

The Wellington Period

There are three basic periods for the Bison Squadron. The Wellington period, Nov 42 to Aug 43, the Halifax period, Aug 43 to Mar 45 and the Lancaster period Mar 45 to Jun 46.

429 (B) RCAF Squadron was officially formed on 7 November, 1942 along with No. 427, 428 and 431 Squadrons which were also formed in November. All were placed into No.4 RAF Bomber Group of Bomber Command. No. 427 and 428 Squadrons were transferred to No. 6 Group on 1 January 1943. 429 Squadron followed on 1 April 1943. No. 431 would not transfer until 14 July 1943.

The formation of these Squadrons were a result of Article XV of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan. Article XV was a clause negotiated into the plan which would allow Canada to have a distinct and separate airforce within the British airforce. No other country had their own Bomber Group within Bomber Command during WWII although many individual squadrons were for specific countries, eg. 460 Sqn for Australia. The Squadron was formed at East Moor, Yorkshire, was set up as a satellite station of Linton-On-Ouse, located 7 miles West of East Moor.

The Squadron was formed with RCAF, RAF and other personnel from the British Commonwealth. Personnel were coming into the Squadron at a regular pace from Nov until Dec 1942. Although the squadron would spend the rest of the war trying to become 100% Canadian, it would never achieve this goal. The authorized strength was 111 aircrew 3 staff positions and 319 groundcrew personnel (Officers: 14 pilots, 26 aircrew, 3 nonflying; Airmen: 13 pilots, 58 aircrew and 319 nonflying) for a total of 433 personnel.

When a new squadron was formed they would put very experienced air and ground crew members, somewhat experienced personnel and of course, sprong crews (green crews with no experience). This can be seen by the caliber of aircrew personnel posted into the squadron.

The first Commanding Officer appointed to the squadron, Wing Commander J.A.P. Owen, was from the RAF. He was posted to the squadron on Nov 11, 1942 from Bournemouth arriving with the opening up crew. He was accompanied by F/Lt T.C. Sheriff (RAF), Adjutant and F/Lt J. Feller (RAF) the medical officer and 16 other ranks (Their names are not listed). The men of the squadron frequently referred to the Wingco as "JAP" or "Jappy" because of his initials. During his term as CO of 429 Squadron W/C Owen never flew an operation trip of his own but he did go on four 2nd Dickie trips.

Jack Kerr, a Navigator in the squadron from its early days, described W/C Owen as, "a short RAF type who, while he tried hard was not the lad for a Squadron Commander. His size, health and his 'guts' were against him, but his training record was good and he had volunteered for an ops posting so I give him credit for that."

Manuel "Manny" Rabinovitch, a tail gunner in Lancaster's crew, said that Sgt. Lancaster spent about 6-8 hrs trying to get W/C Owen checked out so he could be cleared to fly solo in his own Wellington. Sgt. Lancaster confided to Manny that he gave up because Owen didn't have the

"guts" to land a Wellington plane on his own. Manny also mentioned that JAP would make the aircrews wear a shirt and tie when flying an op. I was unable to confirm any of this, however they are the memories of Manny.



One of the first 3 crews posted to 429. L-R: P/O Spence (N), F/O Follows, P/O "Frenchy" deBussac. One of the first three crews posted to 429. Not in photo Sgt. Coe (WAG) and Sgt. Palmatier (AG). This crew would FTR from Krefeld on 21/22 June 1943. All were killed.



Left F/Sgt G Coe WAG, Right Sgt D Palmetier AG from DeBussac's crew. These are the photos taken at the sqn that they took with them on ops. They are to be used for false papers if they were shot down in enemy territory. They would be KIA with the rest of the crew 22 Jun 43



One of the first 3 crews. Stu Bruce and his crew L-R: Sgt Stu Bruce (P), P/O M LaGesse (N), F/Sgt R Godden (WAG), Sgt J Strachan (AG), P/O W Cawthorn (BA) . As far as I know this is the only crew to be screened during the Wellington period.

