud a hostile reception over Bretigny on his first operation with the unit. A chunk of steel pierced his windscreen but he carried on and bombed a railway at St. Pierre.

One of several sorties flown on 8/9 July was the unit's last in a *Boston*. The squadron's 532nd sortie on the type, it was a "routine" patrol of the Orleans-Chateaudun region and was logged by WO A. D. Day, Sgt. E. Maude, and Sgt. A. J. Hunter. The *Boston* bowed out with a record of 5½ E/A destroyed and 6 damaged.

## BUSY SUMMER

The period from 11 June to 9 July was the most intensive four weeks of operations yet experienced by 418. Over this span of time one or more of its crews operated every night except one. It was no coincidence that during this time the Second Battle of the Ruhr, featuring Bomber Command, was at its peak. The intruders had contributed much to its successful outcome by harrying Nazi airfields at times

and places calculated to give maximum benefit to the Ruhr-bound bomber crews. No. 418 Sqn. alone knocked down at least three, and quite possibly five, enemy aircraft, and damaged two others. But it would be misleading to evaluate its work only in terms of enemy aircraft destroyed. The mere presence of its *Mosquitoes* and *Bostons* over certain airfields was enough to upset the fine balance of Goering's night-fighter operations and could not but reduce the effectiveness of his over-all reaction to our bomber offensive.

In an effort to render airfields at least temporarily unserviceable and simultaneously destroy aircraft on the ground, the squadron had, since 19/20 June, been carrying out a new program of hit-and-run bombing raids on selected GAF night-fighter bases. One of its best bombing nights was that of 15/16 July, on which its *Mosquitoes* delivered high explosives to Rennes, St. Dizier and Cormeilles aerodromes. Rennes and St. Dizier were both hit three times at prearranged intervals, each absorbing a dozen 250-pounders on the landing-ground and other selected areas. The bombing raids, necessitating low-level runs over the fields, added to the risks already involved, for crews often found themselves flying for several seconds through a hot-bed of cross-fire from the airfields' defences.

Ostensibly Jerry was getting the wind up with regard to our intruders; his flak was getting hotter and hotter. Crews would find ground-fire coming up not only from expected sources like flak ships, coastal batteries, flak-towers and the airfields themselves, but also from marshalling-yards, freight-trains, small factories, and sometimes the most innocent-looking and unlikely places.

## **BOMBER SUPPORT**

From the middle of July 1943, more and more of 418's operations were being timed to coincide with heavy-bomber raids. These bomber-support operations, code-named "Flower", were to appear regularly and often on the unit's work schedule throughout the next fifteen months. Bomber attacks which it backed up in July and August included the great saturation raids on Hamburg, the Milan-Turin series, and two raids on Berlin.

Throughout August the bombing of GAF aerodromes continued prominent. Moreover, the night of 2/3 August was something of an occasion in that it saw 418's crews deliver their first attacks on airfields in the Third Reich itself. Dromes at Ardorf, Cuxhaven, Westerland and Schleswig-Jagel, all in Germany's north-west corner, were visited by *Mosquitoes* and given the high-explosive treatment. The honour of dropping the squadron's first bomb on Nazi Germany went to F/O F. W. Hallwood and his navigator, F/O Paul Marlatt, who, unable to pinpoint Westerland in poor visibility, went on to identify and bomb Cuxhaven. As if the flak defences in the occupied countries were not sharp enough, those in the Fatherland were even more impressive. Several aircraft were assailed by barrages of beautiful-but-deadly red and green flak; their pilots had to take spirited evasive action to stay in one piece.

In recent operations there had certainly been no dearth of E/A sightings. F/L Spencer saw five in a bunch one night in the circuit at Avord and S/L Bennell saw three at Toulouse, but neither fired a shot. Here were further items of proof that sighting an E/A preparing to land at night was one thing and attacking it was another. As often as not, when first seen the enemy was already in the final stages of the landing pattern, in which case, before it could be approached to within effective range, either its lights were no longer on or it was on the deck. Spencer was given a second chance the same night; later on at the same field he saw another four E/A circling to land. He opened fire on one from 250 yards dead astern, but hardly had he pressed the firing button than the completely unexpected happened — his gunsight fell apart.

Though unable, in July and August, to blast anything out of the air, the squadron did knock out two E/A on the ground, both by bombing. The first, destroyed at Florennes, was shared by S/L Moran, FS Ball and FS H. Hay, while the other, destroyed at Juvincourt, was claimed by F/O D. O. Norcott.

There were, however, some partial aerial successes in the period. On 9 August F/O Hallwood claimed a "probable" at Evreux. Two weeks later 418's *Mosquitoes* were covering fields at Parchim, Stendal,

Greifswald and Jagel in support of a raid on Berlin. The first-named three formed a protective arc subtending the quadrant north-west of the capital from a point about 100 miles due west of Berlin's very heart. The only skipper to find Parchim open for business was Norcott, who then damaged an unidentified enemy. Similar success was achieved at Stendal by "Chubby" Labram.

## GROUND STRAFFING

Throughout the summer of 1943 the unit maintained steady pressure on Hitler's transportation system, almost every one of its pilots damaging one or more trains to the point of making them stop. At least two locomotives were utterly destroyed, the punctured boilers of some 20 others were made to spout steam like giant teakettles, and 14 more trains were damaged or set afire. In addition, numerous hits were made on railway stations, marshalling-yards, sections of track, and barges on the Seine. The leading ground-strafters were Labram, Norcott, Bennell, Beveridge, Moran, F/L Ross Rowlands, and F/O J. R. F. Johnson. S/L Moran chalked up a "first" for the squadron by scoring direct hits on a locomotive and a freight car, both with bombs. His technique was to rake the train with cannon fire until it stopped and then bomb the stationary target.

On the night of 5 September "Flowers" were sent to Juvin-court, Metz, Evreux, and the Mannheim district. Opportunities were presented in the latter area, and the opportunist was Bennell. He found Worms-Biblis airfield illuminated and about to accommodate at least a dozen aircraft circling overhead. He sprayed one with cannon fire. It blew up, went down in flames, and was still blazing on the ground twenty minutes later. Bennell turned northward to Mainz-Ober Olm and there found and attacked a *Dornier* 217. This enemy went out of control and buried itself in the deck at a steep angle, the resultant explosion shaking the little *Mossie*. That was trip number 33 for the flight commander and his navigator, F/O Frank Shield, and the last of their tour. DFCs were promulgated for both in October.

SQUADRON Leader Dick Bennell's twin kill of 5 September 1943 set off a chain reaction of combat successes extending over a period of 13½ months. Refitting with the superb *Mosquito* was starting to pay dividends for No. 418 Sqn. The "Wooden Wonder's" added speed and range had made possible longer and more effective surveillance of Luftwaffe aerodromes, and given the squadron a radius of action embracing objectives in the more remote corners of Festung Europa.

In mid-September the enemy retaliated. Returning from an operation, the team of Sgt. A. Williams and FS R. T. Gurnett were only a few seconds from touchdown when their aircraft became the target of an intruder firing dead astern. Somebody's aim was bad. Williams shoved everything wide open and did an overshoot, with variations. Again the enemy let fly, this time from a rearward-firing gun, and again he missed. The *Mosquito* was then safely landed. The prowler squirted at a runway and dropped anti-personnel bombs which made the field unserviceable until nightfall the next day. By that time 86 of the nasty little things had been harvested and defused by bomb disposal personnel.

From 22 to 27 September the squadron assisted the heavy bombers three times, on each occasion adding to its score. S/L Moran destroyed an unidentified E/A\* (enemy aircraft) at Achmer on the 22nd, S/L Beveridge destroyed two E/A and F/O J. R. F. Johnson one, near Mannheim and Evreux, respectively, on the 23rd/24th, and F/L Hal Lisson got two at Volkenrode on the 27th. Before Bennell's successes of 5 September No. 418's tally of E/A destroyed in the air had reached only seven after nearly a year and half of operations; now it had more than doubled in slightly over three weeks.

Unfortunately S/L Moran's victory had a tragic aftermath. Absorbing a burst from close range, the victim blew up, the blast knocking the *Mosquito* out of control. Moran recovered and steered for base, but, about 24 miles off Manston, the port engine took fire and the flames spread to the wing. He ordered his navigator FS G. V. Rogers to bail out, watched him go, and then followed suit. *Albacore* aircraft found the skipper and ringed his dinghy with flares; after some three hours in the dinghy he was picked up by an Air/Sea Rescue launch. The search continued for FS Rogers but produced only an empty dinghy. With his presumed death the squadron lost a battle-experienced navigator who had

combined with S/L Moran to fly an eventful and highly worthwhile tour of operations, of which this was officially the last trip. Moran was repatriated soon after and decorated with the DFC in October.

Another loss a week later, but unit's fifth in 14 weeks, was attributable not to the enemy's defences but to our own. A *Mosquito* collided with barrage balloons in the haze above Dover and crashed on the beach, the crew being killed. A second such accident the same night was narrowly averted when W/C Davoud and his navigator, F/O Keith Reynolds, found themselves in the midst of the Canterbury balloon barrage in similar conditions of poor visibility. Davoud had to exercise all his skill and quick reflexes to avoid disaster.

## **DAMBUSTER SUPPORT**

One of the more important and unusual operations undertaken by 418 personnel never appeared in the squadron log. It involved the detachment of three crews to the famous 617 ("Dambuster") Squadron for an 11-day period in September. F/L Hal Lisson, F/L Ross Rowlands and F/O Charlie Scherf, with navigators F/O A. E. ("Diamond Jim") Franklin, Sgt. R. H. Medhurst and F/O E. A. Brown, respectively, took their *Mosquitoes* to Coningsby and began a week's training that consisted mostly of night formation flying (with 10 degrees of flap and throttled back to 170 m.p.h.) with *Lancasters* at 150 feet. The operation was carried out on the night of 15th, an attempt the previous night having been abortive because of bad weather. The target was the Dortmund-Ems canal. It was attacked with 12,000-pounds by a small force of *Lancasters* supported by a half-dozen *Mosquitoes* assigned to strafe searchlights (Lisson knocked one out) and gun positions and ward off night-fighters. Only three of eight dispatched *Lancasters* returned. The last aircraft to leave the target area was the *Mosquito* manned by Lisson and Franklin.

The last quarter of 1943 saw a big drop in 418's sortie output, the main reason being the English weather, which was at its dirtiest. Only 141 completed trips were flown, less than half the total for the previous quarter. Still, the unit managed to damage two E/A in November, while in only 37 finished sorties in December it destroyed three, probably destroyed one, and damaged two more.

