

THE STORY OF NO. 412 SQUADRON

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ONE OF the longest and most successful histories of a Canadian fighter squadron in the Second World War is that of No. 412, the squadron that proudly bore the badge of the flying falcon. Sixteen D.F.C.s, seven bars to that decoration and four mentions in despatches testified to this unit's outstanding record. Its Spitfires accounted for 106 Luftwaffe aircraft destroyed, 11 more probably destroyed and 46 damaged in combat.

The story began in the trying days of June 1941. Two Canadian Hurricane-equipped squadrons (401 and 402) and one R.C.A.F. Spitfire squadron (411) were then stationed at Digby, Lincolnshire, in 12 Group (R.A.F.). On the last day of that month Canada's third Spitfire squadron overseas (403 had been the first Canadian fighter unit formed *ab initio* in Britain) was created at Digby.

Squadron Leader C. W. Trevena became the first officer commanding 412 Squadron. He had joined 120 (Bomber) Squadron in the Auxiliary back in 1936 as an AC2 and had been commissioned soon after receiving his private pilot's license the next year. Leaving the accounting department of the Regina *Leader-Post* to go on active service when the war broke out, he had transferred to fighters soon after arriving in England. By the time he assumed command of the fledgling Falcons he had already made his mark in the Battle of Britain.

Sqn. Ldr. Trevena was followed by a succession of fine OCs in 412. The others were:

S/L J. D. Morrison	12 Nov 41 - 24 Mar 42,
S/L R. C. Weston	1 Apr 42 - 28 Jul 42,
S/L C. J. Fee, D.F.C.	28 Jul 42 - 27 Nov 42,
S/L F. W. Kelly, D.F.C.	27 Nov 42 - 25 Jun 43,
S/L G. C. Keefer, D.F.C. & Bar	25 Jun 43 - 12 Apr 44,
S/L J. Sheppard, D.F.C.	12 Apr 44 - 2 Aug 44,
S/L D. H. Dover, D.F.C. & Bar	2 Aug 44 - 28 Jan 45,
S/L M. D. Boyd, D.F.C.	29 Jan 45 - 30 May 45,
S/L D. J. Dewan	30 May 45 - 21 Mar 46.

Sqn. Ldr. Morrison was killed in action in an attack on the marshalling yards at Abbeville. Sqn. Ldr. Sheppard, crashlanding behind enemy lines and wounded in both legs, escaped his captors and reached Allied lines nine days later with the loyal assistance of the French underground.

SPITFIRE ACES

Throughout its long and successful tour overseas 412 Squadron flew all the best-known marks of R. J. Mitchell's famous *Spitfire*. The pilots began training with the 2A, and it was with this mark that the unit became operational on 30 August 1941. A couple of months later they adopted the 5B modification and flew this until the 9E replaced it in November 1943. After the end of the war they were equipped with *Spitfire* 16s and later, as occupation forces, with *Spitfire* 14s.

It was with these sturdy aircraft that the aces of the Falcon Squadron wrote their names large in the annals of Canada's fighting airmen. Flight Lieutenant Don Laubman, D.F.C. and Bar, destroyed 14 enemy aircraft and shared two more. Flt. Lt. W. J. Banks, D.F.C. and Bar, scored 9-3-1 and Flying Officer D. R. C. Jamieson, D.F.C. and Bar, destroyed six German fighters. Other names high in the long list of 412's top scorers were Flying Officer P. M. Charron, Flt. Lt. R. I. A. Smith (who won a D.F.C. and Bar for his gallantry at Malta and on the Continent), Sqn. Ldr. M. D. Boyd, D.F.C., and Flt. Lt. C. W. Fox, D.F.C. and Bar.

In rhubarbs, rodeos and ramrods, in sea sweeps and armed reconnaissance, in dive-bombing and army co-operation, in tedious patrols and fierce dogfights in the skies of France, these men wrote history with bullets and bombs. They won honours in the defence of Britain, over the Channel and the North Sea, over the heart of Hitler's "impregnable" *Festung Europa*. They were there at Dieppe, over the beaches of Normandy, over Arnhem, over the Rhine.

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Once the war in the air had been won, the invasion could be launched. A foothold gained on the Continent, the ground forces began their push across France. The fighter squadrons, which had helped to make that initial landing possible by months of "softening up" the enemy and disrupting communications, then complemented and protected the army's gains with invaluable air support. The Falcon Squadron alone, from "D"-Day to the end of March 1945, bagged 230 mechanized transports, damaged another 574, destroyed 20 locomotives and 27 carriages (while crippling 72 and 75 of each respectively) and put nine tanks out of commission. They cut vital rail lines in 86 places. They harassed enemy troops, battered supply lines. They rained down more than half a million pounds of high explosives on important targets, blasting communications and hardpressing the foe our armies had successfully met and driven into retreat across France and behind the borders of the Reich.