On Nov 11, 1942 F/Lt (Acting Squadron Leader) J. C. Cairns, DFC (RAF) arrived from RAF Station Wellesbourne to command B Flight. Pilot Officer C.S. Campbell, DFC (RCAF) also arrived to assume duties as Squadron Navigation Officer.



P/O Charles Awad

On 22 Nov 1942 P/O Charles Awad arrived to assume duties and the Squadron Bomb Leader. He was known as "Maltese Charlie" because he began his operational life with 40 air raids in five days, and he was on the receiving end, when he was sent to Malta to join 37 Sqn. He went on 32 bombing ops in Libya and added another five raids on Germany when he was screened and returned to England to start his 2nd tour at 429. On his ITS course report Awad is a "very keen lad and should make a good Observer. He is very fast in picking up subjects. He is also very fast to catch on to any problem and good in class but noisy and talks to much. He needs discipline. He is very cocksure of himself and usually has the ability to put it across!" He was rated as not suitable for commissioned rank.

One of the first 3 crews. L-R: Sgt. Boyes (BA), Sgt. Lancaster (P), Sgt. Thom (WAG), Sgt. Hale (N), Sgt. Rabinovitch (AG). They would be screened during the Halifax period. Rabinovitch would become a POW.

P/O Campbell was a very capable Navigation Officer. He had already completed 32 operational missions with 103 Squadron to some notable targets: Berlin, Hamburg and the Renault Works in Paris. He didn't have to volunteer to go on a 2nd tour of operations, which he did when posted to

429. His recommendation for the DFC dated 29 Jul 42 states: "This officer is a fearless and reliable navigator. His conduct when under fire has proved of inestimable value to his crew. He



F/L Colin Campbell, Age 28, Sqn
Navigation Leader FTR 2 Mar 43
Gardening Op

has always endeavoured to concentrate his attack on point of aim and allows nothing to deter him from his purpose. Since September 1941 he has participated in attacks on numerous enemy targets including Berlin, Stettin, Emden, Hamburg and the Renault Works in Paris. He has at all times proved himself a cool, determined and reliable navigator. By his fearlessness when under fire, he has proved himself of inestimable value to his cre. He has at all times proved himself to be one of the outstanding navigators in the squadron, both for his skillful navigation in the air and his leadership on the ground. His cheerful disposition and his enthusiasm have had a marked effect on the other aircrews. His accuracy and coolness under fire have helped to make his crew one of the most reliable and efficient in the squadron. For his fine record and example and his cheerful courage, when under fire, I strongly recommend that he be awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross (signed by the CO of 103 sqn)."

You never know how people are going to turn out. Campbell was originally selected for pilot training. He wasn't able to



complete it because he could not land the aircraft without considerable assistance from the instructor, for that reason they failed him and recommended him for Air Observer training. He did well in his Air Observer training, despite being labelled as a 'pilot washout.'

There were several problems to overcome in the first two months which included getting aircraft and spare parts. Trained and experienced personnel were required at all levels. Consequently getting the training completed as quickly as possible was imperative in order to have the squadron declared operational.

The aircrews of Sgt. John Lancaster, Sgt. Stuart Bruce and Sgt. "Frenchy" DeBussac were the first three Canadian crews to report to 429 Squadron, arriving on 10 November, 1942. These three would become famous as the squadron's "three muskateers." These three crews would go through alot together and would be inseperable. It would be very seldom that the three were not on an op together

S/L Frederick Holmes
DFC, Age 28, A Flight
Commander was action
CO of the Sqn on 16 Mar
43 for 9 days while W/C
Owen was away. S/L
Holmes FTR from
Mannheim on 17 Apr 43

except when one of the crews was on leave. A keen rivalry existed between them. "Frenchy" would gloat at Stu or Johnnie if he got ahead of them in trips and when he did his greeting was "get some in, bud?" It would become a universal saying throughout the squadron. "Frenchy's" navigator was Mac Spence. He and Ronnie Hale (Lancaster's navigator) were in Jack Kerr's estimation, the two best navigators in the business and they competed against each other just as much as their "skippers." This competition was a good thing for the squadron it caused all navigators to improve and try and beat

the muskateers.

