

THE FLYING ELEPHANTS

History of No. 436 Squadron

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SUMMER, 1944. As the invasion of Normandy neared its climax, some 6000 miles to the south-east another Allied offensive was under way. With the coincidence of time, however, any similarity between the two ended. Granted, "Overlord" involved supply problems of staggering magnitude and complexity; but by comparison, the campaign to kick the Japanese out of India and Burma constituted nothing less than a logistical and geopolitical nightmare.

A condition long recognized as one of the area's main causes of economic underdevelopment — lack of an adequate overland transportation system — had now been inherited by the Supreme Commander South-East Asia. Retarded technology and the tropical monsoon compounded the problem. The former necessitated importation by sea of most of the Allied Forces' needs, which meant a rail and road transfer to the forward area from depots at Calcutta, Karachi, Bombay, Madras, Lahore, and Allahabad over distances up to 2,000 miles. (* Ports closer to the forward areas were in Japanese hands.) Inevitably delays were caused by variance in railway gauge in India (necessitating unloading and reloading) and shortage of rolling-stock, among other factors. The monsoon brought heavy rains that washed out sections of track and made the few existing roads virtually impassable. As a result, an overland trip that would have taken two days in Canada required as much as two months in India-Burma. Already formidable enough, these supply problems were magnified in a country of mountains and jungle.

Air Power held the answer. Only increased use of aircraft to the point of initiating a major-scale air transport service would solve the problem of long supply-lines and ensure, whenever and wherever necessary, prompt delivery of troops and war materiel to the battle fronts and quick evacuation of casualties. With the build-up of such a service in the summer and early autumn of 1944 there were created two new Canadian squadrons, one of which was designated "436". (* The other was "435", whose history appeared in *THE ROUNDUP* Vol. 5 No. 2, Feb. 53.)

It was on 7 September 1944, to be exact, that 436 Squadron was authorized to form. Though the first Canadian squadron to be officially created in the Far East, the unit existed only on paper until 9 October when the body corporate began to assemble at Gujrat, a fighter base high in the Punjab near the border of Kashmir.

Temporarily in charge, pending the arrival of the CO-designate, was W/C D. C. S. MacDonald, DFC, a staff officer from 229 Group HQ who had been very active in preparing for the organization of both 435 and 436 Sqns. To solve a temporary shortage of senior air force officers in India, he now bore a quadruple responsibility as station commander, OC both squadrons, and staff officer. This led to some interesting developments, not the least of which was a unique situation regarding chain of command.

With the arrival on 21 October of the first intakes of ground personnel, the embryo unit became a squadron in fact as well as in name. Ten days later W/C R. A. Gordon reported to take over one of W/C MacDonald's portfolios (i.e. command of 436), and hard on his heels came his flight commanders, S/Ls R. A. Denison and J. K. Herriot. The squadron's original member was its adjutant, F/L R. S. McCartney, who at one time had been the sole embodiment of the unit for something like three weeks.

By November, 436 was a working entity with enough personnel and aircraft (*Dakota* III and IV) to start intensive training for its role of air transport in direct support of units of the Fifteenth Army. Belonging

to 229 Group, it was part of an RAF-USAAF-RCAF military airline known as Combat Cargo Task Force.

By mid-November the squadron was undergoing training in combined operations. On the 17th W/C Gordon led seven *Dakotas* laden with paratroops and containers in a practice precision para-drop. It was excellently timed, all troops being put on the DZ (* Dropping zone.) in 45 seconds and a mere 11 seconds after the appointed hour. This reputedly marked the first time in India that a full complement of paratroopers and containers had been dropped simultaneously from *Dakotas*. Three more practice drops (with time errors of only five, seven, and nine seconds) before the end of November helped the unit exceed the monthly quota of training hours (1500 for a squadron at full strength) with four days to spare, this despite the fact that it was only at three-quarters strength in personnel and aircraft and was hindered by shortages of fuel tenders and other servicing equipment.

One of the drops was witnessed by Major-General E. E. Down, SEAC's Chief of Airborne Operations, who called it "the best bit of paratrooping I have ever seen". He added that, to be sure of returning to his headquarters with a smile on his face, he planned to watch still another exercise ("Hawk") in which 436 was to take part. Regarding "Hawk", however, it must be recorded that neither Dame Fortune nor the general smiled on 436. Frustrated by lack of pin-points en route to the DZ and by trees that obscured the smoke signals, crews missed the DZ by a mile and dropped 5½ minutes late. (* A pity it was that the general was not on hand 48 hours later when 436 collaborated with 435 in Exercise "Blackbird". All troops and containers hit the DZ with a timing error of only three seconds.)

And there were other setbacks. On 21 and 22 November, respectively there occurred one ground incident and one air accident. The former came about during the retrieving of parachutes after a practice drop. Two 'chutes had unfortunately fallen on a village, and on this account the natives were quite definitely hostile, flourishing knives to drive away our personnel and warning them to stay away. The accident concerned an aircraft which had crash-landed after becoming lost during a night crosscountry. There were no casualties, thanks to the skill of the pilot who had to grope for the ground in darkness.

The all-out training program continued throughout the first half of December. Four more para-drops were carried out, one (Exercise "Mary") being noteworthy for leading off one of the more hectic flying splurges in 436's history.

Immediately after the above exercise (in fact, 436 contemporaries still wonder if they'll ever be debriefed for "Mary") crews were briefed for a task which, though not an operation within the strict interpretation of their terms of reference, was nevertheless recognized as such. They were to move 117 (RAF) Sqn. from Bikram to Hathazari, both in East Pakistan and over 1300 miles south-east of Gujrat. Despite having to fly over unfamiliar country and through dirty weather at night without navigational aids, all 16 crews reached their destination and did the job on schedule. On 13 December, after doing a glider-tow from Bihta to Fhatejang, they returned to base. They had been away about four days and had been airborne nearly 40 per cent of that time.

Two days later they were ordered to prepare immediately to move themselves to the forward area. Their hopes for early frontline duty were, however, deflated at the eleventh hour; it developed that they remained at Gujrat and helped to move into the line their sister squadron, 435. Thus, even while themselves being temporarily denied what they most wanted, they had at least been instrumental in assisting into operational orbit two other squadrons.

Otherwise in matter of flying activity the Christmas-New Year season of 1944-45 was relatively quiet for 436 and constituted the only partial respite in its active wartime history. Christmas atmosphere did not come easily in the desert-like Punjab, but everyone tried to improvise. In this connection the officers bent over backwards to share what few treats they had with the airmen. Through the months ahead the latter were to prove that all such shows of appreciation were eminently deserved.

On 4 January 1945 the squadron was ordered to move to Kangla and be fully operational by the 15th. It was as good a time as any to be vacating Gujarat, for only the night before heavy rain had caused the roof over the CO's (uninhabited) office to collapse, and in several other offices rivulets of mud were trickling down the walls. The 1300-mile self-airlift to Kangla was the longest overland move undertaken by an RCAF squadron overseas.

At the new base all hands of the advance party, officers included, turned to the task of unloading the aircraft and setting-up camp by the airstrip, a task hardly facilitated by the lack of drinking water and motor transport. (* The USAF eased the situation by lending the squadron a full 200-gallon water trailer and a jeep.) Considerable side-hill gouging had to be done to accommodate the overflow of tentage caused by the presence of 436 personnel plus members of the outgoing unit (42 Sqn., RAF) who had not yet given up the premises.