The two November scores were made during an operation on the 28th in which the unit was acting out-of-character. The crews of Scherf-Brown and Johnson-Gibbons collaborated in an interesting experiment, hedge-hopping in broad daylight to a seaplane base at distant Lake Biscarosse, some 40 miles south-west of Bordeaux. Approaching their objective from the south-east to further the element of surprise, they made one low, skimming pass over the water. Johnson damaged a pair of sitting *Arado 196s* and Scherf shot up an anchored flying-boat (probably a *Bloehm & Voss 222*), all the while managing to avoid intense ground-fire. This daylight expedition, or "day-ranger", was to have many a sequel in the 11 months that followed. In point of vulnerability to enemy fighters, day-intruders were riskier than the night variety but often showed bigger profits.

## **DAY-RANGERS AND FLOWERS**

A day-ranger also produced the next successes. The teams of F/Os Jimmy Johnson-Noel Gibbons and F/L Bob Kipp-F/O Pete Huletsky combined to down a *Heinkel III* at Bourges; then, in similar fashion, added a "probable" at Avord.

"Flower" sorties to airfields in Germany on the night of the 20th resulted in two more kills. Ansbach airfield, near Nuremberg, was found obligingly active by F/O Herb Jones and his navigator, F/O A. J. Eckert. Jones promptly despatched an *Me. 110*, which crashed and burned just off the airfield. F/O Johnny Caine and navigator FS Earl Boal were meanwhile drawing blanks at Speyer and Karlsruhe airfields; but, while proceeding to another patrol area in France, saw an unidentified E/A burning navigation lights and flying on the same course. It altered course for Delme airfield and Caine followed. Presently a single burst of cannon and m.g. fire sent it crashing into the centre of the aerodrome. It was the first of many a kill for Caine and Boal, who, over the next five months or so,

were to fly an eminently successful tour. A good night's work was rounded off by F/O Ray Lee and his RAF guiding-hand, FS E. R. Collier, who damaged an unidentified E/A at Boblingen.

So did 418 score its last few victories of 1943. But the unproductive sorties should not be overlooked. Some mention should be made of the deep penetrations into Germany on nights when nobody had any business being in the air at all. The weather was so bad in the last quarter of 1943 that it rendered 25 per cent of 418's sorties abortive. Remarks such as "Returned early because of inability to pinpoint in low cloud and haze" were commonplace in crew reports of the period. In such conditions decisions to "press on regardless" were not easily made.

There were times when crews went all the way to the target and back and saw the ground only twice — on take-off and landing. On 4 December, for example, S/L Don MacDonald, who had succeeded Dick Bennell as flight commander early in September, intruded with his English navigator, P/O Stan Wilson, to Merseburg airfield, while Charlie Scherf and Al Brown went to Brandis. Both crews slogged through the soup to these airfields in the Leipzig area and back to Ford — a distance of 1100 miles — without a single pinpoint to guide them. They identified their patrol areas by the glow of burning Leipzig and the sight and smell of smoke rising through the cloud.

## **FLASHBACK**

For one intruder pilot a trip to the Paris area on 20 December was the first over enemy territory. The flight in itself was not particularly noteworthy, but when viewed against a background of events of the previous 14 months, it was, if anything, remarkable.

In the early hours of 17 October 1942 a 418 *Boston* aircraft had crashed on Mount Snowden, North Wales, during a training flight. The only survivor was the pilot, who was critically injured. He lay in a semiconscious state for nearly three days before being rescued. In the hospital at Bangor his injuries were initially diagnosed as follows: a fractured skull, brain concussion, broken leg, damaged knee, broken thumb, and assorted cuts, bruises, and abrasions. Further examination revealed still another injury: a broken back. In addition, some of his open wounds had become gangrenous. He remained in hospital for nearly seven and a half months, being released late in May 1943. The medical officer's final report read as follows: "This patient has made a most dramatic recovery from all his injuries and has no disability of any significance whatever. From the orthopaedic point of view he is fit for full flying duties."

Now, before the year's end, the pilot who had once seemed a sure bet of being shipped home an invalid, instead returned to operations with his old unit. His name was Merv Sims, he was a warrant officer, and he was to compile an outstanding record as an intruder pilot with 418.

In October and November of 1943 the unit's ground-strafes had managed to uphold their reputation. They destroyed six locomotives, damaged 13, and shot up the cars and coaches of at least seven other trains. Massey Beveridge accounted for one locomotive destroyed, his accurate marksmanship causing it to explode in a geyser of vapour shooting up an estimated 800 feet. On the same sortie he surprised a tramp steamer moored on the Gironde River, and in two well-executed attacks scored strikes on the water-line and superstructure. Their persistent aggressiveness won gongs for Beveridge and his RAF navigator, Sgt. Bernie Bays, in November.

Notwithstanding 418's acknowledged ground-strafing talents, as of 1 December a fruitful field of operations was denied the squadron by virtue of an official decree banning further attacks by day or night on rail traffic in France, Belgium, and Holland. The ban was to last nearly six months.

## **1944 BROUGHT CHANGES**

Early in 1944 the squadron's unofficial emblem of command changed hands. On 8 January W/C Davoud handed over his celebrated red fez to newly-promoted W/C Don MacDonald. The following day he was informed of his promotion and his transfer to No. 22 Wing. On 17 March there was promulgated in the LONDON GAZETTE the award of the Distinguished Service Order to G/C Paul Yettvart Davoud, DFC, the first officer to earn this high decoration for service with 418 Sqn. Besides mentioning his many operational sorties involving attacks on airfields and other heavily defended areas, the citation referred to him as a forceful and courageous leader whose personal example and exceptional ability were reflected in the efficiency and fine fighting qualities of his squadron.

Other executive changes effective early in the new year saw Hal Lisson take over A-Flight from Don MacDonald and Charlie Scherf inherit B-Flight from tour-expired Massey Beveridge.

In the first three weeks of 1944 the unit's sharpshooters could fatten their score by only one "damaged", Bob Kipp having creased an *Me. 210* or *410* over Handorf. Then things began to happen. Late on 21 January, eight "Flower" crews headed for airfield-surveillance assignments in France, Holland, and Germany. Forward visibility was down to 1000 yards in fog and low cloud, and over the continent no crew could obtain more than one pinpoint. Yet seven of the eight found their objectives.

One of the seven, consisting of Lt. J. F. ("Lou") Luma (USAAF) and F/L Eckert, was pinpointing over Steinhuder Lake when an aircraft showing navigation lights happened along. Luma tore after it and, after losing it periodically in cloud and overshooting it once, managed to get it in his sights. At a range decreasing from 250 to 100 yards he fired. A flash came from the E/A, exposing it as an *Me. 210*. One wing fell off and it went into its death-dive, disintegrating on the ground. Souvenirs of Luma's first kill — two fragments of *Me. 210* — were carried home in the *Mosquito's* wing. So began a string of victories which, within four and a half months, were to quintuple 418's count of E/A destroyed in its first 22 months of operations. It was no coincidence that a good percentage of the kills were scored during the Luftwaffe's ill-conceived and ineffective "Little Blitz" of January, February, and March, 1944.

The techniques and conditions required for successful day-rangers differed from those required for night intrusions. Instead of operating singly as at night, day-intruders flew mostly in pairs to give mutual protection from fighters and facilitate follow-up attacks. Low cloud, usually a hindrance at night, was absolutely essential for daylight penetrations, providing much-needed cover from would-be interceptors.

Over north-west France on 27 January was a weather pattern made for day-intruders: the cloud base was at 2500 feet, the visibility unlimited. At Station Ford it was drizzling rain. This failed to dampen the enthusiasm of W/C MacDonald, who spent most of his lunch-hour wangling permission to send a pair of day-rangers trouble-shooting over France. By mid-afternoon he and navigator Stan Wilson were airborne along with Charlie Scherf and Al Brown. About an hour and a half later they went into action. Near Bourges, Scherf spotted a *Heinkel III*. The wingco got first grabs, opening fire at very close range and perforating the fuselage and starboard engine. The *Heinkel* went straight in, the Australian helping it on its way with a burst that set the port engine on fire. That was at 1625 hours. Almost simultaneously Scherf saw another E/A, a *Focke-Wulf 200 "Kurier"*, and peeled off to go after it. MacDonald's camera recorded the action as Scherf attacked with an eight-second burst that finished with the *Mosquito* climbing up the *Kurier's* back barely 300 feet above the ground. Pieces broke off the E/A, which was then abandoned by its pilot. It dug its own grave at 1630 hours. At 1632 MacDonald was eliminating one of Hitler's "secret weapons" — a *Heinkel 177*, which type was supposed to wipe London off the map. Two French farmers stopped ploughing momentarily to watch it crash in an adjacent field.

Later on, at intelligence debriefing, the wingco jokingly remarked of the other two day-rangers operating that afternoon, "We aren't speaking to them unless they got at least four." A prophetic utterance it was, for the teams of Caine-Boal and Johnson-Gibbons did get exactly four, destroying a *Ju. 88* each and collaborating on a pair of *Ju. 34s* in the Bourges-Clermont region. Johnson also damaged a *Ju. 86*. It was a bad day for *Junkers*.

In just over a half-hour (the last kill came at 1657) the quartet of *Mosquitoes* had shot down seven of the enemy and damaged one. The tally of seven victories, air-to-air, on a single day's or night's operations was to be tied several times but never exceeded on the squadron. Spirits ran high in all messes that night as the septuple bag was celebrated. The events of 27 January 1944 continued long after to be recounted around the tables of the Arundel Arms, better known as the "Shaky Do".

## NIGHTTIME KILLS

For reasons unknown, only one operation in the next four weeks was flown in daylight, that being uneventful. Excellent results were obtained at night, however, ten E/A being destroyed (one on the ground) and one damaged. Several of the kills were in themselves unusual or had eventful aftermaths. One came during a "nursery intruder". (Two of such type were flown by all newly-arrived crews before operational sorties, the flights being of relatively short range and not over heavily defended areas.)

The victors were F/L T. G. ("Tommy") Anderson and navigator F/O J. F. Cadman, who downed an unidentified E/A near Tours. Lou Luma, guided by F/O C. G. ("Fin") Finlayson, blasted a *Heinkel 177*, which, in its death throes, attempted to ram the *Mosquito* but failed. Bob Kipp and Pete Huletsky were officially on leave when they intruded to Juvincourt to intercept E/A returning from a "little blitz" raid on the London area. In roughly 60 seconds they started two bonfires at opposite ends of the airfield, the kindling in each case consisting of a victim *Me. 410*. Near Florennes, Charlie Scherf and Roger Gurnett chased a single-engined E/A which, in an attempt to shake them off, went into an ever-tightening steep turn that was beyond the capabilities of the pilot to handle; it spiral-dived to destruction. Scherf had merely turned with it, using his superior flying skill to force the enemy to destroy himself. He hadn't even touched the firing-button.

