

39 RECONNAISSANCE WING

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Agfacolor Photo by Cpl. C. Molony.

We respectfully dedicate this publication to the memory of those who gave their lives in the cause of world freedom.



This publication aims to be a permanent record of the work of 39 Reconnaissance Wing of the Royal Canadian Air Force in the last phase of the defeat of Germany.

We hope it reflects the spirit of the teamwork displayed by the Wing in its role as the "eyes" of the British Second Army and of the Canadian, British and American armies under the leadership of Field Marshal Sir Bernard L. Montgomery during the Rhine crossing.

At the time we were perhaps not conscious of the full significance of our endeavours but through this publication we hope they will assume their proper relationship in the years to come.

AN OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF 39 RECONNAISSANCE WING, ROYAL CANADIAN AIR FORCE, BY PERMISSION OF GROUP CAPTAIN R. C. A. WADDELL, D. S. O., D. F. C., COMMANDING OFFICER.

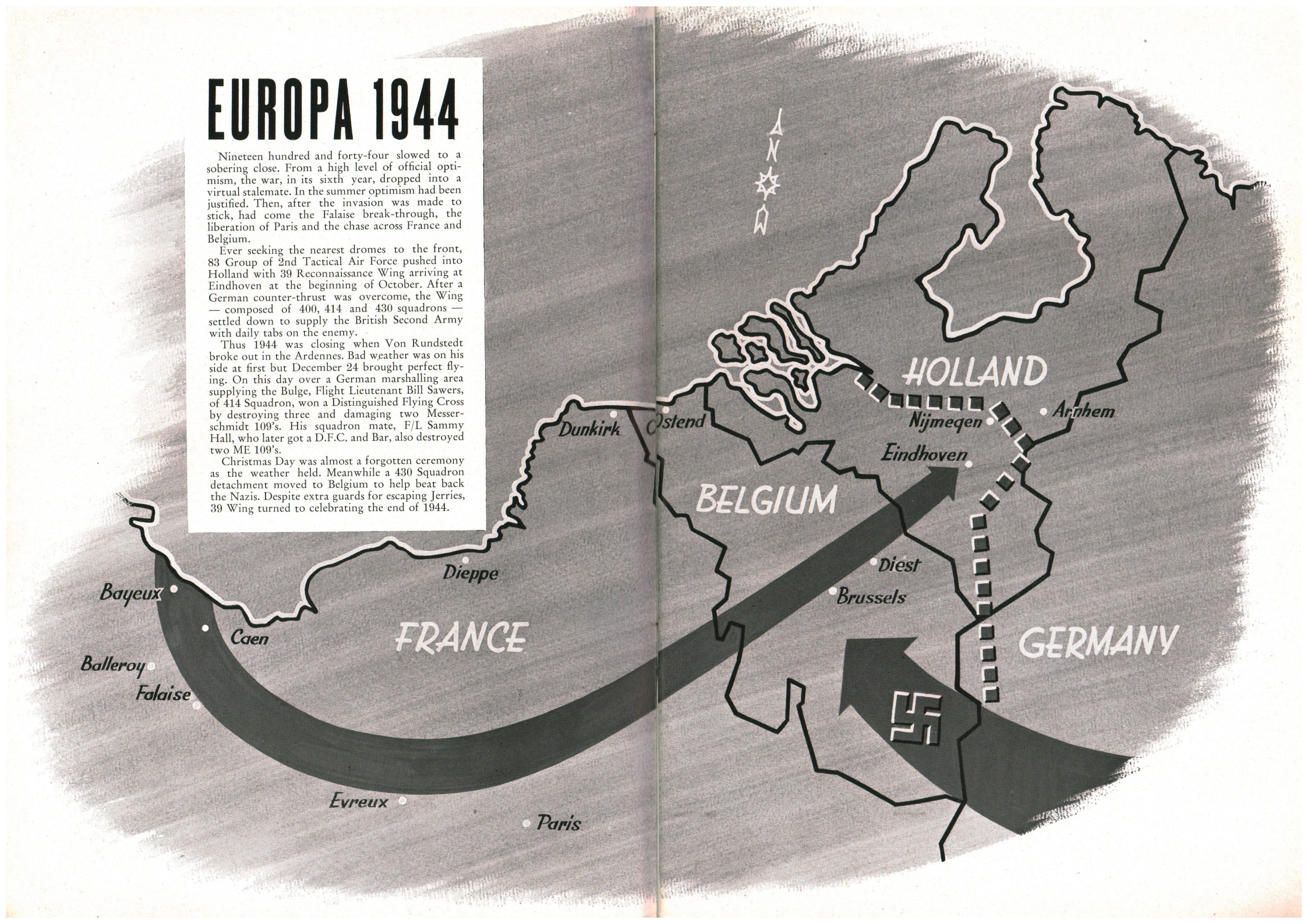
EUROPA 1944

Nineteen hundred and forty-four slowed to a sobering close. From a high level of official optimism, the war, in its sixth year, dropped into a virtual stalemate. In the summer optimism had been justified. Then, after the invasion was made to stick, had come the Falaise break-through, the liberation of Paris and the chase across France and Belgium.

Ever seeking the nearest dromes to the front, 83 Group of 2nd Tactical Air Force pushed into Holland with 39 Reconnaissance Wing arriving at Eindhoven at the beginning of October. After a German counter-thrust was overcome, the Wing — composed of 400, 414 and 430 squadrons — settled down to supply the British Second Army with daily tabs on the enemy.

Thus 1944 was closing when Von Rundstedt broke out in the Ardennes. Bad weather was on his side at first but December 24 brought perfect flying. On this day over a German marshalling area supplying the Bulge, Flight Lieutenant Bill Sawers, of 414 Squadron, won a Distinguished Flying Cross by destroying three and damaging two Messerschmidt 109's. His squadron mate, F/L Sammy Hall, who later got a D.F.C. and Bar, also destroyed two ME 109's.

Christmas Day was almost a forgotten ceremony as the weather held. Meanwhile a 430 Squadron detachment moved to Belgium to help beat back the Nazis. Despite extra guards for escaping Jerries, 39 Wing turned to celebrating the end of 1944.



JAN. 1, 1945

Out of a clear, crystal-sharp Dutch sky they came. More than 50 Messerschmidt 109's and Focke-Wulf 190's flashed out of the sun at 0920 hours and for 20 minutes wove an exact pattern of destruction over the Eindhoven field.

Stung into action by our aerial smashing at the Ardennes salient, the Luftwaffe was making one of its last stands in simultaneous attacks on Allied airfields in Holland and Belgium.

For 20 endless minutes the black-crossed attackers whipped over the drome strafing at will but concentrating on the parked aircraft. Again and again they returned to the attack as smoke belched up from burning and exploding planes.

Feeling like huge targets, everybody hugged the frozen earth or found scanty shelter in ditches, some full of cold water. Coming so long after Normandy the attack had the unreality of a movie newsreel. In white faces and shock-glazed eyes, how-





ILLUSTRATION BY
H. S. ABRAMSON



AFTER THE ATTACK came the task of getting the field back into operation. Against a background of burning planes and smoke the debris was cleared away. Within a short time the Wing was in action against the enemy again.

ever, danger left its mark and many a prayer was muttered amid the curses at the multi-coloured Jerry kites.

But things were not altogether one-sided in the air. Squadron Leader Gordon Wonnacott, D.F.C., returning from a 414 sortie in the Ardennes, went into action at the tail-end of the raid. In double-quick time he shot down two Messerschmidt 109's and a Focke-Wulf 190, winning an immediate Bar to his Distinguished Flying Cross. In the meantime Flying Officer "Wally" Woloschuk, later to win a D.F.C., caught the homebound Nazis in the Venlo-Roermond region. The 414 pilot mixed in immediately, scoring a kill on a FW 190 and damaging an ME 109.