Overcrowded Kangla, which was little more than an airstrip hemmed-in by a sea of tents, was situated about eight miles north-west of the town of Imphal, Manipur, and 40 miles from the India-Burma border. Eight months or so before, Imphal had been relieved after an 80-day siege by the Japanese. Counter-attacking in May 1944, the Allies had cleared the Imphal-Kohima road and the Fourteenth Army had begun its drive to liberate Burma. It pushed the enemy back across the Chin Hills, crossed the Chindwin River, surged onto the Shwebo Plain and, barely a week before 436 arrived at Kangla, had recaptured Shwebo. Now was to begin a drive on Mandalay, an important part of which was the build-up of Shwebo as a key supply base for the army's main body and forward elements. It was in connection with this build-up that 436's first ground-support operations were flown, on 15 January 1945.

The tactical debut involved seven aircraft and their four- or five-man crews in the transport of fuel, food and medical supplies to 33 Corps at Shwebo, 180-odd miles to the southeast. That day they para-dropped, free-dropped or landed 45 tons of payload without incident, and the fighter escort of *Thunderbolts* around the DZ proved unnecessary. The honour of delivering the unit's first load fell to F/L W. S. Robertson (captain), Sgt. B. J. Vincent, RAF (2nd pilot), F/L J. W. Dolphin (nav.) and P/O R. W. Eves (wop.). This crew and S/L Denison's each flew three complete sorties in just over nine hours. To help effect speedy turn-arounds between loads, aircrew subsisted on "K" rations throughout the day.

The squadron now took on a variety of commitments. While some crews supplied 33 Corps at Ye-u and evacuated casualties there from, others delivered aircraft fuel and oil to RAF fighter strips in the forward area and relieved their own housing situation by airlifting 42 Sqn.'s personnel and effects out of Kangla.

At first, to take full advantage of the aircraft's green camouflage and lessen the chance of fighter attack, flights were made mostly at tree-top level. The rare opportunity to indulge in legitimate low-flying to their hearts' content was available to pilots until roughly mid-March, by which time enemy fighters were no longer considered a serious threat. Many hundreds of hours of on-the-deck flying were to be logged, with all eyes straining to pick out Oscars (* Japanese fighter aircraft.) and avoid collision with birds, especially vultures.

The very act of dropping loads was not without its hazards. During the unit's second operational drop, for example, one outgoing bundle fouled on the door and tore it loose. The door hit the tailplane and caused considerable damage, but not enough to prevent safe completion of the flight.

It took 436 less than a week to begin making a name for itself. On 21 and 22 January it topped all squadrons in the Group in matter of tonnage delivered, a feat it was to duplicate again and again in the next eight months. These achievements were realized in spite of two main adverse factors — fogged-in DZs and a shortage of unloading personnel. (* The shortage had existed almost from the beginning, the aircrew themselves having to off-load freight to gain time and manage an extra sortie before dark at the destination

airstrip.) Valley mist forced captains to orbit their DZs for as long as two hours and wait for it to clear. Adding to the unloading problem was the refusal, on religious grounds, of Shwebo's East Africans to unload meat.

Whereas there was no way of controlling fog or religious convictions, something could be done about the unloading problem in general. In unit orders of 22 January there appeared the following notice:

"Groundcrew personnel are to be employed as members of aircrews to assist in off-loading cargoes. Airmen detailed will be entitled to 75c per day crew pay whilst so employed. Duration of detail will probably be two weeks. It is pointed out that the work will be heavy and arduous. All airmen desirous of flying with aircrews are to report to the Squadron Warrant Officer..."

The appeal was well heeded. So emerged 436's version of the crewman, a hybrid species of airman who flew but was not aircrew, who also toiled in his accustomed ground environment but was constantly on call to take to the air. When airborne, the crewman reverted from his normal trade to the duties of a "kicker", whose inflight job was to expel by vigorous footwork supply-bundles through the aircraft's open door, while clinging for dear life to whatever hand-grip was available. For a nominal monetary increment this volunteer shared with the aircrew all the hazards of wartime operational flying over tropical jungle. Additional crewman responsibilities included supervision of loading and assistance in the inspection, fueling and starting-up of aircraft.

To one crewman and four other members of the squadron early in February 1945 the hazardous nature of jungle flying became only too well known. Returning from Sinthe to Kangla after completing a four-sortie day, Dakota KJ845 became lost. After a struggle to get a homing, unsuccessful because of atmospheric, jamming, and possible Japanese deception, the captain, S/L Dick Denison, decided to abandon the aircraft. Excerpts from his description of subsequent events follow:

"We climbed steadily to 9,000 feet using all available power . . . At this point the port engine failed completely . . . Fuel was very low and I ordered the crew into their parachute harness. I cleared everyone to the rear exit. LAC L. V. Vannes (the crewman) removed the inner cargo-door and . . . Sgt. T. F. Laffey (the Australian wireless operator) made sure the detonator was in the IFF*. I steadied the aircraft and gave the signal to go.

The crew worked efficiently and followed my orders quickly and implicitly. They left the aircraft in an orderly manner. Vannes, Lindsay (F/L W. D. Lindsay, navigator), Lee (F/O E. G. Lee, second pilot), and Laffey . . . Laffey, who had jumped before, gave each of us brief instructions on how best to land . . . I left the controls and, after considerable difficulty, managed to capture my chest-pack but could not get hold of my jungle kit as the aircraft had commenced a steep spiral dive. I managed to crawl out of the doorway about a minute after the others . . .

Almost at once I saw a river which I was almost certain was the Chindwin . . . As I neared the ground I tried to spill my 'chute to drift over the river, but I misjudged my height and dropped neatly in the middle of the stream . . . I drifted down to a sandbar . . . and from there managed to bring myself and "chute to shore.

* Identification Friend or Foe, a radio device that identified our aircraft as friendly.

I was quite tired by the time I reached the bank, and, sitting down for a breathing spell, I saw the signal flare go up from across the river. This had been pre-arranged with my WOP to help the crew consolidate on the ground . . . The flare had come from a point half a mile away but I couldn't attract their attention and felt too weary to swim the river. The night was spent trying to keep warm in narrow sand trenches which I scooped into the beach . . . I got a little sleep at intervals.

In the morning I checked my position with a compass rose drawn in the sand . . . I spread out my 'chute in case of searching aircraft and after a few minutes' walk met a native, who co-operated in every way. He took me into his little hut, brought out a coat, and insisted I sleep. He woke me . . . and his wife provided food & tea . . . He and a neighbour indicated by gestures that they wished to take me to a small village called Homalin, where someone spoke English. I was put in a dug-out canoe . . . and after a two-hour paddle upstream we arrived at an imposing little village. My whole crew was there to greet me and no one was hurt."

It was Laffey who had fired the flare. He had bailed out loaded down with medical and jungle kit, water bottles and K-rations, pistol and cartridges. Landing rather heavily on a sandspit in the river, he waited ten minutes before giving the signal. He guided Vannes to his position by the glow of a cigarette, then went to look for F/O Lee, who, after being found, collapsed from concussion and

shock. Ensuring that Lee had no broken bones, he took him to where Vannes was waiting and wrapped him warmly in a parachute. Presently the trio were joined by F/L Lindsay. Later on, Laffey and Vannes investigated a fire by the river and there came upon friendly natives who gesticulated to them about "the Englishman at Homalin".

At dawn next morning the four shared two chocolate bars for breakfast, laid out parachutes for aerial searchers, filled their bottles with river water (which they chlorinated), and set out along the river bank in search of S/L Denison. Seeing no sign of him, they followed a jungle trail to a village, whence, after a palaver with natives, they were ferried across the river and taken to Homalin. There, at the British District Commissioners' headquarters, they were later re-united with S/L Denison.

Next morning W/C Gordon, who had taken a quick check-out ride in a *Stinson L.5*, led a flight of such aircraft (borrowed from 194 Sqn) to an airstrip near Homalin*, and by noon the crew had rejoined their unit. They had been the first of 436 to take a look at Burma on the ground.