On a "Flower" a few nights later he resorted to armament to down two E/A at Ansbach. Also victorious during the period were the crews of Williams and Gurnett, at Coulommiers, and MacFadyen and Wright, at Wurzburg. The air-to-ground marksman was Johnny Caine, who, with Earl Boal, was flying a "Flower" patrol of distant Riem (Munich) airfield. He strafed a taxiing *Me. 110* which had probably just returned from a sortie against our bombers attacking Augsburg. It was left going up in smoke.

The most successful operation of February 1944 was a day-ranger on the 26th by Scherf-Finlayson and F/L A.D. ("Howie") Cleveland and FS Frank Day. They found their first worthwhile targets sitting on the ground at St. Yan — an unidentified E/A and a pair of *Ju. 52s*. All three were incinerated in short order. The next stop was Dole airfield, where waiting for them was the most ideal sitting-duck of a target that any intruder could ever hope to see — a Bi-Heinkel (two *Heinkel III*s joined together) towing two *Gotha* gliders. In a matter of seconds both *Gothas* were falling apart under a hail of cannon fire and then falling straight down, in pieces. The clumsy composite which had been towing them proved easy prey under the combined attacks of the two *Mosquitoes* and soon rejoined the *Gothas* on the ground. En route home Cleveland strafed and damaged another *Gotha* parked in a field near Dole.

## THE SCORE MOUNTS

The success of this day-ranger and the one of a month previous must have done much to convince "the brass" that daylight intrusions were paying propositions, for, only the day after the St. Van-Dole operation, it was learned that henceforth the squadron could intrude by day at its own discretion. (Formerly daylight intruding, though not exactly frowned upon, had to have official sanction.) A wise decision this was, for it allowed 418 to give full rein to its talents of initiative, imagination, and tactical know-how. With their newly-won measure of independence, crews now began to intrude more and more by day. A competitive spirit arose between flights, even among crews, which vied with one another "laying on" trips calculated to pay off. The wisdom of granting the intruders more freedom of

action was seen on the unit score-board. More than 75 per cent of 418's total kills were made in daylight.

Thanks mostly to the two daylight "turkey shoots", in the 30-day period from 27 January to 26 February 1944 the squadron's accumulative bag of E/A more than doubled. Its score for the first 22 months of operations — 22½ E/A destroyed, in the air and on the ground — and its score for the 23rd month alone — 24 E/A destroyed, in the air and on the ground — provide an interesting comparison. For all its success in the latter period it lost only one crew to enemy action.

## EXECUTIVE CHANGES

Near the end of February all three executive positions changed hands. On the 25th W/C MacDonald, who was proceeding on posting to 129 Airfield the following day, handed over to W/C Dick Bennell, DFC, a flight commander with the unit in 1943. On the day of his departure MacDonald was awarded a DFC, largely for his brilliant leadership and combat skill on that eventful afternoon in January. Departing soon after were Flight Commanders Charlie Scherf and Hal Lisson, who were replaced by Howie Cleveland and Bob Kipp, respectively. From time to time, in addition to its offensive operations, the squadron undertook various special assignments. Though officially screened, S/L Lisson and his navigator, F/O Franklin, flew a special mission to Salvaza, in the Toulouse area, on 3 March. Because of circumstances beyond their control, the assignment was not carried out. Instead of turning for home, they proceeded south-east for another 400-odd miles and landed at Alghero, Sardinia, from which they made another unsuccessful attempt the following night. Again taking off from Alghero on the night of 6 March, they found their target and made a successful supply-drop in aid of the Maquis. Then they went home to Ford. When the ground-crew inspected the aircraft they stared in disbelief. Who would have thought the bomb-bay of a *Mosquito* could disgorge such quantities of Italian wines, lemons, and other souvenirs?

While Lisson and Franklin were making their third try to find the drop zone, Luma and Finlayson were prowling around Pau-Pont Long aerodrome, barely 25 miles from the Spanish border. Presently they were shadowing a single-engine aircraft of a type considered the arch-enemy of the *Mosquito* — a long-nosed *Focke-Wulf 190*, the fastest and most formidable E/A then on operations. One three-second burst and its war was over; it exploded and crashed to earth. But the range had been a bit too snug. Fragments of *Focke-Wulf* pierced the starboard radiator of the *Mossie*, causing a coolant leak and rapid overheating of the engine. Forced to switch it off, Luma had to finesse his way more than 500 miles to the south coast of England on one engine. The fact that he did attested to his sound airmanship and the matchless quality of the *Mosquito* and the Rolls-Royce engine. His total airborne time was 6 hours and 22 minutes, approximately half of which was single-engine flying.

To this point the squadron had despatched 24 sorties on day-rangers, destroying at least 14 E/A without loss. On 9 March the unfailing law of averages worked and an entry was made in the debit column. While carrying out his first operation since rejoining the unit, a day-ranger with Johnny Caine, W/C Bennell disappeared over the St. Lo-Avranches area (*Mosquito* LR270). He and his navigator, Frank Shield, were never seen again. Both were later presumed killed in action. Stepping into the executive breach, temporarily, despite having only recently finished an operational tour, was S/L Lisson, a veteran of nine months service with the squadron.

Crew reports from both day and night operations were indicating that ground defences in one of the squadron's favourite prowling areas, the north-west corner of France, were stronger than ever. *Mosquitoes* were more often showing flak scars after operations, in one or two instances the holes being big enough to crawl through. To intruder crews it seemed there was no night in this area; the searchlights saw to that. A belt of beams extended from the coastal town of Le Crotoy to Beauvais, some 60 miles to the south south-east. Almost intersecting it at right angles was another at least as long, from Abbeville to Cambrai. Don MacFadyen's aircraft was trapped in the latter belt one night for virtually the entire distance, despite constant varying of height. Even down below tree-top level the *Mosquito* could not be shaken free. Understandably befuddled by the beams, MacFadyen

temporarily lost his bearings. In addition to hindering our aircrews, the searchlights were directly protecting the enemy's. They swept the air behind an aircraft circling to land, trying to light up any intruder that might be shadowing it while its pilot was pre-occupied with his approach.

## **EDMONTON ADOPTION**

When the unit operated over France, Holland and Germany on the night of 18 March 1944, it carried not only the colours of the RCAF but also, figuratively speaking, the coat-of-arms of Canada's oil capital. That day official word had been received that the squadron was the ward of the municipality of Edmonton, Alberta. Thenceforth it would be known as 418 (City of Edmonton) Squadron. Considering the fact that the unit's C.O. and several pilots and navigators, plus a number of groundcrew, were Edmontonians, the adoption was particularly well timed and appropriate.

F/L C. A. Walker and navigator F/O T. J. Roberts celebrated the new association the following night by destroying an unidentified E/A near Melun. The teams of MacFadyen-Wright and Luma-Finlayson celebrated on the first day of spring with an unprecedented bag of seven E/A destroyed (four on the ground) and 12 damaged on the ground during a day-ranger to Hagenau and Luxeuil. All four officers won DFCs, and Lt. Luma, who was to wind up a tour in May with a total score of 6½ E/A destroyed and several more damaged, added the American DFC.

On the night of 22/23 March the squadron posted its second aircraft missing within 13 days. This time no loss of life was involved. Returning from a "Flower" in the Stuttgart area, F/L Cliff Walker and navigator F/O T. J. Roberts ran out of fuel and crash-landed near Abbeville. Walker began to evade, but Roberts, handicapped by an injured foot, had to be left behind and was soon captured. Contacting the Resistance, Walker moved from house to house and from village to village for the next five months or so, devoting much of that time to helping the Resistance to organize. He was billeted with a local commandant of the FFI\* (French Forces of the Interior) when the British Second Army liberated the area on 4 September 1944.

Bomber-support operations, which 418 had been carrying out regularly since July 1943, may not have brought the sensational scores of the daylight penetrations, but their overall effect was undoubtedly great. A case in point was the Battle of Berlin (ending on 25 March 1944), in which the unit despatched a total of 47 "Flower" sorties to cover selected airfields and give the bombers whatever help it could. Though failing to shoot anything down during their Battle of Berlin assignments, the Edmontonians did present a constant threat to certain Luftwaffe night-fighter squadrons by hounding their bases at times calculated to cause them maximum embarrassment. They could not be kept on the ground, but, being denied free use of their airfields for landing, they no doubt had to declare more fuel emergencies than expected, thereby compounding with confusion the problems of Goering's already overstrained air defence organization.

## **NEW CO, NEW BASE**

Before the end of March there was another change of command. Succeeding S/L Lisson on the 30th was W/C Anthony Barker, a Yorkshire alumnus of Yale University who had joined the RCAF. Lisson soon after put up a DFC and was repatriated.

The end of the first week of April brought a change of location, the new base being at Holmsley South, some 75 miles west of Ford. The move was not a popular one. Squadron life was never more pleasant and unit morale never higher than at Ford, a fact reflected by the squadron's record of achievement in the Ford period.

There was one more pay-off show from Ford before the squadron vacated. The inspiration came from an officer no longer on unit strength. Granted a 48-hour leave from his duties at Intruder Control, F/L Charlie Scherf, DFC, elected to spend part of it the best way he knew — on ops with 418. He hurried to Ford, picked up navigator F/O W. A. R. ("Red") Stewart, and organized a day-ranger with Johnny Caine; by tea-time the two *Mossies* were off. A lack of cloud cover over France made questionable the advisability of carrying on; Caine quite justifiably decided against it and turned back. For some reason Scherf kept going, low enough to bend the grass with his slipstream. At the Loire River he went after a *Fieseler Storch*, but his cannon misfired and the E/A had time to land. Its two crew members scrambled into a nearby wood and then watched as the Australian, with one burst, converted their *Storch* to scrap. Continuing on to Lyons airfield, he meted similar treatment to two unidentified twin-engined E/A, both in the air. As a parting gesture he finished off two *He. III*s parked at St. Yan. Then he went home. So did Charlie Scherf pass five hours of his "48", destroying five enemy aircraft.

### SCORING SPREE

That began a month and a half of the most prolific scoring in 418's history. In the air 30 E/A were destroyed, one more was "shared destroyed" with another squadron, and three others were "probables". On the ground 38 E/A were destroyed and 20 were damaged. To illustrate the unit's scoring power and "depth", 14 different crews contributed to the harvest.

In the week after Scherf's holiday caper, when at least seven E/A were eliminated, the big guns were F/Os G. N. ("Lefty") Miller and G. D. Miller. They counted two destroyed and 2 "probables" in addition to four damaged, and earned a congratulatory letter from their AOC-in-C, A/M Sir Roderic Hill.

