

options, the chiefs of staff decided to seek an expanded commitment from Cabinet one more time.⁵⁰

Facing a groundcrew shortage themselves, the British CAS also approached his prime minister to ask that pressure be put on Ottawa for a promise of specialized construction men. After all, this was a field in which the Canadians were admitted to excel. A provisional offer of works engineers had already been made, but Portal wanted a concrete commitment of 'help in this form.' The result was a vaguely worded communication from Churchill to King on 20 March asking for his 'blessing to the efforts we are making to ensure that our contribution should be prompt and effective.' The RAF was negotiating for a base area in the Calagayan valley in northern Luzon, and it was 'most desirable ... that the British and Canadian Bomber Force should be self-contained and not dependent on the Americans for the construction of airfields and the provision of other facilities.'⁵¹

What Churchill did not say was that the whole question of RAF involvement in the Far East was at issue. The Air Ministry's own plans for Tiger Force were being drastically scaled down, evidently because it was not judged possible to supply and maintain the large contingent which had originally been contemplated. And further reductions, Breadner reported home on the same day Churchill sent his message to King, might be in the offing. The force might even be squeezed down to only a handful of squadrons. The AOC-in-C intended 'to take the stand that this proposed alteration in the size and nature of the total commitment would require Canada to examine once again what proportion she is prepared to undertake and that negotiations to determine this must be government to government.' Leckie agreed that the new information changed everything. Previous calculations had been thrown into the 'melting pot.' King's reply was accordingly cautious and non-committal 'We have been concerned to ensure that we do not find ourselves involved, on somewhat scanty premises, in a disproportionate commitment. Particularly is this so since the practical utility of certain of the proposals which have been made seems open to question as respects considerations of both time and space. We have as yet seen no statement of the latest proposals. When they have been received they will be given immediate consideration.'⁵²

Churchill, receiving this communication, wondered what all the fuss was about. 'Shall we not have,' he minuted to his air planners, 'far more British aircraft than can be provided with jumping off points?' But Canada was needed. His air staff pointed out that the British prime minister was overlooking the requirement for construction personnel. Portal now wanted 10,000 Canadian engineers, as well as ten RCAF bomber and three VLR transport units. That was about half of all the squadrons that were now projected for a greatly reduced Tiger Force, and he concluded that 'if the Canadians do not come in with us our impact on the enemy is likely to be on a very small scale.' Whitehall had serious doubts about Britain's capacity to mount a major offensive against Japan without a drastic reduction in the operational commitments planned for other theatres, even after embracing an American assurance to provide air defence for Tiger Force that had allowed the fighter element to be

dropped from their requirements. The idea was even in the air that the RAF's next step would be 'to take the resources which are available without affecting other plans, offer them to the United States for pooled action in the theatre, and request that a token force be sent to operate on bases built by the Americans.' In view of the British mood, Overseas Headquarters went so far as to advise Ottawa that the RCAF might not be required in Tiger Force at all.⁵³

Nevertheless, that time was not yet. The RCAF understood that the British would soon be asking for a commitment of thirteen VLR squadrons and 18,400 men. They were also hoping for the 10,000 engineers and a further 8000 men for the eleven squadrons engaged in the occupation of Germany. Even though there was no official request, this proposal was put before Cabinet on 19 April, but the answer was the same as it had been each time an attempt had been made to break away from the 23,000 limit. No sufficient reason, in the view of the politicians, had been advanced for an increase in the agreed commitment for participation in the Pacific War.⁵⁴

Perhaps reflecting the view of British authorities, the new AOC-in-C at Overseas Headquarters, Air Marshal G.O. Johnson, was immediately critical of Ottawa's 'indecision' over Tiger Force. He suggested that RAF planning had been 'seriously' hampered, and that 'an early and firm decision concerning our participation is urgently required.' Ottawa had been crystal clear in its policy, however – there was a 23,000 ceiling, and there would be no construction unit in addition to that total – although the government held open the possibility of changes once the British made known the 'actual need' and the 'probable effectiveness' of the force.