It was a tale of sustained courage and devotion, but here and there flashes of remarkable personal valour are seen even against the bright background of the collective effort. On 13 October 1941 Sgt. Edward N. Macdonell sprayed an Me.109 in a patrol from Boulogne to points south of Hardelot, chalking up the squadron's first kill. From then until 30 April 1945—when 412 added the last five victims to its scoreboard before hostilities ceased—the Germans knew the Falcons as a force to reckon with. Highlight of all the outstanding feats was the Squadron's record of 26 and 27 September 1944. The *Luftwaffe* was out those days in unaccustomed strength in the Nijmegen area—and 13 pilots of 412 destroyed 30 enemy aircraft, probably destroyed another, and damaged seven more—an amazing record for two days in the history of a single squadron.

FIRST OPERATIONS

No. 412 received its first two aircraft about a week after its creation on paper. On 7 July 1941 Sgt. L. W. Powell, a peacetime butcher in Edmonton, logged four local flying hours and became the first

Falcon to soar. The following day five more Spitfires arrived and all available pilots were practising circuits and bumps. The squadron's first flight was rapidly taking shape, albeit one of the spanking new planes was badly bent the next morning by a sergeant pilot who overshot the runway and tried to enter an air raid shelter with it.

When the intermittent rain and persistent ground mists of Lincolnshire cancelled flying, the pilots gathered for instruction in the handling of the dinghy and the tommy gun, aircraft recognition exercises, or films on intelligence and aerial combat techniques. Those formerly with *Hurricane* squadrons were especially anxious, however, to "get checked out" on the *Spits* and on 30 August Sqn. Ldr. Trevena's unit was signed out as "Operational State 1."

The squadron immediately commenced operational patrols, but it was not until 13 October that the Falcons chalked up their first victory. Wing Commander Jamieson led 266, 411 and 412 Squadrons in a patrol from Boulogne to points south of Hardelot. Flying Red 2, Sgt. Macdonell became detached from the main force on the return journey. As he neared the English coast he observed two Me. 109s below him and, attacking out of the sun at 20,000 feet, his first burst spattered the cockpit of one of the Messerschmitts. Sgt. Macdonell followed it down in a dive, streaking after the smoking German aircraft at nearly 600 miles an hour. He blacked out completely as he pulled out of his screaming dive and regained consciousness to find himself flying straight and level at 400 feet above the water. Jerry was nowhere to be seen, but Wing Cdr. Jamieson passed over the spot a short time later and reported a large oil slick on the sea. This was regarded as confirmation, 412's guns not yet having been equipped with cine-guns to record their victories, and the Falcons marked up their first score high on the board, leaving room for many more.

On 20 October 1941, 412 made the first of nearly 30 moves that were to carry them all the way from Digby to Utersen, Germany. This one was very short, just a few miles to Digby's satellite field at Wellington, Lincolnshire. There they operated for the winter with their new *Spitfire* 5Bs.

On 25 October there was great excitement in the squadron over Sgt. O. F. Pickell's return from the Rolls-Royce works at Hucknall. One of the *Spit* 5Bs had been fitted out with a novel negative "G" carburetor and, as well as flying it back for them, Pickell (who had been an engineering student at the University of British Columbia before the war) was able to explain its mysteries to the squadron. The device prevented the engine from cutting out when the control column was jerked sharply forward. The Spitfires had previously had some difficulty in manoeuvring, because of this, against the German planes whose injection carburetion obviated this difficulty. No. 412 was the first squadron in Britain to be fitted with this gift from the "boffins".

FIRST CASUALTIES

In November patrols of the French coast became common. It was on one of these that the squadron suffered the first of its battle casualties. Flt. Lt. C. Bushell (acting as squadron commander), Pilot Officer K. R. E. Denkman and Sgt. Pickell were all lost in action. Pickell's last report was: "Have used up all my ammunition. Am going home. Have got one." He was never heard of again.

On 11 December Pilot Officer John Gillespie Magee, Jr. (author of the much-quoted sonnet *High Flight*) was killed when he collided in cloud with an *Oxford* from Cranwell. Magee arrived from 53 O.T.U. to join 412 at Digby on 23 September. An American citizen, he was born of missionary parents in Shanghai, educated at Rugby, and brought to the United States in 1939. The next year, at the age of 18, he gave up a scholarship to Yale University to come to Canada and join the R.C.A.F.

Pilot Officer Magee had recently returned from a high-level flying course at Farnborough. There he received the inspiration for his poem and scribbled it on the back of a letter to his mother. Since it

ranks in the literature of the Second World War at least as high as did the Canadian Macrae's *In Flanders' Fields* in the First, and since it expresses so well the feelings that must have been felt inarticulately by so many of his companions in the air, it would not be amiss to quote it in the history of his squadron.

More accidents, fortunately not fatal, dogged 412 in the next month. In the middle of January the first powdering of snow heralded the beginning of some difficult flying weather. Two *Spitfires* had to be struck off strength due to heavy landings and in February another shuddered to an abrupt stop in a snowbank.