* While there, he combined with business some effective community-relations work, taking the village chief and a boy for their first aeroplane ride and simultaneously searching for the wrecked *Dakota*. The overjoyed Burmese showed their appreciation by directing him promptly to the crash scene.

Three days before the last flight of KJ845 two official pronouncements concerning flying policy had been received. First, the operational tour of transport support personnel in S.E.A. had been extended from 500 to 700 hours. Secondly, squadrons were now restricted to 2500 flying hours a month. The progressive spirit of the Elephants was nevertheless irrepressible. In February they logged 4182 hours, in May 4315, in June 4767, and in July 4999.

Mildly rebellious though this may have seemed to the hierarchy at Group and Command Headquarters, it was rebelliousness in a healthy form, manifesting an uncommonly enthusiastic spirit. It was not the only time 436 was to overlook a regulation for the sake of increased operational output. Moreover, these decisions to deviate from the rule proved so strongly justified, so obviously sensible, that even the lightest official rebuke was unthinkable.

The very next day the unit set another squadron record for tonnage delivered. In 73 sorties it airlifted 223½ tons of freight alone, representing the second-highest total for any day in the squadron's wartime history. The mark was to stand for nearly four months.

Meanwhile, the squadron was maintaining a hot pace of flying. In addition to airlifting a steady flow of supplies to the ground troops, evacuating casualties, and looking for their own lost aircraft, the Elephants (* The nickname was in use even though the squadron badge was not yet official.) in one two-week period moved four RAF squadrons and a wing headquarters to more advantageous locations. Occasionally they even carried bombs — for some other squadron to drop. Also on behalf of other squadrons they delivered ammunition and another volatile cargo — highly inflammable aircraft fuel. During this period they co-operated with nine USAAF C-46 *Commando* crews stationed at Tulihal. The Americans, who were briefed and debriefed by 436, returned after each day's operations to their own base for overnight accommodation.

Statistics for the first month of operations showed that already the Elephants were averaging more operational flying hours than other Transport squadrons (*Dakota* or *Commando*) in the forward area. Cognisant of the contribution made by the groundcrew, more especially the maintenance crews, the aircrew arranged a party for them featuring imported gastronomical delights which most of them had forgotten existed. Furthermore, the officers agreed to sacrifice for the airmen's benefit their entire beer ration for the duration. Greater love hath no man than that!

Other morale-building factors were more subtle but had a more deep-seated effect. As evidenced in their letters home, the airmen well appreciated the fact that the officers were no better off than

they were with regard to food (the communal dining-room fare was normally a cut or two below The Ritz' standard) and general living conditions. The spirit of sharing was extended even to manual labour, in connection with operations or menial camp-chores, which led at least one airman to criticize the officers for overdoing it! Another aid-to-morale was the participation in operations by many of the airmen acting as crewmen. Having seen air supply in action, they were better able to realize the importance of their ground duties, the end result being a boost in self-respect and, consequently, in morale.

Operations continued apace, the principal points of call being Sinthe, Allagappa, Monywa, Sadaung and Shwebo, most of which were newly-captured airstrips within light-artillery range of the front line. It was on the Allagappa airlift of 20 February that the Elephants first became enemy-conscious. Returning crews warned of Japanese patrols active in the area, and all aircraft had to be off the airstrip before nightfall. Crews were also cautioned to watch for enemy fighters over the Allagappa district. On the 26th, crews en route to their various destinations were informed by W/T that Jap interceptors were operating in the vicinity of Sinthe. The Sinthe-bound aircraft pressed on, however, and, as at Allagappa, no airborne opposition was met.

Thus, without further untoward events, the Elephants completed their first calendar month of operations. For the 28-day period they could point to some impressive statistics: 1625 sorties, 4182 operational hours, 4903 tons of payload (exclusive of 1459 passengers and casualties).

SOMETHING more tangible than warnings and vague sensings of the Nipponese presence in Burma occurred on 2 March 1945. No. 436 Sqn. crews had a bird's-eye view of ground action in the form of shell-bursts and gun-flashes along the battle line near their dropping zones (DZs). More of the same was seen the next day, when Meiktila, an important communications centre, was wrested from the enemy. Its capture meant the severance of the trunk road and main railway between Rangoon and Mandalay and the cutting-off of the enemy's reinforcements and supplies for the latter city's defence.

Less than three days after the taking of Meiktila, with fighting still in progress on the fringes of the town, the Flying Elephants were landing *Dakotas* on its airstrip and making para-drops under cover of our fighters. Sustained largely from the air, the 14th Army was able to make a quick thrust toward Mandalay, reaching its outskirts on 8 March.

On 10 March the Elephants began a 340-mile move by air to Mawmubyin, Burma, near Akyab on the Bay of Bengal. A move in a relatively isolated theatre of war inevitably meant more than the normal amount of drudgery. In this case the advance party had to establish messing quarters, plan domestic, technical and headquarters lay-outs, provide garbage-disposal and other indispensable facilities, set up internal telephone communications and receive in-coming motor transport and equipment.

While the move was in progress, operations with a stipulated 10 aircraft continued from Kangla. The movement order presupposed a five-day stand-down from operations (after 14 March) during the re-adjustment period at Akyab. The Elephants however, saw no sense in wasting five days. They continued to supply the Army from Kangla until 19 March, inclusive, and then, right on schedule, began operating from Akyab. In fact, airlift was only slightly hindered by the move, a daily supply average of 134 tons plus 63 passengers and casualties having been carried during a period which, it had been assumed, would show an operational zero.

The only fatal accidents to befall the squadron in South-East Asia occurred on 13 and 14 March. Two *Dakotas* engaged in moving unit equipment to Akyab were standing near Mawmubyin airstrip (which served Akyab) when a *Beaufighter*, making an emergency landing, hit the tail of one and crashed squarely into the other. The co-pilot of the latter aircraft, FS E.G. England (RNZAF), later died of injuries. The second fatality was AC1 L. Blondeau, who succumbed to injuries received in a diving accident during a swimming period.

There could well have been more casualties a week later, when airstrips in the Meiktila district came under fire of Japanese units obviously bent on recapturing them. For two crews on the 21st it was too close for comfort, F/O W. Davidson's aircraft absorbing three bullets near the tail and F/O W. J. Holland's having a fuel tank drained by one well-placed round. In the latter case another bullet missed the co-pilot by inches. More shells found the Meiktila strip on 22 March and were probably responsible for the destruction of the control tower. At any rate, the strip had to be closed to traffic that afternoon and was not revisited by the Elephants for six days. Meanwhile a DZ was used.

The struggle for Meiktila saw some of the bitterest fighting of the S.E.A. campaign. A steady stream of food, fuel and ammunition was imperative for success, and it was often a case of having to hit DZs only a few hundred yards from a desperate enemy only too anxious to pounce on a stray drop.

Whether para-dropping, free-dropping or landing with supplies, aircraft were targets for artillery, mortars, machine-guns and the small arms of roving Japanese patrols. The most ticklish situations, however, occurred when cargoes were landed, as during the unloading period aircraft and crew became stationary targets. In such circumstances Elephant crews performed in exemplary fashion. Three captains, F/L W. S. Robertson, F/O A. V. Foord and F/O H. C. Olafson, won DFCs — mainly for landing and coolly directing the unloading of vital cargoes while enemy guns sought to prevent their doing so.

By 24 March the Elephants were landing with supplies for the Fourth Corps in the midst of a shambles once known as Mandalay. (* The city had been captured on the 20th.) Whether through coincidence or design it may never be known, but the next evening enemy aircraft raided Akyab. It was the closest the squadron came to being bombed, the only loss being a little sleep.