Johnson's concerns that the RCAF might not be pulling its weight did not receive a very sympathetic hearing from Curtis, who was temporarily filling in as CAS. In sending news of the Cabinet's decision of 11 April, Curtis told Johnson that the British would certainly be disappointed by the decision not to send engineers, but it might assist him in his discussions if he pointed out that 'since the RCAF has devoted the major portion of its war effort to a secondary role in Phase I in the form of the BCATP we might expect to devote our major effort in Phase II directly against the enemy.' Johnson should also know that, whatever private complaints Whitehall might have about the Canadians, recent British actions had given rise to doubts in Canada about whether any kind of bomber force at all was necessary.⁵⁵

Certainly there were doubts in Washington about the need for Tiger Force, and the British were finding the United States a difficult and sceptical ally as they attempted to negotiate their way into the air war against Japan. Air Vice-Marshal Lloyd, back in Washington at the end of April 1945, found himself forced to make an 'off the record' promise of 20,000 engineers by 1 October and eight Lincoln squadrons by 1 November simply to get a hearing from the Americans. 'I knew the bid would be entertained only if the Engineer force was really big, as only a big force could do the job in the time and so play a part in the landing on Japan.' Lloyd returned home warning that speed combined with a willingness to take on a major construction project was 'the essence of this proposal and if we cannot meet the time programme as sug-

gested, or meet the Engineer requirement, we should abandon the Tiger Force operation.' He also 'wheeled and dealt' with the Americans for a base. This time they discussed the possibility of using the tiny island of Miyako in the Ryukus chain near Formosa and adjacent to Okinawa, just 990 miles from Japan. Okinawa had been attacked by the Americans on 2 April and Miyako was slated for similar attention in due course. As the fighting on Okinawa raged on, however, plans for a move against Miyako were set aside. Tiger Force had yet to find a home.⁵⁶

Without a base it was difficult to make specific decisions, and in London Johnson's frustration now shifted from Ottawa to Whitehall. He was discovering that the changing situation was so nebulous that he could report no definite plans about the size, nature, and timing of the RCAF's contribution. The British could provide no satisfactory information about the 'practical military utility and necessity' of the operation against Japan, and he was becoming convinced that 'the US will have forces more than sufficient for the task and bases available, and therefore a British or Canadian VLR force is not militarily essential but is solely a political British prestige consideration.' Britain had committed itself publicly to a major role against the Japan home islands in its efforts to restore imperial prestige in the Far East, and it would not be easy to back down from such pronouncements.⁵⁷

It now seemed likely that the British would be seeking eight heavy-bomber and three transport squadrons, and some 2000 engineers from the RCAF. To prepare the ground for the bomber component, Johnson asked that Nos 419, 428, 431, and 434 Squadrons stand down from operations as soon as possible so they could return to Canada for training. Nos 408, 420, and 425 were to be next, and, along with 405 Squadron, would complete the bomber force. These squadrons would not be ready before 1 October, and they would not be among the first units deployed to the Far East. After taking leave, personnel were slated to report to their squadrons for training, which would be carried out on Canadian-made Lancaster Xs at Eastern Air Command bases over a six-week period. This would be followed by a transfer to Britain for another six weeks of conversion training to Lancaster VII's or Lincolns, if available. As for the prospective transport squadrons, No 426 Squadron was transferred to Transport Command on 25 May, but Nos 422 and 423 were still on coastal operations. The Liberators planned for these squadrons would not be available until at least September. Johnson wanted permission to begin assigning Canadians to staging posts in Southeast Asia and to detail groundcrew for service in England. Leckie, while sanctioning the formation of a transport wing, stepped firmly on both of these suggestions.⁵⁸

On 30 May an American offer of a base finally came. Okinawa had fallen, and it had more numerous facilities for aerodromes than previously thought: Washington said that they could provide room on the island for ten squadrons immediately; the other ten squadrons might come later depending on developments. But there were limits and conditions. The United States wanted firm evidence of a British intention to take on their own logistics and construction work. In fact, 15,000 engineers would have to be quickly on the ground if ten

squadrons were to be operational by 1 March 1946. If only half that number of engineers were available, Lloyd was told that 'all we could expect' was four squadrons by early 1946. The Tiger Force commander was left 'in no doubt that if we wanted to improve on our rate of deployment we must give more engineers.' He stressed to Whitehall 'that the Americans distrust us. They think we are trying to deploy our Force on the cheap.' Although realizing that they could not provide a full complement of construction personnel or logistics support – and counting on Canadian engineers to help offset the deficit – the British chiefs of staff nonetheless accepted the American offer on 4 June. The first cargo ships for Tiger Force sailed from Liverpool on the 20th.⁵⁹

Whitehall now approached Canada with a firm request for assistance. Churchill sent King a message on 16 June, underlining the need for construction engineers, 2500 of whom it was earnestly desired would be Canadian, asking for two bomber squadrons for Tiger Force's first deployment, and holding out the hope that 'another six Canadian heavy bomber squadrons will be available for the second contingent of 10 squadrons if and when this is approved.' Having had an intimation that this communication was coming, the Canadian Cabinet had already authorized a construction contingent, as well as two bomber and three transport squadrons, all of which could be provided within the 23,000 ceiling, but King and his ministers deferred consideration of six additional bomber squadrons for the next deployment.⁶⁰

