

# No. 430 SQUADRON

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WHILE the British Second Army was fighting its way from the beaches of Normandy to the shores of the Baltic, the fighter-reconnaissance pilots of No. 39 (R) Wing kept it fully supplied with information about the disposition and movements of the opposing enemy forces. Included in No. 30 Wing, one of several R.C.A.F. wings in No. 83 Group of Second Tactical Air Force, were three Canadian fighter-recce squadrons (Nos. 400, 414, and 430), with their servicing echelons, two mobile field photographic sections, and an army photo-interpretation section. An R.A.F. squadron, No. 168, also flew with the wing until the beginning of October 1944.

No. 430 Squadron was formed on New Year's Day of 1943 at Hartford Bridge, a satellite of R.A.F. Station Odiham. The first commanding officer of the new unit was Wing Cdr. E. H. G. Moncrieff, A.F.C., who had recently come overseas after a long period of service as chief flying instructor and C.O. at No. 12 S.F.T.S. (Brandon, Man.) where his outstanding work had been recognized by the award of his decoration. Nos. 400 and 414 Squadrons provided a nucleus of experienced personnel for the new squadron, which soon reached a strength of 16 pilots (all officers) and 240 ground staff, including a small army liaison section.

As soon as the initial stages of organization had been completed at Hartford Bridge, No. 430 moved to Dunsfold, a new airfield which the Royal Canadian Engineers had constructed in Surrey to accommodate the R.C.A.F. army co-operation squadrons. Here Wing Cdr. Moncrieff's unit began intensive air and ground training to prepare for operations against the enemy. Exercises with the British and Canadian Armies were an important part of this training, on which the pilots practised tactical, photographic and artillery reconnaissance, message-dropping, and "beat-ups." Initially the squadron was equipped with Tomahawks.

These were soon replaced, late in January, by Mustangs, and this latter type remained in use until the end of December 1944. Flying accidents during the early months of training resulted in the death of three officers, Flying Officers G. F. R. Jackson, R. B. Reed, and P. R. S. Brouillette. Another pilot was seriously injured.

On 1 June 1943, Army Co-Operation Command, to which No. 430 Squadron had been assigned since its formation, was disbanded; Wing Cdr. Moncrieff's unit was transferred to Fighter Command, and then, a few weeks later, was assigned to No. 83 Group in 2nd T.A.F. The change in designation from an army co-operation to a fighter-reconnaissance squadron coincided with the beginning of No. 430's operations against the enemy. There was no opportunity at this time for the pilots to carry out on the field of battle the various army co-operation tasks, which they had been practising (they had to wait a year for that opportunity to come), but in the interval they were able to flex their muscles on "rhubarbs" and "populars." "Rhubarb" was the code-word for an offensive operation against ground targets, carried out normally by a team of two pilots who flew "on the deck" in search of freight trains, vehicles, or other suitable targets for their bullets. Adequate cloud-cover was essential for the

success of these sorties, and, as a result, the ratio of abortive missions was always high. The first five "rhubarbs" attempted by the squadron had to be abandoned on account of unsuitable weather over the French coastal area, but the sixth mission, by Flt. Lt. N. S. Clarke and Flying Officer T. M. Pethick on 1 June, finally succeeded. Two locomotives and several freight cars were damaged by the pilots' bursts of fire.

"Rhubarb" operations continued at intervals, when weather conditions were favourable, through the next six months and resulted in a total bag of at least 30 locomotives, about 15 electric pylons, and a miscellaneous collection of freight cars, boats, sheds and vehicles, destroyed or damaged; a power sub-station, a hangar, and a flak post, were also targets for the strafing Mustangs. Particularly noteworthy was one "rhubarb" on 2 November by Flying Officers R. B. Moore and V. C. Dohaney, who ranged over the Somme valley, leaving behind them a trail of ten or eleven damaged engines and five battered pylons. Enemy fighters had little chance to intercept the fast low-flying Mustangs, but flak was a constant menace. Three pilots (Flying Officers T. M. Pethick, R. G. McKessock and J. R. Wardrope) were killed on these operations.

If the "rhubarbs" may be taken to represent the fighter aspect of the squadron's role, its reconnaissance function was carried out in a long series of "populars," or photographic missions along the enemy-held coast. Like the "rhubarb," the "popular" sortie was usually done by a team of two pilots, one of whom did the camera runs while the other acted as "weaver" to guard against surprise attack by enemy aircraft. Most of the missions were flown over the French coast, between the mouth of the Seine and the tip of the Cherbourg peninsula, to gather information required by the staffs as they drew up the plans for "Overlord," the landings in Normandy. Sometimes the Mustangs went farther afield, to Brittany, the Pas de Calais, or the coast of the Netherlands. Flying Officer B. Emmerson was lost on one long sortie across the North Sea to photograph enemy coastal batteries, when engine failure caused his aircraft to crash into the waves.