HOCKEY ACES, TOO

The squadron hockey team was a bright spot in the picture. Led by Flying Officer Howe (with Leading Aircraftman Blas, Corporal Leclair and Aircraftman 1 Clarke in the forward line and Cpl. McQuestion joining Howe on defence) it distinguished itself that winter. After an unbroken string of victories it met its match, however, in 400 Squadron at the championship game in London but proudly retained Group Captain Campbell's trophy for the leading team in 12 Group.

Operational time in February 1942 was the highest to date: 412's 18 *Spitfires* and the *Miles Magister* flew a total of 209 hours on convoy patrols and 301 hours in training. None of the patrols, however, spotted the enemy. The "big action" was still ahead.

In March aircraft tests were conducted (when the filthy weather of the blustering season permitted) and flying was pretty routine. Sgt. Thompson's escapes from two serious Spitfire crashes within the space of four hours, and not the Hun, formed the topic of the day in the mess. On 24 March the squadron saw some action against the enemy in an attack on the marshalling yards at Abbeville, but it cost the Falcons dearly. Sqn. Ldr. Morrison, the OC, was killed in action while leading his squadron and Pilot Officer A. T. A. Young fell prisoner of war in the same engagement and spent three years in the notorious confines of *Stalag Luft III*.

On the first of April 412 (now commanded by Sqn. Ldr. R. C. Weston) left 12 Group and moved south to the more active 11 Group zone. They moved to Martlesham Heath, Suffolk, and were joined by 3048 Echelon for servicing. In June subsequent moves took them to North Weald (Essex) and Merston (Sussex). Their apprenticeship was over: they were being "moved up" into some real action. By the time the squadron's first anniversary rolled around in June the Falcons were full-grown.

They marked their new estate on 26 July by recording their most successful encounter with the *Luftwaffe* up to that time. Yellow Section of 412 tangled with *Focke-Wulfs* over the airdrome at Abbeville-Drucat. Flt. Lt. F. E. Green destroyed one and damaged a second, Flying Officer G. C. Davidson scored a probable kill, and Flying Officer K. I. Robb damaged still another. In the same combat Lt. Col. A. P. Clark was lost in action. With Major McNickle and Captain Davis he represented the U.S.A.A.F. with 412 Squadron. On 29 July Flt. Lt. Freddy Green claimed another *FW.190* shot down.

The next month he and Sqn. Ldr. Fee, who had very recently taken over command of 412, became the squadron's first pilots to receive the D.F.C. This illustrated something of the international character of the squadron, for Frederick Ernest Green (a product of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan and by now a veteran with three kills to his credit) was a native of Petersburg, Virginia, while Clark John Fee was a product of Calgary, Alberta. Sqn. Ldr. Fee was cited as "a fine pilot and skilful leader.... by outstanding ability mainly responsible for the high standard of fighting efficiency of the squadron." In the Dieppe action of 19 August 1942, 412 flew three operational missions. On the second trip out Pilot Officer N. N. Brookhouse was hit by flak, crashed and was listed among the six

Canadian pilots lost that day. Flt. Sgt. W. F. Aldcorn was luckier: when he was forced to bail out near Beachy Head he survived a forty-minute dip in the Channel and was rescued by a naval launch. The squadron recorded no victories that day. Total enemy casualties in the Dieppe action were 93 aircraft; Allied aircraft losses were 98 (30 of the pilots being rescued).

RHUBARBS AND RODEOS

On 23 August 412 Squadron moved to R.A.F. Station Tangmere and began to function as part of the Tangmere Wing. The squadron was by now operating in high gear and its operational hours for the month, in excess of 500, were double the total of training hours logged.

The business of the unit soon became rhubarbs in northern France where, flying in pairs, the Spitfires harassed communications and strafed rail targets. When the airdrome at Tangmere was rendered unserviceable by the frequent drizzles of the English autumn, the squadron continued operations from Kenley. Light but fairly accurate flak cost them two pilots (Sgt. W. D. Pagan and Sgt. W. H. D. Spence) in these dark November days.

In mid-December the field at Kenley became a soggy and virtually useless expanse and 412, now under Sqn. Ldr. F. W. Kelly, moved about half its ground crew to Friston and based some of its operations there. By now the strafing missions had given way to support of the bombers, which were pounding Abbeville and Berck-sur-Mer. On one of these missions Flying Officer W. B. Needham of Wynyard, Saskatchewan, earned the D.F.C. for great gallantry in defence of a *Flying Fortress*, which, even though five of the crew had bailed out, was being harried by four *FW.190*s.

In January 1943 bomber escort operations continued over the Cherbourg, Samer, Triqueville, Flushing and Abbeville areas in company with 401, 402 and 416 Squadrons. Sqn. Ldr. Kelly won a D.F.C. for his exploits on these missions and

Wing Cdr. Fee (one of his predecessors as OC of 412) was lost on operations. During the month elements of the squadron based at Friston and Redhill were assembled at Kenley and, on 29 January, the entire unit moved from Surrey to R.A.F. Station Angle, South Wales, and later to Fairwood Common. "Exercise Sparton" then took them to Hurn for some time and subsequently the "travelling circus" flew convoy patrols out of Perranporth, Cornwall, in April.