On 14 April, for the fourth time, the squadron wiped out seven E/A in a single day. Intruding by day to Copenhagen's Kastrup airfield, Kipp-Huletsky and Caine-Boal sighted four *Ju. 52*s and dunked same in the Kattegat. By so doing they were indirectly assisting in the sea-mining campaign, for three of the *Junkers* were mine-sweeping when attacked. Strafing of the airfield followed, three more E/A being cremated and two damaged on the ground. At this point a pair of *FW 190*s from Grove airfield checked in overhead. A spirited chase ensued, but the *Mossies'* speed kept the enemy beyond effective attacking range. By his audacity and thorough planning S/L Kipp earned the DFC, as did his navigator, F/O Huletsky. F/O Caine, whose DFC had been gazetted ten days before, was to receive a second such decoration seven weeks later. Boal also was gonged.

On 16 April the squadron had its biggest scoring rash of any single day since beginning operations. That early evening ten E/A were nullified and another temporarily put out of action. It all started when the teams of Jasper-Martin and F/L W. J. Harper-F/O T. H. Rees intruded in late afternoon to Luxeuil airfield, 35 miles from the Swiss border. Harper opened the scoring by blasting a *Ju. 34* which blossomed into flame and plummeted to earth. Meanwhile Jasper was making hay air-to-ground. Seeing a *Caudron* warming up on the drome, he gave it a two-second squirt that left it blazing. Flying through the flames of this victim, he did likewise to a second *Caudron* parked nearby which also went up in smoke. He then caught a third *Caudron* in the act of taking off. It barely cleared the airfield boundary before going in. Next Harper surprised another *Ju. 34* whose pilot had pushed the panic button and was desperately trying to land. Absorbing a three-second burst the low-flying *Junkers* collided with a tree, lost its port wing, flipped onto its back, and disintegrated. In this action, air-to-air and air-to-ground, five E/A had been written off in less than five minutes.

Equally successful were day-rangers Cleveland-Day and F/E J. W. Kerr-F/O P. Clark, whose attacks were confined to E/A on the ground. Finding nothing attractive at Chateaudun, Orleans, Melun or St. Dizier airfields, the intruders called at Toul and discovered a number of aircraft dispersed along its perimeter. Two *FW 190*s and a *Bucker Jungmeister* trainer blew up or fell apart under Cleveland's fire, while one *Jungmeister* was consumed by fire and another was damaged in a single pass by Kerr. Then, on to a small field north of Thionville, where a lone *Stuka* was eliminated. Cleveland and

Day scored again during a "Flower" on the 28th, but this time their weapon was nothing more than intimidation. Seeing the lights of an E/A approaching to land at Croix de Metz, Cleveland went for it head-on. Before he (Cleveland) could touch the firing-button, the enemy pilot panicked; his well controlled approach became a desperation dive. The E/A hit heavily while still nose-down, caught fire and soon burned out.

That was the second time a pilot of 418 had forced self-destruction on an enemy aircraft without firing a shot. More orthodox methods were used by Sims and Sharpies on the 27th. Their "Flower" vigil over Schweinfurt led to an attack on an E/A, which, virtually saturated with cannon and machine-gun rounds, hit the deck almost vertically.

IF THERE was a climax to the deadly pace set by No. 418's sharpshooters, it must have come on 2/3 May 1944. During that 24-hour period the unit established its own all-time records for E/A destroyed in a single operation and also passed the "100" milestone in matter of E/A destroyed *in toto*.

The chain reaction of contributory events was triggered by the squadron's most active honorary member, S/L Charlie Scherf, DFC and Bar, who again succumbed to the operational urge and casually cooked up a day-ranger with F/O Caine and navigators Stewart and Boal. Airborne by mid-afternoon, the two *Mosquitoes* headed for Germany's Baltic shore. They first attacked 20 or more *He. 115s* and *Do. 18s* sitting on the water between Ribnitz and Putlitz. Caine destroyed two *Dorniers* and damaged two more, while Scherf damaged two *Heinkels*. The next point of call was Barth airfield, which was mercilessly strafed. Scherf blew up a *Do. 217* and an *He. III* and Caine reduced to junk four members of the *Junkers* family.

However, Caine's port engine ingested too much *Junkers'* debris for its own good. It quit. The skipper was about to head for Sweden, only 70 miles across the Baltic, but after huddling with Boal and weighing the merits of Swedish blondes against possible internment for the duration decided to trust the remaining Merlin to take them the 500-plus miles (90 percent over water) back to England. It did just that. While Caine struggled westward, Scherf continued eastward. At Greifswald he shot down in flames a *Ju. 86* and pulverized a parked *He. 111*. At Bad Doberan, on the way home, he added to his list of victims another ground-bound *Heinkel*.

When the unit's official scorer announced that the record bag had boosted 418's total of E/A destroyed (independently) to 96, crews all but queued up for the chance to get the 100th. Two of them, MacFadyen-Wright and Kipp-Huletsky, took off within the same minute that night, the former for St. Yan and the latter for distant Munich. MacFadyen was the first to attack, damaging an aircraft on the ground at St. Yan. He followed with three strafing runs on a *Bi-Heinkel*, which was consumed by fire. That was number 97, and Mac's chances of getting three more looked pretty good, at least until he dived to take photographs and took a burst of machine-gun fire in his starboard engine. A small explosion was touched off and the propeller had to be feathered, all of which rendered MacFadyen and Wright *hors de combat* for the time being.

Kipp got the 100th. He also got the 98th, 99th, and 101st. To add frosting to the multiple-victory cake, each victim was the *Mosquito's* deadliest foe, the *FW 190*. The first was perfectly illuminated by the beams of searchlights with which it was cooperating in an exercise near Ammer Lake; the second was approaching to land at Gunzburg with its navigation lights twinkling; the third and fourth were obligingly flying all lit up and in such tight formation (near Saarburg) that Kipp was able to blast them both on the same pass. It was a wonder there was a fourth at all, for while attacking it the *Mosquito* flew into the wreckage of the third and fell into a wicked stall from which its pilot recovered just in time. A paltry hundred feet or so of altitude meant the difference between his returning home in triumph and not returning at all. In shooting down four E/A Bob Kipp established an RAF-RCAF record for a single night sortie, this without the help of A.I. \* Already, so to speak, between a DFC recommendation and award, he had now earned membership in the Distinguished Service Order. The citation stressed his genius for leadership and his most inspiring example. Huletsky, also about to receive a DFC for work on previous operations, now earned a bar to that decoration.

\* Airborne Interception (radar) Equipment. An RAF night-fighter pilot, assisted by A.I., was to equal this mark some six months later.

Since 22 March, although there had been many a close shave with ground defences, enemy fire had failed to inflict casualties on 418 in nearly 200 sorties. A prime example of the Edmontons' luck was seen on 5 May, when Merv Sims' aircraft returned safely from a day-ranger with a dud incendiary bullet (which had severed the fuel line from the starboard tanks) lodged in one of its belly tanks. Nevertheless the law of averages applicable to intruder operations had to assert itself; with all the practice they were getting, German gunners were bound to knock something down every now and then, even a fast night-intruder *Mosquito*.

## INEVITABLE CASUALTIES

The inevitable happened in May, when three "TH" \* *Mosquitoes*, manned by experienced intruder teams, were brought down in eight days, all by flak, and a fourth was lost by misadventure. A night-ranger over the Baltic coast on the 8th was the 23rd and last sortie for the team of F/L J. M. Connell and F/O Dave Carr, each of whom was to spend nearly a year in a prisoner-of-war camp. A day-ranger to Luxeuil airfield on the 14th was also the 23rd and last sortie for F/L Willard. J. Harper and F/O T. H. Rees (RAF), who were last seen (by F/Os F. M. Sawyer and J. E. Howell) bracketed by flak as they were shooting-up hangars (NS855). They never returned and were later presumed dead. Only a few days before, on a day-ranger with Sims and Sharpies, they had destroyed two E/A and damaged three more at Metz and Thionville. They were given credit for damaging still another on their last operation.

\* The squadron's identification letters.

The unit's third loss of the period came during a day-ranger on the 16th by Howie Cleveland and Frank Day (RAF), accompanied by S/L Charlie Scherf, DFC and Bar, (who, for the third time, was flying "just one last trip") and "Swede" Finlayson. Over Denmark and Germany's Baltic coast the Scherf-Finlayson combination destroyed five E/A in the air and one on the ground and damaged another on the water, while Cleveland and Day destroyed two and damaged one. While strafing seaplanes moored offshore, however, Cleveland's aircraft was hit by the fire of two Bofors guns and the starboard engine had to be feathered. With his instruments destroyed and his aircraft labouring sluggishly, Cleveland turned for Sweden. He failed by three miles to reach it. The *Mosquito* was ditched and rescue came in three hours, but by that time navigator Frank Day was dead. In his 26 operational sorties with Cleveland the Lancashire lad had shown a high degree of ability, determination and devotion to duty, assisting in the destruction of nine E/A and in damaging attacks on three more. These facts were mentioned in the citation accompanying his award of the DFM, which, having been recommended earlier, was announced a day or so after his death. Simultaneously S/L Cleveland, described as an extremely efficient flight commander whose courage and determination had proved most inspiring, received a DFC. Repatriated after recuperating in a Swedish hospital, he was eventually to rejoin the squadron and become its last wartime commander.

## SCHERF'S SUCCESS

Returning to the exploits of Scherf and Finlayson, they were struggling home minus a port elevator (flak had removed it) when, over the German coast, they were "bounced". A flock of birds which had taken off from a strip of beach intercepted the *Mossie* and used ramming tactics. The nose and spinners were damaged and some two dozen holes were punched in the leading edge and upper side of the wings. Yet, even with these aerodynamic surfaces so vital to its lift thus impaired, the matchless *Mosquito* made it home.

S/L Scherf's bag of five E/A air-to-air in one trip was never exceeded on the squadron. His score now stood at 23½ conventional E/A destroyed and 4 damaged, which gave him all-time unit leadership in that category also. A unique aspect of his score was the fact that he chalked up all but six of the "destroyed"

and all but one of the "damaged" when no longer officially on squadron strength. His final performance with 418 earned him the decoration of the Distinguished Service Order. In view of his consistently excellent work on operations, the words of the citation — "His successes are a splendid tribute to his great skill, enterprise and fearlessness . . ." — seemed almost an understatement. Partly for navigational services rendered on the above operation, "Swede" Finlayson was awarded a bar to his DFC.

"Last trip" Charlie was not again to fly on operations with 418 Squadron. Ironically, what proved in effect his last trip of all was not made in an aircraft. On 13 July 1949 he was killed in an automobile accident in his native Australia.

