

THE TALE
OF THE
TYPHOON

A RECORD OF

146 WING

2ND T.A.F.

ENGLAND = N.W. EUROPE

FEBRUARY 1944

TO

JUNE 1945

THE
ODYSSEY
OF
No. 146 WING

Compiled by The
Senior Intelligence Officer

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CHAPTER ONE

ENGLAND AND THE BEACHHEAD

One last February, 1944 during the period of intense preparation for the Invasion of Europe, No. 146 Airfield, as it was then called, began to form in a Sussex farmhouse on the edge of Tangmere Aerodrome.

Wing Commander D.E Gillam, D.S.O., and D.F.O. and Bar, had not then been officially “Posted” as Officer Commanding the Airfield.

A number of famous Squadrons passed through the Unit during the early stages, including Nos. 183, 193 (Brazilian) 197, 257 (Burma), 263, 266 (Rhodesian) and 609 (West Riding) until concentration for the assault took place at Needs Oar Point, Hampshire, in April, when Nos. 193, 197, 257, and 266 Squadrons became the finally “posted” strength.

Wing Commander Gillam was promoted to the rank of Group Captain and assumed command of the parent Unit, No. 20 Wing, which also controlled Nos. 123 and 136 Airfields. Wing Commander E. R. Baker, D.F.C. and Bar, became Wing Commander Flying of No. 146 Airfield, with Wing Commander E. W. W. Ellis as Airfield Commander on the administration side.

On the 11th May, 1944 the title of the Airfield was changed to “Wing” and that of the parent to “Sootor”.

Under the brilliant leadership of Wing Commander Baker, the Wing, operating at the first from Tangmere and later from Needs Oar Point, successfully carried out a wide variety of missions directed against the enemy wherever he was to be found, on land and sea and in air.

This “softening process” a prelude to the Invasion, included attacks on the large number of Flying Bomb sites in the Cherbourg Peninsular and in the coastal area between Dieppe and the Pas de Calais, over 700 sorties being made against this type of target alone, during the months of February, March and April.

It was obvious that the vast Armada necessary to transport the Invasion forces, must achieve complete surprise in order to make a successful landing on the shores of France and so the fiat went forth – all Radar Installations from Cap de la Hague to Cap Gris Nez must be destroyed! This formidable task was allotted to Nos. 123 and 146 Airfields. By 146 Airfield alone, over 400 sorties were made and despite the intense flak guarding these vital points, the attacked were pressed home to point blank range. As is now known these missions were entirely successful and on 6th June, 1944 the Invasion was launched and, covered by the continuous air patrols, landed on the shores of Normandy while the unsuspecting enemy broke his fast.

There followed a hectic time for all. The flow of Army demand for air support became almost continuous, and weather permitting, Pilots flew from dawn to dusk, smashing enemy troop concentrations, Strong Points, Road Transport, Tanks, and A.F.V's with bombs, Rockets and Cannon shells.

The 2nd British Army hold the eastern flank of the Beachhead, what was once described as the "hinge of the Door" into Western Europe and not unnaturally, the enemy concentrated the cream of his forces around that point, consequently for a time the fighting was long and bloody and the advance slow.

On the 16th June, a day of poor flying weather, there came an urgent call from the Army. For some days, it appeared, the enemy had been bringing strong reinforcements in from the south, through the village of Thury Harcourt. It was hoped that the R.A.F. could destroy the three road/river bridges at this point and so put a period to enemy movement. Two factors made the mission extremely hazardous, a low cloud base over the target area and a known intense flak concentration surrounding it, despite all this, realizing the urgency of the mission. Wing Commander Baker decided to make an attempt.

He carefully briefed Nos. 197 and 257 Squadrons and in the late afternoon, crossed the French Coast near Point de La Feroce and flew south at 4/5,000 feet, just below cloud base. When a few miles west of Caen, they ran into an intense accurate flak barrage of all calibers. The Wing Commander's Aircraft disappeared from sight and all aircraft were thrown to reform, a calm, confident voice was heard over the radio: "Hello Carefree and Vampire aircraft, Port 180 – Lochinvar – Out." He was not seen again, but the Wing reformed and returned safely to base. It was firm belief of all, that Wing Commander Baker gave the order which took the Wind out of the danger area, as he was actually crushing, for one Pilot caught a glimpse, through cloud, of a Typhoon diving almost vertically, apparently out of control, just before the last order was received.

Later we learned, to our sorrow, that he crashed near St. Mouvieu, where he was buried by our front line troops. So the Wing lost a fine leader, to whom it owes much, and I – a great friend.

His majesty the King graciously approved the award of the Distinguished Service Order to this gallant gentlemen.

On the 19th June, 1944 Wing Commander "Johnny" Baldwin, D.S.O. , D.F.C and Bar, ex-Commanding Officer of No. 198 Squadron, was appointed Wing Commander Flying.

Between the 2nd and 3rd July, the Wing moved to France and by the latter date was fully installed at B.15, near the village of Ryes, where "M. and V., Discurits, and Compo Tea" as all tentage and equipment had not yet arrived, so the Pilots for the first few days, returned to England each night and flew to the Beachhead into morning.

The following story is told by a long-suffering Intelligence Clerk who was a member of the Sea Rocco Party. On July 2nd, 1944 our small convoy of about 20 vehicles and 50 men (known as the "Sea Rocco" Party) left Needs Oar Point, Hants. In pouring rain the 5 hour journey to the "Sausage Machine" was anything but pleasant. A hot meal and accommodation, under canvas, were soon provided and everyone settled down to a couple of pleasantly lazy days spent reading, drinking tea, or visiting the Cinema and ENSA shows on the Camp. Most people took the opportunity of enjoying a hot bath – a welcome luxury. "Old Sarum" will always be vividly remembered for its Camp Broadcasting System which, with amazing regularity, announced its messages day and night.

Very early on 5th July, 1944 our party moved off to an Army Transit Camp of Fareham, Hants. Here the food, and accommodation in wooden huts were excellent. We started "collecting" various items of equipment for our sea voyage – Life Jacket, Rations, &o.

The following day, we left the Transit Camp and journeyed to Gosport Marshalling Area. Our stay will I am sure be remembered for the generous hospitality of the local residents who provided everyone with Tea, Cigarettes and Matches and allowed us the use of their Bathrooms for the final wash and brush up before embarking.

Finally, at 16.00 hours on Thursday, 6th July, 1944 our turn came to go board the L.C.T. that was to convey us to the Beachhead. Two "Craft" were allocated to our Unit and here I must pay tribute to the personnel of the Army and Navy responsible for the excellent safety aboard.

It had been arranged that we should sail at midnight, but "Met" had other ideas and a heavy thunderstorm accompanied by vivid lightning, which destroyed a number of Barrage Balloons protecting our Convoy, forced us to spend a night in the Solent in sight of Needs Oar Point, our late "home."

At 06.00 hours the following day we set sail for the Beachhead. It was a beautiful day and everyone took advantage of the warm sunshine. The Crew of the L.C.T. were very helpful and most of us learned something more of the life of the Navy. The journey was uneventful, but we had the pleasure of seeing many R.A.F. Squadrons heading for the Continent.

At 20.00 hours we anchored off "Green Beach" at Graye-sur-Mer, to await landing instructions. In the next few hours many of us witnessed some never-to-be forgotten sadness. The "first" battle for Caen was raging, and to our left, about half-a-mile away a Destroyer was shelling some unseen target in the battle area, whilst 800 Halifaxes and Lancasters added to the devastation. Many times have we read in the Press that our Bombers "queued up" in the air to bomb the target, and it was a most awe inspiring sight to us in reality.

At 23.00 hours we went ashore, almost "dryshd", and without any interference from the Hun. We were conducted to the R.A.F. Marshalling area at Tierce Ville, where from high ground we had an excellent view of the battle in the valley below. Persistent enemy bombing and strafing of the area apparently in our immediate vicinity, gave us a wakeful night, and everyone was

relieved to see, from under the vehicles, the dawn break and happy to know that we has suffered no casualties.

At 09.00 hours we set out for our first Airfield on the Continent – B.15 at Ryes and here amid pleasant surroundings we were ready to operate within 90 minutes of securing our site and on the arrival of our aircraft from England our “portion of the Battle for the France was on!”