Shortly after starting its strafing and photographic operations, the squadron moved from Dunsfold to Gatwick, and then, six weeks later, went to Ashford to spend two months under canvas. Wing Cdr. Moncrieff left the squadron when it moved to Gatwick, to take command of No. 129 Airfield, of which No. 430 now became a unit. Sqn. Ldr. R. A. Ellis, D.F.C., succeeded Moncrieff as C.O. of the squadron until the middle of September 1943, when he was posted to No. 400 Squadron and relinquished his command to F. H. Chesters.

When summer ended and tent life became less pleasant, the squadron returned to winter quarters at Gatwick, where it remained, except for two brief interruptions, until the end of March 1944. One interruption took it far north to Peterhead, in Scotland, for a fortnight on an air-firing course. The other interruption, in February, was to participate in an army exercise at York, on which the pilots learned many valuable lessons and received commendation for their "magnificent" work. During this period No. 430 was adopted by the City of Sudbury, an act which not only gave the unit its war-time nickname, but also resulted in many generous gifts of cigarettes, food, and other comforts.

Weather conditions through the winter months were seldom favourable for photographic reconnaissance, and as a result the squadron's record of operations fell off sharply between October 1943 and February 1944. This quiet period ended with the advent of spring and the opening of the intensive aerial preparation for "Overlord." Between 28 February, when the squadron resumed operations after its excursion to Yorkshire, and the eve of D-Day, Sqn. Ldr. Chesters' pilots flew 359 sorties over northern France and Belgium. Much of their work was to photograph the flying-bomb sites, which the Germans were busily constructing in several coastal areas. They also continued to gather information about coastlines, bridges, defences, and rail traffic, which the invasion planners

required; and frequently the Mustangs accompanied formations of fighter-bombers to obtain on-the-spot pictorial evidence of their attacks upon enemy targets.

The work which the fighter-recce squadrons did during the pre-invasion period elicited an expression of gratitude from Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force for "the magnificent way our demands for photography of all descriptions have been met, both in the past few weeks and in the long months of planning that now lie behind." The railway reconnaissances in particular were "of outstanding value" for the light which they threw upon the enemy's intentions.

On 1 April 1944, Sqn. Ldr. Chesters' squadron left its comfortable quarters at Gatwick and set up its tents at Odiham, transferring at the same time to No. 128 Airfield, the other component of No. 39 Wing. When D-Day came, the squadron had been on operations for just over one year; in that time it had recorded about 750 sorties on photographic and other missions. The invasion — which at last gave the pilots the opportunity to carry out the army co-operation role which they had been practising for the past year — brought a sharp increase in the tempo of operations; and in the three months, June to August 1944, the squadron flew more than double the number of sorties it had logged in the previous twelve months.

Casualties also were more numerous, five pilots being reported missing in the first three weeks of the invasion. Flying Officer J. S. Cox was shot down and killed in an encounter with some Focke-Wulfs in the late afternoon of D-Day. On 17 June, Flt. Lt. R. B. Moore was lost in another engagement with enemy fighters; and four days later, Flying Officers C. E. Butchart and H. K. Jones did not return from a reconnaissance into the Dreux area. Butchart was later reported a prisoner of war; his companion was presumed dead. Then, on the 28th, Flying Officer F. H. Bryon was shot down by some Me. 109's while making a sortie from a landing-strip on the beach-head. To provide greater protection, the recce missions were increased for a time to four pilots and, when possible, were tied in with our own fighter patrols.

For three weeks after D-Day the squadron continued to operate from Odiham, flying across the Channel to make tactical recces over the roads and railways leading to the battle area. Significant concentrations of vehicles and rolling stock were photographed. Some artillery "shoots" were also carried out in order to range our guns on hostile targets.

On 22 June the pilots began using landing-strips on the beach-head to refuel and rearm between sorties. A week later the squadron flew across to B.8, one of the new strips at Sommervieu, near Bayeux, where it was within very close range of the fighting-front. While the Army was battling to capture Caen and fight its way down the highway to Falaise, No. 430 was busy on tactical recces to keep daily check on the enemy's movements and bring back photographs which were printed in wholesale quantities for the Army staffs. On 25 July, when the Canadian 2nd Corps opened an offensive south of Caen, the squadron's operations reached a peak with 50 sorties flown between dawn and dusk. Flt. Lt. Wolf was lost on a recce around Vire in the last days of July.