On the ground, Warrant Officer Ron Beatty, then a flight sergeant, got going as soon as the Jerries attacked. He grabbed a Bren gun, mounted it on a partly broken-down wall and practically unprotected "proceeded to engage all and sundry aircraft as they approached within range." Thus read the official report of his action which won him a Mention in Despatches.

Amid the whining bullets and cannon shells, death came to two of the Wing's groundcrew. Due to leave for Canada the next day, LAC Ross Bell, a fitter of 6414 Servicing Echelon, was showing his replacement the ropes when the attack began. They dived under a Spit for protection but a Jerry unleashed a burst which killed Bell and wounded his replacement. LAC Len Williams, a rigger of the same outfit, had just completed his DI's (daily inspections) when he was hit seeking cover in the centre of the field.

In all some 15 were injured slightly while a considerable number of aircraft were rendered unoperational and a score of trucks damaged.

Death was ever close all over the field, especially in the corner which housed the armament and maintenance sections. Caught in the cross-fire from every angle of attack, the tail-end of bursts whipped through their work shacks.

Loaded with enough high explosive, gun cotton and detonators to blow up the whole area, the bomb disposal truck took a direct hit from a burst but the bullets missed the explosive by a scant four inches. Inside the armament section a 20 mm. cannon shell smashed through some files and through a wall, leaving a snowstorm of paper behind.

Meanwhile in all parts of the drome, weird experiences were happening every minute. A 414 mechanic was enveloped in flames when a plane blew up behind him. His overalls, leather jerkin and pants were burned and his winter underwear singed but he was untouched. Another came out of his shack to have one bullet tear a pair of pliers out of his hand and another strike him in the leg. Sitting in a gasoline tender when the first wave swished over, an "erk" dived under the truck. Suddenly realizing it was a gas "bowser", he scrambled over barbed wire and broken concrete to a small gully. The moment he reached comparative safety, the bowser went up in flames.

Finally the attack was over but danger was still present. Planes of neighbouring wings were blowing up and exploding ammunition crackled through the air. Tense nerves found relief in swift action and soon the Wing was operational again.

WINTER IN EINDHOVEN

An unprecedented Dutch winter of snow and mud held down flying activities the rest of January but the Wing found other ways to relieve the grind. Station movies and dances in the Flieger Kaserne; plays, orchestras and ENSA shows at the Rembrandt and Philips theatres; a Canada House downtown; cafes with weak beer and strong "cognac;" trips to Brussels; the Malcolm Club; cigarettes and guilders, kids asking for "cow-gum;" English beer (NAAFI style) at the Dutch Oven; heart-warming Netherland hospitality and buxom Dutch girls all helped to this end.

February saw Group Captain E.H.G. Moncrieff, A.F.C., depart for 83 Group to be succeeded by G/C G.H. Sellers, A.F.C., as commanding officer. Meanwhile the war tempo stepped up and all of TAF's 83 Group redoubled their efforts with 39 Wing taking care of the Group's recce tasks. A detachment from 414 Squadron moved to a field near Hertogenbosch to work with the First Canadian Army in its drive through the Reichswald Forest where crack Nazi troops fought for every inch of ground. The Wing daily checked the Rhineland as the Allies unleashed their powerful attack which smashed the Germain armies striving to hold the strong Siegfried Line defences.



WINTER TRACERY on a road from the airfield reminded us of winters spent back in Canada.



PHILIPS' FACTORY and Eindhoven meant practically the same thing. Here we stocked up on electric razors, dynamo lights and radios.



MAIN STREET and its beautiful twin-spired church.



"WELCOME CANADAISA" from the kids who asked for "cow gum".

B-90 PETIT BROGEL



THE BUILD-UP FOR THE RHINE CROSSING

Allied successes in clearing the Rhine approaches provided a background of speculation as the Wing moved back into Belgium, setting up at B-90, Petit Brogel, in the beginning of March.

After five months in winter billets, the old TAF spirit quickly revived with the switch to tents. Newcomers proved as adept as Normandy veterans at improvising for life under canvas. At the same time Station BLA 6 7/8 got into its stride of "airing" music during meals under "Kay-Cee" Coffey, new Knights of Columbus supervisor.

Shortly after arriving at B-90, Flight Lieutenant R. J. Cutting chalked up a kill in 414 Squadron records. On a tactical reconnaissance mission with F/L W.J.C. Pearson, he was jumped by 21 Focke-Wulf 190's 70 miles inside German lines on the other side of the Rhine. After the fray, F/L Cutting had a score of one destroyed and one damaged to his credit.

Meanwhile the Nazi buzz-bombs continued to use Petit Brogel as a regular alley for their fiendish attacks. For most of us the return to Belgium meant the reappearance of eggs in our diet. By means of the age-old barter system, we swapped soap, chocolate and cigarettes for eggs, eggs and more eggs. We had them raw, fried, boiled, poached, scrambled or in omelettes. After a couple of weeks, some of the boys didn't dare look at an egg. However, Brussels and Bourg-Leopold were both nearby and the thirsty were in good form.

A feeling of mighty impending events gradually enveloped the field. Day after day the roads were crowded with army divisions moving to new positions. Then battle courses started. We learned by apt demonstrations how to meet convoy attacks and properly guard a drome.

Bad weather hampered flying and whole armies waited impatiently for the vital information they needed. Finally the weather broke on March 19; the scramble was on.

Despite collapsing undercarriages which kept flying control and maintenance hopping, the work went on at a keyed-up pitch. Large scale photo cover was obtained of defences and gun positions in areas immediately east of the Rhine. In one day alone 10,679 negatives were taken by the Wing! Then they had to be developed, printed and interpreted before being rushed to the armies.

In these momentous days, Flying Officer Paul Barton won a D.F.C. for flying a sortie in his 400 Squadron "Bluebird" which revealed well camouflaged gun sites and a mine field. Flight Lieutenant Fred Stevens, of 430 Squadron, earlier won a D.F.C. for a low-level mission over the Wesel area in which the camera just behind his cockpit was shot away by a cannon shell.

The terrific pace kept up for days with everybody going "flat out". Finally they tallied the score. The "go-ahead" signal was flashed and Operation "Varsity" was on.



GETTING THE GEN on military strategy and the background to the immediate phase of the Rhine battle then in progress.

OPERATION "VARSITY"

All the weeks of work and bone-tiredness fell away in a wild surge of excitement at the sight of the air armada which was the final punch of Operation "Varsity"—code name for the Rhine crossing.

This was air power at its greatest and none of the Canadians at Petit Brogel will ever forget March 24, 1945. The tightness in the chest, the choked feeling in the throat added up to the realization that this was IT. Germany, the enemy's country, and the uncertainty of life or death lay ahead.

Mixed with these emotions was justifiable pride in the Wing's part in the preparations for this air epic. On this day our pilots were in the thick of it by flying over a hundred sorties, largest total in its history as a three-squadron wing, in direct support of the armies below.



FIRST ALLIED AIRFIELD OVER THE RHINE

Swift link-ups between armoured columns and airborne troops carried Montgomery's smash many miles over the sacred soil of the Third Reich. The army pushed ahead east of the Rhine at dazzling speed, calling incessantly for "recce" reports to exploit their advantage to the fullest.

Thus at 1200 hours on March 30, 1945, 39 Reconnaissance Wing of the Royal Canadian Air Force crossed the river over the pontoon bridge at Xanten — the first Allied airfield over the Rhine. The convoy rolled through battered Wesel, still burning and housing fighting Nazi fanatics, past the hundreds of gliders used in the airborne landing and so to B-104, Damm airfield, 15 miles northeast of Wesel. Just before reaching the field, the trucks halted to let the airport construction machinery clatter by! It was an omen for this field with the descriptive name. B-104 was just mud and water.