Sgt. Manuel Rabinovitch, part of Sgt. Lancaster's crew, said that the day after they arrived there were still no aircraft for the crews to fly in. They kept busy getting flying gear issued, learning the lay of the land, participating in various sporting events and doing what training they could

without aircraft. According to Sgt. Boyes logbook, Lancaster's Bomb Aimer, the crew didn't make their first training flight until 31 December, 1942.

Before a crew could fly on an "op" the pilot was required to do two "2nd Dickie" trips. A "2nd Dickie" trip was when a pilot would go with another experienced crew on an "op" over enemy territory. This gave the new pilot a chance to see how a crew worked together on a trip and get some pointers from the experienced pilots. No. 76 and 78 Squadron, stationed at Linton-On-Ouse, were responsible for taking the Bison pilots on their 2nd Dickie trips. These trips took place from 18 Nov 42 to 9 Dec 42. At this time 76 and 78 Squadron were equipped with the Halifax bomber.

Reporting to the squadron in the early days was not an event that inspired confidence. When Sgt. John Lancaster and his crew arrived on Nov 11th, 1942 at the small train station in the wilds of North Yorkshire they called to the East Moor Station to have someone pick them up. The Orderly Officer at the other end of the phone told them there was only one truck on strength and it had been dispatched to the York train station to pick up other aircrews that had arrived. The Orderly Officer, who was also the Medical Officer, sent the ambulance out to pick them up. The men had to leave their baggage at the train station because there was no room in the ambulance for the men and their kit. They were dropped off at the Sergeant's Mess. The Orderly Sergeant promptly appeared and informed the gaggle that there was only one cook and two kitchen staff and they were located at the Airmen's mess. They enjoyed a meal of tea and sandwiches at the Airmen's mess then bedded down for the night at the Senior NCO's Barracks. At this point there were a total of 2 officers, the MO and Adjutant, one WO1, one QM Sergeant with a staff of 3 airmen along with the newly arriving aircrews.

Sgt Lancaster (RAF) and Sgt. DeBussac (RCAF) were the first to fly an op as second pilots with 76 and 78 Squadron on the night of 18 Nov 1942 to Turin.

Squadron Leader F. R. Holmes, DFC (RAF) arrived on Nov 20, 1942 to take command of A Flight. The strength of the squadron on Nov 20th is reported as 150 Officers and men with approximately 50% being RCAF personnel.

On 22 Nov 1942 P/O Fox (RAF) and Sgt. Ellison (RAF) flew as 2nd pilots with 76/78 Squadron on an Op to Stuttgart.

The next hurdle was to get enough Wellington bombers so the crews could train together before going on a trip. On the 24th of Nov 1942 everyone around the station heard the rumble of the Hercules engines as the first four Wellington III bombers for the squadron come in for a landing. Sgt. Lancaster's crew was flying Wellington BJ798. The 3 other Wimpy's were BJ799, BJ908 and DF625. It's not know which crews flew these ones.

As soon as the planes landed they were declared unserviceable for a period beyond 48 hours. Jim Rollison, a member of the squadron ground crew right from the beginning, mentioned to me that the planes that were given to the squadron were pretty well clapped out (worn out, at the end of their serviceable flying life)! The first 4 Wellingtons would remain unserviceable until Dec 3rd, 1942 when they were declared serviceable and crews could start flying. On this date there were

also 12 new Wellington X bombers assigned to the squadron. They were all declared serviceable immediately! The Wellington X bombers slowly started to disappear for some reason from the Squadron. There are only 8 listed on strength on the 4th of Dec, 6 on the 5th, 2 on the 6th and 1 on the 6th.

Once serviceable planes arrived at the squadron they were used constantly, day and night, as was every plane as it arrived. The crews were kept busy familiarizing themselves with the latest type aircraft and with the local area. The navigators were kept busy practicing with the navigational aids such as GEE and doing Astro navigation. In order to get the crews experienced in their trades they did cross country exercises, bombing practise, wireless exercises, gunnery air-to-air firing and fighter affiliation.