Operating as part of the Perranporth Wing in May, 412 flew 221 operational sorties, mainly against shipping. In one of these (7 May in the Ile de Batz-Ushant area) Flying Officer L. W. Jones was shot down, but Flt. Sgt. (later Warrant Officer 1st Class), E. J. V. Levesque, though hit in the cannon magazine, managed to coax his craft home on a damaged mainplane. He failed to return from a scrape in June. While strafing rail targets on the Brest peninsula between Morlaix and St. Brieux, exactly a month later, he was knocked down by flak.

ADOPTION

On 13 May a cable arrived from the Parkdale Lions Club of Toronto, offering to "adopt" the squadron. This was the beginning of an association that lasted until 412 was disbanded and brought many "comforts" to the boys overseas during the war.

Also in May Flying Officer L. W. Powell (in an operation with 610 and 65 Squadrons in support of a dozen *Venturas* attacking the airdrome at Morlaix) brought down an *FW.190* and earned himself a D.F.C. He and Sqn. Ldr. Kelly, D.F.C., attended the investiture at Buckingham Palace on 25 June and received their decorations from H.M. the King. Powell was listed as missing a few weeks later when

he failed to return from a convoy patrol off the Scilly Islands. Flying Officer H. E. Holbrook was also lost in this action, while. Pilot Officer R. W. Thatcher was "fished out of the drink" by the Air/Sea Rescue boys.

RAMRODS

The squadron left the southwest in June and returned to Friston for more action in the "Hell's Corner" of southeast England. In July they flew ramrod and rodeo ops from Redhill and then, with the move of 126 Airfield, repaired to Staplehurst, in Kent, on 7 August. In mid-October this seemingly restless crew began their programme of ramrod operations from Biggin Hill.

In November 1943 the great bomber strikes commenced in earnest against the threatening rocket installations and other significant targets at Calais, Triqueville, Minoceyque, Lille, Venderville and the vast airdromes at Cambrai and Chievres. Number 412 flew close escort to the 72-bomber armadas of *Marauders* or *Mitchells*. They also conducted fighter sweeps of the Hardelot, St. Omer and Bethune sectors. No enemy aircraft were in evidence but flak sent down Flt. Lt. A. C. Coles to share the fate of the *Kriegesgefangenen* partaking of the meagre amenities of *Stalag Luft IV*. Flt. Lt. D. B. Wurtele stretched his luck successfully and limped back in a damaged aircraft to a safe let-down.

December was marked by increasing demands upon 412 to supply cover for bombers pounding French airfields and returning from attacks on the Schipol airport at Amsterdam, but in a hectic month of ramrod operations the squadron suffered no casualties and only its most outstanding fighter (Flt. Lt. G. F. "Buzz" Beurling, D.S.O., D.F.C., D.F.M. and Bar, who served briefly with the Falcons) scored. It was his only "kill" with 412, but the 31st entry in his amazing record.

1943 ROUND UP

During 1943 the Canadian fighter squadrons in the Second Tactical Air Force (401, 403, 411, 412, and 421) flew 11,743 operational sorties in their *Spitfires*, an impressive total of 18,420 hours and 15 minutes. They brought down 97 enemy aircraft, scored 10 "probables" and damaged 59 ½. Number 412's contribution (in 2,315 operational sorties totalling 3,200 hours of ramrods, rhubarbs, rodeos, air/sea rescues, scrambles and general reconnaissance) was 7-2-6. In addition many locomotives, motor vehicles, goods trains, military formations and airfields were strafed, although the chief operations were interception patrols, fighter sweeps, escorts for bomber withdrawal and convoys, and such tasks as that. On all these missions the Second Tac squadrons lost a total of 54 listed as missing in action. The Falcons regretfully recorded five killed or presumed dead, one wounded and one prisoner of war. Two of their members listed as missing turned up safe in 1943.

As 1943 drew to a close the war in the air seemed to be taking several turns. On 28 November air photographs of the German research facilities at Peenemunde (and the nearby airfield at Zempin) revealed the existence of the buzz-bombs soon to launch the age of missiles. The day before that another historic event took place: Churchill and Roosevelt met Stalin at Teheran. The way was being prepared for the breaching of the walls of Hitler's fortress, an invasion which air supremacy, won in brave combat against the *Luftwaffe*, was to make possible. Already, in December, the U.S.A.A.F. bombers escorted by R.A.F. Mustangs with wing droptanks, were giving evidence that this air supremacy had been achieved, inaugurating daylight bombing raids with long-range fighter escort (on Kiel, Bremen, Hamburg and the Schipol airport in Holland).

The 1,462 aircraft used by the Americans on 13 December—the record for the Allies up to that date—suggested the shape of the offensive to come. But before the dawn of "D"-Day there was a lot of work to be done—and 412 was to have an increasingly significant part in it.

THE Falcon Squadron began the eventful year of 1944 unspectacularly with a week of air-firing practice at Hutton Cranswick. They then returned to the routine attacks on "Noball" targets and bomber escort assignments. The future was to hold even more interesting work for them, however, than 1943's 3200 hours of operations.