## DITCHING EPISODE

The fourth aircraft loss of the eight-day period previously mentioned involved no loss of life. W/C Barker and F/L Frederick, returning from a night operation in which their aircraft had been rendered sluggish by severe flak damage, took a parting shot at Jerry by shooting-up a coastal gun post on a cliff-top at Biville. While diving on it, Barker glanced back momentarily to check on a suspected E/A. Thus distracted, he may have descended a little too low; or possibly the damaged aircraft "mushed" a little on the pull-out. At any rate his propellers briefly churned water instead of air. The bent blades set up such severe vibrations that Barker decided to ditch rather than chance the aircraft's self-destruction in the air. The *Mosquito* pancaked at 110 m.p.h., and its crew abandoned via the cockpit floor which had been ripped open by the impact. They watched from their dinghies as the *Mosquito* submerged scarcely 90 seconds later. After about 16½ hours *Spitfires* spotted them. In another hour-and-a-quarter they were picked up by a *Walrus* aircraft right under Jerry's nose, two miles off Dieppe. The *Walrus* was chased by four *Me. 109s* but reached its Hawkinge base safely. Frederick, who had sustained a broken leg, was posted, but the wingco re-crewed with F/O W. A. R. ("Red") Stewart, DFC, and returned to operations on the eve of D-Day.

During the unit's most productive month-and-a-half, which ended on 21 May, there were several other successes. Caine and Boal destroyed two flying-boats and damaged two more on the water at Putlitz, this on the night-ranger operation from which Connell and Carr failed to return. Almost simultaneously Jones and Eckert were eliminating an airborne *Ju. 290* hundreds of miles to the southwest near Wurzburg, Bavaria; still farther south, F/Os D. E. Roberts and A. D. McLaren were dispatching an *FW 190* at Oberphaffenhofen, near Munich. On the day Harper and Rees disappeared, Jasper and Martin probably destroyed an *He. 111* in the air near Nancy and then blew up a *Stuka* parked at Azelot. A few hours later Kipp and Huletsky destroyed a *Heinkel 177* which was approaching to land at Mont-De-Marsan. The last kill of the period came in the course of an unusual operation in which *Mosquitoes* manned by Jasper-Martin and Kerr-Clark combined with sections of *Mustangs* to day-range over Denmark. Kerr shot down a twin-engined *Le 0.45* and shared a similar kill with two *Mustangs*. Although their score was unchanged throughout subsequent operations in May, the Edmontons bombed several airfields and, for the first time in several months, strafed a few trains.

The last sortie in May was a night-ranger on the 31st to the most distant airfield ever intruded upon by the squadron from a base in England. F/L C. J. (John) Evans and F/O Stan Humblestone (RAF) flew to Pilsen, Czechoslovakia, and back (over 1200 track miles), their margin of fuel being a scant 15 gallons.

## PRELUDE TO D-DAY

Came the momentous month of invasion, and the Edmontons' score began to mount again. Anderson and Huletsky prowled over the Rhone Valley soon after dawn on the 1st and disposed of a *Do. 217* north of Avignon. That evening Sims and Sharpies added another kill, a *Ju. 34*, this one being registered over the upper Rhine near Baden Baden.

After two "flowers"\* on 2/3 June the squadron was partially diverted from its primary duties to assist in the softening-up of coastal defences preparatory to the assault on Normandy. On D-Day eve it contributed a "maximum effort"; only one of 19 operational crews on strength did not take part, that crew having no aircraft to fly. One *Mosquito*, manned by Sims and Sharpies, was quite possibly the first Allied aircraft to penetrate enemy territory in the D-Day show. With 11 other aircraft of 418 it supported Bomber Command's blasting of the vaunted West Wall by harassing 20 airfields in France. In addition, with the anti-train-busting decree no longer in effect, a rail junction and a few coast-bound freight trains were bombed or strafed. Six more crews undertook as primary assignments attacks on tactical targets such as anti-aircraft guns (five of which were silenced), searchlights, and a railway bridge, all in strategic Cherbourg Peninsula. The *Mosquito* carrying Anderson and Cadman was twice hit by light flak and had to be crash-landed at base with a full bomb-load still aboard. Its crew walked away from the kite unhurt. These 18 sorties constituted the biggest night's work done by the squadron on intruder operations.

\* Bomber-support operations.

Superb work by the groundcrews made possible another "maximum effort" the following night. Exclusively engaged in flower patrols covering airfields behind the battle line, the squadron registered five kills.

Accounting for all but one of these was F/L S. H. R. ("Stan") Cotterill, who thereby tied Bob Kipp's mark of four in one night. The victories, against three *Ju. 52* transports and a *Ju. 188*, were recorded in 20 minutes and brought Cotterill an immediate DFC and his navigator, Sgt. E. H. McKenna (RAF), a DFM. Another *Ju. 52* was claimed by Don MacFadyen, while WO T. T. P. McGale claimed one damaged, his cannon having jammed at the wrong moment. In air-to-ground action F/L Tommy Anderson and WO McGale scored bull's-eyes on bridges over the Seine and Loire, respectively, while P/O W. E. Bowhay blew up a truck and crippled a locomotive. During a sortie on 7/8 June still another *Ju. 52* went down, this before the guns of F/L Kerr. All in all it had been a grim 24 hours for the Luftwaffe's air transport organization.

Until the middle of June, operations consisted mostly of flowers in support of heavy bombers attacking rail targets in France. When unable to find enemy aircraft or illuminated airfields to attack, the Edmontons took a more intimate part in the anti-communications campaign by bombing and strafing roads, railways, and trains. Although from 8 to 15 June surprisingly few E/A were seen, on the 14th three were destroyed. Kipp-Huletsky and Sims-Sharpies each scored on a Baltic day-ranger, while, on their first operation, S/L Russell Bannock and F/O E. R. Bruce incinerated an *Me. 110* taxiing on Avord airfield at night.

For Kipp, who was soon to be posted after completing a tour, it was the last of 10½ air-to-air victories. (He destroyed two more aircraft on the ground.) In matter of manned E/A shot down, therefore, he led all pilots of 418 Squadron. Surviving the war, he remained in the RCAF and became CO of 410 Squadron. On 25 July 1949, while practising aerobatics in a *Vampire*, S/L Kipp crashed at St. Hubert and was killed. By an almost incredible stroke of irony, he and Charlie Scherf, who had each completed two tours of operations involving duties hazardous in the extreme, met untimely deaths by misadventure in peacetime, only 12 days apart.

## **ENTER THE BUZZBOMB**

Shortly before 0400 hours on 13 June, while returning over northwest France from an intruder patrol, skipper Don MacFadyen and navigator Jim Wright had seen what they described as "a rocket projectile heading northward leaving a red trail". Whether their sighting had any special significance can only be conjectured. Nevertheless, at precisely 0418 hours that morning the first flying bomb fell on Britain. The next operation by MacFadyen and Wright began on 17 June, just past midnight. It was not an intruder mission; they were not stalking conventional enemy aircraft. They were after something probably similar to what they had seen before, something that glowed orange-red. They saw it at 0125 hours,

some 25 miles south-east of Beachy Head at 2000 feet. Opening the throttles wide MacFadyen closed in to 300 yards range, chased it on a course of 340 degrees magnetic, and fired twice. The target began to burn, then fell off its line of flight and into the sea. An hour or so later this procedure was repeated 20 miles south of Dungeness — the same type of target, the same course and airspeed, virtually the same altitude and range. A single burst put the target into a dive that culminated in a vivid explosion on the water. Hunting similar quarry that early morning, John Evans and Stan Humblestone sent a third crashing into open country near Hastings, while Ed McGill and F. D. Hendershot probably destroyed one over the coast between Dungeness and Folkestone.

So did the squadron perform in its debut against the *Vergeltungswaffe*\* or "retaliation weapon" — three kills and one "probable" in five sorties. It also lost one crew. More than two-thirds (400-plus sorties) of 418's operations in the next 14 weeks or more were to be directed against V1 and another secret weapon that was an even greater menace to London and the successful conduct of the war.

\* Alias V1, flying bomb, buzzbomb, pilot-less bomb, robot bomb or robomb, doodlebug, and, in official code, "Diver".

Though it could neither take evasive action nor shoot back, the V1 was a tricky and dangerous target. Only a fraction the size of a conventional aircraft, it had to be fired at from closer range, 300 yards being the maximum for a reasonable chance of success. The *Mosquito* pilot had to judge the gap while in a power-dive (because of his slower speed he could not get within attacking range straight-and-level), this making even more difficult the delicate matter of timing. At too long a range chances were he would miss; at too short a range the thing might explode in his face. Usually, even with ideal sky conditions, he had six minutes at most in which to shoot it down\*; if he chased it for longer than that he might be trapped in London's hellish ack-ack and balloon barrage. Finally, there was the possibility of surprise attack by a German night-fighter or intruder during the time of concentration on Diver.

\* The enemy took every advantage of cloud cover to cut down the already short time our fighters had to intercept.

## HAIR-RAISING ATTACKS

Despite these problems, in the next ten days ten different crews downed doodlebugs as 418's list of victories over V1 swelled to 20. Kills did not come easily, however. Sorties, successful and unsuccessful alike, had their hair-raising moments. Tony Barker was directing a stream of cannon fire at a robomb when both of his engines inexplicably cut. Robombs were forgotten while he sweated to coax the Merlins back to life, before height and time ran out. They responded, preventing what would have been his second ditching within six weeks. F/O S. P. ("Syd") Seid achieved at least one kill in a way not calculated to lengthen his life expectancy. In his eagerness he closed to the almost suicidal range of 50 yards. He had barely touched the firing button when the V1 exploded, virtually in his lap. The *Mosquito* survived the holocaust intact except for losing all its paint. WO McGale had a target lined up in his gunsight when his starboard engine failed. Even after feathering it he managed to climb to 5000 feet; but then the port engine took fire, forcing him to restart the starboard and feather the port. The aircraft just made it over the English coast before the starboard engine conked out for good. McGale and his navigator, F/O E. T. Story, bailed out, the skipper at a height only 800 feet above ground. He sprained an ankle.

Typical experiences of hunters were described to the Press by two 418 pilots. Stan Cotterill commented, "We used to stooge around just out from the launching area . . . Sometimes we could see the actual launchings, like a great half-moon of brilliant explosion. When the things came up we dived on them vertically at full throttle. Several kites would line up on one bomb, and, if the first one missed, another would go down for a try. Sometimes . . . we were not always sure there was a doodlebug. So we lined up the light with a star and, if it moved, in we went." Ross Gray told how, during attacks early in the anti-Diver battle, the flash of exploding robombs temporarily blinded attacking pilots, who momentarily had to fly by the seat of their collective pants. "As the days went by," he continued, "we developed a habit of closing one eye as we shot for a kill, so after the flash at least one eye would be serviceable."