Meanwhile back at B-90, the terrific pace continued with tactical, contact and artillery recon-



HISTORIC CROSSING of the Rhine by 39 Reconnaissance Wing of the Royal Canadian Air Force on March 30 at Xanten.

SMASHED WINDMILL just over the Rhine.



RUBBLE AND DUST of a shattered town before reaching the Rhine River.





BATTERED WESEL, still burning after a week of battle, was a sight to remember. It was the evidence of our military power. First had come the pounding by Allied bombers then the artillery went into action to pave the way for the infantry.



RUSSIANS WALK wearily back to the camps for displaced persons.



GERMANS RIDE in our trucks to the P.O.W. cages.

naissance sorties flying every possible minute.

On all its moves, the Wing was divided into two parties which were complete airfields in themselves. Thus the first group would push on to a new site, get operational and the planes would fly in without losing a moment. Then the second group would move to the new drome.

A current of tenseness underlay all our actions at Damm with extra sentries at nights, special guards on M.T. runs and ration trips which took endless hours. We moved about the countryside in groups of three at least. At night the huge searchlights beamed on the sky at the Rhine spread an eerie glow over the dark fields. In the distance red tracers laced the sky as Nazis fought on in Wesel.

But there were compensations in many ways. German civilians, still dazed by the speed of our powerful drive, were evacuated from the airstrip locality with the result that a farm came into the Wing's possession. In no time chicken, geese, pork chops and roast pork turned up on the menus. Hunting of all sorts was very good in the neighbourhood and soon venison and souvenirs appeared.

An enemy jet fighter zipped over the field shortly after we arrived but got a hot reception from the ack-ack batteries. Constant rain and the speed of the army's advance eventually "washed out" B-104, so on April 8 we moved to Rheine.

THRUSTING DEEP INTO GERMANY



PLOWED-UP FIELD by retreating Nazis failed to prevent us from using Rheine as a drome.



MERTON HANGAR amid the trees at Wunstorf was centre of airfield life as a mess and cinema.



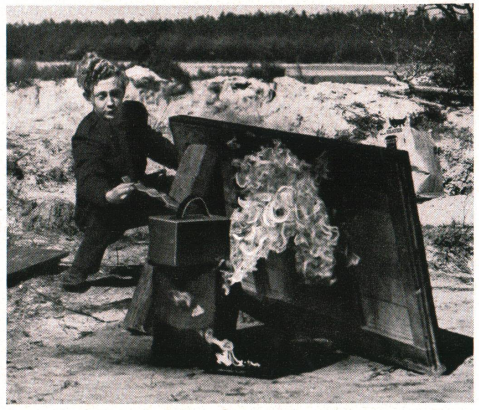
VICTORY BOND sign strikes unusual note amid Rheine wrecks.



YEEOW! Cut it out you g——d——— b————————!



CONVOY ON THE MOVE rolls through a smashed town where the fleeing Germans made a futile stand against our armour. In this outstanding picture is exemplified the whole spirit of an airfield pushing ahead into enemy territory.

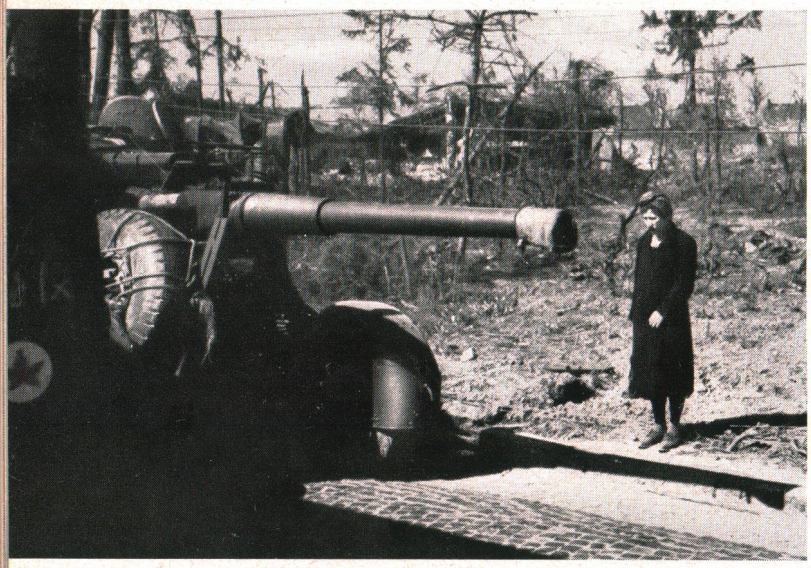


MAKING TEA, believe it or not, in the accepted *TAF* manner.

Keynote of a network of German airdromes, Rheine, 25 miles north of Munster, had been well plastered by our bombers. Runways gaped with huge holes, hangars were piles of twisted steel and the remaining buildings wrecked by demolition. The Wing again became a complete unit when the aircraft and the rest of the field pulled in from B-90.

In this period every kite available was in the air checking for indications that the Wehrmacht would mass and fight. A daily watch also was kept to see if the Nazis were pulling out of Holland. Bremen and Hamburg were every day targets as our pilots answered the army's incessant calls for information.

The swift pace of the Allied advance resulted in "leap frog" tactics on April 16 when over 60 sorties were flown. The planes took off from B-108, completed their missions and landed at B-116, at Wunstorf near Hanover, where "A" party was all ready for them. Wunstorf was in good condition with hangars, aircraft and supplies intact. Here "requisitioning" hit a peak with the discovery of a champagne warehouse!



SHAME OF DEFEAT bows the head of this German woman.



BAGS OF MAIL which caught up to us at Reinsehlen.



AIR PRIZE taken when Nazi groundcrew flew in to surrender.

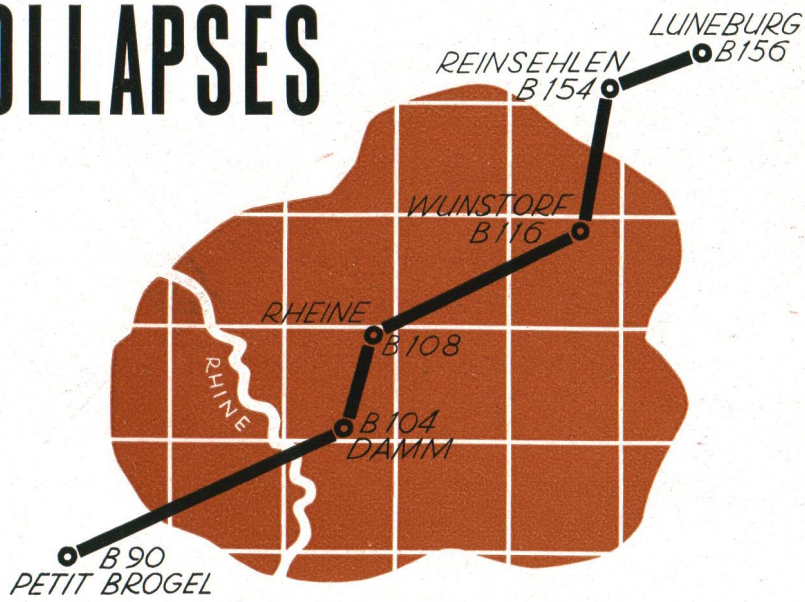


LATRINE HUMOR pokes fun at British anti-travel poster.

DEEPER INTO GERMANY the convoy rolls with the men sprawled on top of the vehicles now that resistance is crumbling.



THIRD REICH COLLAPSES



The chase went on after the faltering German armies and so over bad roads we moved to B-154 at Reinsehlen, about 30 miles south of Hamburg, on April 26. Pockets of German troops were still in the area and the next day five SS men were captured crossing the drome.