We “Penguins” had our sleep disturbed twice during the first week by enemy intruders, fortunately their aim was poor, only one vehicle was hit and this received only superficial damage.

After a week at B.15 we moved to B.3, St. Croix-sur-Mer, North of Caen, where “tracking” made take-off and landing with heavy bombs less hazardous.

Normandy Dust – greyish brown in colour – inches deep on the roads – covering the hedges, houses and trees, in your hair and eyes, in your tea, on your food, between your teeth and in your blankets.

Dust of shell shattered roads, dust of thunderous transport day and night, dust storms by aircraft taking off and landing, dust obscuring the sun and darkening the moon – a veritable pall overall the Beachhead.

Apart from the infamous Normady dust, later to become equally infamous Normandy mud, the new site in an Orchard alongside the air strip, was a pleasant spot. It has previously been the site of a German Unit H.Q., and boasted some very fine deep shelters, a tribute to our bombers.

On July 17th, 1944, the constitution of the Wing was changed, Wing Commander Ellis returned to England. Group Captain Gillam became the Commanding Officer and No. 20 Sector was disbanded.

At 15.15 hours, on 17th July 1944 Wing Commander Baldwin led No. 193 Squadron to attack an H.Q. and Strong Point near Dozule and hits were seen on and among the buildings. Having an abundance of fuel the Wing Commander decided to carry out a sweep of the surrounding country in the hope of finding some enemy transport. On the road, S.W. out of Caen he saw a small convoy consisting of 2D/R's, 2 Armoured Car and the Staff Car were left stopped and burning, and the aircraft then returned to base.

Long afterwards, No. 84 Group H.Q. telephoned for an exact detailed report on this Operation. Conjecture was rife as the reason for this order, but we were not left long in doubt. Field Marshal Rommel had been travelling in the convoy and it was believed that injuries inflicted then, later led to his death.

Though all sorts of conflicting claims and reports were made by the “Rival firms” we firmly believed that “Johnny” was the men who killed Rommel!

No. 263 Squadron then joined the Wing which now operated five Squadrons.

The “break-out” of the Beachhead or attempt to “knock the door off its hinge” began on the 18th July. An endless procession of Lancasters, Fortresses and Liberators escorted by Spitfires swept over our heads to pound the enemy positions south and east of Caen. Later we were allowed to participate and numerous sorties were made against “dug-in” Tanks and M/T on the roads.

There followed several days of completely non-operational weather from a flying point of view, enlivened considerably by a visit paid by the Rt. Hon. Winston Churchill, who flew into the Airfield in a Fieseler Storch flown by Air Vice Marshal Broadhurst the Air Officer Commanding of No. 83 group, under whom we operated for some time before the arrival of No. 84 Group in France.

“Winny” spoke well and wittily, though as usual he promised us “only tears and toil”, heartened everybody by his presence, as witnessed by the tremendous cheers given by the immaculate assembly of R.A.F. personnel.

Strong Points, S.P. Guns, Mortars, Tanks in woods, Observation Posts, Headquarters, Troop Concentrations, Dumps and M/T – so ran the Army demands and all within our power – fulfilled – day after day – in rising crescendo – but always accompanied by the Hellish crackling cacophony of flak.

Yes, ‘twas not always burning vehicles and running Huns but often burning planes, shattered planes, missing planes, weary Pilots flying from dawn to dusk, weary ground crews servicing aircraft before dawn after dusk – planning, plotting, computing – “hard task” – little sleep – dust – dirt and flies – until – FALAISE!

CHAPTER TWO
THE FALAISE "BAG" AND THE RACE
THROUGH FRANCE.

The German hordes, the cream of their Armies penned-in by our victorious ground forces, staffed continuously by our Fighters, Fighter-Bombers and "Rocketeers" – the Battle of the France was practically won!

I quote a page from the Wing Diary – a typical day, not a record one – nearly 100 hours flown, over 120 sorties in ten missions successfully carried out and over 80,000lbs. of H.E. safely delivered to the Huns!

146 WING AIR HEADQUARTERS.

WING DIARY

PART ONE

STATISTICS

DATE:		9.8.1944
MISSIONS:		10
SORTIES:		122
OPS HOURS:		96 hours, 22 mins.
BOMBS DROPPED:		110 x 500lb = 55,000lbs 485 x 60lb = 29,100lbs R/P.
CASUALTIES:	(a) AIRCRAFT	2 Typhoons
	(b) PILOTS	F/Sgt. Green, 266 Squadron
	(a) AIRCRAFT DESTROYED)	
	PROBABLE)	KILL.
	DAMAGED)	
	(b) GROUND TARGETS	
	FLAMMERS	10 Met, 1 Tank, 3 A.F.V 1 Excavator
	SMOKERS	5 Met, 2 Tanks
	DAMAGE	14 Met, 1 Tank, 2 Guns

PART TWONARRATIVE

266 Squadron were airborne at the “crack of dawn” looking for trouble on the road on the roads, near Falaise. They found only scattered M/T and Tanks and claim one Tank Damaged and one M/T destroyed.

No. 263 Squadron followed them and claim 2 Tanks “smokers” and 4 damaged.

Eight aircraft of 257 Squadron were given two pin points, 880430 and 883421 which were said to cover Tanks and M/T. Though no movement was seen they claim all bombs “hit the pin point.”

Reported Tanks at 854414 were next for attention by 197 Squadron. No Tanks were seen but the pin-point was bombed. Pilots were rewarded by the sight of a very large explosion.

“Thirty plus Tanks” moving into Falaise were attacked by Wing Commander Baldwin and 266 Squadron. They claim one Tank destroyed and two “smokers”, one A.F.V. and 3 M/T destroyed, two M/T “smokers” and one damaged. To this they added a Mechanical Excavator destroyed and Infantry and 20 M/T well strafed with cannon.

An Armed Recce near Falaise, by 263 Squadron produced two M/T destroyed and two damaged. Another by 266 Squadron, in the same area scored two A.F.V. and three M/T destroyed, one M/T smoking and three damaged and two H.D. Guns also damaged.

Thirty-one aircraft from 193, 197, 257 and 236 Squadrons, including Group Captain Gillam, dropped 52 x 500lb. bombs and fired 64 x 60lb. R/P into a village in which Tanks were said to be concentrating (163481). One M/T was seen to be destroyed and a large fire started in the village from which dark brown smoke billowed, accompanied by a large explosion.

A “Nebelwerfer” position at 981479 was attacked by 15 aircraft from 263 and 266 Squadrons. The area was blasted by 112 x 60lb. Rockets, but nothing was seen of the NEW’S.

Sixteen aircraft of 193 and 257 Squadrons, led by Wing Commander Baldwin, attacked Mortars. (T.805423) with 32 x 500lb. bombs. A large column of black smoke rose from near the edge of a wood at 811420 and 815420.

As the neck of the Bag was closed and the remnants of the German Armies fled to the Seine and beyond so our activities changed.

Bridges, Barges and Communications became our objectives with occasional “areas of resistance” to live the proceedings.

16th August, 1944 – Good news this evening : Flying Officer Kilpatrick of No. 193 Squadron returned after 9 days on the “wrong side of the line”, (he was shot down by flak near Vire) with a

week's growth of beard and an even broader grin than usual. He had a great story to tell which briefly is as follows:

His aircraft was hit by flak near Vire, and he forced landed half a mile on the wrong side of the line. By the time German patrols reached the point, he was hiding beneath one of their won tanks. He could hear the scraping of foot as the Tank crew moved about inside it, but before he could move to a safer spot he was seen by other Germans coming along the road and taken prisoner. Each night nearly a week he was taken further into enemy-occupied territory until on the sixth night, Allied aircraft dive-bombed the cluster of the buildings where he was held.

The German guards were themselves in such a hurry to take over that he had no trouble in gaining a ditch – where already five German soldiers were crouching. “After a lot of argument I persuaded them that if, posing as my escort, they would see me through the German lines to our own, I would see that they were well treated,” he said. “I was to take them over as soon as we reached our line.” During the night I managed to steal German lorry, and we covered some distance towards the Allied forward troops. The lorry let us down, so we set fire to it and started to walk.”

“From some French people I discovered the exact position of our forward troops, and decided it was better to wait until they reached us rather than we should try to reach them. While we were waiting 22 more Germans located us and were persuaded to be ‘guards’ on the same terms.