August was the busiest month in the squadron's history, with a record total of 608 sorties. The wing's photographic sections were especially busy answering the Army's requirements for pictures: the total for the month was well over 800,000 prints, the output for one day being no less than 44,236. Enemy road traffic increased as the Nazis first tried to move their armour westward in a vain attempt to check the American break-through, and then sought to pull their forces out of the iron pocket that was closing in on them at Falaise and Argentan. The fighter-recce pilots found many attractive targets for our fighters and fighter-bombers. No. 430's Mustangs couldn't resist the temptation to take a few cracks at the enemy, and claimed three vehicles and four armoured cars. An F.W. 190 was also damaged by Flt. Lt. R. F. Gill when he and a companion were attacked by more than 40 enemy fighters near Alengon. Turning in to meet the attackers, the two Mustang pilots got in quick bursts

before diving to the deck to make their escape. Flak, always a much greater menace than the German fighter force, was responsible for the only casualty in August, when Flying Officer F. C. Goring was shot down on a reconnaissance around Falaise.

As the battle moved farther inland, the wing advanced on 14 August from Sommervieu to B.21 at St. Honorine de Ducey, near Caumont. For the next fortnight the pilots kept watch over the Falaise "pocket" and the Nazi retreat eastward to, and beyond, the Seine. As the Allied armies raced onward in pursuit, the recce pilots added "contact/R's" to their repertoire. After taking off, the pilots reported by R/T to a forward control post (a recce car moving with the advance ground elements) and received instructions for any special mission, which the Army desired. One day, when Flying Officers J. A. Lowndes and K. K. Charman were flying near the Seine, a pair of F.W. 190's sought to engage the Mustangs. Lowndes quickly got on the tail of one, which he destroyed, and then drove off the other fighter.

By the end of August the battle had receded out of effective range of the airfield at St. Honorine. On 1 September the wing moved forward again to B.34 at Avrilly, about 40 miles west of Paris. After a few days, however, this base too was left out of range, and it was a fortnight before Sqn. Ldr. Chesters' unit was able to re-enter the battle. In the interval, a detachment of four pilots was sent ahead to Poix and thence to Melsbroek to continue work with the Army as it advanced across Belgium into the Netherlands. On 20 September, No. 430 moved up to Diest (B.66) in north-eastern Belgium. On one of the first operations from this base, Flt. Lt. J. W. Cowling was lost, probably as a result of bad weather. Early in October, Sqn. Ldr. Frank Chesters reached the end of his tour and was succeeded in command by Jack Watts, one of the flight commanders.

The airfield at Diest was poorly drained, with the result that the frequent autumn rains soon made it a sea of mud. After a fortnight the wing pulled out of the mud and moved on to Eindhoven (B.78), in the Netherlands, where the pilots settled down for a long five-month stay, during which their major occupation was keeping watch on the enemy along the Rhine and Maas rivers. October was fairly busy, but thereafter the tempo of operations diminished as the persistent fog of late autumn and winter made its effect felt. In the four months, November 1944 through February 1945, No. 430 averaged only 260 sorties. Five pilots were lost while the squadron was at Eindhoven. Flt. Lt. I. M. Duff, Flt. Lt. J. N. McLeod, and Flying Officer G. S. Taylor, were killed in accidents due to engine trouble, while the enemy flak gunners brought down Flt. Lt. J. D. McIlveen and Flt. Lt. E. F. Ashdown, both of whom baled out behind the lines and were taken prisoner.

By the time the squadron moved to Eindhoven, the Mustangs were beginning to show the effect of age; for, despite the zealous work of the ground crews, serviceability was a depressing problem. In November, conversion to Spitfire XIV's began, the change-over being completed by the end of the year.

On 16 December, the Nazis launched their counter-offensive through the Ardennes. For the next six weeks much of No. 430's activity was concentrated over the area to the south, where the "Battle of the Bulge" was being fought. To shorten the flying time to this new front, a detachment of eight pilots and ground crews was sent to Ophoven (on 31 December), where operations were carried out in support of the 30th Corps until 21 January, when the detachment returned to Eindhoven.

While the detachment was away, the airfield at Eindhoven was strafed by a force of enemy fighters in the famous New-Year's-Morning raid. No. 430 had two pilots and three airmen wounded in the attack, while four of its thirteen aircraft were destroyed and three more badly damaged. Lack of aircraft and bad weather curtailed activities for some days, but by the middle of January the squadron was again operating normally.