Coastal shipping sorties were the main task of the Wing during these days in which we saw the inevitable collapse of the Third Reich coming after Berlin fell.

May 2 was an eventful day in the history of the Wing. Flight Lieutenant Sammy Hall, D.F.C., of 414 Squadron, won an immediate Bar to his Distinguished Flying Cross by bagging three Focke-Wulf 190's and one Messerschmidt 108 and damaging a FW 190 and an ME 108. On the same day, Squadron Leader Jim Prendergast, D.F.C., Commanding Officer of 414, shot down two FW 190's. Honor of first sighting of the Russians in the 21st Army Group area went to F/L Bill Blakeney, D.F.C., of the same squadron, on this day.

Then it came. The flash arrived around eight o'clock on evening of May 4 that the Germans in our sector had surrendered to Montgomery at Luneburg. The result was terrific.

There was still work to be done, however, and so on May 7 "A" party moved to B-156 at Luneburg.

Thus 39 Reconnaissance wing, through 400 Squadron the direct descent of the 110th City of Toronto Squadron which was the first R.C.A.F. unit overseas, ended the war the furthest into Germany of any Canadian airfield.





GERMANS SURRENDER to Field Marshal Montgomery on Luneburg Heath where the memorial (right) now stands. Oblivious to the camera, some of the boys (above) listen to the momentous news which ended the war in our sector.

V.E. DAY





We felt it coming for quite awhile. It was reflected in the faces of the dazed civilians, in the bedraggled Wehrmacht, in the masses of equipment captured intact and in the general disintegration of the Third Reich.

It had been an off and on proposition for too long. So it came as a complete anti-climax when they finally got around to making the formal announcements on May 8, 1945.

The emotional impact of it had long since been over, the first excitement was finished. Primarily there was the relief that we were still alive and the tremendous struggle over. It was like taking a long breath and letting the air get right down to the very bottom of the lungs. It felt good but there was something lacking. The urgency of war, a thing that had been close to every moment of our being for nearly six years, was no more. We suddenly realized we were tired clear through.

The radio blared out the news of wild celebrations in Allied lands. Crowds were going mad with joy and liquor. While here we were, the guys who helped do the job, sitting around in the middle of Germany as everybody else whooped it up. It was a paradox. But it made one think. We thought about all the things we had been through, all the fellows who weren't going to be with us anymore. We thought of home, of Canada and how many of us had found a new concept of our nation, of the different countries and peoples we had seen, and of our own futures.

We thought too of the East as Victory in Europe still meant there was another job to do.

Then there was the problem of Germany. What were we going to do with her as a nation? What about fraternization? Would our governments live up to their pledges of how they would deal with the Germans? Would our sacrifices go for naught in later years? Could these people be educated to the principles of democracy or was the poison too deep? Would our own men live up to the ideals they had fought for or would they themselves become victims of Nazi ideas?

All these things were in our minds as we turned over the thoughts of victory but a dry, flat taste was in our mouths.

Our main task had been done — the job was over for the immediate present. It had been a struggle in which we had united with all the different peoples of the world to put down the Nazi reaction against the concept of civilization. We were members of a gigantic Canadian team which had given an outstanding account of itself on the battlefronts, kept the supplies of food and material coming and earned a place in the council of free nations.

So it had come about that our task in Europe was over. We had played our part and now, from the titantic ruin of a terrible war, the freed peoples faced a future with renewed hope and the right to decide their own destinies. We too faced the job of building a new and better future as Canadians — a future which would give full significance to the victory we had achieved.

J.H.M.



HELLO MAW – WE WON!

BELSEN

In such camps as Belsen lies the answer to why we fought the war. These pits of rotting, emaciated corpses are the logical product of the process of Fascism which in Germany was called Nazism.

For the last twelve years the German people have been led by a deliberate campaign of propaganda. Starting from the most trivial beginnings a process of self-centred intolerance and perverted nationalism was developed until a whole nation could stand by calmly while millions of human beings were slowly starved, tortured and then slaughtered as efficiently as possible. The Germans who objected to such treatment of other human beings soon found themselves behind the barbed wires of the concentration camp with the very ones whose rights they had tried to uphold. The Germans who remained passive preferred to accept the new order, and identified themselves with it because they were afraid to do otherwise and they believed that they had something to gain in this process of expansion of the Third Reich.

To further the growth of greed and callousness of a whole people the leaders of the German nation exploited every possible avenue. Particularly for the young, they exalted ruthlessness and racial predjudice. Such a system made the concentration camp possible.

The enemies of Germany were those who by accident of birth or circumstance were unacceptable to the perverted philosophy that claimed an exclusive nationality and the future of the human race for the German. These victims of the concentration camps were not soldiers, but civilians who were the pawns in a gigantic plan to destroy the races and creeds that stood in the way of world domination. The first to go were those who spoke for freedom and humanity. Those who died in the camps across Germany in the past ten years were the soldiers of democracy as surely as we are.

The Germans have had to pay—and pay dearly—for their willingness to accept a whole system of false values and debased ideals. Their towns have been levelled and their men and women have died by the tens of thousands before the monstrous creed of Fascism was smashed. Belsen stands as a terrible warning to the people of the whole world.

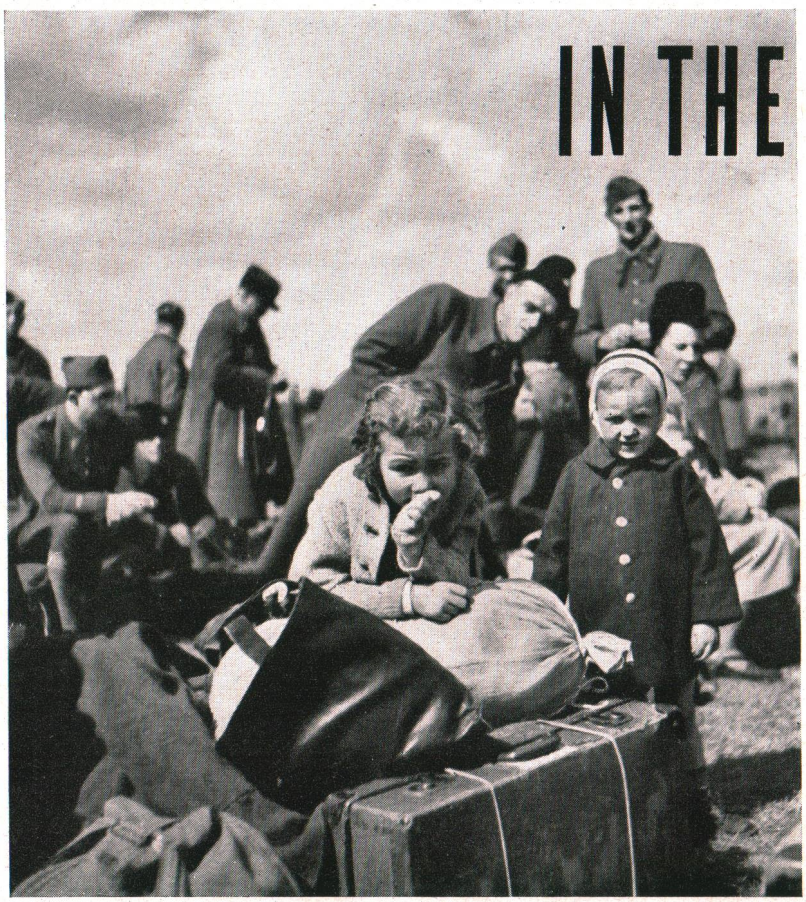
If we do not wish to see this war fought in vain we must make sure that we will never allow the seeds of predjudice and intolerance to be sown among us. Time will tell if the Germans have learned the lesson of Belsen. We must make sure that we have learned that lesson also. It will take unwearying vigilance and clear thinking to make sure that this does not happen again anywhere—ever.