“I handed over my ‘escort’ of 27 Huns to our advanced columns later the same evening and then hitch-hiked back to my own Squadrons. By that time I had covered about 250 miles and been away nine days.”

It's good to think that some of the Boys are “getting away with it.”

“Two Tanks – 21 M/T – 2 A.F.V's – 3 Barges – 1 Dredger – 2 D/R's – destroyed.
Six Tanks – 27 M/T -12 Railway Trucks and 5 Barges – damaged.”

So read the claims for the 17th August, 1944.

One day we were told that a long ranged railway Gun, which had been shelling the Beachhead and disturbing our sleep for some time, had been located in a Tunnel near Point L'Eveque.

The attack was carefully planned by Wing Commander Baldwin and carried out at low-level. Eight aircraft ‘in fours’ carrying 1,000 lb. bombs, delivered their cargo on both ends, in an

attempt to “bottle up” the Gun. It was an unqualified success. At least 10 bombs exploded on or in the tunnel with such effect that the entrance could be seen three quarters blocked by debris! The Gun did not fire again, and we heard afterwards, that it took the Huns several days to dig it out!

Though highlights of this type did not always come our way, steady toll of the German war effort was being taken on routine sweeps! Our claims for the month of August were:

		<u>Destroyed or Burning.</u>	<u>Damaged.</u>
Aircraft	-	-	3 x FW.190.
Tanks	-	40.	36.
A.F.V.'s	-	13.	21.
M/T	-	223.	242
Barges	-	16.	36
Guns	-	5.	-
Railway Trucks	-	12.	-

The amazing speed of the advance of our Armies, necessitated at first that is of Long Ranged Tanks and then the Transference of our Squadrons to Manston, from which base they could comfortably operate in the Pas de Calais and further east, following the battle.

At 22.50 hours on 5th September, 1955, in pouring rain, the “Penguins” began the long trek through France, in the wake of the Army. “The powers that be” had planned a strip at B.23 – Thiberville but when we arrived there it was water-logged and so we crossed on to B.37 – Corroy – south west of Abberville. There conditions were found to be precisely the same.

“Forward” was again the watchword – this time to Lille, which was reached at 15.00 hours on the 10th September, This whole journey was a nightmare – rain – bad roads – little sleep wet clothes and an over-powering stench of dead cows and petrol. Still “we made it” and drew comfort from the thought that the Huns were having a much worse trip!

During this part of the “Odyssey” the Squadrons, operating from Manston had been actively engaged on Shipping Strikes among the Dutch Island, where, though we has lost two Pilots to enemy flak, three ships of over 1,000 tons had been destroyed, in addition to a number of Barges and small vessels severely damaged.

Calais, Dunkirk and Boulogne were holding fairly strongly and from Lille Vendeville we operated mainly against those "areas of resistance," though other Forts and Shipping among the Dutch Islands received some attention.

Here is a quotation from the Wing Diary for the 16th September which typifies a day's work at this time. Over 100,000 lbs. of bombs dropped on 19 missions, with a total of 170 sorties:

"The Wing carried out a record number of sorties in completing 19 missions, 17 being successful.

The day began with a weather reece by 2 aircraft of 193 Squadron, who reported favourable weather conditions in the Pas de Calais area. This was followed by 2 Squadron attacks, 193 and 266 Squadrons, on Strong Points in the defenses of Boulogne. Seventy-five per cent of bombs and R/P were reported in the target area.

Four aircraft of 263 Squadron were sent to destroy 4 Guns south of Dunkirk, There should be little doubt about success, for an Ammunition Dump in the very centre of the four Guns detonated with a vast explosion, which was felt at 3,000 feet, and a mushroom of smoke was seen rising hundreds of feet into the air.

A second four on two other Guns to the south west of Dunkirk were not so fortunate for although they accurately fired their rockets into the emplacements, no Guns were visible.

Wing Commander Baldwin led 197 and 257 Squadrons in an attack on what was believed to be German Ration Store on the Quay, in Dunkirk Harbour. A large mound, well camouflaged, was the only thing seen on the Quay, and 16 Rockets fired by 257 Squadron were seen to strike home. 197 Squadron claimed 12 bombs on the Quay, but do not claim hits on the exact pin point.

266 and 193 Squadrons attacked Strong Points near Boulogne, with R/P and bombs claim 80 per cent in the target area.

263 and 197 Squadrons attacked a Church and Gun positions near Zeebrugge. The Church spire was of course being used as an Observation Post. 263 Squadron completely destroyed the body of the Church but failed to fell the spire. 197 Squadron saw no Guns, but in bombing the pin point were rewarded by two columns of smoke.

257 Squadrons were dispatched to destroy the canal defenses S.W. of Dunkirk, and poured their salvoes into the pin points, staffing at the same time. No results observed. Dunkirk Casino, being used by the enemy, as Barracks won't cut twice on this mission and claim 12 discreet hits.

266 Squadron poured 51 Rockets into Strong Points west of Dunkirk, scoring several direct hits on what may well be the Control Room in the centre of the area.

Two shipping strikes, 197 and 263 Squadrons, 197 and 257 Squadrons led by Wing Commander Baldwin, on 5 vessels of approximately 500 to 1,500 tons in Terneusen Harbour, resulted in 1 vessel of 500 tons claimed Cat. I, 3 or 500 tons claimed Cat. II, all received direct hits and many near misses. It is interesting to note that on the second sortie carried out two hours later, the Ship claimed sunk had indeed disappeared, another claimed Cat. II, was still burning fiercely.

257 Squadron destroyed the steeple of the Church, near Zeebrugge, which was the object of the previous attack by 263 Squadron.

266 Squadron carried out the last operation of the day, being an attempt to destroy with R/P the Lighthouse just south of the Cap Gris Nez. Although Pilot thinks the Lighthouse was hit, it still stands.”

“197 Squadron regretted the necessity of the destruction of the Distillery , but this personal angle did not prevent them from obtaining a number of direct hits, resulting in an explosion and a great volume of smoke from a large building in the target area, soon to be well on fire.”

This entry in the Wing Diary in 27th September 1944, serves well to illustrate the fine discipline of our Fighter-Bomber Pilots!

Another type of entry on the same day is illustrative of the spirit which permeated 2nd T.A.F.:

“Air Marshal Commanding 2nd T.A.F. has expressed his appreciation of the very efficient manner in which service ability of aircraft and availability of air crews has been continually maintained during the past four months and wishes it to be conveyed to the ground personnel of Units and to be administrative, technical, equipment and personnel staff of Headquarters and Units.”

CHAPTER THREE

ANTWERP AND "INTERDICTION"

On 29th September, we received the first intimation of a type of Operation which was destined fully to occupy the Wing during the winter months.

"INTERDICTION" – the purpose of which is to deny the enemy the use of rail communication.

As the Army overran the Flying Bomb and Rocket sites in France, the Hun had been feverishly constructing others on Eastern and western Holland, so to continue the offensive against London.

Our task was to "cut" the lines of communication between the factories in Germany and the firing sites in Holland and thus prevent the delivery of these infernal weapons.

Though this objective was our "primary commitment" it was naturally not always possible to carry out pre-arranged program in the "Interdiction" tactical area, owing to unsuitable weather conditions.

As alternatives, attacks on shipping missions in support of the Army, and some R.A.F. tactical targets were carried out in other areas.

From one of these, on 2nd October, 1944, an attack on a 2,000 ton Ship near Hook, Squadron Leader "Barney" Wright, Commanding Officer of No. 266 (Rhodesia) Squadron did not return, though we had reason to believe at the time that he was able to carry out a force-landing in enemy territory: later we learnt that he was a Prisoner of War.

The Pilots who accompanied him, all described in glowing terms the brilliance of his attack. Apparently Squadron Leader Wright launched his Rockets at zero feet and point blank range, all of which obtained direct hits. As he pulled up to clear the hull of the vessel, it disintegrated with violent explosion, and his aircraft disappeared from view in a huge cloud of smoke, flame and debris.

He "called up" on the radio saying that "He had been hit and was going to force-land." He was last seen heading in the direction of Rotterdam with his aircraft under control.

On this same day the Wing moved to Antwerp Deurno, B.70. During the German Occupation the Aerodrome had been a non-operational base and boasted a fine tarmac runway. Though the enemy had moved out in some haste, they had succeeded in destroying many of the

buildings and hangers, but not all and we who lived in Tents for so long, were delighted to move into comparatively comfortable houses in the vicinity.