On the 28th of Nov 1942 the squadron saluting base was completed and the RCAF Ensign was run up for the first time at the first Commanding Officer's parade. The squadron was formed up on the runway by W/O Whitehead who handed the parade over to F/Lt Sheffiff, the Adjutant. After the Ensign was raised W/C Owen took the salute at the March Past.

After the parade, Sgt Bruce (RCAF) and Sgt Rodgers (RAAF) were 2nd dickies on an op to Turin with 76/78 squadron.



F/O E.G. Burton (RCAF) arrived at the squadron to assume duties of the Squadron Engineer Officer on Nov 30th. Also arriving was F/L Lowry (RCAF) to serve as the Protestant Chaplain. During his time with 429 Sqn he was extremely well respected by the men. He quickly determined that all the aircrew should be remembered and attempted to take photos of all the aircrew and put them in what he called The Padre's book. Several of the crew photos in this book are here as a result of his efforts.

F/L Harold Lowry, the Protestant Padre of 429. When the Squadron moved to Leeming he remained at East Moor

One of the most popular and respected members of the ground personnel was F/L (later S/L) Harold Lowry the Protestant Padre. Jack Kerr describes him as being meant for the job. His "hut-church" was converted into a games room and crew centre during the week and on Sundays his voluntary services were always well attended. When the squadron starting "operating" Padre Lowry was the busiest man on the station. Jack Kerr recalls he had another Padre in to relieve him for a week when Lowry went on leave. It was a tough week, they were all tough weeks. The relief Padre was relieved by F/L Lowry's return and said "Whew, do you always lose so many crews?" They did.

The Padre was a real morale booster and deserves a terrific amount of credit. In his hut he arranged to have pepsi-colas, really wonderful when compared with English minerals. He also had Canadian papers from all over, a well stocked library, table tennis, darts and mini-pool tables. It was here during the day, that rank meant nothing, S/L's played pool with LAC's and WAAFs had pepsi's with Sergeants. The padre's hut was a jolly place. Everyone thought the world of Padre Lowry.

Padre Lowry did everything possible for the comfort of the aircrew and ground personnel on the station. The Padre leaned more towards the aircrew which was to be expected. Two ground crew personnel, Jim Rollenson and Stan Smith went to the padre and asked if he had any cigarettes to give out. Padre Lowry replied that he gave all the cigarettes to the aircrew.



S/L Cairns, B Flight
Commander

The Roman Catholic personnel had their spiritual welfare attended to by Squadron Leader Kennedy (RAF) stationed at Linton. It was also noted in the ORB that during this organizational period great assistance was rendered by the energetic Canadian YMCA representative, Don MacDonald. Despite the extensive district under his direction he was a frequent visitor and the comforts and amenities supplied were highly appreciated by all personnel. On the 3rd of Dec Mr. MacDonald was promoted to the post of district supervisor at Leeds and his position at the squadron was filled by Stan Morris an Australian born Canadian. It is noted that at this stage of the squadron's organization considerable difficulty was experienced due to the number of cancellations of posting to this squadron.



F/L Gerald Lunn
Age 23, the
Squadron Gunnery
Leader who FTR'ed
from Mannheim on
15/16 Apr 43

On Dec 6th, 1942 Sgt Burini (RAF), F/Sgt Beckett (RAF) a Bomb Aimer, P/O Johnson (RNZAF), P/O Knott (RAF) and P/O Fox (RAF) all flew as 2nd dickie's with 76/78 Squadron on an op to Mannheim.

Newly promoted F/L CS Campbell, headed to London on Dec 7th to be invested with his Distinguished Flying Cross he earned while completing his first tour of operations with 103 Squadron. He received his DFC at Buckingham Palace by King George VI.

The Squadron participated in another 2nd dickie op to Turin with 76/78 Squadron on 9 Dec. The pilots were Sgt Conroy (RCAF), Sgt Lancaster (RAF), Sgt Rodgers (RAF), Sgt Hanan (RCAF-USA), Sgt Ellison (RAF). The target was once again Turin.