L. V.



BELSEN CONCENTRATION CAMP WILL NOT SOON BE FORGOTTEN BY MEN OF 39 WING WHO SAW ITS HORRORS. THIS PAINTING BY LAC. H.S.ABRAMSON DEPICTS THE INTENSITY OF ITS TRAGIC DRAMA.

IN THE WAKE OF WAR



PATHETIC VICTIMS of war await their turn for air transport to their homes

As the wave of war rolled back across the Continent, prisoners of the Third Reich were freed.

Through our airfields passed broken civilian victims of war, slave workers, wounded and weakened ex-prisoners-of-war, the airborne troops returning to their units and Germans who flew in with their own aircraft to give themselves up.

The work of aerial transportation of these thousands got under way at B-154 and increased tremendously when the war ended. With the help of the padres, the men of the Wing gave their rations of chocolate and cigarettes to thousands who used our fields as staging points on the long trek home. First the X.P.W.'s went through and then came the displaced persons who had been torn from their homes in other lands to become the slaves of the German "master" race.



AIRBORNE TROOPS get ready to fly home to England in a tremendous convoy of Dakotas which filled the Luneburg sky.



DOWN TO EARTH for these deflated Luftwaffe pigeons.



FROM NORWAY came this Nazi Condor bomber to surrender.



PADRE DUNPHY gives out cigarettes to freed Canadians.



FLYING AMBULANCE takes on sick and wounded for Britain.

DAKOTA TRANSPORT squadrons performed the gigantic task of flying home the thousands who required speedy air travel.





EYES OF THE ARMY

Toward the broad, spring-turbulent Rhine River, last ditch barrier of the tired German armies in the West, on March 24, 1945 roared wave after wave of Allied air-craft in the greatest airborne assault of all time.

Endless formations of troop carriers and gliders, swarms of watchdog fighter planes and hedge-hopping, steeple-dodging supply craft droned relentlessly eastward — a great aerial spearhead to be thrust deep into the side of the struggling Reich.

As this air armada crossed the river and neared its objective the damp grey shroud of artificial fog lay over the Rhine and its defences. Dense clouds of black smoke from Allied artillery bombardment concealed jump areas.

Scant minutes before the German sky blossomed out in silk the artillery barrage, a stream of steel that had been pouring

THE STORY BEHIND THE RHINE ASSAULT

death over the river for almost an hour, was turned off like a tap. Timing was split second.

When our artillery left off, German flak guns started up. Steely flak fingers groped wildly above the blanket of smoke and fog as the sky broke out with the white puffs of opening parachutes and silent gliders were cast loose from their tow planes.

Within a few hours after the first Allied paratrooper landed on German soil a report of the complete success of this vital part of the great Rhine crossing was flashed over the wires of army communications. Actual casualties to paratroopers in the air had been negligible and although the glider-borne infantry suffered a much greater buffeting as they slowly planed down on German fields the percentage of casualties sustained in the whole action was the smallest in any airborne assault up to that time.

This remarkable record was made despite the fact that the Germans knew we were going to throw an aerial bridge over the Rhine and also knew almost the exact area where the landing would take place!

Weeks before the actual airborne assault they had dragged, driven and rolled into that part of the map every flak gun they could lay their hands on. Anything with a barrel that would point upwards was concentrated in this area.

Why then were our ponderous transport craft, lumbering over the German countryside at very low altitude, not blown out of the sky on that March morning like so many clay pigeons?

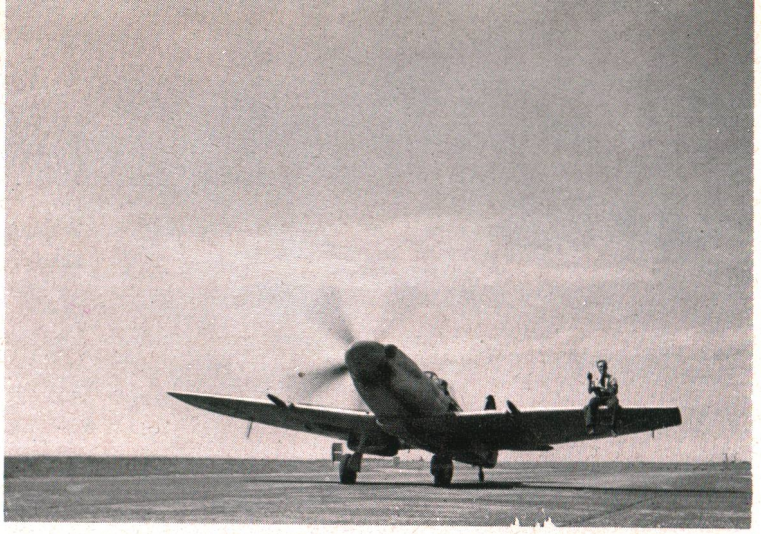
In the answer to this question lies the story of how 39 Reconnaissance Wing, R. C. A. F., of 83 Group, 2nd Tactical Air Force, turned in the biggest job of its whole invasion career. It is the story of the way this Wing, working in direct support of the British Second Army from Normandy to the outskirts of Hamburg, showed how close, how precise, the co-operation between air force and army could be. The story of how highly developed techniques of aerial reconnaissance, never dreamed of by the vaunted Luftwaffe in its cockiest days, were used to help seal the final defeat of the Wehrmacht.

The story starts back in the dying days of the winter campaign of waiting when plans were being shaped for the big spring push that would finish the war in Europe. The dull, drizzling month of February, which should have been a period of great activity, was recorded as the worst month for high-level photo reconnaissance since the Wing landed on the Continent. Plans had been made for an airborne thrust near Wesel just over the Rhine but by the middle of March, with only ten days to go to the big attack, weather was still bad and the army was like a blindfolded prizefighter waiting for the bell to ring.

Desperate army demands for pictures were finally met on March 19 when the weather that had



BRIEFING PILOTS on information the army wanted, an army liaison officer working with the air force intelligence officer.



TAXI-ING OUT to start on a tactical recce mission over the Nazi lines.



MAINTENANCE kept the Spitfires in the air.

pegged aircraft to the ground for so long finally broke and "Bluebird" Spitfires of 400 Squadron flew 16 successful sorties. But even here low clouds forced them to improvise and fly at 10,000 to 12,000 feet instead of the usual high-level reconnaissance 25,000 to 30,000 feet. From these and from tactical reconnaissance reports and pictures of 414 and 430 squadrons the first information of the massing of German gun positions was gained.

Measures taken to counteract these enemy moves produced a classic of army co-operation reconnaissance. Day after day, whenever high-level flying was possible, swift, unarmed "Bluebirds" whistled over German territory on precise missions to plot gun batteries being set up by the enemy. At the same time low-flying tactical reconnaissance aircraft of 430 and 414 squadrons gathered first hand evidence like the following taken from an operational report: "between 10.20 and 11.20 a.m. a tactical reconnaissance of 11 reported gun positions NW of Wesel was carried out. Adverse reports were made on three of them. A second TAC/R was made between 15.00 and 16.40 hours which reported fresh diggings and 5 suspected gun pits at one position." On the same day another TAC/R concerning 11 more suspected gun positions also near Wesel showed the same kind of activity.

In that last frantic week before the zero hour of the Crossing 39 Wing worked furiously to turn out photographs not only for their own army, the British Second, but also for both the First Canadian and American Ninth armies. In this one big job, undoubtedly the all-time epic of photo reconnaissance work, more than a million prints of all kinds were produced by the Wing.