Operations continued apace with an increasing tempo in “Interdiction” which Operation by the way, the Pilots loathed, for a railway line when hit, does not go off with a nice big bang!

They cheered up considerably when told that a successful day’s “Interdiction” reduced the following day’s Rocket offensive on England to a minimum.

The 8th October dawned with visibility of only 100 yards haze. When this has lifted it was then found to have become 10/10th cloud at 1/3,000 feet with a general visibility of considerably under a mile. Flying in it would have been unpleasant but Operational flying was deemed practically impossible! But at 17.30 hours the Army sent in an urgent request for “Air” – the need was apparently “vital” as strong units of enemy armour – taking advantage of the impossible weather conditions – were forming an offensive.

Taking seven aircraft of 257 Squadron, Wing Commander Baldwin, airborne at 18.10 hours, picked his way to the target, reported massing by the enemy for an attack on our positions south of Bergen op Zoom. White smoke was arranged and located. Intense light flak met our aircraft, but despite this the attack was pressed right home. The area north of the smoke was blasted by 64 Rockets, fired in a dive from 1,500 feet to nought feet. Even at this level, haze made it impossible to assess damage, though all Pilots were confident that if the enemy was massing where the smoke indicated, he must have had an extremely uncomfortable time. We lost W/O Powell, seen to go down in flames.

The following is an extract from No. 84 Group Summary of Operations, No. 63 for October 13th, 1944:

“On October 8th, 257 and 266 Squadrons led by Wing Commander Baldwin were called upon to do a show in immediate support for the Army. Weather conditions were almost impossible, but the show went on, and although intense flak was experienced the attack was pressed home to zero feet. One Pilot was lost. To-day the Divisional Commander concerned, reports in the following terms: - Intelligence, patrols, and civilian sources had informed him that the enemy was making preparations for counter attack the following dawn. He asked for R.A.F. supports to try to break up the concentration the previous evening. The enemy attack duly took place but was very disjointed and easily repelled. P.O.W.’s taken, and direct evidence from his front line troops confirm that, in the attack by the R.A.F., not only was damaged and casualties inflicted on the enemy, but more important, communications were so disorganized that the varying formations were never

able to co-ordinate the attack. His thanks and appreciation are expressed to the Squadrons concerned for their effort in conditions which he knew were extremely difficult.”

On October 13th, 1944 His Majesty – King George VI, accompanied by Field Marshal Montgomery, Air Chief Marshal Sir A. Coningham and their Staff Officers visited the Wing. They talked with Group Captain Gillam, Wing Commander Baldwin and a number of Pilots, after which they inspected the aircraft at Squadron dispersals.

Oostburg, Bergen-op-Zoom, Breskens, so the tide of Victory flowed, the Huns fall back across the Maas, north of Antwerp and the front line became static for a time all along that natural barrier.

From time to time on “information received from other sources “the Wing attacked special targets known in some circles as “Cloak and Dagger Jobs” but to the Boys, for obvious reasons, as “Tit Shows.” Such a “show” was the carefully planned attack on the H.Q. of the 15th German Army, at Dordrecht.

Forty-eight aircraft led by Group Captain Gillam and Wing Commander Baldwin, launched over 40,000lbs. of H.E. into the Park, in which the H.Q. was sited in the heart of the City. Pilots reported the bombs well concentrated and a number of direct hits were seen on buildings in the target area. Photographic reconnaissance confirmed their claims. Just how successful the Operation had been we did not realize, until on the 30th October, we learnt “from other sources”: -

“That the attack was a complete success. The Operations Room and other buildings were destroyed, there was a Staff Conference in session when our aircraft arrived and that as a result of the attack, 50 Officers were killed including 2 Generals, and 17 Staff Officers. In addition, casualties in other ranks numbered 200! “

It was with great regret that on the 3rd of November, 1944 we said “Good-bye” to Wing Commander “Johnny” Baldwin, D.S.O., D.F.C. and Bar. Though he strongly denied it, the powers that be” had ruled that he was operationally tired and must go on rest, and well he might be, for in four short months, in addition to carrying out the planning of numberless successful Operations, he himself had led over 150 missions and under his brilliant leadership the Wing had built up a reputation second to none.

His enthusiasm, determination, fine strategy and consideration for his Pilots and all under him, has greatly endeared him to those with whom he came in contact, and made his loss, temporary though it may be, keenly felt by all.

During what was called the “static period”, Walcheren was cleared and the port of Antwerp opened. The Army rested and re-grouped for the final stages – the crossing of the Maas, the storming of the Siegfried Line, and the final assault on the Rhine.

It was the firm belief of the Army leaders that as soon as these three bastions fell, the “end” was only a matter of days.

But for the R.A.F. before this was accomplished a great deal of preparatory “softening” was to be done!

It was with great pleasure that on 19th November, 1944 we welcomed Wing Commander J.C. Wells, D.F.C. and Bar, Croix de Guerre, (“Johnny” to his friends). Some of us had known him in the old Manston days when he “shared” the Manston Typhoon Wing (Nos. 198 and 609 Squadrons) as Commanding Officer of No. 609 Squadron, with our late Wing Commander Flying – Wing Commander “Johnny” Baldwin, as Commanding Officer of No. 198 Squadron.

It may be said that we were extremely fortunate in keeping the Wing “in the family”, so to speak, which is a great factor in preserving the team spirit in a “heterogeneous mob” of five Squadrons.

So under our new leader it was “the mixture as before” and everyone was happy.

There followed for a time, a period of bad weather. A series of “fronts” delivered by “Mot” at frequent intervals curtailed our activities considerably and what was worse following the “fronts”, a persistent thick ground mist in the mornings, which stopped all flying, while up above, the sun shone in a clear blue sky. This of all weather is the most irksome to Pilots; to be earthbound at all, in a source of infuriation, but for days on end – well their tempers beggar description!

The V.I and V.2 offensive had now been extended to include Antwerp. These “fiendish inventions” were arriving at the rate of about 40/50 per day, and though they did a lot of damage to buildings in Antwerp and killed a lot of innocent civilians, they were purely a “terror Weapon” which could not possibly have any material effect on our war effort.

Of course had the Hun been able to launch them in “thousands” and a considerably improvement in their accuracy been possible (they were reported to be accurate to 6 miles), then the history of the War might have been changed.

Our second “C.D” target, the Gestapo H.Q. and Mess in Amsterdam was successfully attacked on 26th November, 1944. Group Captain Gillam and Wing Commander Wells, attended by various “lesser lights” discussed the attack for some hours and the plan they evolved proved brilliantly successful. Nearly forty aircraft carried out a series of attack, both high and low-level,

with a nice mixture of 1,000lb., 500lb. H.E. and Incendiary bombs and Rockets. It was intended to catch as many as possible of the “Gentlemen of the Gestapo” at launch and we were told it was beautifully timed. All the Pilots returned safely and showered me with glowing reports of “beautiful explosions and lovely fires.” Reconnaissance photographs proved the truth of their statements.

Months later Group Captain Wells visited Amsterdam and was hailed with delight by the Dutchmen, who vividly described just what we had done to the hated Gestapo! I gathered from what he told me “That the Operation was a success!”

“Interdiction” – poor weather – Close Support – bad weather – “Interdiction” – impossible weather – so December slipped away.

There were two “bright intervals” in an otherwise dark and gloomy month, the announcements of the award of a second Bar to the D.S.O. to Group Captain Gillam and a Bar to Wing Commander Baldwin.

To those Officers we offer our sincere congratulations. Needless to say both awards were duly “christened” in the customary manner – with Champagne!

Christmas Day and Boxing Day were both spent in the air. Despite this the “Normal Operations” were carried out at night. On Christmas Day, while 193 and 266 Squadrons were attacking trains between Goosfield and Dorsten, they were “Bounced” by 60/80 FW.190 and ME.109’s in two “gaggles.”

Flying Officer Bulleid of No. 193 Squadron destroyed one FW. 190 and Flight Lieutenant Smith damaged another, without loss. 266 Squadron’s experience was more tragic – Flying Officer Scot-Eadie and Flight Sergeant Green were lost though Scott-Eadie became a Prisoner of War, Flight Sergeant Green, “missing” from some time, was eventually posted “Killed in Action.”