In February, the Battle of the Rhineland began as the Canadian First Army opened an offensive from the Nijmegen area south-eastward through the Reichswald. No. 430 was not directly involved in the battle to the north of its tactical area, but, so far as the handicap of low skies permitted, it made recce over the road and rail centres in the Rhineland to keep tab on enemy movements, and also carried out numerous "shoots" against targets in the Geldern, Roermond and Venlo sectors. Early in March the left bank of the Rhine was cleared of the enemy, and preparations began to cross the river and advance to the Elbe.

Sqn. Ldr. Jack Watts had now reached the end of his tour, and Cal Bricker took over command of the squadron as it moved to Petit Brogel (B.90), in northeastern Belgium, in readiness for the attack across the Rhine at Wesel. Prior to the assault, No. 39 Wing was particularly busy securing up-to-date photographs of objectives for the use of the airborne troops. In the five days preceding the Rhine crossing, the wing's two photo sections produced 286,500 prints from 32,091 negatives, using four miles of film and thirty-six miles of photographic paper. When the Rhine defences had been breached and the Second Army drove northeastward to Bremen and Hamburg, and across the Elbe to the Baltic coast, the fighter-recce pilots flew along the axis of the advance, keeping the troops informed of the situation on their immediate front. In the last two months of the campaign Sqn. Ldr. Bricker's pilots made almost 1000 sorties on photographic, tactical, contact, and artillery reconnaissance. Two pilots were killed in this period: Flying Officer L. P. Hedley, as a result of engine trouble, and Flying Officer G. W. Bouck, probably due to weather conditions.

From Petit Brogel the squadron crossed the frontier into Germany on 10 April, operated from Rheine (B.108) for a week, pushed on to Wunstorf (B.116) for twelve days, and then advanced to Reinschlen (B.154), near Soltau, where it remained until V-E Day. Despite these frequent moves, operations continued without interruption. The German flak defences remained in action to the very end, but little was seen of the enemy air force. In one of the rare encounters, Flt. Lt. W. M. Middleton destroyed an F.W. 190, which attempted to intercept his section while the two pilots were reconnoitring around Ulzen. Some of the squadron's last operations were shipping-reconnaissances from the mouth of the Weser around to the Elbe and north to Kiel. Other recce over the area between the Elbe and the Baltic brought back reports of confusion along the German roads as troops and civilians fled before the converging Allied and Russian forces.

Sqn. Ldr. Cal Bricker's tour ended just as operations ceased, and H. W. Russell took command during the squadron's final three months overseas. On V-E Day, No. 430 moved from Soltau to B.156, at Luneburg, where it settled down in luxurious accommodation to a routine of flying training, sports, and speculation about the future. Late in July the squadron returned to England for an air-firing course. Before the course ended, the pilots and ground crews were recalled to Luneburg, and, on 7 August 1945, No. 430 Squadron was disbanded.

Just over 31 months had elapsed since the squadron had been formed at Hartford Bridge. In that time 97 pilots had served with the unit; training accidents had caused three fatalities, while operational casualties totalled 19 (three pilots killed, 13 presumed dead, and three prisoners of war). Seventeen pilots received the Operational Wings badge for completing a tour with No. 430, and eleven were decorated for their services: Flying Officers V. C. Dohaney, R. H. Rohmer, Sqn. Ldr. C. D. Bricker, Flt. Lt. J. B. Prendergast, Flying Officer E. J. Geddes, Flt. Lts. C. F. B. Stevens, E. S. Dunn, W. M. Middleton, and E. F. J. Clark, were awarded the D.F.C.; Flt. Lt. R. F. Gill received the U.S. Air Medal, and Flying Officer J. A. Lowndes the French Croix de Guerre.

The story of No. 430 Squadron's long tour as "the eyes of the Army" may be closed with a tribute, which the commander of the British Second Army sent to No. 39 Wing after operations ended.

"We of Second Army realize very well how much we owe to the Royal Air Force and, in particular, to 83 Group. And none of their achievements in the air has been of greater help to us than the consistently splendid work of 39 Reconnaissance Wing, R.C.A.F. In all weathers and in all conditions you have flown for us on your reconnaissance and photographic missions. The results you have achieved have enabled us to set about our business as fully-equipped with information of the enemy as we could ever hope to be. On behalf of Second Army, I give you my thanks."

On 1 November 1951, No. 430 Squadron was reformed at North Bay, Ontario, as a Sabre jet fighter unit in Air Defence Command. After a period of training, it was detailed for duty overseas, and, in the autumn of 1952, took part in "Leap-Frog Two," the mass flight of three Sabre squadrons from Canada to Europe. No. 430 is now based at Grostenquin, France, as one of the three squadrons in No. 2 Fighter Wing of the R.C.A.F.'s Air Division.