At the end of January 412 shifted from 126 Airfield to R.A.F. Biggin Hill's main mess and taxied their aircraft over to the nearby dispersal area previously used by 411, the "Grizzly Bear" squadron. They thereby inherited more creature comforts, including Flt. Lt. R.S. Hyndman's murals in 411's elaborately decorated dispersal hut.

On 2 February the Canadian High Commissioner, the Hon. Vincent Massey, visited the squadron during his inspection of the wing. He was accompanied by Air Vice Marshal N.R. Anderson (second in command of the R.C.A.F. overseas) and Group Capt. G.R. MacBrien, C.O. of 17 Wing. Mr. Massey showed a special interest in 412 as his son, Flt. Lt. Hart Massey, had served for some time in the unit as intelligence officer.

Bomber escort duties in the Pas de Calais sector, sweeps of Ostend-Bethune-Abbeville, fighter umbrellas for *Mitchells* and *Bostons* pounding Noball installations at Tocqueville and south of Dieppe, support of heavy attacks in the Eindhoven area, and rendezvous near Brussels with *Forts* returning from Germany: February was a busy month. In all these operations the squadron experienced only light flak and no fighter opposition. The month's tally was 291 sorties; the casualties were nil. Air supremacy had been realized. Engine trouble, not the *Luftwaffe*, accounted for Flying Officer A.B. Ketterson's death on 4 March. It was not until 23 March, despite the continued fast pace of operations, that Jerry was sighted again. Flying Officer Laubman and Flt. Lt. Needham shared a *Ju. 88* on that occasion.

BALE-CUTS

During Ramrod 661 (16 March) against Abbeville, Flying Officer T.M. Saunderson experienced engine trouble over the Channel and glided in toward the French coast, baling out at 2500 feet about a mile from the Somme Estuary. He spent an hour and a half in the drink, with Flt. Lt. Laubman hovering over to provide protection, before the Air/Sea Rescue types managed to land a *Walrus* and pick Saunderson up.

The "softening-up" of France continued, with 412 dive-bombing rail and road communications and flying-bomb sites. The operations in May brought the Falcons some casualties. On the 10th of the month, at 6000 feet over Rheims, two *FW. 190s* were attacked by Flt. Lts. E.G. Likeness and J.A. Crimmins. Both the Falcons were shot down, a rare occurrence in this period of the war. Likeness, hit by enemy fire, was forced to bale out three miles inland from Treport. He evaded capture and was soon back with his squadron. Crimmins crashed and was buried by the commune of Beauvais in the department of Oise. Next day, in a dive-bombing show on a Noball site, Flying Officers J.S. Hamilton and R.W. Thatcher collided in mid-air over the target. Hamilton, who had fought through the dark days at Malta, found that his luck held once more; he baled out and was picked up almost immediately by Air/Sea Rescue. Thatcher was never heard of again.

D-DAY

Expectation sat in the air as the bright days of June dawned. On the fourth came the order to paint distinguishing stripes on all aircraft. It was literally down in black and white: the grand assault was coming. It was patent that the *Luftwaffe* had been swept from the skies and that the disruption of ground installations in northern France, in preparation for the greatest invasion in modern history, had been completed.

On the afternoon of 5 June the pilots moved from their composite to billets at Crocker Hill. That night at 2330 hours, just as aircraft began filling the sky overhead with gliders full of paratroopers and airborne troops bound for France, Group Capt. MacBrien called all the pilots of 126 and 127 Wings together to announce that "D"-Day had arrived. The briefing broke up at 0130 hours on the 6th. Two hours later 412 was summoned to readiness.

At 0810 hours the squadron was airborne for the first of the four beach patrols they flew that day. The *Luftwaffe* wasn't home. It wasn't until D plus one that Jerry appeared in the air. The wing on one of their four patrols encountered a dozen *Ju. 88*s and knocked eight out of the sky, scored a "probable", and damaged two. Flying Officer Charron destroyed one *Ju. 88*. The credit for the two damaged went to Flt. Lt. H.L. Phillips and Flying Officer J.P. Laureys, both of 412. The three beachhead patrols on the next day were uneventful and bad weather grounded all R.C.A.F. aircraft on the 9th.

INSIDE EUROPE

On the 11th the major part of the wing's ground personnel left Tangmere for the concentration area en route to the Continent. The vehicles of that echelon formed a convoy, which stretched for approximately four and a half miles along the dusty roads. All 412 personnel, and the 25 servicing personnel attached to them, went later by air on the 18th, when they were reunited with the rest of 126 Wing at Beny-sur-Mer.