By the time that King replied to Churchill, however, it had undoubtedly been brought to his attention that only 335 volunteer construction personnel had yet been found among 6600 who had been approached. His telegram of 19 June, therefore, committed only two bomber and three transport squadrons. The question of construction personnel was being 'actively explored,' but no specific number could be promised.⁶¹

Having accepted the American offer in the hope that both the United States and Canada would make good the RAF's own manpower shortages, the British chiefs of staff were disappointed with Ottawa's response. They vented their frustrations at a meeting on 22 June, accusing Canada – rather unfairly, given that they were attempting to play the same game themselves – of being 'up to their old tricks of trying to get out of their proper share in providing the unspectacular but necessary support for their operational units.' Portal followed up this discussion with a message to Leckie suggesting that 'at no time have we received any warning that you might not be able to participate on the agreed basis.' The Canadian CAS disagreed and reminded Portal that he had never given definite support to an engineering contribution. Nevertheless, he understood and shared his British counterpart's embarrassment at the turn of events: 'the difficulty in which you now find yourself and which from a planning angle is similar to my own is thoroughly appreciated.'⁶²

The RCAF also asked Cabinet to make a decision about the six additional bomber squadrons for the second echelon. On 28 June the air minister, Colin Gibson, told his colleagues that definite plans were proceeding for a reinforcement of ten Tiger Force squadrons. The prime minister remained wary of a major commitment, but Leckie was told to return with the fullest possible

details about the financial and personnel requirements of the force for Japan. This he did on 12 July. He needed 15,000 men, he said, and the cost, including training in Canada, was estimated to be \$143.5 million right away and \$192.1 million annually after that. These projections included the six extra squadrons, equipment, maintenance, medical and other essential services, but not construction engineers, few of whom were willing to volunteer. Cabinet gave its approval and London was informed, 'You can make it clear to Air Ministry that the provision of these 6 additional bomber squadrons for the Pacific was authorized on the condition that the occupational force be reduced by two bomber squadrons [from eleven to nine] thus keeping the total manpower allotment within the 23,000 approved limit.'⁶³

The advanced element of Tiger Force was to consist of one RAF Mosquito and nine Lancaster squadrons, five from the RAF, two from the RCAF, and one each from Australia and New Zealand. The follow-up element would be made up of one Lancaster-Catalina air/sea rescue squadron and eleven Lincoln squadrons. Two RCAF squadrons, numbers 419 and 428, were to be at their base and ready to operate by 1 January 1946. The force would ultimately consist of two operational groups, one Canadian and one British, and, when the second contingent arrived in theatre, a Canadian group headquarters was planned. Tiger Force Headquarters itself would be integrated and 50 per cent Canadian. The RCAF was making an effort, wherever possible, to have fully Canadian units in support of squadrons 'on a basis commensurate with our front line effort.' Consistent with the prime minister's policy announced on 4 April 1945, the RCAF was canvassed for volunteers - 21.5 per cent of the 103,402 men and women interviewed by 15 June had volunteered for service in the Pacific. The Tiger Force commander agreed to the participation of women, members of the Women's Division having volunteered at a much higher rate than men.⁶⁴

The British chiefs of staff assembled on 6 August to discuss the latest developments with Lloyd, freshly returned from the United States, where he was still complaining about the uncertainty of a Canadian engineering contribution. On the same day, an American B-29 dropped the atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. This was followed by a second atomic attack on the 9th, this time on Nagasaki, and Japan surrendered unconditionally on 14 August.⁶⁵ Tiger Force, it turned out, was never more than a paper tiger.

PART TWO

The Fighter War



No 110 Squadron groundcrew in the machine shop at Odiham, mid-1940. (PMR 93-297)



Among the officers of No 1(F) Squadron, RCAF (later No 401), photographed at Croydon in July 1940, were a number who would play prominent roles in the history of the RCAF Overseas. Back row, l to r: R. Smither, T.B. Little, A.M. Yuile, E.W. Beardmore, B.D. Russel, E.C. Briese. Middle row: B.E. Christmas, Capt W.D. Rankin (medical officer), O.J. Peterson, G.R. McGregor, A.D. Nesbitt, S.T. Blaiklock, H.de M. Molson, E.M. Reyno, J.P.J. Desloges, E.A. McNab, P.B. Pitcher. Front row: G.G. Hyde, W.P. Sprenger, J.W. Kerwin. (PMR 80-620)



Wing Commander R.W. McNair, DFC and two Bars, of Springhill, Nova Scotia, was a highly successful fighter pilot who became a respected wing leader. The photo shows him early in his career as a pilot officer with No 411 Squadron. (PL 4988)