The first half of April 1945 saw a continuance of 436's so-called milk runs to Meiktila and Myitche, one or both of which had been supplied daily since early March. Meiktila-bound aircraft had to penetrate a smoke haze, originating from the heavy ground-fighting, over the mountains thick enough to necessitate instrument flying. A greater natural hazard to aviation — the towering, 25,000-foot cumulo-nimbus cloud, soon to be all too common in this theatre — was already beginning to appear. Though enemies of flight, the "cu-nims" were actually helpful to navigation. The tallest, which were visible for great distances, invariably formed over 10,400 ft. Mount Victoria and were useful for taking bearings. The same mountain was a common sight on the Myitche run. Tactics dictated a dog-leg to the north to avoid sustained flight over enemy-held territory, and the detour frequently led directly over it. Sometimes as often as three times a day the *Dakotas* would have to clear its peak — the loftiest in Burma — and then drop rather quickly down the other side to Myitche, less than 60 miles away. In dirty weather this was a situation requiring the best efforts of the navigator.

One navigator of the period dispensed both navigational and spiritual guidance. Substituting for the OC's navigator, who was absent on course, was S/L W. P. Irving, the protestant padre. A tour expired observer, he had a ready answer to his skipper's inevitable question, "How's the beacon, Deacon?"

Through most of April and May the squadron experienced an abnormal number of engine failures. Acting on orders from higher authority, No. 436 had switched (with misgivings) from "T" to "X" oil and the mounting unserviceabilities were traced directly to this change. More than moderately interested in this problem was Air Marshal Sir Keith R. Park, KCB, KBE, MC, DFC, Allied Air Commander-in-Chief, S.E.A., who happened to be making an inspection visit at the time.* He agreed that the matter should be investigated immediately. Largely due to data accumulated by the Elephants on the relative merits of "T" oil, the original order was reversed and aircraft serviceabilities rose again to normal level.

* On being introduced to W/C Gordon, the A/M quipped, with a twinkle in his eye, "So you're Gordon. I hear you've been doing too much flying".

Meantime, an endless battle was being waged against disease (especially malaria), the cause of more casualties to S.E.A. forces than were the Japanese themselves.** A unit anti-malaria program had been in effect for several months, and its originators were ensuring that it was being fully carried out. In mid-April more rigid measures against the malarial mosquito were taken, a daily roster of duty teams being drawn-up to check on observance of regulations. In some instances charges were laid for failure to obey the orders, but with the campaign on a disciplinary basis malaria cases were remarkably few.

** Disease-induced casualties among the British and Americans in the theatre outnumbered battle casualties by as much as ten to one.

Apart from disease, there were leeches and ticks — and the world's deadliest snakes. As with disease, however, by the application of common-sense safety measures the creepy-crawlies were restricted to a nuisance value. Of snakes, there were incidents; of snake-bites, none.

With our ground forces advancing steadily every day, the front-line was constantly changing and each new DZ was extremely shortlived. In fact, the march from Mandalay to Rangoon was marked by a trail of abandoned DZs dotted with parachutes which, from the air, looked rather like wilted rose blossoms. So rapid was the advance that the Elephants "bomb line" was moving forward daily and DZs were becoming obsolete after scarcely 24 hours of use. Some were developed into airstrips, but the great majority were left behind and forgotten.

By 27 April, moving at the rate of 150 miles a week, advance elements of the 33rd Corps were being supplied at DZs 65 miles north-east of Rangoon. Thereby did the Elephants make their longest supply-hauls, non-stop round trips of roughly 700 miles. The salient created by the quick advance must have been one of the narrowest in the history of warfare, consisting only of the highway and railway plus a hundred yards or so on each side. Many landings had to be made at strips near the salient's tip and open to attack by the enemy's rearguard.

Crews visiting a forward strip known as Tennant reported that it had been strafed by an enemy fighter in the early morning with no resultant damage or casualties. At the same strip later in the day F/O Foord's aircraft came a cropper when struck by a truck as it was touching down. The *Dakota* was a complete write-off; it was fortunate that the crew's only injuries were superficial. A few days later a similar but less serious accident occurred at Payagyi, the cost being a smashed tailplane. So far, native-driven vehicles were proving a greater menace to 436's aircraft than the Imperial Japanese Air Force and Army combined.

In spite of the drop in serviceability in April plus the five-day diversion of five crews to move two *Mosquito* wings from Kumbhergram to Kinmagon, 436's sortie total (1238) was more than in March and the tonnage (3907, plus 1130 passengers and 204 casualties) only slightly less. Paradoxically, although the figures suggest an intensity of endeavour, the squadron was committed to nothing like a maximum effort; despite the big drive on Rangoon, it was relatively overloaded with leisure time.

The free hours were profitably spent. Swimming and surf-board riding at the beach* and sight-seeing among the magnificent, gilded pagodas and 40-foot Buddhas were the more popular pastimes. The squadron's dramatic society polished-up its first show, "On the Road to Mandalay", a potpourri of musical numbers, skits. Extremely well received, the show was brought to an unscheduled ending by an air raid alarm. Also cut short by enemy action were the beach activities, suspended because of enemy mines reportedly sown in the area. The Japanese may have failed to

impede the squadron's military operations, but they did manage to put a crimp in its favourite recreation.

* The fact that two nurses ("a honey of a blonde and a cute brunette") took regular afternoon dips may also have contributed to the beach's popularity.

May began with "Dracula", a combined operation by land, sea and air forces aimed at the taking of Rangoon. Representing the squadron were 20 of its wireless operators, who, after a week's special training as jumpmasters with USAAF squadrons, now operated with them in the latter role.* Fittingly enough, the Elephant jumpmasters were concerned with a phase of the operation which had as its objective the capture of coastal guns at Elephant Point. They arrived over the point at daybreak on 1 May and put their Indian paratroopers squarely on the mark; later in the day they repeated the process with equal success. When thanking the CCTF, the commanding general of the Indian Airborne Division remarked, "This is the first operation I know of in this war in which paratroops have been dropped 100 per cent accurately." His statement reflected credit on the jumpmasters, who were responsible for the smooth and uninterrupted dispatching of the sometimes-balky paratroopers. One of their number, 436's F/L H. N. Cuming, earned a DFC for his part in the operation.

* At a high-level planning conference the services of 436 and 435 Sqns. as entities had been requested. The job went to American units, however, the **RCAF's** participation consisting of the despatching of paratroops by the jumpmasters and parapack-loading by the armourers of both squadrons.

Rangoon officially changed hands on 3 May; now the enemy's lines of communication were severed and his expulsion from Burma was only a matter of time. The irony of the triumph was that, in sustaining the ground forces in their long slog through Burma climaxed by the city's capture, the squadron was doing itself out of a long-term job; with the seaport available, supply of the 14th Army by air would not long have to be continued.

By this time the aerial supply lines were beginning to stretch beyond what was considered economical flying distance for the Elephants. From 10 through 12 May, therefore, operations were suspended as the Elephants packed their trunks and moved 70 miles south-east to Kyaukpyu, on Ramree Island.

Aware of Ramree's reputation as one of the wettest districts in South-East Asia, all hands set to work digging storm drains, sand-bagging and building-up tent floors, and covering them with tar paper. In another effort to beat the all-pervading, mould-producing dampness, two enterprising LACs named Green and Hurdle set up a power laundry and drying establishment. Even greater ingenuity was shown by Sgt. Ross Huston and his staff, who designed and built kerosene stoves for use in the camp's three kitchens. * The stoves were eventually approved by the highest catering authorities in ACSEA; messing specialists visited Ramree to inspect them and prepare specifications for their widespread use in field kitchens.

* There was now one for officers and NCOs, another for airmen, and a third for aircrew at the dispersal area, all providing the same standard of meals.