They were operating at last from inside Hitler's "Fortress Europe." Their programme of patrols and armed reconnaissance continued unabated despite the move and 412's 18 *Spitfire IX*s flew a little more than 1034 operational hours during June. Even their little *Auster III* was kept pretty busy. Their claims for the month were one *FW. 190* destroyed and another damaged, one *Me. 109* destroyed, one *Ju. 88* destroyed and two damaged. This was a remarkable showing, considering the fact that the Hun was chary about coming out in force that month and his appearances had been sporadic and timorous. In July he began to show himself, especially after the push around Caen began. The Falcons flew 902 operational sorties (1092:20 hours) for the month. They destroyed 18 enemy aircraft and damaged five — not a bad piece of work for 26 pilots. Noteworthy was Flt. Lt. O.M. Linton's sortie on 24 July when he knocked three enemy aircraft out of the air on a single operation east of Lisieux.

CASUALTIES

The squadron recorded four casualties in these two months: W.O. II L.W. Love was killed over Bavent on patrol (17 June), W.O. II A.E. Seller was forced down near Caen and became a P.O.W. (28 June), Flying Officer H.W. Bowker was killed in action southeast of Caen (2 July), and Flt. Lt. Needham had to bale out near Falaise (7 July). Needham, the B-flight commander, turned up safe in the U.K. a month later.

On 2 August the O.C., Sqn. Ldr. J. Sheppard, crashlanded behind enemy lines a few kilometres northwest of Les Chapelles. The aircraft was badly damaged on landing and Sheppard was wounded in both legs. He fell into the hands of a German patrol and was taken to a hospital at Alencon from which he escaped (in company with a Royal Marine) on 6 August. He returned to the Allied lines a week later after a harrowing series of exploits. Meanwhile, however, Flt. Lt. D.H. Dover (a 412 flight commander) was made acting squadron leader and took over command of the Falcons. Both he and Flt. Lt. O.M. Linton, the B-flight commander who had distinguished himself on 24 July, were soon thereafter granted non-immediate D.F.C.s.

The rapid advance of the ground troops made it possible for 412 to move to a succession of front line airfields in the succeeding weeks. Constantly on the move, they nevertheless lost nothing in efficiency. On 8 August they left Beny-sur-Mer for Cristot and soon after that moved on to Illiers l'Eveque, Poix, Evere—a large airport half a dozen miles from Brussels—and then Le Culot, also in Belgium. October took them across the borders of The Netherlands to Rips and then Volkel. Although the outfit began to take on some of the aspects of a travelling tentshow, their usefulness only increased.

TWO-DAY RECORD

Indeed, in September they chalked up an almost incredible record on two successive days. Pickings had been small of late, due to Jerry's caution. On 26 and 27 September the situation was redressed, and 412 scored an amazing total of 31 enemy fighters destroyed and seven damaged.

A lull in October checked this rapid pace and gave the squadron a little time to settle into their latest "digs". There was plenty of flyboy talk in the mess, however, even on rainy days. Five pilots of 401 Squadron had destroyed an *Me. 262* on 5 October and this was thought to be the first jet-job bagged by any R.A.F. or R.C.A.F. squadron. The *Me. 262*, originally a *Kampfzerstoerer*, was the first successful jet ever to come into general combat use. Ordinarily no *Spitfire* could touch it, but these R.C.A.F. lads were lucky.

The only real action of the month for 412 Squadron came on the 28th. Pilot Officer W.C. Busby joined the aces Laubman and Charron on the scoreboard and between them they put up four destroyed and one "probable."

WINTER OPS

One of the squadron's worst days came on 19 November. In an armed recce in the Bocholt area a whole section was wiped out. Flying Officers J.W. Johnston, W.H. Bellingham and the stalwart Flt. Lt. Charron were all killed while W.O. I J.A. Comeau was severely wounded and later lost his right leg by amputation. Flying Officer F.T. Murray was credited with the month's sole victory during a patrol over Venlo on 26 November.

On 5 December the squadron moved from the rain-swept and muddy fastness of Volkel to Heesch, in The Netherlands, for the winter. From here they continued their rail interdiction, often carrying 1000 pounds of explosives—a 500-pound bomb under the fuselage and a 250-pounder under each wing. Fighter sweeps continued as well, however, as the six destroyed, four "probables" and five damaged of December testified. Flt. Lt. R.N. Earle, one of the outstanding pilots, was killed by flak that month and Flying Officer C.W. Glithero became a P.O.W. for the rest of the war.

As 1944 closed the Falcons could justly claim a substantial share in the vast and gallant effort that was to make 1945 the long-sought year of victory. The last major operation of the *Luftwaffe* in war in the air came on New Year's Day, 1945. In an attempt to catch the Allied airmen off guard and to make a valiant try at salvaging an already forlorn cause, the Germans attacked the airfields of The Netherlands and Belgium in force. R.C.A.F. wings at Eindhoven, Evere and Heesch sustained losses in aircraft and personnel, but took a heavy toll of the enemy. During the day 40 enemy aircraft were destroyed and at least a dozen more probably destroyed or damaged. Of this bag 412 alone netted seven, the victors being Sqn. Ldr. D.H. Dover, Flt. Lts. J.B. Doak, B.E. MacPherson, W.J. Banks, J.A. Swan, and Flying Officers V. Smith and E.D. Kelly. None of 412's aircraft was damaged on the ground and they had but one casualty in the air: Flt. Lt. Doak was shot down near Osnabruck.