An Me 109E brought down in the Battle of Britain. (PL 3054)



Prime Minister Winston Churchill inspects bomb damage after the Luftwaffe's first major raid on London, 7 September 1940. (H 3976)



A No 1 Squadron Hurricane is refuelled in October 1940. (PMR 93-295)



Pilot Officer John Gillespie Magee, the author of 'High Flight,' in the cockpit of his No 412 Squadron Spitfire. (PMR 76-245)



Fitters work on the engine of a Lysander of No 110 Squadron, RCAF (later No 400), in a hangar at Odiham in the autumn of 1940. The objects in the stub wing protruding from the undercarriage are light bomb racks. (PMR 93-296)



Navigator's view of the cockpit of a No 406 Squadron Beaufighter. (CH 4893)



Pilots and observers of No 110 Squadron run to their Lysanders during an exercise. The two men in the foreground are an army liaison officer and his wireless operator. (CH 2414)



A No 410 Squadron gunner enters the turret of a Defiant night-fighter in late 1941.
(PL 4799)



The undercarriage of a No 401 Squadron Hurricane II undergoing maintenance in the summer of 1941. (PL 4471)



A Beaufighter II of No 406 Squadron being refuelled. (CH 4895)



Bombing-up a No 402 Squadron Hurricane in early 1942. (PL 7122)



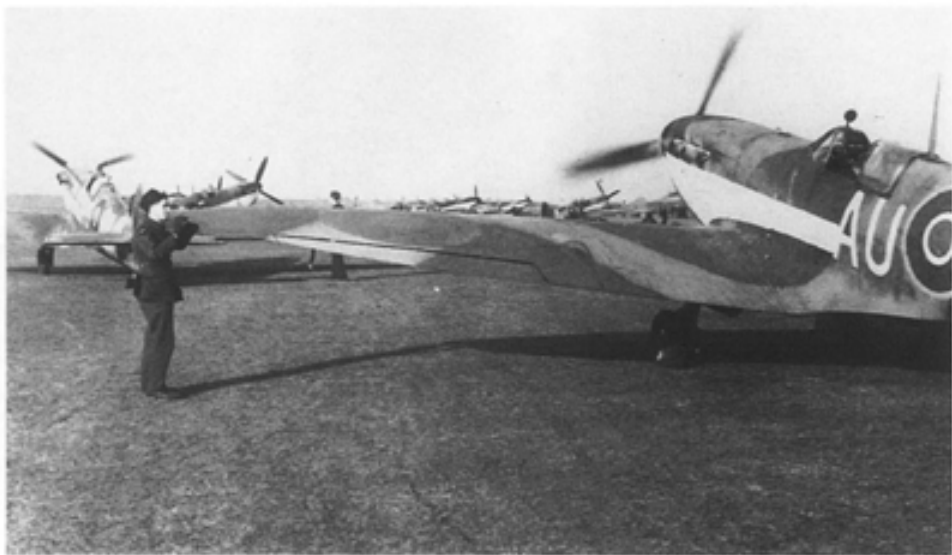
No 402 Squadron groundcrew inspect the carburettor air scoop of a Hurricane IIB.
(PL 7121)



Air Marshal Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory, AOC-in-C Fighter Command (here bearing a curious likeness to Adolf Hitler), speaks to an army liaison officer during Exercise Spartan. (H 27941)



One of the RCAF's top fighter leaders was Wing Commander L.V. Chadburn, DSO and Bar, DFC, who commanded the RCAF's Digby Wing and No 127 Wing of Second Tactical Air Force before his death in a flying accident on 13 June 1944. He is seen here when he commanded No 416 Squadron in late 1942. His Spitfire carries the squadron's distinctive lynx and maple leaf emblem. (PL 15079)



Spitfire Vs of No 421 taxi out in March 1943 bearing the temporary white markings applied to some aircraft participating in Exercise Spartan. (PL 15556)



Skeet shooting was considered a useful exercise for hand/eye coordination and provided practice in deflection shooting. (PL 7755)



The threat did not always come from the air or anti-aircraft guns. While reconnoitring a new airfield in Sicily, Squadron Leader P.S. Turner, DSO, DFC and Bar, and Flight Lieutenant A.U. Houle, DFC, of No 417 Squadron had their truck strike a Teller mine. Turner was trapped in the cab, 'badly lacerated and suffering from shock.' Houle was blown out of the door and 'had both eardrums punctured & was off flying 5 weeks.' His hat can be seen lying on the ground. (PMR 529)