A paradox of life in Burma was that there was usually too little drinking-water and yet too much rain. Coincident with the Elephants' arrival at Ramree, the monsoon, that eminent precipitation-producer which as early as 2 May had inundated and rendered temporarily unserviceable several destination airstrips in southern Burma, began to live up to its reputation. Largely for this reason the squadron's haul fell off sharply for a few days. Nevertheless, once acclimatized, the Elephants bounced back; in the last two weeks of May they averaged 161 tons daily, despite the unfavourable weather. On 20 and 31 May a total of 20 crews logged the coveted but elusive "fourth sortie."* The 31st of May was the squadron's second-best day of all, 74 sorties being flown (the wings' other two squadrons contributed 40 each) and 243½ tons airlifted. That day the foot-sloggers benefited in many

ways, not the least of which concerned 13 tons of one bottled comfort and 10 tons of another (without a permit!). Despite the monsoon's rumblings and the loss of three days while moving, the tonnage for May exceeded that for April.

* The flying of four sorties in a day was a special target aimed at by CCTF crews.

Though failing in the period to deter seriously or inflict casualties on the Elephants in the air, the monsoon did indirectly cause the loss of one aircraft on the ground. *Dakota* KG 724, so deeply mired in the mud of Mingaladon (* Rangoon's airfield.) that it had to be abandoned, eventually stopped a runaway *Spitfire* and was therewith reduced to scrap.

By 1 June USAAF squadrons were departing from India and Burma for another battle theatre. Their withdrawal meant that aerial supply of the 14th Army would have to be continued exclusively by units of 232 Group, a situation which would somewhat prolong the Elephants' stay in Burma. With Rangoon captured, the back of the airlifting job in Burma was broken. Mopping-up of isolated bands of Japanese still had to be done, however, and regular supply runs to forces so engaged had to be maintained at least until supply movements into and out of Rangoon could be expedited.*

* Bomb-damaged roads & railways radiating from Rangoon were still under repair, and entry of large ships into the harbour was being delayed by dredging operations.

The Elephants' immediate task in June was to supply those troops engaged in clearing pockets of resistance in the Arakan and around Toungoo, Pegu and Kalaw, to evacuate casualties, and to stock rear airfields in central Burma, where backlogs of food, fuel and ammunition were being built up.

June also brought the full fury of the monsoon. Approximately 45 inches of rain fell on Ramree that month; consequently, cancelled sorties and enforced diversions of aircraft away from base became almost daily occurrences. A persistent downpour on the 10th was too much for the drainage system of Kyaukpyu's "all weather" airfield, which by mid-afternoon could have accommodated seaplanes. This situation existed until 1000 hours on the 11th, but, by early afternoon, rain had made the field once more unserviceable. Moreover, the woeful-weather problem had been complicated by the loss of USAAF-sponsored weather-reporting and forecasting facilities not yet replaced by the RAF. Though unable to combat the monsoon on the ground, the Elephants essayed to fight it in the air by providing a substitute weather service of their own. So was born "Watchbird".

The brainchild of W/C Gordon, "Watchbird" was a simple yet surprisingly effective system of airborne weather surveillance. Usually one crew would get airborne at 0430 hours (an hour before regular take-off time) and watch and report the weather over a designated area until 1130 hours; a relief crew then took over for the rest of the working day. Besides broadcasting general weather reports twice every hour on R/T and W/T, Watchbird dispensed "spot weather" (* Conditions existing at the moment.) at airfields and DZs, recommended airfields for diversions, gave preferable routes, okayed or vetoed flights to certain areas, washed-in and washed-out flying, and provided weather data on request. In addition to promoting safety in monsoon-flying, the scheme led to some useful discoveries; for example, by flying at 8000-9000 feet, the more turbulent centres of the CBs could be spotted and avoided. Watchbird further recommended, and most strongly, that attempts at low-level contact flying be abandoned as a risky business in a country notoriously hilly.

Word of the system's merit spread throughout 232 Group and beyond, finally reaching the ears of A/M W. A. Coryton, CB, MVO, DFC, Air Marshal Commanding Air HQ, Burma. On a visit to the squadron the air marshal expressed his interest in the service and asked for particulars of its operation. The biggest testimonial, however, came from the many pilots who were eventually requesting its aid. Other units were using Watchbird and even monitoring its broadcasts. Furthermore, Burma Command was said to be considering its wholesale adoption.

Occasionally Watchbird's reports were somewhat inconsistent with conditions actually encountered. Alluding to this was a ditty found scrawled on a navigator's log, which read:

"Oh where, oh where has my Watchbird
gone? Oh where, oh where can he be?
We can't see our 'plane for the snow,
sleet and rain,
Still his broadcasts say 'Jl — Class 3'."*

* "Jl" was the code reference for a specific area; "Class 3" indicated that conditions were favourable for flying.

At times, through no fault of Watchbird, its information came a little too late. In one case a skipper was doing his damndest to get out of a storm which was manhandling his aircraft rather severely. Whilst so employed he was greeted by the cheery voice of Watchbird announcing with maddening nonchalance, "There is a thunderstorm in your area."

THE monsoon season in Burma continued unabated during June 1945. Hardly a day passed without at least a temporary washout of flying or a swamping of Kyaukpyu airport, causing partial or wholesale cancellations, recalls and diversions for No. 436 Sqn's *Dakotas*.

The violence of a monsoon storm is apparent in F/L R. W. Cornell's description of an experience in one:

"... I was brushing through the cloud-tops, alternating between clear and instrument flying. I had entered what appeared to be a small layer of cloud when it began to rain. After ... about a minute three sudden bursts of extremely heavy rain, possibly hail, hit the aircraft, giving the impression that it would break the windscreen, and severe bumpiness started. I immediately put the aircraft into a turn to starboard, intending to turn 180 degrees, but had completed only half of it when the force of the (CB) cloud hit ...

My recollection of what happened at that instant is rather hazy. Both gyro horizons toppled and I had to rely on needle, ball and airspeed and a directional gyro which very fortunately remained working. The next thing I knew, we were in a terrific dive. The control column was absolutely frozen, so ... I had to rely entirely on elevator trim to ... pull out. The airspeed indicator was reading 300 m.p.h., the vertical speed was at 6,000 feet-per-minute down, and the altimeter was unwinding at a frightful rate. I can't say how much altitude I lost, as my one idea was to pull out of the dive before the aircraft went into the ground. It finally did pull out, and in a fraction of a second the vertical speed read 6,000 feet-per-minute up. I frantically applied more "Down" trim and forward pressure on the control column, but (by then) the aircraft was on its back and I was hanging on my safety belt. I applied full aileron and kicked the rudder and ... the aircraft must have half-rolled and ended up in another dive. This time I was able to level out, and I suddenly came into a clearing ..."

Effective 15 June the normal payload per aircraft was reduced from 6,000 to 5,500 pounds to allow for more fuel and an increased safety-margin for bad-weather flying. The Elephants' hides may have been dampened, but not so their enthusiasm, which is reflected in the following extract from their diary, dated 22 June:

". . . 'A'-Flight started off today with 17 aircraft, determined to get a few more sorties than they've had in the past week. However, the weather once again stepped in, and, after the second wave, the base strip became more suitable for submarines, take-offs and landings being prohibited until late in the afternoon. Nevertheless some of the still-airborne crews landed at Akyab and did a lift from there . . . to Meiktila, Kinmagon, Mingaladon, and Myingyan."

Their zeal was not always matched by their co-workers'. On 27 June, for example, 15 crews were airborne at 0600 hours, after waiting for the green light from Watchbird.* All flew to Kinmagon, there to find they were the only people yet awake! Consequently they had to unload the aircraft themselves. They returned to base disgruntled at having lost precious time on the turnaround.

*Airborne weather surveillance.