Weather permitted a mere eight days of flying in the next three weeks. When 412-finally did get back into action after this enforced idleness, there was a tragic loss of an entire section of four aircraft. Flt. Lt. MacPherson, Pilot Officers B.S. McPhee and W.J. Walkom and Flt. Lt. F.H. Richards all failed to return from a sweep in the Nijmegen area, disappearing in snow flurries. Forced down by weather, the first three became P.O.W.s at Stalag Luft XIII. Flt. Lt. Richards, knocked down by flak, was slightly wounded but (with the aid of the valorous Dutch Resistance) made his way back in April.

CHANGEOVER

In January a number of squadron standbys completed their tours. The O.C., Sqn. Ldr. Dover, was succeeded by Sqn. Ldr. Boyd. Flt. Lts. Banks, and D. Dewan took over "A" and "B" Flights respectively. Numerous other changes were made through postings but by February 412 once again had its full complement of pilots (25 officers and two warrant officers), two ground officers and 13 airmen.

Dive-bombing and armed recce operations, unopposed but for occasional flak, continued; usually six aircraft composed a section and 500-pound bombs were carried. The 45-gallon extra fuel tanks were often used and afforded valuable added range. They tended, of course, to render the aircraft a trifle less manoeuvrable, but this was unimportant due to the absence of concentrations of G.A.F. fighters. Two pilots brought down by flak on 11 February (Pilot Officer L. Dunkleman and Flying Officer A.T. Gibb) both made their way back unharmed. Engine failure claimed the life of Pilot Officer Cowan on the 22nd when he was within six miles of base.

During February Flt. Lt. C. Fox, who had recently completed his tour with the Falcons, received a bar to the D.F.C. he had previously won with them. Flt. Lt. Banks also was so honoured. Pilot Officer A.K. Keats commenced his second tour with the squadron in February.

SPRING OFFENSIVE

The squadron was released for 24-hour periods on several occasions in March as part of the wing's new policy of restricted flying. Only twice in that month was the *Luftwaffe* encountered. Their boldness then cost them five aircraft at the hands of 412. Ground targets had assumed paramount importance. With the successful completion of the first stage of the Rhine crossing, 412's role became armed reconnaissance aimed at harrying transportation and disrupting communications. Operations were conducted in the Dorsten /Haltern /Ham /Munster area with very favourable results and the squadron logged 601 operational sorties (897:20 hours), twice the February score.

Germany was beginning to crumble; even some of the Germans saw that. When Flt. Lt. J.G. Burchill was hit by flak and forced to bale out, he fell into Nazi hands and was held prisoner at Handorf airfield. One of the guards (with an eye to the future) helped him to escape, hid him in an air raid shelter, and contacted 9th U.S.A.A.F. advance troops for him. "He had fed me and kept up a continuous recce during this period," Burchill reported to intelligence officers later, describing the couple of days in which he hid from the Germans in their own camp. "I signed a paper for him."

As the routed German forces fled before the relentless Allied advance, the pace of operations quickened. In April 412 flew 642 sorties (1065 hours), strafing the crowded roads. Many, while carrying out their duty with determination, disliked the work. Bombing bridges or doing "rail cuts" was all very well, but some pilots had to force themselves to fire their guns when an enemy column of men or horse-drawn carts was in their sights.

TEAMWORK

But the end was near and this was no time to slacken. The pilots piled up impressive lists of "smokers and "flamers"* and on the ground the servicing crews did yeoman service to keep an average of 79.4% of the aircraft ready for use at all times. Surely, in any estimate of the factors directly contributing to the squadron's enviable place among the top fighter units, an enormous amount of credit would have to be accorded to the ground crews who "kept 'em flying." The chief role of 2nd T.A.F. being army support meant that everything had to be subordinated to two principal considerations: continuity of operations and mobility.

*From "D"-Day until 31 March 1945 the squadron scored 230 enemy transports destroyed and 574 damaged, 27 train carriages and 20 locomotives destroyed, plus many more damaged, cut rail lines in 86 places, dropped 1132 500-pound bombs, and generally harried enemy troops and communications.

In functioning under mobile field conditions the servicing crews worked wonders and earned the highest praise. Lacking the glamour of the pilots, and some of the amenities and privileges afforded to their officers, these "erks" nonetheless worked with cheerfulness and efficiency. The nickname became in time one which lost any pejorative colouring that it might once have had and it designated an indispensable member of the fighting team.

GERMANY AT LAST

The groundcrew didn't have time to ponder this, however. They were moving again—and into Germany at last! The Falcons went first to Rheine on 12 April and then to the old *Luftwaffe* permanent air station at Wunstorf (distinguished from the air by its St. Andrew's cross pattern of runways) on the 15th.

Although they had moved up in order to put their *Spits* even closer to the front lines, they seemed in one sense to be even farther from the war. They were already, in the luxury of Wunstorf, tasting the fruits of victory. The leaky tents and Spartan accommodations seemed far away memories. Now they had brick buildings, crystal chandeliers, bowling alleys and wine cellars!