A Spitfire V of No 417 Squadron in front of the Italian farmhouse that served as squadron headquarters at Lentini West, Sicily, during the autumn of 1943. (PL 18285)



With Marshal of the Royal Air Force Lord Trenchard are (l to r) Group Captain D.M. Smith, commanding No 39 (Reconnaissance) Wing, Squadron Leader R.A. Ellis, commanding No 400 Squadron, Wing Commander E.H. Moncrieff, commanding No 128 Airfield, Air Vice-Marshal W.F. Dickson (RAF), AOC No 83 Group, and Squadron Leader H.P. Peters, commanding No 414 Squadron. Peters was to be killed in action on 4 November 1943. (PL 19596)



Pilots and ground personnel of No 430 Squadron with a Mustang I, in September 1943.
(PL 22792)



Pilots of No 401 Squadron in the autumn of 1943. Flying Officer William T. Klersy, destined to become one of the RCAF's most successful pilots, is second from the right.
(PL 22010)



Flight Lieutenant George Beurling, DSO, DFC, DFM and Bar, touches up the victory markings on his Spitfire, in late 1943, when he was flying with No 403 Squadron. (PL 22170)



Flight Lieutenant M.A. Cybulski (right) and his RAF navigator, Flight Lieutenant H.H. Sadbroke, stand by the badly burned tail of the No 410 Squadron Mosquito in which they shot down an enemy aircraft over the Netherlands on 25 September 1943. Their Mosquito was spattered with burning fuel and had one engine knocked out, but it reached the United Kingdom safely. (PL 19740)



The mainstay of the three RCAF army cooperation squadrons overseas during most of 1942 and 1943 was the Mustang I, seen here at dispersal in late 1943 while a captured Focke Wulf 190 flies low over the field. (PL 26337)



Fighter pilots of No 416 Squadron and a unit Spitfire in late 1943. (PL 15081)



A Messerschmitt BF 109 under attack by Squadron Leader A.U. Houle of No 417 Squadron over Anzio on 7 February 1944. Houle eventually shot the tail of the enemy fighter off, some of the pieces damaging his Spitfire. (PMR 77-520)



With levelling jacks supporting the wings and rear fuselage and a plumb bob hanging from the machine's nose, the guns of a Spitfire are harmonized. (PL 18516)



Briefing No 417 Squadron pilots before an operation, Marcionise, Italy, 22 January 1944. (PMR 77-528)



Arming the 20-millimetre Hispano cannon of a Spitfire. (PL 27501)



Wing commanders (Flying) carried their initials as code letters on their aircraft rather than using the codes of any of the squadrons making up the wing. Wing Commander H.C. Godefroy, DSO, DFC and Bar, held that appointment in No. 127 Wing from 19 September 1943 to 15 April 1944 and is seen here standing by his Spitfire IX at the end of that tour of duty. (PL 29352)



A recently delivered Mosquito is readied for operations by groundcrew of No 418 Squadron in the spring of 1944. (PL 29463)



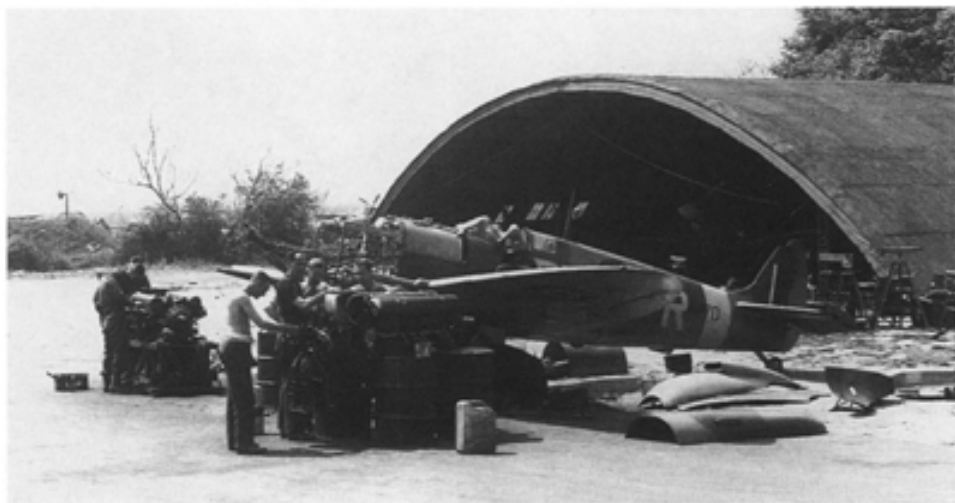
Prior to the invasion of Europe, the Supreme Allied Commander, US General D.D. Eisenhower, inspects the Second Tactical Air Force station commanded by Group Captain C.R. Dunlap, RCAF. On Eisenhower's right is Air Marshal Sir Arthur Coningham, AOC-in-C Second TAF, and on his right, Air Chief Marshal Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory, commander-in-chief of the Allied Expeditionary Air Forces. Dunlap, on Eisenhower's left, would subsequently become the last Canadian chief of the air staff, 1962-4. (PL 28711)