On the last day of the year, we lost Squadron Leader Alan Smith, the justly popular Commanding Officer of No. 197 Squadron. 193 and 197 Squadrons, led by Wing Commander Wells, has just completed a successful attack on the bridge at Culemborg, when Squadron Leader Smith’s aircraft was hit by flak. He carried out a forced-landing about 2 miles from the target area and was seen to run from his aircraft. Some weeks later it was officially announced that he was a Prisoner of War.

Two other highly successful missions were completed on this day: -

- (1) A very fine piece of bombing was carried out by 197 and 257 Squadrons, led by Wing Commander Wells, on the H.Q. of 88 Corps. A mixture of H.E., Incendiary and Cluster bombs was dropped in the target area and P/R photographs shows the house destroyed and the whole area devastated.

- (2) An attack by 12 aircraft of No. 193 Squadron on an M/T Repair unit, south east of Utrecht. Many direct hits were seen and a “ground report” from the Army runs: -
 “One of the best of pin-point bombing seen for many-a-day.”

Thank you “Army” message of this type meant a “Hell of a lot to the Boys in the Air.”

The Diary for the 1st January, 1945 reads: “1945 started with a Bang!” Between 09.00 and 10.00 hours, three formations of ME.109’s flew across the Airfield at nought feet! Only the first formation carried out an attack, during which eight aircraft in dispersals received superficial damage by cannon fire! “

At Daurne, the enemy aircraft flew “straight and level” through our Bofors fire and British Pilots, standing on the top of an Air Raid shelter in full view, shouted “Weave, you ‘so-and-so’s, Weave!”

This enemy operation was part of a large scale effort by the Luftwaffe to neutralize the R.A.F. and so assist the prosecution of his “Ardennes” offensive.

Though the attack was more successful on other ‘drones the whole effort was a failure, for the Hun found on “licking his wounds” that he had lost well over 200 aircraft.

The destruction of the Vianen Bridge on 5th January 1945 by No. 193 Squadron was a job of “Interdiction” which appealed to the most critical Pilot. The two vital hits were scored by Pilot Officer Lenson and the huge structure sagged into the river.

For four months we had operated from Antwerp and for over three of these months we had been “pestered” day and night, by Flying Bombs and Rockets. I use the word “pestered” because even at the height of this unpleasant offensive when over 80 per day were “coming over”, there was no relaxing of the Wing “air” effort; through shortly after our arrival in Antwerp, a Rocket landed very close to a Typhoon on which ground crew were working and a number of them were killed or horribly mutilated. Throughout the period at Antwerp the spirit of the “ground” Boys was such, that they never even attempted to take shelter, but went quietly on with their work throughout the “Blits.”

CHAPTER FOUR
HOLLAND – THE SIEGFRIED LINE
UP TO THE RHINE.

The last stage of the Wing's move from Antwerp to Mill on 8th February, 1945, coincided with the first day of the Army offensive on the Siegfried Line, which as well as being a busy one administratively, was hectic operationally. All missions were devoted to ultra-close-supports and excellent results were obtained. Strong Points, in villages, Railway lines and Marshalling Yards Arty-R. targets, Slit Trenches, Nutterdon and the Matterborn Feature all received their quota of bombs and cannon shells, out contribution to the Army's steady progress through this much vaunted obstacle!

According to the Army there is not going to be much left of the Siegfried Line to "Hang out any washing," by the time we have both finished with it!

An Army request to "Liberate" Asperden resulted in sixty-six Typhoons in seven waves between 14.16 and 16.45 hours dropping 80,000lbs. of H.E. in the village.

The Army report reads: -

"As a result of your attacks on this 'area of resistance', 170 'Bomb-Happy' Germans have walked out to meet us."

A quotation from later Army report is of interest:-

"On February 16th the villages of Asperden and Hussum were focal points on the Western approaches to Goch, both were targets of our Operations, the former by Typhoons, the latter by Spitfires. A statement received from Army sources says that Asperden virtually surrendered when the ground troops attacked at dusk, prisoners stating that the constant attacks made by the Typhoons had prevented any defense being organized and incidentally killed any desire to fight on. Hassum was captured very easily though some sort of resistance was put up, but the prisoners stories remained the same. The results achieved for the weight of attacks put in are extremely gratifying.

The Operational Order for the day, 21st February, 1945 stated briefly, "Destroy Calcar." This small town, about 6 miles north east of Goch, received the almost undivided attention of the Wing from noon, when it was first possible to fly, to last night. An almost unbroken procession of Typhoons bombed and "Rocketed" the place in support of the Army who were attacking in that direction. It is impossible to tabulate results in this case. Three of the Squadrons attacked it four

times and the other two would have done likewise had they not been briefed for other even more important targets. In 138 sorties, 105, 500lbs. of bombs were dropped and 11,420lbs. of R/P were fired. Very many buildings were seen to be demolished and numerous fires were started all over the town. At 17.00 ours, it was reported that a pall of smoke was to be seen to a height of 4,000 feet.

Kappeln, Sonsbeck, Kastel Bijen Beek, Winnekendonk, all received the same treatment, while a Seminary used as an H.Q. and Observation Post, south west of Goch was left “a sea of flames.”

To-day, 27th February, 1945, Group Captain Gillam relinquished his Command of No. 146 Wing. The record of the Wing under his command speaks for itself – in the air he has assisted in the planning of many of the larger Operations and the Wing under his Command has been efficient and happy.

Wing Commander, now Group Captain Wells assumes Command of the Wing. We know him and are therefore confident that under his Command we shall go from strength to strength!

Squadron Leader, now Wing Commander J.H. Deall of No. 266 (Rhodesia) Squadron becomes Wing Commander Fling. We wish him every success in his new Command.

As the number of demands for attacks on “CD.” Targets increased it became necessary to accelerate the speed of delivery of P/R results by the “Recce” Wing. As they were already over-worked, permission was obtained for the Wing to carry out its own P/R sorties. Under the new system it became possible to examine “Wet Prints” within two hours of the Recce aircraft landing, and thus had the mission not been entirely successful, a “repeat” attack could have been organized immediately.

Though in the majority of cases, result Photographs were clear enough to assess damage, Flight Lieutenant Ince, No. 193 Squadron, felt that improved results could be obtained by mounting a Camera in the place of an inboard cannon, i.e., in the leading edge of the Wing, where it could be more efficiently “aimed” at the targets and that this modification would afford the following added advantages: -

1. A perfect “Oblique” could be taken, without distraction, at great speed, almost down to ground level!
2. The risk of damage by flak was considerably reduced, because of the increased speed.
3. That any fighter Pilot could take almost perfect photographs without further training.

Flight Lieutenant Ince’s claims were fully justified, as results proved, and other Wings after trials, adopted his modification with similar success.

With the German Army of the Rhine in retreat before the American and being hard pressed also on our front, it was expected that they would attempt to ferry their troops east wards across the Rhine.

TO watch for this and to harass any movement seen, NO. 263 Squadron, led by Squadron Leader Rumbold, were detailed to maintain a continuous patrol.

Mock posters began to appear mysteriously in the Briefing Room, on Lorries and walls of Buildings: -

NOW SHOWING
+ +
RUMBOLD'S RENEGADES
i n
"THE WATCH ON THE RHINE"

+ + +
Numerous Performances Daily!

Naturally enough No. 263 Squadron became universally known as "Rumbold's Renegades," to the great delight of the Squadron and the Wing generally.

It was with great regret that we learnt that No. 257 (Burma) Squadron was to be immediately disbanded. The Squadron had operated in the Wing since 1st February, 1944, and had nobly played its part in the remarkably successful Operations carried out from England and in France, Belgium and Holland.

Although "257" as a Unit was no more, we were pleased to know that many of the Pilots were to remain with us, being posted to re-inforce the other Squadrons in the Wing.

In an "Interdiction" attack on a Bridge at Raalte, by No. 193 Squadron, Squadron Leader Derek Erasmus D.F.C., disappeared.

Much cloud over the target area prevented the Pilots from observing results or anything of the incident which robbed us of one of our finest leaders and most popular Squadron Commanders.

We learnt later that he had crashed near the target and that he had been buried by the Germans in a nearby Churchyard.

On 18th March, 1945 thirty-six aircraft, led by Group Captain Wells and Wing Commander Deall, became airborne to attack the H.Q. of General Blaskowits, known as H.Q. Army Group "H".