## MORE DIVER CHASES

Even if leading to no kills, anti-Diver sorties were highly useful to Intelligence. Crews of 418 brought back valuable information on the height, speed, and track-made-good of buzzbombs chased, and, most important of all, the exact spot where they had passed over the French coast. Combining the latter item of knowledge with the reciprocal of the T.M.G. produced a position line on which, at some point a few miles inland, lay the launching site. Many V1s were seen emerging over the hamlet of St. Quentin on a course of 340°M. These had quite possibly come from Oisemont. Others were seen actually being launched from a position bearing about 150°T and eight miles from Pte. d'Ailly. That was the approximate position of a site at Foret du Croc, twice attacked by Bomber Command in the month-and-a-half after this information was reported.

On 5 July word came that a V1 shot down over the sea would thenceforth count as an E/A destroyed, whereas one shot down over land would count as only half an E/A. Judging by the results of operations flown in the next 48 hours or so, the announcement gave fresh incentive to the Diver chasers, one crew destroying four and two others destroying three each on the 6th. Bannock and Bruce scored the quadruple kill in just over an hour-and-a-quarter. (Having had a triple kill three nights before, they were becoming acknowledged experts in this strange type of air war.) One of the "hat tricks" was scored by Evans and Humblestone, who got number three under highly adverse circumstances. Immediately after blowing their second victim to bits they flew into some of the wreckage, which damaged their starboard engine badly enough to make it quit. That was a legitimate reason for discontinuing the operation then and there, but Evans thought differently. Making up for depleted airspeed by diving from 6000 to 1800 feet, he attacked on one engine and scored again. His feat prompts a question to which there is no ready answer. In the brief history of air warfare, how many twin-engined fighter pilots, if any, have shot anything down when flying on one engine? Nearly a year later, Evans was to receive the King's Commendation for Valuable Services in the Air and a mention in dispatches.

The other triple victor of 6/7 July was Don MacFadyen, who flew two sorties. With four more kills 24 hours later (two by Bannock), the three-night bag reached 20 V1s destroyed in 27 sorties. More successes the next night and the next made it seven consecutive nights of victories over *Vergeltungswaffe*.

## ON THE MOVE

On 14 July the squadron moved from Holmsley South to nearby Hum. The latter base was, however, found unsuitable because of inadequate housing, and a fortnight later came another move, to Middle Wallop. After only six weeks that station was to be vacated in favour of Hunsdon.

In the last half of July the score against V1 continued to grow steadily, this despite the news that each anti-Diver patrol would now count as only half an operational sortie. Before the month's end 13 more were destroyed, of which Bannock claimed six. That made a unit total of 40 for July. To illustrate the relative intensity of operations, whereas in 1942 the Edmontons had operated roughly every second night, in the hectic spring and summer of 1944 they operated on an average of six nights a week.

The pace was maintained in August, the squadron keeping up a one-a-day-average score against the Diver until the 21st, the date of its last V1 kill. While some patrols were routine enough to be monotonous, others were anything but that. At least three times aircraft were chased by enemy night-fighters just as they were closing in on buzzbombs, violent manhandling of the *Mosquito* being required each time to elude the E/A. On at least one occasion necessity dictated bold and unorthodox tactics. Spotting a Diver approaching him about 15 miles south of Beachy Head and quickly estimating that it would be over land in 2½ minutes or less, Syd Seid attacked in the only way that time permitted — head-on. The closing speed was nearly 800 m.p.h., but his judgment and aim were good; one less V1 fell on Britain that night. An attack by Russ Bannock had a unique twist in that it made a robomb boomerang on the enemy. Initially his cannon fire forced the thing's starboard wing

to drop. It righted itself for a while but then turned almost completely about and flew back to France. Bannock went along with it. At the proper moment he attacked again, then watched the runaway robot crash in a military zone near Boulogne.

## EXIT THE BUZZBOMB

Shortly after 0200 hours on 21 August F/O R. D. Thomas shot down a robomb which had crossed the French coast just north of Berck-sur-Mer. Although over the next three weeks the squadron was to fly another 33 of these sorties, this was its last official V1 kill.

The bare statistics of 418's part in the buzzbomb battle are as follows: sorties, 402; kills, 83\*; damaged, 16. Its *Mosquitoes* accounted for roughly 14 percent of the V1s shot down by aircraft at night. Tops among its doodlebug exterminators was S/L Bannock, with 18½ official kills. Second to him was F/L John Evans, with 7½. Next came F/Ls MacFadyen and P. S. Leggat (5 each), F/O S. N. May (4½), and F/L Cotterill, F/L D. E. Forsyth, and F/O Seid (4 each).

On more than half-a-hundred days and nights throughout 418's anti-V1 period its crews were also hunting their more traditional enemy, the conventional E/A. Their score was thereby increased by nine destroyed, two "probables", and nine damaged. Among the more successful teams were, Bannock-Bruce (3 destroyed), Evans-Humblestone (1 destroyed, 1 shared, 1 "probable"), and Jasper-Martin, Kerr-Clark, Sims-Sharpies, and Bowhay-Naylor. For four crews these victories were the last. S/L Kerr and F/O "Butch" Clark, whose total score was now six E/A destroyed or "shared", never returned from a mid-July night-ranger to Kolberg. Five nights later (23 July) P/Os Ed Bowhay and H. K. Naylor, who, a fortnight or so after D-Day, had scored 418's only official V1 \* kill made over the continent, were killed in a training accident (HR149). Jasper-Martin and Sims-Sharpies were screened from further operations with the squadron. Jasper had now claimed 8 E/A destroyed or probably destroyed, plus 3 V1s; Sims' score of E/A was virtually identical. Both pilots and their navigators soon wore DFCs.

\* Seven were shot down over land, reducing the official total to 79½ -

## BACK TO GROUND-STRAFING

The latter half of the summer of 1944 also saw the unit perform some specially effective ground-strafting. Its cannon shells ripped open numerous locomotive boilers, set fire to coaches and freight cars, blew up dozens of trucks and vehicles, and damaged a few canal barges, among other moving things. Outstanding work in this department was done by F/L H. E. Miller and F/O Seid. On 31 August, prevented from reaching Hagenau airfield by the un-serviceability of his drop-tanks, Miller began to raise proper hell with ground targets around Metz. He dived on a long line of vehicles and let go a long burst of enfilading fire. The leading vehicle blew up, and the convoy was so tightly packed that a chain reaction set in, carrying down the line until perhaps 10 "MET"\* exploded and were burning furiously. Later that night he destroyed four more vehicles. His feat of 14 vehicles destroyed in one sortie was a squadron record. Seid applied his technique to road and rail transport, destroying two locos and five trucks and damaging five more vehicles.

\* This one was not headed for England; it was on a bee-line for the Normandy beachhead.

\*\* Mechanized enemy transport.

Two flights of the period were in all probability connected with Operation "Dragoon", the Allied landings on the south coast of France. The first, on 15/16 August, was an intruder to the Toulouse area by F/L F. M. Sawyer and F/O J. E. Howell to help oppose possible nocturnal reaction to the landings by any of the estimated 220 German aircraft based in southern France. It proved uneventful. The second was more interesting. When the squadron was informed that it was to provide escort for a German aircraft, it no doubt suspected leg-pulling on somebody's part. Yet, on 6 September, three *Mosquitoes* flew from Hunsdon to Carpiquet airfield at Caen. From there they flew to Toulouse airfield, from which they took off to escort a *He. 177* back to England. The *Heinkel* was presumably carrying German V.I.P.s captured during "Dragoon".

AT 6.40 p.m. on 8 September 1944 the V2 introduced itself to London. This horror differed from V1 by virtue of its immunity to interception. It was a rocket that travelled at ultra-sonic speed; once it was successfully launched, no power on earth could stop it. The only active defence against it was to destroy the launching sites, and the first step in this direction was to learn exactly where these were. V2 reconnaissance patrols were flown by Air Defence of Great Britain even before 8 September, No. 418 Squadron being assigned to such work on the first night of that month.

Thirteen individual patrols were flown without a sighting. Finally S/L D. N. ("Doug") Annan and navigator F/O A. M. Macintosh saw a launching and pinpointed the site. Annan described the sighting as follows:

"At 2135 hours (12 September) we saw what appeared to be "Big Ben" . . .\* It ascended vertically, only a large blob of light similar to a flare being visible . . . At 8000-9000 feet it went on a course of 270 degrees true, climbing steeply until it disappeared. When first seen, it was about two miles away . . . Viewing it from behind, we saw a grey smoke-trail extending down to the ground."

\* Code-name for V2

The squadron flew a total of 36 "Big Ben" sorties, all in September. Its crews saw only four launchings, but each time the launching site was pinpointed.

In September, besides chasing V1 and scouting V2, the Edmontons flew well over 100 intruder sorties. For the first three weeks their successful kills were confined to road and rail transport; S/L Bannock, for example, having an especially fruitful sortie with six trucks and two railway coaches destroyed.

A lull of 23 days without an E/A destroyed ended over Bad Aibling (Munich) on the 21st, as Ross Gray and Noel Gibbons clobbered an aircraft attempting to land there. They presently destroyed one on the ground and damaged two others, while their partners, F/L P. R. Brook and F/O A. D. McLaren, destroyed one and damaged one. All this took place in just three minutes. Brook's aircraft, damaged by its victim's debris, was landed at newly captured St. Dizier airfield, which, over a span of a year-and-a-quarter (until as recently as three weeks before), had been kept under regular surveillance by No. 418. Three air-to-ground victims were claimed at Helmshagen and Tutow on the 22nd by Forsyth-Esam and one by F/O J. S. Hill-FS W. Roach. The Baltic airfield of Parrow was the scene of a double kill on the 27th by Bannock-Bruce, who subsequently were themselves attacked from the air. They dodged the enemy, but, shortly after, their port engine took fire and had to be shut off. It took them nearly four hours to cover the 600 miles to base. So did Bannock become co-holder of the squadron endurance record (he tied Lou Luma's old mark of 6 hours and 22 minutes) and a wearer of the DFC. A "Flower" that night saw F/Ls F. A. Johnson and Noel Gibbons down a *Ju. 88* over Hailfingen. It was the squadron's 100th air-to-air victim.

On 30 September the unit made its first operational take-off from an airfield in continental Europe. Gray-Gibbons and Brook-McLaren left at noon from St. Dizier to visit Erding (near Munich) and Eferding (Austria) airfields. At Erding their cannon fire chewed to pieces two parked fighters and damaged five more. At Eferding Gray blasted one fighter out of the air and his fire was eating up the tail and rear fuselage of another when his cannon ammunition ran out. He had to content himself with emptying his machine-guns on a bomber parked at Horshing.