No 411 Squadron groundcrew apply white identification stripes in preparation for D-Day. (PL 30827)



Air Marshal Sir Arthur Coningham addresses personnel of No 143 (RCAF) Wing of Second TAF on the eve of Operation Overlord. (PL 30188)



A Spitfire IX undergoes an engine change shortly before the Normandy invasion.
(PL 29564)



Air Marshal Sir Arthur Coningham, commanding Second TAF, Air Vice-Marshal Harry Broadhurst, AOC No 83 Group (which contained the RCAF squadrons of 2nd TAF), and Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder, deputy supreme commander of the Allied Expeditionary Forces, confer in Normandy. (CL 285)



No 417 Squadron 'erks' erect a mess tent in 1944. (PL 27748)



No 412 Squadron Spitfires at their new base of Beny-sur-Mer (B 4) soon after the Normandy landings. (PL 30268)



Groundcrew dig slit trenches in the early days of the Normandy campaign. Enemy activity was largely confined to sporadic bombing by night. (PL 30059)



A Repair and Salvage crew recovers a No 403 Squadron Spitfire in the field. (PL 31115)



Repacking a parachute in Normandy. (PL 31784)



A No 440 Squadron Typhoon serves as backdrop while part of a French field is cleared of its wheat crop. (PL 31378)



For a period in 1944, No 418's Mosquitos carried nose art representing characters from Al Capp's 'Li'l Abner' comic strip. This aircraft was normally flown by the squadron commander, Wing Commander R. Bannock, DSO, DFC and Bar, and shows his personal score of both enemy aircraft (swastikas) and V-1's. (PL 33521)



Typhoons of No 143 Wing in a maintenance area during the Normandy campaign. (PL 30262)



No 409 Squadron armourers work on the cannons of a Mosquito in the summer of 1944. (PL 31818)



A No 442 Squadron Spitfire undergoes an engine change in August 1944. (PL 31363)



Groundcrew load an oblique camera into a Spitfire XI of No 400 Squadron in the autumn of 1944. (PL 40301)



A Typhoon gets reammunitioned at Eindhoven, Holland, in the autumn of 1944. (PL 33858)



Reading and drying-out! No 430 Squadron operated the venerable but effective Mustang I on fighter reconnaissance operations with Second TAF until the end of 1944. (PL 3336)



This aircraft (or what was left of it) was discovered in a German salvage yard in November 1944. Its previous owner had been a pilot of No 416 Squadron, a prisoner of war since May. (PL 33706)



A Typhoon of No 438 Squadron taxis through a flooded area at Eindhoven, Holland, in the late winter of 1944-5 (one of the wettest on record), while a pilot practises his dinghy drill watched by an airman trying to keep his feet dry by squatting on jerricans. (PL 42099)



In order to cope with crowded tarmacs and poor forward visibility (and a certain amount of surplus rainwater), this No 400 Squadron Spitfire is guided towards a dispersal area at Evèr by two groundcrew in December 1944. (PL 40401)



Flak damage sustained by a No 416 Squadron Spitfire on Christmas Eve, 1944.
(PL 41349)



Aftermath of the Luftwaffe's New Year's Day strike against Eindhoven. (PMR 74-318)



With Spitfires of No 412 Squadron in the background, groundcrew clear away snow at Heesch. (PL 41492)



Spitfire XVI of No 403 Squadron at Evère, in early 1945. (PL 41857)



De-icing a Mosquito XIII of No 409 Squadron at Vendeville, France, in early 1945.
(PL 41735)



Water-soaked accommodation area of No 39 (Reconnaissance) Wing at Eindhoven in March 1945. (PL 42674)



Typhoons of No 143 Wing take off from Eindhoven in March 1945. (PL 42816)



No 443 Squadron Spitfire XIVs buzz the mobile flying control installation at Petit-Broegel, Belgium, in March 1945. (PL 43236)



No 412 Squadron Spitfire IXs undergoing maintenance at Heesch in March 1945.
(PL 42422)



A No 143 Wing convoy crosses the Rhine on a Class 80 Double-Single Pontoon Bailey Bridge in April 1945. (PL 44575)