In order to deal effectively with the five component parts of the target, the Wing was split into five formation and each was allotted a building.

In all 72 R/P were fired, 48 X 1,000lbs. 4 x 500lbs. H.E., and 2 x 500lb. Incendiary bombs were dropped. The attack was mainly low-level, and a number of the 1,000lb. bombs with 25-sec delay were seen to "bounce" in the Courtyard of the General's house and skip over the target.

However, R/P salvoes and a number of the bombs were claimed direct hits and the Church, used by the enemy as military Telephone Exchange was shattered. Full assessment at the time was difficult owing to the pall of bomb smoke, but P/R photographs taken later revealed that the General's house was completely destroyed and that the other buildings had been severely damaged.

On the following day, another "CD." Target was destroyed. Thirty aircraft led by Wing Commander Deall were dispatched against this M/T Repair Depot, situated just north of the river at E.9976, near Doetinchem. 1,000 and 500lb. bombs and Rockets were aimed at the target and in a short space of time it was reduced to a burning mass of rubble. A Recce Pilot who photographed the target an hour and a half later needed no course for his flight. He was guided there by the volumes of smoke which rose to a height of 3,000 feet from the flaming wreckage. The photographs when printed gave full proof of the claims made.

Extracted from the Daily papers of the 20th: -

"A smashing blow was struck during the afternoon at the enemy's ability to re-equip and refit armoured fighting vehicles for the big battles that cannot be long delayed on the British sectors of the Western Front.

A Repair Depot, near Emmerich, capable of dealing with over 500 tanks and other fighting vehicles, was wrecked by Typhoons.

A reconnaissance Pilot said: 'It was a miniature Falaise. I don't think one vehicle escaped.'"

The receipt of the following message from the Air Officer Commanding, No. 84 Group Main H.Q., was much appreciated by all concerned:

“Please convey all Pilots my appreciation of the highly successful attacks on the H.Q. of General Blaskowitz, and on the Repair Depot at Doetinchem. The success of these attacks may have an important bearing on the progress of future Operations.”

Marshal of the Royal Air Force, Lord Trenchard, visited the Wing to-day, 19th March. He inspected the Briefing Room and was impressed by the Wing Photographic Record of Operations. He was accompanied by Air Vice Marshal Hudleston, Air Officer Commanding, No. 84 Group.

The H.Q. of 25th Army at Bussum, near Hilversum was attacked in the early morning of 21st March, 1945 by 25 aircraft led by Group Captain Wells and Wing Commander Deall. The H.Q. situated in a Hotel, was first attacked by 263 Squadron, who got many direct hits with their R.P's, followed by 193 and 197 Squadrons dropping 1,000lb. bombs in low-level attacks, and finally 266 Squadron unloaded 16 x 500lb. Incendiary into it. Two and a half hours later the target was photographed by a Pilot from No. 197 Squadron and was seen to be severely damaged and still burning.

Extract from No. 84 Group Intelligence Summary of 7th April, 1945:

“Attack by No. 146 on H.Q., 25th Army in Hotel Bosch van Bredius, Bassum, on 21st March, 1945. ‘The Hotel was demolished in the first attack. Several Germans were killed or wounded. The villa opposite the Hotel was also demolished. There were eight killed and some wounded. The General had just left the Bilthoven the day before, and after the raid on Rudelsheim. The other Officers and all documents were still there during the attack.’”

Our Public Relations Officer informed us that “Blow-Ups” of the photographs of the Wing attacks on the “Seminary “and “Kastel Bi jen Beek” have appeared in the Lobby of the Prime Minister’s entrance to the Air Ministry, as an example of “Classic Attacks of the Week!”

“CD.” targets were coming in thick and fast and the latest one, an attack on the Ammunition Dump in a Factory, at Zevenaar was carried out at 09.00 hours on 23rd March, 1945.

Led by Wing Commander Deall, 266 Squadron were first in, and dropping 1,000lb. bombs low-level, claimed 3 direct hits, starting fires and explosions which rather obscured the target for 193 and 197 Squadrons who followed with 24 x 500lb. Incendiaries. They too claimed A.B.T.A. and added to the general conflagration. Group Captain Wells, who orbited the objective in an Anti-Flak role during the main attack, went in last and dropped 2 x 1,000lb. bombs in the target area for full measure. Our photographic Recce which immediately followed produced some excellent results.

Twente-Enschede and Steenwijk Airfields were attacked by two formations from 193, 197 and 266 Squadrons. No activity was seen on either Airfield, but in order to discourage the Hun, 28,000lbs. of Anti-Personnel bombs were dropped on dispersal areas.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE FINAL ASSAULT

The “Great Day” – the crossing of the Rhine – began most propitiously with three effective attacks on enemy H.Q., at Zelham, Halle, and Krudenberg. Bombs and Rockets were all reported in the various target areas, several important buildings were seen to be demolished and left on fire, while a number of explosions, one of which was particularly violent were seen and smoke rose in one case to 1,500 feet. An excellent Photographic Recce of two of the targets was carried out by Pilot Officer Hurst, of 193 Squadron – despite the “Battle haze” which made pin pointing difficult in the afternoon.

At 10.15 hours, the first Squadron, No. 193, was airborne and Anti=Flak patrol of the “Beachhead” – the object being to “smooth the path” of the Airborne Boys.

All Squadrons operated in fours at 15-minute intervals until 16.00 hours. Eighty-eight sorties were made and 74,000lbs. of bombs and Rockets and a vast quantity of 20mm. cannon shells were aimed at the enemy Guns and Gunners. Many direct hits with bombs and Rockets were claimed and many cannon strikes were seen in and around Gun pits, accurate assessment of damage or claims in such an Operation is practically impossible, but if we only made the Gunners “keep their heads down,” we had gained our objective. Unfortunately, F/Lt. Harrison, 193 Squadron was forced to baled out east of Wesel. He was reported to have landed among the Gliders on the ground, but no confirmation has yet been received. F/Lt. Miller, 266 Squadron carried cut a successful “Belly-Landing” near Udem with engine trouble and was back at base within two hours – unhurt.

Though much enemy movement was seen during the day, our primary role prevented “great slaughter” in M/T – but eight destroyed and eleven damaged were claimed in fruitful sideshows!

Mortar and defense positions in a Brickworks north of Rees, were effectively attacked by 193 Squadron, five direct hots on various buildings were claimed and one building was left burning furiously. The target was also well staffed.

The final mission by 197 Squadron, was carried out under M.R.O.P., the “battle haze” having, by this time, made normal dive bombing attacks impossible. No results were observed.

TO-DAY'S AIRBORNE LANDINGS.

The U.S.A.A.F. used 541 aircraft dropping Para Troops

571 Gliders and Tugs.

TOTAL - 1112

and lost 45 due to Flak.

The British used 440 aircraft and lost 6 due to Flak.

These low British losses are attributed to the excellence of the ANTI-FLAK AIRCRAFT AND ARTILLERY BARRAGE – Army Report.

The following message of Congratulation has been received from Air Officer Commanding, No. 84 Group Main Headquarters:

Personal for Officer Commanding from Air Officer Commanding.

“Please congratulate all Pilots and Ground Crews under your Command on great work done by them during the past few days in preparation for the final assault on Germany to-day.

Good luck and good hunting.”

Extract form the Army Report on “The Military Situation” for 24th March, 1945:

“A considerable force, both British and American, was dropped by parachute and landed by Glider this morning. Zero hour was 10.00 hours, and from then until after 13.00 hours, men, material, and supplies were landing in the enemy's rear. By this evening these airborne forces had joined up both with each other and also with these British formations to their rear and flanks, many prisoners had been taken and some vital bridges over the River Ijssel captured. And it is fitting here to say that without the support of the 2nd T.A.F. it is doubtful whether the Airborne Operation would have succeeded to the extent that is has done. The air borne forces' greatest enemy is flak, and without the Group's effort in its Anti-Flak role the Operation could never have been realized; 192 sortied were flown by 123 and 146 Wings in this role, involving the engagement of no less than 62 separate gun positions, and the “Brown jobs” are honestly grateful.”

F/Lt. Harrison of 193 Squadron who had baled out near Wesel, on Saturday, 24th March, 1945, returned to-day the 26th.