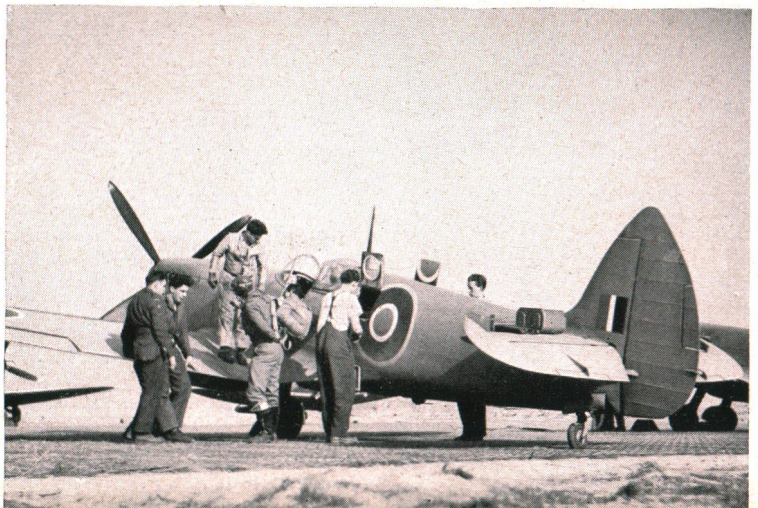
As "recce" pilots daily burnt up the skies back and forth over the Rhine area more and more exposed film poured into the processing units at the two Mobile Field Photographic Sections attached to the Wing. These highly technical, mass production print factories with their special photographic machinery were kept operating at top speed. The fabulous multi-printers, capable of "sausage machine" churning out of aerial prints at the rate of over 1,000 per hour, were never



AERIAL FILM magazines to be developed.

VITAL RADIO receives complete checkover.

GROUNDCREW swarm over returned kite. Gas up (right) for next trip.





AIR PHOTO ESPIONAGE

stopped for days. Shifts worked right round the clock, fresh crews taking over at the machines as they ground out literally mile after mile of prints.

In five days just before March 24 these two units developed 32,091 negatives, 286,500 prints and in the process used almost 2,000 gallons of photographic chemicals, three tons of "hypo", 45,500 gallons of water (every drop of which had to be hauled by motor transport), 4 miles of film and 36 miles of photographic paper!

The British Second Army Photographic Interpretation Section (APIS) attached to 39 Wing, whose job it was to sift vital information from mountains of air photos, was literally snowed under with more prints than it had ever seen before. Divisional interpreters had so many thousands of prints delivered to them that, although they invariably had the largest tent or room at headquarters they ended up by having to spread pictures out in the fields for sorting. Never before had photographs been used to this extent in battle and the scheme was carried so far that even section leaders went into action with copies of the same photos used by "brass hats" to plan the attack.

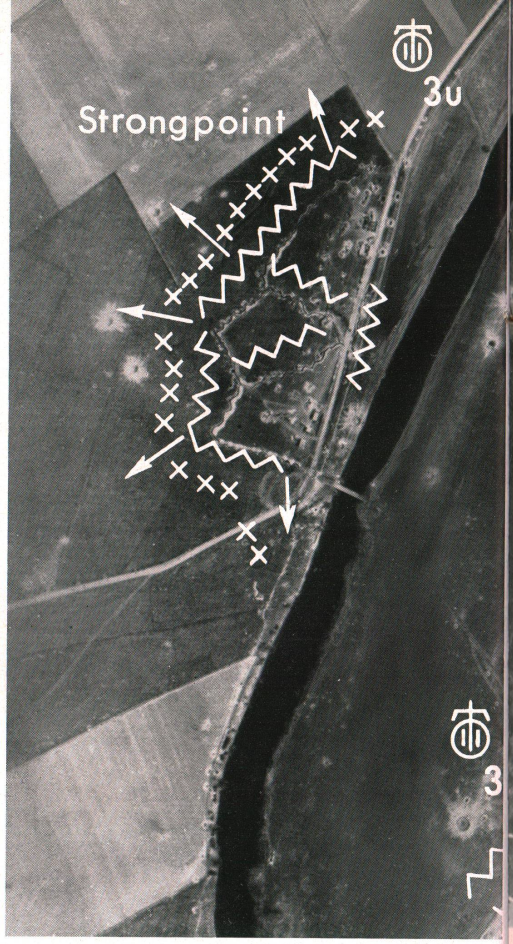
All the time this colossal photographic production was in progress American Transport Command Dakotas waited at Petit Brogel airfield to fly immense loads of pictures back to the airborne divisions. Every man who took part in the airborne army's attack had up-to-the-minute photographs of the jump area to be used as maps.

Even the final go signal for this air operation was determined from air photographs taken by 39 Wing. As soon as there was enough light on the morning 24 hours before the drop 400 Squadron "Bluebirds" roared out over the Rhine and flew complete coverage of the entire area where the landing was to be made. The rush prints were flown to England and placed on the desk of British and American airborne headquarters at 9 p.m. the same day. One look at these pictures convinced generals that no new flak positions had been set up and that the operation could go ahead as planned.

During the bustling weeks of preparation at the elbow of APIS photo-interpreters sat counter-battery artillery officers of Second Army in direct wireless communication with advanced artillery headquarters who, as quickly as information on gun positions was translated from photographs, passed it on to their gun crews in the forward areas.

In this job 39 Wing aircraft not only spotted and mapped Nazi gun batteries for the army but both 414 and 430 squadrons took off day after day on artillery reconnaissance (ARTY/R) sorties to direct fire from our own guns that were blasting away at these same positions.

Sometimes Recce pilots, while cruising around at about 5,000 feet busy "calling the shots" of our own batteries on some German target, would be hampered by enemy flak. When this became too annoying a hurried message like the following would crackle over the radio communication: "Hello Queen-Dog ... hello Queen-Dog ... Apple Pie ... Apple Pie ... over ..." This apparent untimely desire of the pilot for solid food had an almost instantaneous if not relevant effect. Within



INTERPRETATION OF AIR PICTURES

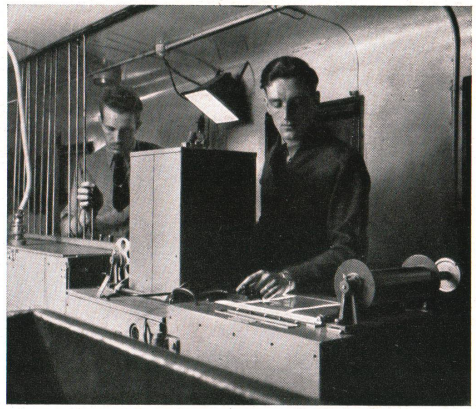


APIS spent hours pouring over prints, ferreting out Nazi defences.



WESEL BRIDGEHEAD defences revealed by interpretation of the aerial photographs taken by pilots of 39 Wing. Pictures such as this became the key to the Rhine defence secrets and answered all the army's questions about the enemy.





MILES OF PICTURES poured from the intricate multi-printer machines of the two busy mobile field photographic sections.

SECOND SIGHT FOR TROOPS AND TANKS

minutes every enemy flak battery in the entire area (positions previously noted from air photos) would be under a hail of Allied artillery fire.

After a short spell of this kind of vindictiveness the pilots were usually able to continue their ARTY/R in comparative quiet. This routine also served the additional purpose of getting enemy gun crews above ground while we were pounding their positions.

Swift Spitfires from these two squadrons at the same time were required to meet heavier and heavier demands for tactical reconnaissance both before the Second Army started its drive and while the day to day battle was in progress.

A modern army asks many questions: Where are the enemy's tanks, his guns, his mortars, his trenches? Where is he moving his troops? And a thousand and one other queries that kept the Wing busy searching from the skies.

As demands for vital and specific information on Rhine defences and enemy deployment became more and more exacting, planes were forced to sweep lower and lower until the recce point of saturation was reached . . . pilots were coming back with oblique air pictures that looked directly into second-storey Nazi windows!