The Typhoon squadrons of No 143 Wing became the first RCAF air units to operate from German soil when they moved into Goch in the last days of March 1945. They were close to the front, and armed groundcrew are seen in the back of a truck moving up to their new station. (PL 42792)



Members of a Canadian Mobile Photographic section listen to British prime minister Winston Churchill announcing the end of the war in Europe. (PL 44125)

Introduction

Captivated by the strategic bombing doctrine enshrined in the concept of an 'independent' air force, the Royal Air Force paid scant attention to the question of air defence for the first fifteen years following the end of the First World War. That situation changed in the summer of 1934 when British politicians, frightened by the prospect of German rearmament, compelled the air staff to reconsider the balance to be maintained between bomber and fighter. A separate Fighter Command was established in 1936, and by 1938 government policy was clear. In the event of war with Germany, the RAF's first responsibility was to defend Britain from attack: and the fighter aircraft then entering service, the Hawker Hurricane and Supermarine Spitfire, were perfectly suited to this defensive role. Only later would the Air Ministry launch a bombing offensive against the Fatherland – an offensive which, according to the thinking of the time, would not require fighter escorts.

Supported by Chain Home radar stations and a complex network of ground observers and controllers, Fighter Command won the Battle of Britain in the summer of 1940. At that juncture, the strategic rationale for maintaining a large force of short-range day interceptors based in the United Kingdom all but disappeared. However, since it was impolitic for psychological reasons to dispatch many of them to other theatres, some new employment had to be found. Hence the offensive fighter sweeps conducted over northeastern France and Holland in 1941, whose main object, beyond keeping Fighter Command staff and pilots busy, seems to have been to establish a vague, uncertain air superiority over the enemy and thus further secure British air space.

Once Germany attacked Russia, a strategic rationale was found for the fighter offensive – to compel the Luftwaffe to move forces from the Eastern Front to the west. 'Leaning forward into France,' however, was something of a failure: the RAF/RCAF lost far more pilots and machines than the enemy, and significant attrition of the German fighter force in the west had to wait on the evolution of the American long-range fighter and its conjunction with the USAAF daylight bombing campaign over Germany itself – aided and abetted by the inept planning of the Luftwaffe's leadership.

Meanwhile, with the evolution of fighter-bombers and the development of new fighter weapons systems (particularly the rocket projectile), Fighter Com-

mand found a new lease on life in supporting ground operations. That role had been inherent in the formation of the short-lived (and largely neglected) Army Co-operation Command, and was demonstrated more concretely in the operations conducted by the Desert Air Force in the Mediterranean theatre. It would reach its zenith with the creation of Second Tactical Air Force, which supported the Anglo-Canadian 21st Army Group throughout the Northwest Europe campaign.

As part of Canada's modest rearmament program, in February 1939 the RCAF's Calgary-based No 1 (Fighter) Squadron began to exchange its Armstrong-Whitworth biplanes for more modern Hawker Hurricane Mk Is. Sent to England in June 1940 to bolster the depleted strength of RAF Fighter Command, No 1 (which became No 401) was the only RCAF unit to fly in the Battle of Britain and claimed its first victories on 26 August 1940.

No 1 Squadron was not the first RCAF unit to arrive in England, however. No 110 (Army Co-operation) Squadron – later No 400 – equipped with Westland Lysanders, had been dispatched overseas in February 1940 to work with Canada's one-division expeditionary force. No 112 (Army Co-operation) Squadron joined it in June 1940, but in December was redesignated No 2 (Fighter) Squadron – later No 402 – and re-equipped with Hawker Hurricanes. All the RCAF fighter squadrons eventually flew variants of the Spitfire, while fighter-bomber squadrons flew either Spitfire variants or the Hawker Typhoon.

The renumbering scheme noted above, which saw the RCAF allocated the block of RAF squadron numbers falling between 400 and 449 (450–499 were assigned to other Commonwealth Air Forces), was implemented to avoid the confusion that would result if, for example, two No 1 (Fighter) Squadrons, one RAF, the other RCAF, happened to be serving in close proximity to each other and messages were misdirected. Symbolically, allocating these blocks of numbers to the dominion air forces recognized national contributions to the air war while, at the same time, proclaiming and confirming the extremely close relationship that existed between them and the RAF.

No 414 Squadron joined No 400 Squadron in Army Co-operation Command in August 1941, both units then being equipped with Curtiss Tomahawks and later with North American Mustang Is. Brought together into No 39 (Army Co-operation) Wing, RCAF, they were joined by No 430 Squadron in January 1943. Following brief stints with Fighter Command, and subsequently assigned to the fighter-reconnaissance role, the three squadrons again served together as No 39 Wing in No 83 Group of the Second Tactical Air Force.