A simultaneous day-ranger over the other extreme of 418's operational theatre — Denmark — resulted in the loss of F/L R. H. Thomas and F/O G. J. Allin (both RAF). They were avenged by their partners, Miller and Hooper, who sent an *Me. 109* crashing to earth near Aalborg by shooting off its starboard wing. Still another day-ranger saw the team of Forsyth-Esam boldly blast a *Focke-Wulf 190* head-on and send it down in flames near Eggebek (Schleswig-Holstein).

As of 10 October the squadron was under new management. Wing Commander Barker, departing on posting, was succeeded by newly promoted W/C Russell Bannock, DFC.

## THE SCORE BUILDS UP

Though free to concentrate on the Luftwaffe in October, the squadron, strangely enough, failed to catch a single enemy in the air. It did, however, author an impressive score on the ground to the tune of 18 E/A destroyed and 16 damaged, this in four daylight sorties. Responsible for most of these successes were day-rangers Gray-Gibbons and F/O R. D. Thomas-F/L R. W. MacDonald, combined to chalk up nine destroyed and nine damaged on 418's first intrusion over Czechoslovakia, on 12 October. Operating from Jesi, Italy, they first dropped in on Ceske Budojovice and wrote off three *Ju. 34s* while damaging another. Proceeding to Nemecky Brod, they found it packed with *Stukas*, six of which they destroyed while damaging eight. For Gray, who accounted for six of each category, the Czechoslovakian trip was a glorious wind-up to a tour and boosted his bag to 10 E/A. He was to be gonged early in the New Year.

A day-ranger on the 15th by F/Os S. P. Seid and D. N. McIntosh alone was the most fruitful single sortie ever flown by the Edmontons. From Le Culot, Belgium, they intruded to Stargard and Kolberg airfields in north-east Germany and strafed to their hearts' content. Their tally: five *Ju. 88s*, one *Me. 110* and one *Stuka* destroyed, plus two *Ju. 88s*, two *Me. 109s* and an unidentified aircraft damaged. Not a round of enemy fire even grazed the *Mosquito*, but a flock of birds contested its use of their airway and considerably damaged its rudder and tailplane. For their sterling efforts on this operation and many another, Seid and McIntosh were gonged simultaneously. Seid's citation mentioned this American's long hours of careful planning and studying of tactical situations, which were all too obvious in his outstanding record. In cold figures that record was: nine E/A, four V1s and three locomotives destroyed, 20 vehicles destroyed or irreparably damaged, and seven E/A, six locomotives and three escort ships damaged. Small wonder his C.O. called him "an operational pilot whose eagerness to attack the enemy has known no bounds".

For nearly 11 months the Edmontons had been venturing forth by day as well as by night. On their day-intrusions particularly, eminent success had been realized and losses were surprisingly low (only 2.8 per cent, involving five fatal casualties).

On 17 and 22 October, however, three stunning losses were incurred on successive day-rangers, and in each case Fate was no respecter of operational experience. Four veteran aircrew were eventually presumed dead — F/L Stan Cotterill, DFC, and S/L Ken Boomer, DFC, with their navigators, F/O Colin Finlayson, DFC and Bar, and F/L Noel Gibbons, DFC and Bar. Cotterill had downed four E/A and V1s, besides damaging two locomotives and 15 vehicles. Finlayson had assisted in more kills—18½—than any other navigator of 418.\* S/L Boomer, though a fighter pilot of long standing, had only recently joined the squadron.\*\* But on his last sortie (22 October) he did knock out one E/A and damage a second on the ground at Holzkirchen. Both attacks were witnessed by F/L F. A. Johnson and his navigator, WO E. W. Pace, whose aircraft partnered Boomer's on the operation. Gibbons, a second-tour navigator who had guided three different pilots to destroy 15½ E/A and damage 15 more, was also the squadron's navigation leader.

\* Although tour-expired and on non-flying duties, Finlayson had volunteered to replace another navigator who was ill.

\*\* As OC 111 Squadron in September 1943, S/L Boomer had destroyed a Japanese *Zero* over Kiska in the RCAF's first and only air combat in the North American theatre.

Both members of the third missing crew survived and evaded. F/L S. N. May and F/O J. D. Ritch took off on the 17th from a base in Italy to range over the Vienna area. While strafing Piestany airfield (Czechoslovakia) their aircraft was so badly damaged by flak that they had to crash-land only two kilometres from the field. They lay low for two days and then contacted Russian officers from a Partisan group. Handed from one band of Partisans to another over the next four months, they were smuggled into the Russian lines on 19 March. Two days later they were received in Lucenec by a Russian major "in charge of repatriation" . . . Presently May became ill and entered a Hungarian hospital, but Ritch embarked for the U.K. via Odessa on 16 April.

## FLOWERS AND NIGHT-RANGERS

Although practically all its anti-Luftwaffe successes were being counted by day, most of 418's operations in the fall of 1944 were "Flowers" and night-rangers, with which at every opportunity were combined attacks on suitable ground targets. The squadron's *Mosquitoes*, occasionally taking off from advanced air bases on the continent, prowled over the Reich from Dummer See in the west to Breslau in the east, from Peenemunde in the north to Munich in the south.

It was during "Flowers" to two Hessian airfields on 1 November that the squadron both suffered its last loss on intruder operations and inflicted its last fatal blow on a manned E/A. P/O John S. Hill and FS C. W. Roach were briefed to cover Giessen aerodrome but were never seen again after take-off (LR327). They were eventually presumed lost in action. Dispatched almost simultaneously to Hanau, Miller and Hooper intercepted a *Ju. 88G* at nearby Udenheim and blasted it to eternity.

Shortly before midnight on 18 November S/L C. S. Leggat and F/O R. R. Bruce returned from a night-ranger over south-east Germany and west Austria. So was written "finis" to the brightly glowing "Intruder" chapter of 418's history. That day word had come that a move to Hartford Bridge was imminent, such to coincide with a transfer of the unit to No. 136 Wing of No. 2 Group, Second Tactical Air Force, and another phase of operations. In future its work would be close support of the ground forces, virtually all by night.

The move to Hartford Bridge took place on 21 November. The following day brought a change of command as W/C Bannock handed over to W/C J. C. ("Jack") Wickett upon being posted to No. 406 Squadron. With Bannock's departure the unit lost not only a proven leader but also its number one sharpshooter. In fact, with 11 E/As and 18½ V1s to his credit, Bannock was the RCAF's leading destroyer of aerial weapons. He was soon to add a bar to his DFC.

## NEW ROLE

Having been pronounced "non-operational" on 20 November, the squadron was free to concentrate on settling into its working and living quarters at Hartford Bridge and on training for its new operational role. In the latter connection, exercises in dive-bombing, low-level bombing, air-to-ground firing and cross-country navigation were under way by the 24th and continued uninterrupted for a month.

Came Christmas 1944. But there was no Yuletide spirit in the heart of the enemy, who was showing anything but goodwill toward men of the Allied ground forces in the Ardennes area. It was on this morning 24 hours or so after Rundstedt's troops had reached their point of maximum penetration in "The Bulge" that the Edmontons were again pronounced operational.

There followed, in the words of 418's diarist, "a huge flap". All squadron personnel on leave or pass had to be recalled at once, many being interrupted at Christmas dinner. The weather, which had

favoured Rundstedt all along, remained poor and delayed the tactical debut for nearly a week. Finally, on 30 December, a high pressure area materialised off south-west England and skies began to clear.

Before the end of 1944 "The Bulge" had become a salient from which the enemy was making a strategic withdrawal. With the improving weather an intensive aerial counter-attack was put up to impede his eastward movements. Such was the situation when 418 flew its first tactical sorties, on New Year's Eve. Now the unit's duties were to disrupt Jerry's communications, bomb his troop concentrations and area headquarters (the latter were usually well hidden), and generally raise merry old hell behind his lines, thereby smoothing the way for our footsloggers. Albeit no longer officially "intruder," the new assignment would in some aspects resemble the air-to-ground part of the old. It would still be intruding in a loose sense, but in support of a ground force instead of a strategic air force. The main targets were now the Wehrmacht and its supply lines rather than the Luftwaffe and its airfields.

## RETURN TO ACTION

The return to action entailed mainly bombing and strafing roads and military towns in the Ardennes and Eifel regions. On eight nights in January 1945 these areas were revisited, as the Edmontons patrolled behind the battle front and along the "bomb line", smashing road and rail transport, barracks, beacons, and everything showing a light. From the number of attacks made on lights it appeared that the enemy's black-out was being loosely enforced. He would pay for his carelessness with heavy losses of vehicles and drivers.

The squadron had its losses too. In one nine-day period in January four crews were lost, two on operations and two on a communications flight over Wales in an *Oxford* aircraft.

By mid-January "The Bulge" had been straightened out and another was developing in an easterly direction. Operating ahead of the British Second Army, Wickett's crews regularly worried the Wehrmacht (whenever the weather permitted) until, by the 22nd, they were attacking objectives east of the Rhine, among these being the supply communications centres of Munster, Wesel, and Dorsten.

Favourable weather at low level, the *sine qua non* of effective close support operations, deserted the unit on 20 days of January. (For a total of two-weeks it was grounded by freezing rain, sleet, blizzards or fog.) On several occasions, when operating in the worst weather imaginable, it had to use as a bombing guide the navigational aid, "Gee".\* The device was employed to good effect during operations from 29 January to 6 February, when enemy strong points impeding the advance of the U.S. Ninth Army on Cologne were bombed.

\* More than once in this bad-weather period 418 was the only Allied squadron in action over north-west Europe.

Notwithstanding that for eight of the next 15 days Hartford Bridge was virtually "socked in", 81 more night sorties were flown in the fortnight. On these forays the *Mosquitoes* slashed at towns largely in the Zwolle-Munster-Osnabruck and northern Ruhr areas, towns through which the Germans might try to bring up reinforcements to combat the Canadian's offensive between the Maas and the Rhine.

On 22 February the stage was set for Operation Clarion, a large-scale air-to-ground strike aimed at annihilating in 24 hours all means of ground transport still available to the enemy. Nearly 9000 aircraft, operating from England, France, Holland, Belgium and Italy, ranged over a quarter million square miles of the Greater Reich, attacking every transportation artery, medium and facility imaginable. It was 418's only tactical operation by day and it proved the costliest in its history. Missing were W/C Wickett, with his navigator, F/O W. Jessop (RAF), F/L H. E. Miller with FS W. Hooper (both RAF), F/L M. Hope with F/O L. A. Thorpe (RAF), and F/L C. Hackett with F/O W. S. E. Brittain (RAF). Of the Canadians, Wickett was captured, Hope was presumed dead, and Hackett was listed as safe. The only information available on the RAF personnel concerned was, Jessop (captured) and Brittain (safe).