Many a hedge was jumped and many a steeple dodged before this special work was finished. One pilot flying a special low-level sortie over the Rhine came back with his camera shot away from behind his head.

Closest and most spectacular co-operation between army and air force was achieved in contact reconnaissance work. Here some recce pilots got a chance to see how the other half lived. They travelled with advance elements of the army attacking force in armoured cars or jeeps, had to duck small arms fire with the rest of the foot sloggers and in their own words "wished they were back in the air where it was safe."

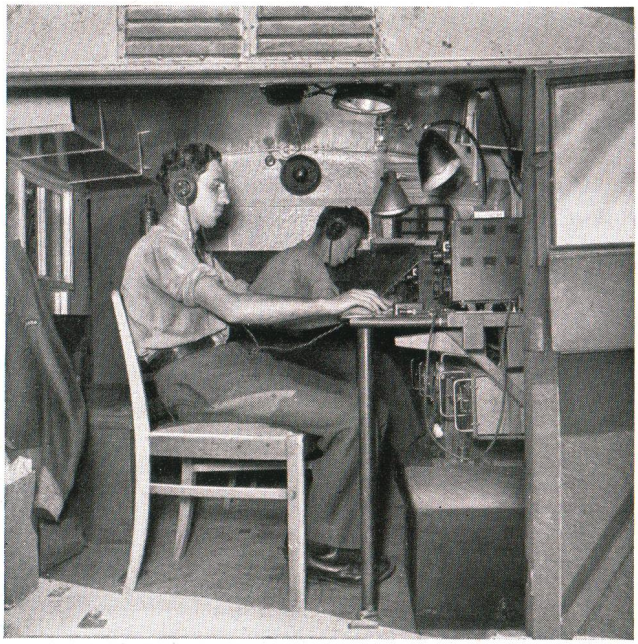
These "Recce Controllers" as they were called, allotted TAC/R tasks to their airborne brothers who were flying just ahead of leading troops during periods of breakthrough when the enemy was beating such a hurried retreat that he was difficult to locate.

When the Rhine defences cracked open, German forces opposing on our front were turned suddenly from an organized defensive force to a helter-skelter of little islands of resistance set up wherever terrain or hastily prepared defences permitted. Our forward troops, rolling down German roads or across fields in tanks never knew when they would suddenly run into a blocked road or a cleverly concealed 88 to blast their armour and hinder their sweeping progress.

Stuttering messages like this filled the ether between the five-man-crew contact car — four radio operators and an aircrew officer — and the cruising recce plane: "Hello Preview . . . hello Preview . . . Bathbun to Preview . . . Bathbun to Preview . . . TAC/R wood East of canal for enemy armour . . . over . . ." Shortly the answer would crackle back: "Hello Bathbun . . . Preview to Bathbun . . . TAC/R of wood . . . it is unoccupied . . . wood is unoccupied . . ." And so the army rolled ahead.

Because of the pressing importance of their work these x-ray eyes for our combat troops were flying in all kinds of weather that would have been considered impossible for ordinary reconnaissance tasks.

When the German armies in the North-west were



MOBILE SIGNALS unit provides the link between the Wing and the rest of TAF by wirelessing the reconnaissance reports.



IN CONTACT/R our pilots report direct to the ground. On the gun is a pilot who united the army and air groups.





SHIPPING PATROLS were flown in the closing days of the war as the Wing's pilots checked surrendering vessels. Wrecked water transport choked the harbors and bays of the Baltic Sea where German naval power came to its end.

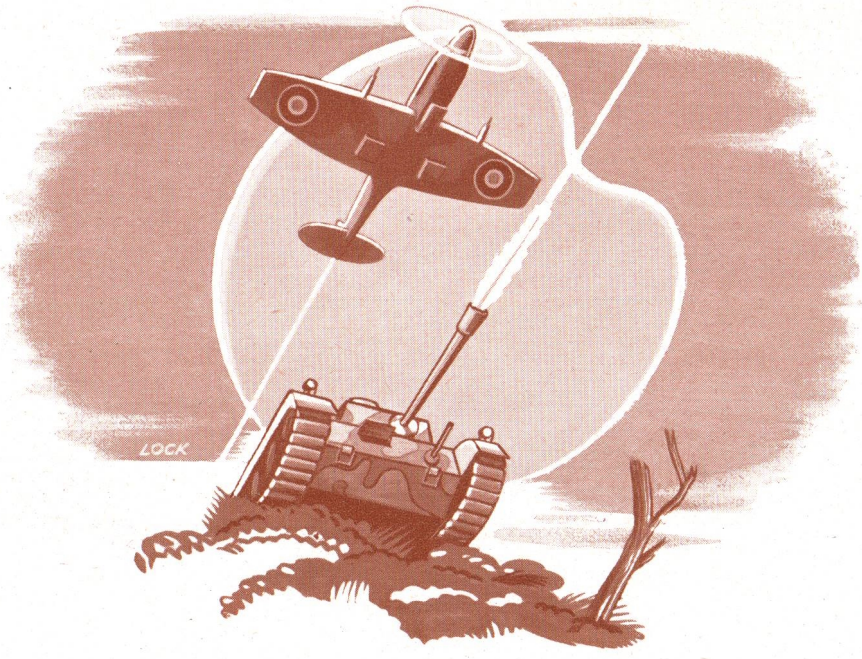
reduced to a sprawling, dismembered colossus of tired and bedraggled soldiers waiting for their leaders to make the final surrender, the aircraft of 39 Wing flew their last operational sorties over Europe. They were given the "flatfoot" job of patrolling enemy shipping and U-boats coming into ports to surrender to the Allies and their "beat" was the Baltic Sea.

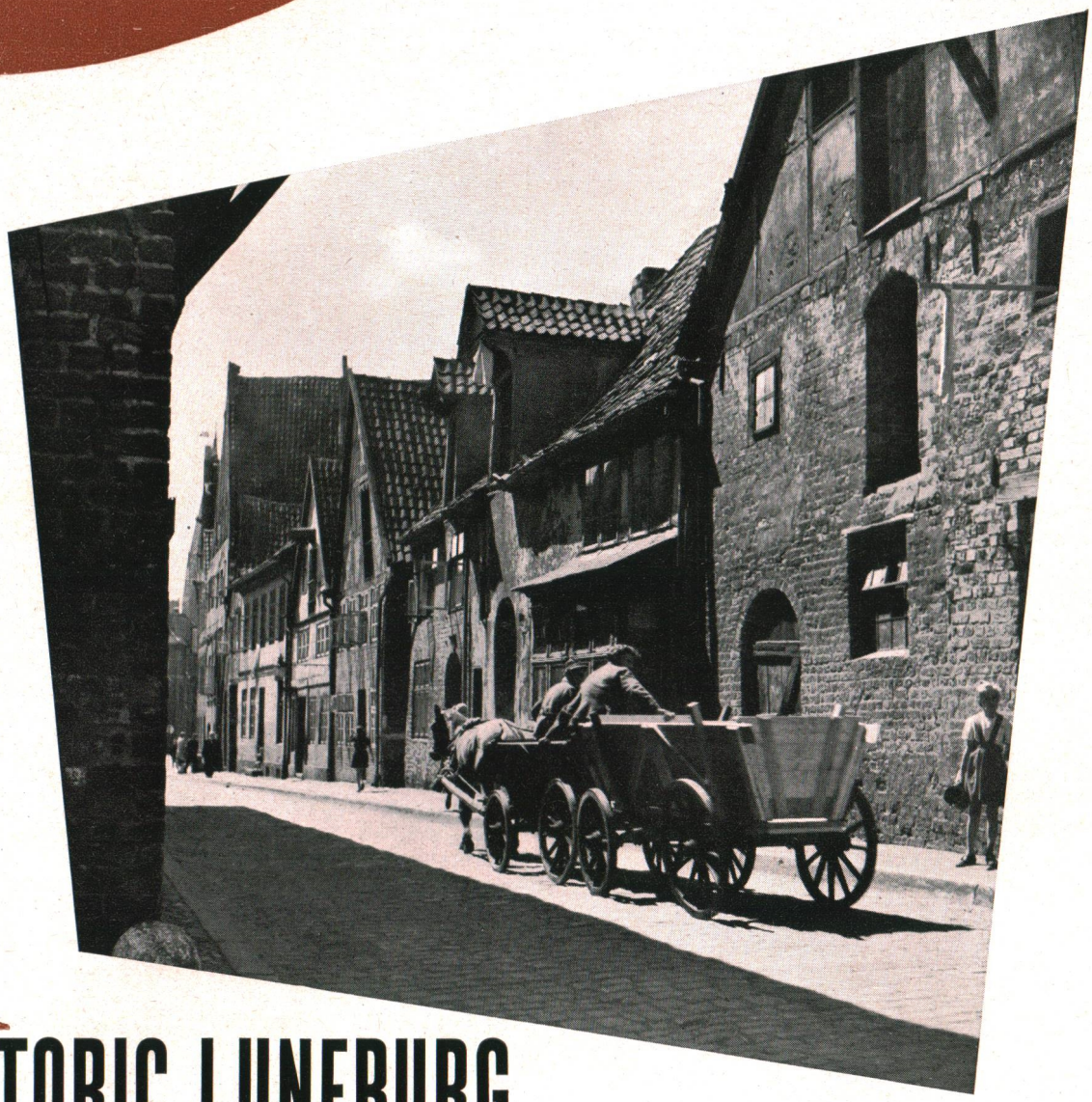
The job done during the whole invasion by Allied aerial reconnaissance is best summed up in the words of a divisional order of the 19th German Air Force earlier in the campaign:

"Enemy aerial reconnaissance detects our every movement, every concentration, every weapon, and immediately after detection smashes every one of these objectives."

The job done by the 2nd Tactical Air Force and that of 39 Reconnaissance Wing, Royal Canadian Air Force in particular, is best expressed in a tribute from Lieutenant General Sir Miles Dempsey, G.O.C. of the Second British Army:

"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, RCAF. 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." M.C.K.





HISTORIC LUNEBURG

For us, Luneburg was the last stop on the line. Of moderate historical importance, in that Johann Sebastian Bach taught and played the organ in one of the churches, the little town suddenly found fame on May 4, 1945. On that date the cessation of hostilities was signed nearby and shortly afterwards British Second Army Headquarters were established in the town.

In addition to sheltering a population swollen by ex-prisoners-of-war, refugees and displaced persons, Luneburg also saw the suicide of Himmler and the capture of William Joyce (Lord Haw-Haw) who was later flown to England for trial.

With its old buildings and cobbled streets, Luneburg is a memento of the days when the Germans wrote a history which their descendants discredited.





TYPICAL STREET lined with houses dating back hundreds of years. This atmosphere of charm was one of the outstanding features of Luneburg in marked contrast to more modern parts of Germany. War's destruction had missed the town.



WHITE FLAGS of surrender fly in the street leading to the Johanneskirche.



ANCIENT WAREHOUSE in classic style.



16th CENTURY HOUSES front the river.

RATZEBURG

TRANQUILLITY AND REST were the keynotes ot the "Recce Roost" which had many of the qualities of famous Canadian holiday centres. One of the guests relaxes while his companions enjoy themselves by the thatch-roofed boathouse.

German hospitality, a trifle forced, enabled the boys of the Wing to spend pleasant 48's as guests in the country mansion of Dr. Eric Henschel. A doctor of finance, not of medicine, our unwilling host was also a patron of the arts and owner of several factories. Incidentally he was quite a friend of Goering.

The previous tenant found comfortable, if less spacious, quarters in what was once the gardener's lodge, while we basked on the lawns or fished from boats newly christened with appropriate Canadian names.

Thus we rested in the peace and quiet of Ratzeburg, a little country town not far from the Baltic port of Lubeck where another rest camp was opened later.



HAMBURG

DESTRUCTION OF WAR in its most terrible form is evident in this dramatic photograph of a devastated street in the Hamburg area. An open city in the last days of the war, Hamburg is an example of the power of air bombardment.



By direct contrast Hamburg was an utter shambles. Germany's second city and greatest port was bombed to a heap of rubble in one week's furious air assault in July, 1943. Once a leading city in the Hanseatic League, Hamburg will have to be largely rebuilt if it is to regain its former importance.

When we saw Hamburg, a good portion of what little was left of the city was used to house the Military Government headquarters. In spite of the incredible destruction the city was gradually being cleaned up. Meanwhile thousands of refugees were still trickling back to camps in the area though their homes and the streets where they stood had been wiped out.

STUDY AND HOBBIES FILL NEW LEISURE

The end of hostilities brought more leisure time. Sports were reorganized and expanded, and at the same time a host of other station activities were created. Many of these were part of the trend back to "civvy street." In these ways we sought to enliven our spare time, while changing our outlook and activities from the tasks of war to those of peace.

The first peacetime activity started on the Wing was the station newspaper, the "Recce Flash". In spite of numerous difficulties of which the irregular power supply was the most annoying, the paper was published weekly as long as the Wing was on the Continent. By July, 1945, "Flash" was the only R.C.A.F. printed newspaper left in Europe.

Several clubs were organized under the guidance of the educational section. The urge to tinker was successfully met in the Hobby Club. For the pictorial-minded, the Camera and Sketch clubs were



EDUCATIONAL CLASSES in business and store management, advertising and selling, mathematics and German featured the Wing's approach to serious post-war planning. These well-attended courses were a part of our switch from war to peace.



HOBBY SHOP was popular.



CAMERA CLUB helped new enthusiasts.



WRECKY REVUE was a "bang-on" show.

formed. Sunday evenings were devoted to the Music Appreciation group organized by Padre Cameron who "scrounged" records of classical music.

Closely co-ordinated with the possible change to "civvy street" were the educational courses and the personnel counsellors. The personnel counselling service sought to help the men readjust their thinking to "civvy street" conditions and to advise them on suitable educational courses or employment with particular reference to the skills they acquired in the service.



SKETCH CLUB members in action on a Sunday outing to the Elbe River.



RECCE FLASH was an outsanding achievement in providing the Wing with a smart weekly newspaper. It was produced in a Luneburg plant with consequent language problems while engravings were made 30 miles away in Hamburg.



PERSONNEL COUNSELLING aided our post-war planning.



MUSIC APPRECIATION group had numerous adherents.



I should like to take this opportunity to thank all the members of 39 Reconnaissance Wing for their splendid work and co-operation in helping to bring to an end our struggle against Nazi oppression.

In modern warfare, so highly specialized, each one of us is dependent on the other, no matter what the job may be. It has been this devotion to duty and team-work that has made our ultimate success possible.

While working together in this common task, we have had an opportunity to develop a great communal spirit of comradeship which will be long remembered after the discomforts and trials of service life have been forgotten.

None of us who have lived through the episodes which this publication has recorded will fail to emerge without a better understanding and fellow-feeling for one another. All of you may be justly proud of your achievements which have been made possible by a spirit born of sharing a single purpose.

Continue with this same spirit on your return to Canada in order that your contribution to the Peace may be as great as the sacrifices of this War.

In closing I wish to thank the staff of "Flap" for the time and work spent on this issue and to each and every member of the Wing wherever his pursuits may take him — good luck.

Group Captain R.C.A. Waddell, D.S.O., D.F.C.



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39 R WING

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