The hazards, hardships and problems born of the monsoon and its rain failed to prevent the Elephants from carrying more payload in June 1945 (3954 tons) than in any other wartime month. This figure was realized by a squadron operating from a base acknowledged to be one of the hardest-hit by the monsoons and repeatedly inactivated because of flooded runways; and achieved with a perfect safety record, matched by

no other squadron operating in Burma. It gave special meaning to the alias "Canucks Unlimited",** assumed by the unit some months before.

**A popular name acquired early in the squadron's history and painted on its aircraft.

Undoubtedly a big contributing factor was Watchbird, but also important were other preparations for bad-weather aviation. In the fair-weather days of January a special program of instrument-flying had been initiated. All aircraft were equipped with blind-flying hoods made by the parachute section, and pilots were ordered to fly under the hood on all homeward flights when west of the Chindwin or Irrawaddy Rivers.* Practice let-down procedures were formulated, every pilot being required to perform one blind let-down per flying day. Navigators were to use "Rebecca-Eureka" (the only homing-aid then available to them) even in perfect weather, and wireless operators were instructed to practice HF homings daily. As a further check, written examinations were sprung on all aircrew to see what they knew and did not know about operating procedures; anyone below standard wrote a supplemental. An extra load of responsibility fell on the instrument section, charged with maintaining the instruments and gyros. Periodically, rather than relying on replacements through normal channels, instrument mechanics journeyed 950 miles to Cawnpore to service the instruments themselves. Finally, Kyaukpyu tower's obsolete radio equipment was replaced by a VHF transmitter from one of the *Dakotas*; thereby range was increased to over 100 miles and another homing-facility was provided.

*This included an area of moderate-to-severe turbulence over 6000-foot mountains.

The stocking of rear airfields continued as the main project in July, the most frequent points of call being Meiktila, Toungoo and Myingyan. There were also a number of para-drops to the 4th Corps near the Sittang River north-east of Pegu. On the 5th, near one of the DZs in the latter area, at least one *Dakota* was an intended target for enemy anti-aircraft fire and an unintended target for our own artillery fire. When some "friendly" shells began coming too close for comfort, the skipper quit the scene until the fire subsided. The next day the drop was repeated, this time to the tune of *Thunderbolts* beating up adjacent Jap positions. It was exciting to do a para-drop while sneaking a look at their strafing stint and listen to their pilot's patter on VHF.

One of the above drops had an unfavourable aftermath. The Japanese managed a break-through to one of the DZs and commandeered the supplies. Another drop was requested and carried out. This time, despite some small-arms fire from a point near the DZ, the operation went as planned; those on the receiving end of the drop were unquestionably Gurkhas.

That day an aircraft (KN208) making the unit's 7,559th operational sortie, a routine run to Toungoo, did not return. The Elephants searched for six days, mostly over the Shan Hills in weather that made aerial spotting extremely difficult. They found the wreckage (on 13 July* about 20 miles north-east of Toungoo. The crew members, all dead, were F/L Alexander R. W. Harrison, F/O Wilmer J. Friesen, F/O William C. Campbell and FS Sidney H. L. Smith. The reported absence of enemy air or ground activity around Toungoo or along the route thereto gives rise to a strong presumption that the crew were victims of the monsoon. They were the squadron's only casualties directly attributable to wartime operations.

*Unbeknown to them, it had been discovered by a ground search party three days before.

The monsoon persisted, but operations had to go on. An order from Group had stipulated a daily airlift of 90 long tons per squadron to keep the Army well stocked. The order was qualified by the words, "Air Command South-East Asia appreciates, however, that the monsoon may not permit this target to be achieved every day."

In spite of itself the monsoon did permit. The Elephants' daily output during the remaining period of their all-out effort was some 22 percent above quota, thanks partly to an early-July moderation in the

weather. It should, however, be noted that during the monsoon's six-week peak there were 22 days on which operations were appreciably curtailed by impossible conditions aloft or flooded airfields. In other words, on more than every second day the airlift was substantially reduced by condensation in some form or other.

The relatively favourable period in July enabled the squadron to forge ahead with its principal commitment, the stocking of rear airfields. By mid-month substantial inroads were made into unfulfilled commitments, RAMO* happily proclaiming that it was only 50 sorties behind on its Army demands. Though pleased with their progress, the more senior Elephants had good cause to be annoyed at the incredulous rookie aircrew who were brash enough to inquire, "What's all this talk about monsoon-flying?"

*Rear Airfield Maintenance Organization, an Army body responsible for supplying the daily loads and scheduling the priorities and delivery points for each day's operations.

By late July 1945, after seven months of intensive operations, one Elephant crew or another was being pronounced tour-expired almost daily. Among those screened from further operations was the squadron commander, who departed for the UK on the 29th. Early in 1946 there was to appear in the LONDON GAZETTE promulgation of the only Distinguished Service Order awarded a member of 436. Its recipient was W/C Ralph Gordon, DFC, referred to in the accompanying citation as "an exceptional leader who organized, and often personally operated aloft, an airborne weather-observation system which proved of the greatest assistance to the transport services in Burma." He had earned his DFC in October 1945 for his many supply flights across the Arakan's mountains and jungles into Central Burma.

Gordon's successor was S/L Dick Denison, who was also to put up a DFC late in the year. He was in turn replaced as flight commander by F/L F. A. (Ab) Aikman,* DFC, and Bar, in the diarist's parlance "a reformed fighter pilot".

Group operational statistics for July placed the Elephants again well to the fore among Burma's transport squadrons. They led in hours flown (5000), tonnage delivered (3708), and percentage of completed sorties (98.6).

*Aikman flew number two to W/C "Paddy" Finucane on the latter's last flight and saw his flak-damaged *Spitfire* crash and sink in the English Channel.

In the vital department of flying safety they topped their Group. Contributing along with Watchbird to 'their safety record was Kyaukpyu's "approach control system", adopted in mid-July. Before then, with the airfield closed in by low ceilings much of the time, several 436 aircraft and other units could be in the circuit simultaneously without knowing one another's whereabouts. In the interests of safety, and with Wing's blessing, a liaison transmitter and receiver operating on a special approach-control frequency was installed in the control tower. An aircraft captain entering the zone within a 25-mile radius of the airfield would call the tower on this frequency, giving his distance from the field and his ETA** over the beacon. Flying Control would then either clear his aircraft to the field, or, if another aircraft had the same ETA, give holding instructions and a new approach time. Thereby the danger of midair collision was virtually obviated for both inbound and outbound aircraft. Credit for originating and organizing the system was due S/L F. E. W. Smith, AFC, whose flying on supply and Watchbird operations was to earn him a DFC.

**Estimated time of arrival.

Although the natural enemy, the monsoon, was becoming relatively tame, the fanatical human enemy was still full of fight. He was providing stiff opposition in, among other places, the Shan Hills, where small, isolated groups of the 14th Army were engaged in guerilla warfare with his pockets of resistance.

In this connection the crews of F/L H. W. Pearson and WO D. A. Parker, together with eight groundcrew, were sent on three weeks' detached duty to Toungoo on 1 August to undertake special para-drops for our forces in the area.

Their operations were hardly facilitated by a monsoon revival lasting five days. They nevertheless discharged their tasks ahead of schedule. About two months later were to be announced awards of the DFC to both captains, the reasons being readily perceivable in the joint recommendation, excerpts from which follow.

"F/L Pearson and WO Parker . . . undertook one of the most difficult tasks ever assigned a transport crew. Our . . . guerilla fighters were operating in the most difficult terrain . . . in purely defensive positions surrounded by the enemy, and were dependent entirely upon these two pilots for their very existence.

Their work presented the greatest difficulties. Based at Toungoo, an airstrip with the worst general weather conditions in the whole area, without adequate radio-aids and lying close to the Shan Mountains, Pearson and Parker were required to find difficult DZs in the valleys and on the slopes of the monsoon-obscured hills. They often spent hours ... endeavouring to find their DZs through occasional breaks in the heavy clouds. On locating our troops . . . these pilots faced the continuous threat of casualty from enemy ground-fire . . .