The report which appeared in the newspapers admirably recounts his story:

BALED OUT INTO MIDDLE OF A BATTLE

“Shot down while attacking flak positions in the Allied Airborne landings over the Rhine, a Typhoon Pilot, 24-year old Flight Lieutenant J. Harrison of Normanville, South Australia, made parachute landing into the middle of a battle, and found himself taken prisoner by Americans. ‘I tried to convince them I was an Australian’ said Flight Lieutenant Harrison. ‘I used all the American epithets I knew in the process, but I am tall and fair, and I was wearing a German belt, and they just were not having any.’

The Americans set him to work unloading ammunition and supplies until he convinced a Lieutenant of his nationality.

Given a Rifle.

He then drew an American armband and a rifle, dug himself a foxhole, and settled down to make himself useful until the ground assault joined up with the airborne troops. ‘I spent the time helping to pick off snipers, and taking a crack at any other Germans I could see,’ he said. When British armour broke through to the American positions, Flight Lieutenant Harrison hitch-hiked back to his Airfield.”

The following Congratulatory message were received by the Officer Commanding, on 2nd April, 1945:

From the Commander-in-Chief.

“The success achieved by Second Tactical Air Force during the Air Operations covering the crossing of the Rhine and the advance into Germany by 21st Army Group can be attributed in no small way to splendid build-up of our force in aircraft, Pilots and supplies before the Operation commenced. I wish to congratulate all personnel of the Staff, Wings, Repair and Salvage Units who by their hard work prior to the Operation enable Squadrons to commence the battle at full strength and service ability.”

From Field Marshal Montgomery.

“I would like to express to you my great appreciation of the good work done for Second Army by 83 and 84 Groups, R.A.F. during the battle of the Rhine. Over a long period of very high class performance, the standard reached before, during and since the crossing of this great River obstacle has been remarkable: the splendid support given by the whole of 2nd T.A.F. has been the admiration of the soldiers. I would be grateful if you would convey to all concerned my grateful thanks and my high appreciation of what they have done for the Army.

The advance of the Army, coupled with the unremitting air offensive carried out on enemy rail communications, had reduced his available “lines” to those between Amersfoort, Zwolle, Meppel, and Apeldoorn.

Thus the Operational Order for 7th April, 1945, was a “Top Priority” one, to “cut” these lines. It followed that the Hun would do his best to repair any “cuts” we made, with the utmost dispatch and so we were ordered to “follow up” all attacks throughout the day, maintain all breaks, destroy repair trains and isolate all others.

By the end of the day, these vital lines had been cut in seventeen places and three trains damaged and stopped.

In response to a request for an attack on S.P. Guns and troop concentrations on the Canadian front, No. 263 Squadron found the Guns and saw slit trenches, but no movement. However they thoroughly strafed the whole area and in the evening we received the following message:

“The Commander of 10th Canadian Infantry Brigade wishes his most sincere Congratulations by conveyed to the ‘Bird Men’ on to-day’s shows.”

Through we had frequently dropped “Leaflet Bombs” between raids with more lethal weapons, we had not previously dropped supplies from Fighter-Bombers; we were detailed for this new type of Operation on 9th April, 1945.

Just before dusk, No. 193 Squadron, having been very carefully briefed, set out with supplies for the S.A.S. troops operating in a certain area.

Having arrived at the pin point, they circled the spot and saw a lot of “Bearded Scarecrows appear for nowhere” and wave their arms to attract attention.

The special containers fell amongst them and before our Pilots left the containers were empty and the troops with a “wave for thanks” – disappeared!

Little has been told in these pages since Falaise of the steady havoc wrought amongst enemy transport throughout the campaign. But I assure you that when not engaged on more definite targets, innumerable patrols on Armed Reconnaissance have been carried out far behind the battle zone.

Aircraft on the ground, transport on the roads, and barges on the rivers and canals to say nothing of the countless rail trucks and locomotives attacked on “Interdiction.”

The score for 11th April, 1945 fully illustrates this:

AIRCRAFT

DESTROYED: 5 JU.88, 1 ME.262
 1 HE.111, 1 FW.190
 1 ME 109 and one aircraft unidentified.

DAMAGE: 3 JU.88, 1 ME.262

OTHER TARGETS

DESTROYED: 1 Locomotive, 23 M/T.
 3 H.D.T.

DAMAGED: 2 Locomotives, 16 M/T.
 3 H.D.T., 2 Tanks.

Thus we helped to speed the disintegration of the German Forces!

In Germany at last!

To-day, 16th April, 1945 the Wing moved to Drope – few miles north east of Lingen.

From this Airfield our major commitment was changed to Shipping “strikes” in and around the north Dutch Island, though time was still found to carry out Wing attacks on special targets in Oldenburg district.

A Brickworks, which was said to house the H.Q., of a Para Unit, a Factory – being used as an M/T and stores Dump and an Infantry concentration in buildings west of the town, were all effectively dealt with.

Close support claimed the majority of our missions on 19th April. Targets included H.Q., Ammunition Dumps, Guns, a special train and troop concentrations. All were apparently successfully attacked, though from a Pilot’s point of view, results are often disappointing on “close support” targets.

However, the message received from Brigadier J.C. Jefferson Commanding 10th Canadian Infantry Brigade caused considerably satisfaction to the Wing:

“I wish to express great appreciation for the magnificent effort put up by 2nd T.A.F. in support of forward troops of this formation. I consider your effort largely responsible for maintaining our forward troops in their positions though the day. All ranks have great admiration for boldness and determination of Pilots in pressing home attacks. Sincere Thanks.”

We received a visit from Squadron Leader Able, of O.R.S. on 24th April, 1945, who came to report on various targets attacked consequent on his “delvings in the debris.”

The H.Q of General Blaskowitz.

“The ‘Brown country house’ in which the Staff Officers were billeted in completely destroyed. Severe damage was inflicted on the Church which was being used as a Telephone Exchange, and though unfortunately little damage was done to the Exchange, four men operating a radio in the Tower were killed, the casualties on the whole Operation totaled 62 killed, mainly in the Officers’ billet.

The P.O.L. Dump in the Woods near Epse.

“The P.O.L. Dump in the woods near Epse. Though three direct hits were registered on the Schoolm little damage was done, but two direct hits entirely demolished the Castle, including a cellar full of priceless Porcelain to the great annoyance of the Dutch owner. It is interesting to note that there were indications that three bombs had bounced clean over the target.

The Ammunition Dump at Zevenaar.

“Ammunition Dump at Zevenaar. A 500lb. Incendiary bomb struck the office part of the building on the second floor, penetrated to the first, which is completely burnt out, together with half the second floor in the immediate vicinity of the point at which it struck. The Castle or Chateau alongside was gutted. A healthy fire started which was extinguished by the Germans but later broke out again, greatly assisted by a number of Bazooka Bombs stored in the cellar, which continued to detonate at frequent intervals during the night.”

On 30th April we made, what turned out to be our last “Operational move” of the war, to Ahlhorn, south west of Bramen.

After two or three days in inactivity caused by our old enemy, the weather, the Wing was ordered on the 3rd May to fly to BJ50 – Hustedt – there the Squadrons operated under No. 83 Group control for two days, the last two days of the war against the Germany, on Shipping in the Baltic.

The object of the Operation was to prevent the enemy from escaping in strength to Norway.

Whether the Operational was successful or not I do not know, but the Wing faithfully carried out its allotted task.

From subsequent Photographic Reconnaissance it was established that our Pilots had sunk or damaged, at a conservative estimate, over 40,000 tons of Shipping.

A fitting end to the record of No. 146 Wing’s achievements in the campaign for the Liberation of Europe.

W I N G R E C O R D .

From the date of formation, 1st February, 1944 to "D" Day, 6th June, 1944 the Wing has achieved operationally the following:

BOMBS, R/P, AND 20MM. CANNON SHELLS EXPENDED.

MISSIONS	SORTIES	1,000lb.	500LB	R/P.	20MM.
130.	1,986.	-	3,547.	-	229,795.
From "D" Day to date, 4 th May, 1945:					
1,755.	14,840.	2,118.	13,791.	22,407.	1,173,862.
TOTAL - 1,885.	16,826.	2,118.	17,338.	22,407.	1,403,657.