From Wunstorf the army-support programme—defensive patrols over our own forward lines—continued immediately. Every day began with the pre-dawn roar of the "milk-run" patrols warming up their engines. Flak was the major enemy, road convoys throwing up heavy barrages to protect

themselves and railway flak cars being particularly dangerous. In addition the Germans had set up camouflaged flak traps in the fields, often baiting them with dummy aircraft.

Flak brought down Flt. Lts. W. J. Anderson (killed) and W.R. James (P.O.W.) at the end of March, but as the squadron began to operate closer and closer to Allied lines the chances increased that, if one had to hit the silk, one could return to the squadron. Flying Officer V. Smith and Flt. Lts. R.B. Barker and L.A. Stewart were brought down, only to be back with 412 in a matter of hours.

LUCK —GOOD AND BAD

The accurate pinpointing of Flying Officer G.N. Horter's crash on 28 April made possible a spectacular rescue. He had "ridden it down" in No Man's Land about two miles southeast of Marschacht. At first the other members of his section were sure he had "bought it" for, on landing, the jet tank of his 'plane had caught fire and left a 50-foot trail of fire "before the a/c blew up." The Operations Record Book recorded: "It is strongly believed that he was instantly killed, unless he was miraculously thrown clear."

They were wrong. Two days later the squadron medical officer, Flt. Lt. J.E. McAllister, arrived on the scene and found Horter, still strapped in the cockpit, wounded but semiconscious. An army unit nearby had seen the crash and the aircraft in flames but "were not anxious to investigate", having recently lost a lieutenant and a sergeant to snipers in the area. Flying Officer Horter's life was saved by the squadron's loyal concern for one of its own—and by the fact that he had not been thrown clear. In his injured state he would surely not have been able to keep his head above water in the deep pool nearby into which he likely would have been thrown.

Flying Officer D.M. Pieri, D.F.C., one of 412's best pilots, was not so lucky. Brought down by flak northeast of Hamburg on 3 May, he became the squadron's last wartime casualty. He had 3 ½ e/a destroyed while with 412 to his credit, plus another 2 ½ scored with another squadron. Pilot Officer J.E. Taylor was fatally injured after the war, on 1 June, in a highlevel bombing practice at Weymouth, and Flt. Lt. J. MacKay was seriously injured in a crash-landing while on course at R.A.F. Station Sylt, Germany, on 19 December 1945.

V-E DAY

And then it was all over. Rumours that the Reich was "Kaput" had been rife since the beginning of May. By the time the capitulation was official the Falcons had nearly worn themselves out with rejoicing, but they summoned enough strength on 4 May to greet the proclamation with "enthusiastic and spontaneous celebration."

The squadron, with other units of 126 Wing, then moved to Fassberg, one of the largest and most comfortable airdromes in Germany, in May, and in July to Utersen, near Hamburg, as part of the British Air Forces of Occupation. But everything now was an anticlimax. The burning question in nearly every mind—far more important even than "scrounging" and souvenir-hunting—was *when do we go home?* The answer did not come until the Ides of March 1946. A few days after that the *Spits* took off for Topcliffe, the "sausage machine" of demobbing, and the Ile de France draft for Canadian shores.

POST-WAR POSTSCRIPT

On 1 April 1947 No. 12 Communications Squadron, which had operated out of Rockcliffe since 10 September 1939, was reorganized to lay more emphasis on the unit's transport responsibilities. Its new designation became No. 412 (Composite) Squadron and its badge, the flying falcon.

Thus began a new career for 412, which has made it once again one of the best known squadrons in the R.C.A.F. On 1 April 1949, 412 (Composite) was redesignated 412 (Transport) Sqn., having dropped its functions of providing practice flying facilities for A.F.H.Q. and A.M.C.H.Q. a year and a half previously, and became a unit of Air Transport Command. In June 1955, after a record 16 years of tenure at the same station (Rockcliffe), the squadron moved to Uplands, its present home base, from which its aircraft fly to all parts of the globe.

In 1946 the squadron made its first V.I.P. intercontinental trip— a *Dakota* flight to South America. Since then it has logged many thousands of miles and in the process has carried many distinguished passengers—latest of whom was H.R.H. Princess Margaret on her cross-Canada tour in the *C-5* this summer. The squadron's maiden trans-Pacific flight was made by a *Liberator* in June 1947: its first trans-Atlantic crossing the following April. In the spring of 1949 the squadron acquired its first *North Star*, after which intercontinental flights became routine. First round-the-world trip was made in January 1950. On 29 May 1953 412 received the *Comet*, first jet transport in the R.C.A.F.

International developments during the post-war years have greatly increased, the transport commitments of the R.C.A.F. as a whole and of 412 in particular. The notables, including those of royal blood, who have been entrusted to its care are legion, and far too numerous to mention here. Suffice it to say that the flying falcon continues to add honour to a proud heritage—in a vastly different role than that to which it was born.

THE END