. . . They carried their project to successful conclusion . . . after 22 days of hazardous operations, both flying daily without relief.

The admiration and appreciation by the British troops . . . is amply displayed in the following words: 'Please convey our thanks and admiration to the air force for their splendid drops. We were dead scared they would hit some cloud-covered hill. Good show, Canucks.' "

During the third week of August a larger detachment consisting of 16 crews and servicing personnel operated their *Dakotas* from Kinmagon and Meiktila, moving all the squadrons and headquarters of 221 Group to Rangoon.

The fact that 14 August meant the end of hostilities with Japan actually meant nothing to the Elephants in an operational sense. The ever-hungry Army still had to be steadily supplied by air to make possible a build-up of great stocks of food and materiel before the release of yet more transport aircraft for service elsewhere. With the main body concentrating on the rear airfields and the two detachments busily occupied, the first three weeks of August could compare favourably, in point of sorties, with any three weeks in 436's history.

Upon the return of the detached crews the squadron was concerned primarily with the evacuation of casualties from Ramree and Akyab to Chittagong. This was completed on 29 August.

The Elephants were active in their air supply function for CCTF* until 31 August 1945, thereby sharing with their "Chinthe" co-workers (No. 435 Sqn.) the honour of being the RCAF's last squadron to carry out operations in the Second World War period. On that day, for the record, they flew seven trips, airlifting 29,400 pounds and seven passengers. With these flights they bowed out as an operational entity in the South-East Asia theatre. How typical was their last diary-entry for the Burma period:

"Rainfall at base during August has totalled 57.34 inches."**

*Combat Cargo Task Force.

**This is slightly more than Vancouver's yearly average over the past half-century.

In a short but highly intensive operational tour of eight months in South-East Asia the Elephants piled up a most impressive set of statistics. Logging some 32,000 hours while covering about 4,000,000 air miles, they airlifted nearly 29,000 tons of food, military necessities, and "treats and comforts", among other things, to sustain soldiers and civilians alike. In addition, they transported more than 15,000 troops,

casualties and passengers. Having no protective armament other than mere sidearms, they were wide open to enemy ground-fire and aerial attack. Moreover, they faced the constant threat of forced landing or bail-out over impenetrable jungle inhabited by wild animals, unpredictable natives, and a merciless enemy. On half their flights they were assailed by their most formidable foe of all, that being, of course, the tropical monsoon. No squadron had better fulfilled its motto than the Elephants, with their "Onus Portamus". They truly did *carry the load*, and in some of the most adverse conditions imaginable.

In something like 11 months of corporeal existence in the India-Burma theatre No. 436 Sqn. lost only two aircraft and four aircrew on operations. One aircrew officer and a groundcrew airman died through misadventure on the ground and another airman died of natural causes.

Awards for valour or efficiency, in the air and on the ground, included one DSO, 18 DFCs, one AFM, three MBEs, three BEMs, two Commendations for Valuable Services in the Air, and numerous mentions in dispatches.

Apart from operations, the most significant event of August was the start of the unit's self-airlift from Burma to England. The first of the UK-bound Elephants, led by S/L Smith, departed on 25 August. The route was via Chittagong, Allahabad, Karachi, Masirah Island, Aden, Wadi Haifa, Cairo, Lydda (Palestine), El Adem (Libya), Sardinia, and finally Down Ampney, in Gloucestershire — an 8,000 mile trip of 44 hours' flying time.

THE SECOND PHASE OF THE ELEPHANTS' CAREER began on 15 September 1945. Led by W/C R. L. Denison, No. 436 Sqn. completed its self-airlift from Burma to its new base at Down Ampney, England. The unit's European version now became liberally infused with new blood, more than 60 per cent of its aircrew having arrived directly from a transport OTU in Canada and half the remainder having served with No. 435 Sqn. in Burma.

The squadron regrouped and reorganized, a flying training and lecture program was begun, and by early October crews were getting their first glimpse of continental Europe as they flew their *Dakotas* on navigation exercises to the French coast. During training there came a setback, the like of which had not been experienced throughout even the hazardous monsoon months in Burma — a fatal flying-accident causing the loss of four aircrew.

In October and November the Elephants' sphere of activity expanded to embrace virtually every key air terminal in Europe, including Brussels, Paris, Hamburg, Munchen-Gladbach, Oslo, Copenhagen, Bordeaux, Strasbourg, Frankfurt, Berlin, Prague, Warsaw and Naples. To and from these points and various UK airfields they transported troops and casualties and hauled practically everything from medical supplies to aircraft engines. On 12 November they came under control of 120 (RCAF) Wing, No. 46 Group (RAF).

As of 8 December 436 was committed to a daily schedule of transporting casualties from Brussels, Hamburg, Munchen-Gladbach, Buckeburg and Celle. On the 9th a detachment* was sent to RAF Station Biggin Hill for more than four months to provide transport services for the Canadian Army. By mid-December the detachment's *Dakotas* were handling daily-scheduled passenger, freight and mail flights, mostly to Amsterdam and Brussels, and a twice-weekly passenger run to Paris. Almost daily, in addition to its continental flights, the squadron operated domestic flights to various UK airfields, the "Wing shuttle run" (Down Ampney-Odiham-Biggin Hill-Croydon-Down Ampney) being included. Except for the shuttle run (discontinued in mid-March) operations went on throughout the first quarter of 1946 in much the same pattern. Having established a record of proficiency and safety in Burma, the Elephants were upholding it in the European sphere. For having led all squadrons of 46 Group in hours flown during the first quarter of 1946, yet having had no accidents, they received a special

award of merit. They also topped 120 Wing in ton-miles flown during their period in Britain, this despite April reductions in aircrew and aircraft of 40 percent.

* Replacing a detachment of 168 (RCAF) Sqn. due for repatriation.

On 4 April the squadron moved to Odiham. The recall of the Biggin Hill detachment ten days later presaged 436's disbandment. Flights to the continent, throughout Britain and occasionally to Ireland were continued at a gradually-reducing tempo until mid-June, the last (Brus-sels-Odiham) occurring on the 16th.

Two weeks before, one section of the squadron had already taken off from Odiham, bound for Rockcliffe. On 15 June the remainder were "stood down" to prepare for their trip home. They took off a week later and, like the first section, made the crossing without incident. Their flight which began on 22 June was the squadron's last in the World War II era. On that day 436 was disbanded.

THE THIRD HERD OF ELEPHANTS

In the early 1950s, attendant upon the RCAF's increased responsibilities resulting from Canada's membership in the UN and NATO, there arose a requirement for greater air transport capabilities. Accordingly No. 436 (T) Sqn. was authorized to form at Dorval, PQ, effective 1 April 1953. As stated in the official order, the unit's duties were "to provide air transport for the RCAF, transport support for the Canadian Army and such other airlift as deemed necessary."

To discharge its role the squadron acquired an aircraft type which replaced the *Dakota* as the work-horse of Air Transport Command — the C119 *Flying Boxcar*. Never was an aircraft better named, for it could do the work of several *Dakotas*, with a 50 per cent increase in range and a 25 per cent increase in cruising speed.

Given their first assignment only 12 days after their effective date of formation, the Elephants were soon active in all specific phases of their role and then some. Ration runs and seasonal resupply operations, army co-operation exercises and airlifts, mercy missions, training and flight-testing, air shows, a Coronation fly-past — this gives some indication of the variety, if not the number, of their activities in the early and middle 50s. Some of their more interesting flights of the era were in connection with their first post-war overseas operations, one ("Rhumba Queen") involving the transfer of 1 (F) Wing personnel and ground equipment from North Luffenham to Marville in January 1955, another the airlift of supplies to the Air Division the following June. These flights, which familiarized crews with North Atlantic and European weather problems, ICAO procedures and continental-route flying in general, provided valuable experience for overseas operations that followed. Also in June 1955 there took place one of the major army-support operations — the transport of troops from Calgary to Frederic-ton (and return) for summer manoeuvres at Camp Gagetown, constituting what was called the largest peace-time airlift* in Canada's history.