In attacks on Aircraft and Fighting Vehicles, etc., the following claims were made: --

SQUADRONS.	TANKS			AIRCRAFT		
	AFV's and M/T. Dest.	Dam.	In the Air. Dest.	Dam.	On the Ground Dest	Dam.
193	111	189	6 ½	6	-	-
197	147	244	-	1	9	3
257	46	91	1 ½	5	-	-
263	90	94	1	-	-	-
266	285	276	2	2	3	4
TOTAL --	679	894	x14	15	12	7

X Including 3 Aircraft destroyed and 1 damaged Group Captain Baldwin, D.S.O., D.F.C., when Wing Commander Flying.

In addition the Wing makes the following claims: --

- CAT. I. 35,000 Tons.
 CAT. II. 32,000 tons, plus a Dredger, 2 Ferries, and a number of small Boats.
 CAT. III. 22,000 tons, plus a Dredger, 4 Ferries, 2 Sailing Vessels and an M/L.

35 BARGES AND TUGS have been DESTROYED and 156 DAMAGED

THE SQUADRON COMMANDERS OF NO. 146 WING
IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

No. 193 SQUADRON.

Squadron Leader D. Ross, D.T.C. (Deceased)

- “ “ J.C. Button, D.F.C.
- “ “ J.M.G Plamondon, D.F.C.
- “ “ D. Erasmus, D.F.C. (Deceased)
- “ “ D.M. Taylor, D.F.C. (Second Tour with the Wing)

No. 197 SQUADRON.

Squadron Leader D.M. Taylor, D.F.C. (First Tour with the Wing)

- “ “ A.H. Smith, D.F.C.
- “ “ R.C.C. Curwen, D.F.C.
- “ “ K.G. Harding, D.F.C.

No. 257 SQUADRON.

Squadron Leader R.H. Fokes, D.F.C., D.F.M., (Deceased)

- “ “ W.C. Ahrens, (Deceased)
- “ “ W.J. Johnson, D.F.C.
- “ “ D.P. Jenkins, D.F.C.
- “ “ A.G. Todd, D.F.C.

No. 263 SQUADRON.

Squadron Leader R. D. Rutter, D.F.C.

- “ “ M.T.S. Rumbold, D.F.C.

No. 266 SQUADRON.

Squadron Leader J.W.E. Holmes, D.F.C., A.F.C.

- “ “ J.D. Wright, D.F.C.
- “ “ J.H. Deall, D.F.C.
- “ “ R.E.G.G. Sheward.

ROLL OF HONOUR OF PILOTS KILLED IN ACTION.

PRIOR TO "D" DAY, 6TH JUNE, 1944.

Flight Lieutenant Lord.

Flight Sergeant McGill.

Flying Officer Coles.

Squadron Leader Ross.

Pilot Officer Holland.

Flight Lieutenant Buckley.

Sergeant Holland.

SINCE "D" DAY, 6TH JUNE, 1944 TO 4TH MAY, 1945.

Flying Officer Potter.

Squadron Leader Fokes.

Flight Sergeant Richards.

Pilot Officer Watson.

Flight Sergeant Hodnett.

Pilot Officer Clark.

Squadron Leader Ahrens.

Flight Lieutenant Williams.

Flight Sergeant Harrold.

Flight Sergeant Love.

Flight Sergeant Bell.

Pilot Officer Thyagarajan.

Flying Officer Le Gear.

Flying Officer Wakemen .

Warrant Officer Powell.

Pilot Officer Thould.

Flying Officer Barr.

Flight Sergeant Cambrook.

Flying Officer Broad.

Flight Lieutenant Nesbitt.

Flight Officer Inglis.

Wing Commander Baker.

Flight Sergeant Turton.

Pilot Officer Taylor.

Flight Sergeant Blair.

Pilot Officer Meyer.

Pilot Officer Forrester.

Warrant Officer McCartney.

Flight Sergeant Price.

Flight Lieutenant Proctor.

Flying Officer Campbell.

Flying Officer Reid.

Warrant Officer Paul.

Flight Sergeant Pratt.

Flight Lieutenant Evans.

Pilot Officer Vance.

Flight Lieutenant Arkle.

Flying Officer Necklen.

ROLL OF HONOUR OF PILOTS KILLED IN ACTION – Continued.

Flying Officer Freakly.	Warrant Officer Read.
Flight Lieutenant Unwin .	Pilot Officer Campbell.
Flight Sergeant Green.	Flight Lieutenant Turner.
Flying Officer Jones.	Flight Lieutenant Lao.
Warrant Officer Button.	Flying Officer Lunn.
Warrant Officer Points.	Squadron Leader Erasmus.
Flight Sergeant Culligan.	Flying Officer Donne.
Warrant Officer Randall.	Flight Lieutenant Woodward.
Flying Officer Borland.	

ROLL OF HONOUR OF GROUND CREWS

KILLED BY ENEMY ACTION.

Sergeant Harris.	Corporal Ball.
Corporal Day.	Corporal Jefferies.
Corporal Stowe.	Corporal Townsend.
LAC Brierly	LAC Noble.
LAC Ashby	LAC Poile.
LAC Cockayne.	LAC O'Connell.
LAC Blaskett.	LAC Relph.
LAC Burgess.	LAC Bentley.
AC Cole.	Ac Gordan.
AC Wickens.	

List of awards, graciously approved by His Majesty the King,
made to Pilots who served with No. 146 Wing.

Group Captain D. E. Gillam,	-	Two Bars to the D.S.O
D.S.O., D.F.C., A.F.C.		
Wing Commander E. R. Baker,	-	D.S.O
D.F.C. and Bar.		
Wing Commander J.R. Baldwin	-	Bar to the D.S.O.
D.S.O., D.F.C.		
Wing Commander J.H. Deal,	-	D.S.O.
D.F.C.		
Flight Lieutenant A.W. Kilpatrick	-	D.S.O.

BAR TO THE DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS.

Squadron Leader A.H. Smith, D.F.C.

“	“	W.J. Johnson, D.F.C.
“	“	K.G. Harding, D.F.C.
“	“	M.T.S. Rumbold, D.F.C.
“	“	J.M.G. Plamondon, D.F.C.

DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS.

Squadron Leader D.M. Taylor.

“ “ J.C. Button.

“ “ D. Erasmus.

“ “ J.D. Wright.

“ “ D.P. Jenkins.

“ “ R.C.C. Curwen.

Pilot Officer J. Watson, No. 197 Squadron.

Pilot Officer J.B. Wood, No. 257 Squadron.

Flight Lieutenant R.G. Smith, No. 257 Squadron.

Flying Officer H. Balance, No. 266 Squadron.

Flight Lieutenant A.S. Ross, No. 193 Squadron.

Flying Officer E. Jolleys, No. 197 Squadron.

Flying Officer E.T. Catheart-Cunnison, No. 266 Squadron

Flight Lieutenant D. McGibbon, No. 266 Squadron.

Pilot Officer B. Gilbert, No. 197 Squadron.

Flight Lieutenant D.H.G. Ince, No. 197 Squadron.

Flight Lieutenant S.J. Eaton, No. 257 Squadron.

Flight Lieutenant D.C. Borland, No. 266 Squadron.

Flying Officer B.J. Spragg, No. 257 Squadron.

Flight Lieutenant J.D. Howarth, No. 257 Squadron.

Flight Lieutenant J.G. Simpson, No. 193 Squadron.

Flying Officer J.C. Rook, No. 197 Squadron.

DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS. Continued.

Pilot Officer D. E. Matthews, No. 197 Squadron.

Flight Lieutenant E.A. Tennant, No. 263 Squadron.

Flight Lieutenant J.G.B. Hartley, No. 197 Squadron.

Flight Lieutenant G.E. Cassie, No. 263 Squadron.

Flight Lieutenant J. Harrison, No. 193 Squadron.

Flight Lieutenant B. Lenson, No.193 Squadron.

DISTINGUISHED FLYING MEDAL.

Flight Sergeant J. Kyle, No. 197 Squadron.

Flight Sergeant L. Richardson, No. 197 Squadron.

Flight Sergeant R.B. Farmiloe, No. 197 Squadron.

FOREIGN DECORATIONS.CROIX-DE-GUERRE.

Squadron Leader R.D. Rutter, No. 263 Squadron.

Flying Officer W.D. Ellis, No. 197 Squadron.

Flying Officer D.H. Dodd, No. 266 Squadron.

Flying Officer W.H. Upperton, No. 257 Squadron.