Most Canadian fighter squadrons were either formed in, or assigned to, Fighter Command – redesignated as the Air Defence of Great Britain between November 1943 and October 1944. Although Ottawa's hopes that an RCAF fighter group paralleling the Canadian bomber group might be formed were not realized, two Canadian fighter wings were established in England, the first at Digby, the other at Kenley, until their squadrons were transferred to Second

Tactical Air Force (TAF). Formed in the summer of 1943, Second TAF would eventually comprise No 2 (Bomber) Group, and Nos 83 and 84 Composite Groups, the former being about half Canadian. Ottawa had hoped that No 83 would be associated with First Canadian Army; however, a complex series of strategic and political decisions in air and ground policies led to the group's serving primarily with Second British Army. More and more, fighter forces, including the Canadians, were used for air support of ground forces, their ranges increased with the introduction of jettisonable auxiliary fuel tanks.

As Canadian fighter squadrons moved to the Continent after the invasion of Normandy, at one time or another all of them would serve in Second TAF, including the six squadrons from the Home War Establishment transferred overseas between November 1943 and February 1944. Eventually, ten Canadian squadrons would see service in the day-fighter role, three as night-fighters, three as fighter-bombers, and one in the Intruder role. Two RCAF fighter wings (Nos 126 and 127) and one fighter bomber-wing (No 143) operated throughout the campaign in Northwest Europe. They provided a small part of an overwhelming Allied air superiority.

The Luftwaffe was not a major factor during the Overlord campaign, but as Allied armies approached the Rhine it began to play a greater part in defending the Fatherland. German fighters (including the jet-powered Me 262) endeavoured to frustrate Allied air interdiction and support of ground forces. By that time, however, German technology was more than matched by Allied numbers and training.

The RCAF night-fighter squadrons had joined the order of battle in the late summer of 1941 to help deal with the Luftwaffe's bombing raids against Britain and then to support Bomber Command's night offensive against Germany. By mid-1944 the Canadian night-fighter squadrons were equipped with de Havilland Mosquitoes and had moved to the Continent as part of Second TAF.

No 418 Squadron operated as Canada's only Intruder unit, ranging far and wide by day and night against German fighter bases and lines of communication and, in 1944, taking on the V-1 rockets. In August 1944 it, too, was transferred to Second TAF for close support work, and it moved to Belgium in March 1945.

No 417 Squadron, meanwhile, was the only RCAF fighter unit to serve beyond the bounds of the Home War Establishment and Northwest Europe. It left Britain for Egypt in April 1942 and served in the Desert Air Force and in Italy until the end of the war.

Establishing a Presence, 1940

At the end of the First World War contemporary air-power theory, based on the limited precedents of 1917 and 1918, held that future wars could be settled quickly, cheaply, and relatively painlessly through the 'knock-out blow' – an unstoppable and devastating bomber attack on an enemy's commercial and industrial centres. Bombers were everything and fighters a distracting and wasteful nothing. Political realities nevertheless dictated that some lip service be paid to assuaging civilian anxieties, and in 1922 Air Commodore J.M. Steel of the Air Ministry and Colonel H.J. Bartholomew of the War Office were instructed by the chiefs of staff to create an air defence plan for Britain based on a proposed fourteen bomber and nine fighter squadrons. When, in 1924, this force was increased (on paper) to thirty-five bomber and seventeen fighter squadrons, the proportion of squadrons changed slightly in still further favour of the bomber.¹

Adolf Hitler's accession to power in January 1933, together with Germany's withdrawal from the League of Nations in October and the 1935 recreation of a German air force in brazen defiance of the Treaty of Versailles, led the British government to re-examine its defence requirements. There then appeared a series of expansion schemes, each intended to counter, as cheaply as possible, the threat posed by a proliferating Luftwaffe. Still, assigning priority to bombers as it did, the Metropolitan Air Force (the operational part of the RAF based in Great Britain) of Schemes A through H was meant to intimidate rather than defend; and only with Scheme J of October 1937 did the government's attitude begin to change and planning turn towards putting the air force on a more balanced war footing. Sir John (later Lord) Slessor, then the RAF's deputy director of plans, has described Scheme J, calling for some thirty-three fighter squadrons (with immediate reserves) by June 1941, as 'the first scheme based on estimates of minimum overall strategic requirements.'²

The shift in emphasis towards fighters seems to have been largely driven by the need for politicians to be able to talk in terms of 'parity' with the Luftwaffe, whatever that might mean, and by the economic reality that fighters were cheaper and quicker to build than bombers. A more significant change in the relationship between fighter and bomber, brought about by the invention