* Other squadrons also assisted in the airlift, which became an annual commitment.

A fateful day was 9 March 1956 for it saw a misfortune that led to the unit's relocation in another city. Shortly after 0900 hours an explosion occurred in "A" Bay of ATC's hangar. Fanned by a strong wind, the resultant fire gutted the hangar, two adjacent office buildings and three aircraft, including a C119. Records (including historical narratives) of Nos. 436 and 426 Sqns. were destroyed, as were aircrew equipment and flying-gear.

The fire's most significant aftermath came some 15 weeks later when on 1 July the squadron began a move to RCAF Station Downsview in Toronto. It was an ideal strategic location for a transport squadron, being approximately a mile from No. 1 Supply Depot, one of the RCAF's key logistics-

support bases in Canada. It also created a precedent of sorts, 436 being the regular force's first flying squadron to be based in metropolitan Toronto.

Early in November 1956, as hostilities broke out between Egypt and Israel, quick UN intervention led to the formation of a United Nations Emergency Force to police the troubled area. Canada initially volunteered to contribute a battalion of troops, and in this connection Nos. 436 and 435 Sqns. flew nearly 2000 Army personnel from Calgary to Halifax (Operation "Rapid Step"), where it was intended the battalion would embark for Egypt. These troops never did sail, however, it being finally decided that Canada would assist UNEF in air transport operations and provide army personnel to handle administrative and communications services. Accordingly the RCAF furnished, as logistic support for UNEF, a squadron of C119s which originally included 16 aircrew, a number of groundcrew, and four aircraft of No. 436 Sqn. On 21 November the C119s, equipped with long-range fuel tanks and bearing UN insignia in place of RCAF markings, departed Downsview for their base-to-be at Capodi-chino (Naples), Italy.

Although UNEF's C119s were engaged largely in a thrice-weekly, 1300-mile shuttle between Capodi-chino and Abu Suweir, Egypt, with troops, equipment and supplies, there occasionally were interesting departures from the normal routine. For example, one crew contributed by 436 was required to fly Egyptian prisoners-of-war* 1900 track-miles from Djibouti, in French Somali-land, via Wadi Haifa and Khartoum, to Cairo.

By the end of January 1957 the intensive phase of the UNEF airlift was over and most of the 436 element had left Naples to return to Downsview. For some months thereafter, however, the squadron was represented in the operation by both aircrew and groundcrew sent on detached duty to the Middle East.

The years 1957 through 1960 saw the Elephants maintain an increasingly heavy schedule in their transport-support role. Their workload** expanded to a point where an establishment increase (granted in January 1958) was necessary. A prime responsibility has been the supply of remote Arctic and sub-Arctic bases. In this category were the spring and autumn resupply operations benefiting the Arctic weatherstations at Isachsen, Mould Bay, Eureka and Canada's northernmost settlement, Alert. These have necessitated some of the most intensive flying of the squadron's post-war period, aircrew and groundcrew having, in some instances, worked around the clock on 12-hour shifts to make their deadlines. A large-scale airlift to a far-northern base in 1959 (repeated in 1960) required a hundred-man detachment to be stationed in Greenland for nearly three months. Hindered by weather best described as fickle, the detachment's C119s flew-in nearly 2000 tons of supplies, including 5220 barrels of fuel. Perhaps the most appreciated supply hops are the Christmas para-drops to DEW Line sites and other snow-bound outposts throughout the Arctic archipelago, including the aforementioned weather-stations. Mid-Canada Line sites have been frequent recipients of heavy loads, mostly bulky and beyond the handling capability of civilian airlines.

* The one-time crew of a ship sunk in the Red Sea during hostilities in the Suez crisis.

** In 1959 and 1960 the average weight (cargo, baggage and mail) carried per month was a million pounds (approx.) The average number of passengers and troops carried in addition was 1200 (approx.).

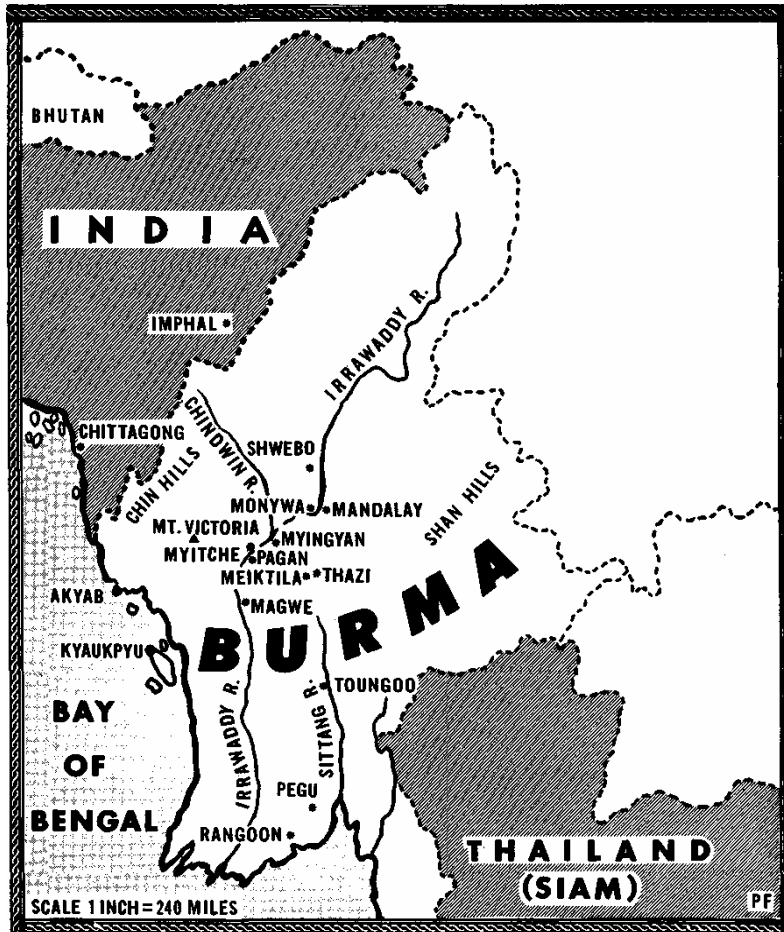
Another top-priority commitment is the fulfilment of army airborne requirements. In para-drop and other purely-tactical exercises the Elephants have co-operated scores of times with army regiments, particularly the Royal 22nd and the RCRs. In June 1959, in recognition of the long association, the "Van Doos" granted all officers of the squadron honorary lifetime memberships in their mess.

Airlifts in support of surveys and scientific expeditions have taken the Elephants north to the polar regions and south to the jungles of sub-equatorial South America. They have supported or taken part in air shows, military and civilian, practically across the length and breadth of North America, their chief responsibility in this department having been the Golden Hawks' tours. Then, of course, they have made innumerable flights of the routine or "sked run" category. Late last September the unit's operations were

extended temporarily to the very heart of the Dark Continent as a detachment of two aircrews, a groundcrew party and two C119s was despatched to Leopoldville to assist in the internal-transport phase of the Congo airlift.

Thus it is obvious that the Flying Elephants' story is far from a completed one. Their current exploits are reported from time to time in these pages. *

* THE ROUNDDEL, Vol. 13, No. 3, Apr. 61.



(Reference: The Roundel, 1962, Volume 14, No. 2, 3, 4, 6)