The squadron commander's aircraft, crippled and on fire, had been crash-landed south of Oldenburg, and its crew were immediately apprehended. They spent the night on a barge and were interrogated and shouted at by a naval petty officer and a policeman. In the next six days they were moved to an airfield near Lingen, thence to Rheine, thence to Oberusel. For the latter journey they were given a loaf of bread and a sausage, which had to last four days. At Frankfurt they had to be sheltered in the basement of the railway depot when menaced by a group of townspeople. Upon arrival at the Oberusel camp, Wickett was given a week's solitary confinement.

On his second day of confinement he was interrogated three times. His interrogator lost no time, greeting him with the words, "Hello Credo 17.\* When are you going to Coxyde?"\*\* He also said, "I expect S/L Annan will take over your squadron, as he is the senior flight commander". He knew No. 2 Group's losses, wing by wing. He knew when No. 136 Wing had been formed and that it had just received a new Wing Commander Operations.

\* The squadron call-sign and W/C Wickett's number.

\*\* An airfield in Belgium.

The day after his release from "the hole" W/C Wickett was moved to Dulag Luft, from which, on 27 March, all POWs were evacuated to begin a forced march. This lasted more than three days, during which the only nourishment consumed was a little soup and a few bites of concentrated food from a Red Cross parcel. On the 30th the party was overtaken and liberated by an advance unit of Americans.

The only ill-treatment of prisoners seen by the wing commander throughout his captive period had come from Gestapo bully-boys, who kicked and threw bricks at P.O.W.s marching through village streets.

### **INFORMATION WAS CORRECT**

Wickett's interrogator had been well informed. S/L Annan did take over, on 23 February, and was promoted a week later. Moreover, from 10 to 15 March a cross-Channel shuffle of men, aircraft and material took place as 418 vacated Blackbushe for Coxyde.

In the fortnight between its acquisition of a new commander and a new base the squadron despatched 120 sorties on 12 operations (mostly in the Munster-Osnabruck sector) and lost two crews, both members of one being eventually safe. On one of these operations 418's bombs fell on the edge of the Hochwald Forest, which was alive with Wehrmacht then under heavy attack by the Second Canadian Division.

Jerry waited three days to welcome the new tenants of Coxyde. A reception committee at Dunkirk, barely 11 miles away, laid down a small-scale artillery barrage accurate enough to damage a few aircraft. This did not prevent the Edmontons from operating virtually full blast on 10 of the next 11 nights. From their continental home they now struck at the heart of Germany (e.g. Stendal, Magdeburg) for the first time since their intruder days. With their more advanced situation, and availability of alternate landing-fields close to the scene of operations, their fuel problems were minimized and their striking power considerably increased.

In the last week of March the squadron assisted the Second Army in Operation Plunder (the crossing of the Rhine) and in the final push into north-west Germany. During one of these operations it suffered its last fatal casualties of the war. *Mosquito* C-Charlie failed to return, and later known to have been killed in action near Rooegeveen, Holland, were its crew of F/L George Graham and his RAF navigator, F/O R. T. Styles. This pair had only recently scored against an unusual victim, a small German coaster, which, despite vicious flak, they had attacked from 50 feet and left listing and in flames.

But for a plucky performance by its pilot, another aircraft might well have failed to return in this period. While attacking a target in the Osnabruck area, F/O Alister Nicol was wounded by flak in the

chest and right arm, and his navigator, F/O T. H. Wicken, was even more seriously wounded. Resolutely controlling the aircraft even while rendering all possible aid to the navigator, Nicol reached friendly territory and masterfully landed the damaged *Mosquito* despite his useless arm and weakness resulting from loss of blood. This earned him a DFC.

In April the all-out drive on the ground was accompanied by a similar drive in the air so intensive that, for 418, as with many other Tactical squadrons, the last full calendar month of hostilities was the busiest of all. From the first operation of the month, on 1 April, to the last, on the 26th, the unit flew 273 sorties and operated on all but two nights. On their last 18 working-nights in April they ranged over the Bremen-Hanover area and Berlin's western approaches.

The crescendo of operations in April brought a rising toll of enemy road and rail transport and considerably fattened the individual scores of several pilots. Heading 418's ground strafers was W/C Annan, whose final score of ground targets destroyed or damaged was 50 or more MET\* and eight trains. Also prominent were F/L J. McKittrick, F/O W. N. MacLeod, S/L F. A. Montgomery, F/L W. Drake, and F/O Nicol, with respective total scores of 30, 26, 25, 20, 15 and 12 MET destroyed or damaged. Nicol also destroyed at least 12 freight cars and one locomotive.

\* Mechanized enemy transport.

On 25 April the squadron undertook yet another move to an airfield in another country — Volkel, Holland. Awaiting the squadron there were accommodations which, to most 418 personnel, constituted a novelty — tents. In the next 4 ½ months all the little hardships attendant upon life under canvas were to become only too familiar to the Edmontons.

A few hours after they bivouacked at Volkel the weather went sour. From 26 April through 6 May it hardly stopped raining. Operations were nevertheless carried out on the night of 2 May, when enemy lines of communication were patrolled, and the following night, when a single reconnaissance sortie was flown. These were 418's last operations in time of war.

## VICTORY

The hysteria of victory made the Edmontons forget for a while even their damp tents. Then, within two weeks after the hubbub had subsided, 20 of them were given a full reprieve from the mud and rats of Volkel by being posted. One of these was tour-expired W/C Annan, whose DFC was to be gazetted about three months later. His successor was W/C Howie Cleveland, DFC, who had been briefly interned in Sweden following an operation with 418 almost exactly a year before.

For most of the 21 crews that remained, there were some compensations. On 10 June, for example, they flew in a 1,400-'plane flypast at Frankfurt for the benefit of Marshal Georgei Zhukov. Three weeks later they took part in an air show at Copenhagen, over the same airfield (Katsrup) where they had performed once or twice when it was under German management. Thereafter, while the wheels of demobilisation slowly turned, the discomforts of Volkel had to be endured for about another ten weeks.

On 7 September 1945, after a wartime life of three years, nine months and 23 days, the City of Edmonton Squadron officially ceased to exist.

To assess in capsule form the contribution to victory of a fighting unit, figures are often better than words. In the case of No. 418 Squadron the statistics speak volumes for themselves. In the 37 months from their first operation to their last, 418's crews flew 3492 sorties, all but a score or so in search of the enemy. These sorties kept them airborne for a total of 11,248 hours, a figure practically duplicated on training and communications flights.

During all but four months of their active life the Edmontons sought chiefly to destroy the Luftwaffe wherever they could find it. Their success in this is seen in their long victory-list — 178 E/A

destroyed (73 on the ground), nine "probables" and 103 damaged. All 105 air-to-air kills were registered by visual contact alone, the unit never having had Airborne Interception equipment. In downing these aircraft they must have taken at least as many enemy lives; on the other hand, in destroying 83 V1s they quite possibly saved even more Allied lives.\* Out of these scoring statistics arises one incontrovertible fact: even though 418's "kill" record remained static throughout the war's last six months, in matter of total winged weapons destroyed, manned and unmanned, it was equalled by no other day or night-fighter unit in the RCAF.

\* For every V1 that fell on the U.K., approximately 1.4 people were killed and 4.1 seriously injured.

No less impressive was the squadron's bag of ground targets other than aircraft. Its bombs and guns destroyed approximately 200 motor vehicles and damaged nearly twice that number. Likewise destroyed were 16 locomotives, while 23 were probably destroyed and 36 more were damaged. Some 52 railway freight cars and passenger coaches were destroyed, seriously damaged or derailed, and strikes were scored on at least 50 other trains. Completing the anti-transport list, three barges and trawlers were sunk and about 20 appreciably damaged. Of the static targets attacked, one bridge was known destroyed, 10 factories were damaged, and hundreds of hits were made on searchlights, defensive positions, rail facilities and sundry other objectives.

A comparison of the squadron's kills of conventional E/A and its own operational aircraft losses (59) reveals a 3:1 ratio in its favour. Its aircrew casualties totalled 143, of which 94 were killed or presumed dead, 14 were captured, eight evaded or were safe, and 27 (all non-RCAF) must be listed here under "fate unknown", no information on them being available.

In the lists of honours and awards 418 was well represented, winning 62 decorations for valour on operations. These consisted of three DSOs, nine Bars to the DFC, 43 DFCs, five DFMs, one American DFC, and one U.S. Air Medal. Also bestowed on unit personnel were several King's Commendations and numerous mentions in dispatches.

Of such a squadron the late Air Chief Marshal L. S. Breadner, CB, DSC, once wrote:

"The record blazed across the skies of Europe by the gallant members of 418, the City of Edmonton Squadron, is outstanding in the annals of air warfare. No group of young Canadians . . . displayed more courage, more of the 'press on' spirit, than did these men . . .

"There was no finer spirit in the RCAF than that which impelled the members of 418 to Herculean efforts . . . They were night intruders, a name that had the call to adventure in its very sound. Theirs was a job that called for cool courage, astonishing risks, and individual fortitude excelled by no other branch of the service . . ."

Probably the supreme tribute ever accorded the squadron by anyone outside the RCAF came from the C.O. of Station Ford, W/C G. C. Maxwell, MC, DFC, AFC (RAF), who professed, as he watched its crews head for their aircraft and another operation, "There go the finest pilots and navigators in the world."

## **PEACETIME POSTSCRIPT**

On 15 April 1946 the squadron was re-activated at Edmonton as one of the first units in the RCAF's post-war Auxiliary component. Originally a fighter-bomber squadron equipped with *Mitchells* and *Harvards*, it underwent three designation changes within three years. On 31 March 1958, after nine years on light-bomber duties, it was given an emergency, search and transport role and accordingly converted to C-45 *Expeditors*. More recently the unit acquired two *Otter* aircraft.

In June 1958 the City of Edmonton Squadron acquired an official badge, and, in keeping with the unit's wartime background, a distinctive emblem it was.\* Symbolising the functions of the squadron standing on guard on Canada's northern frontiers, it has as a central figure a harpoon-wielding Eskimo on an ice floe. The first badge ever presented to an RCAF Auxiliary squadron, it also sets two other precedents for squadrons: its design incorporates a human figure and its motto, "Piyautailili" (Defend even unto Death), is in the Eskimo tongue.

\* The designation "City of Edmonton" had been incorporated in the post-war squadron's title in 1952.

**(Reference: The Roundel, 1960, Volume 12, No. 9, 10 / 1961 Volume 13, No. 1, 2, 3)**