F/O A.O. Appleby (RCAF) arrived on Dec 12th to take over the Adjutant's duties from F/L Sheriff (RAF).

On Dec 15th the Senior NCOs moved into their own mess, now that it was completed and there was enough staff available to operate it. Prior to this they had been using one side of the airmen's mess. Now that the Senior NCOs were in their own mess the half of the airmen's mess they were using was used at the station theatre.

On the 19th of December the AOC of 4 Group, Air Vice-Marshal CR Carr visiting the Squadron and joined in the festivities of the first Officer's mess dance. This was his 1st visit to the squadron and it was unofficial.

The Operational Record's Book (ORB) notes that a major problem for the groundcrew was the lack of parts and tools to maintain the aircrafts. During the two week period ending 23 Dec 42

the serviceability was a low of 5 aircraft and a high of 11. One groundcrew member, Don Ross who was posted to the squadron in Dec 1943 and served with it until June 1945, actually went out of his way and purchased the tools he required to do his job with his own money. When interviewed in August, 2000 Don said he never told anyone that he bought the tools or asked for reimbursement of any money he spent. He said it was just something you had to do to get the job done. He still has the toolbox and all the tools he bought. Despite this type of commitment, rarely were the groundcrew ever recognized for their contributions and this situation was no exception. In the ORB it never mentions when groundcrew were posted in or out. This makes it difficult to find the names of all the ground crew. Padre Lowry recorded in his book the names of most of the ground crew and squadron HQ personnel at East Moor, however it is nearly impossible to verify the accuracy of the list.

The backbone of the aircrew side of the squadron was made up of the "A" Flight Commander, S/L Fred Holmes, who went through Operational Training Unit with Jack Kerr and had tried to recruit Jack to his crew. He promised Jack that they would be flying Lancasters and Holmes would be the CO of the Squadron. The "B" Flight Commander was a likeable 2nd tour RAF laddie S/L Peter Cairns who was really keen but Jack Kerr felt Cairns was influenced by his elder cohorts Holmes and Owen who were definitely "unkeen." The Navigation Leader who had the section really "clicking" and proved a valuable friend to Jack and the rest of his crew was F/L Colin Campbell. "Gabby" Lunn was the Gunnery Leader was, in Jack's estimation, a prince of a chap. F/L Freddie Reynolds was the Signals Leader.

The body of the squadron would eventually consist of about 26 crews, all complete "spongs." A sprong was a crew with no operational experience. In fact, many of the crews trained at the same OTU together. Having a squadron of complete "spongs" would add to the difficulties of the squadron and the high losses that 429 Squadron would become famous for, during the Wellington period. No. 429 Squadron is credited with having the highest Wellington losses of No. 6 Group. The squadron would lose 30 Wellingtons on operations and flying accidents from January, 1943 until August 1943. The closest any other squadron would come to 429 Squadron was No. 426 and 431 who each lost 21 Wellingtons on operations.

The East Moor Station was dispersed over a large area to reduce the effects of any enemy bombing that may occur. Because of this, getting around on foot would take forever so all aircrew under the rank of Squadron Leader were issued a black bicycle. It would allow them to get to their aircraft and any other place they wanted to go. One of the frustrating things a person had to do when he came out of the mess hall was to try and find his black bike among the hundreds lying around. Many gave up and just grabbed one.

A great deal of excitement occurred on 25 November, 1942 when the roar of Hercules engines of the Squadron's first four Wellington Mark III's flew over the airfield and landed at 1430. Sgt Lancaster and his crew were flying Wimpy serial number BJ798. The other three Wimpy's were serials number BJ799, BJ908 and DF625. The other 3 crews bringing in the Wellingtons may have been S/L Cairns, DeBussac and Bruce. They had picked up the Wimpy's from Driffield, which was 15 minutes airtime from East Moor. These four Wellington's were handed over by 466 (Australian) Squadron. You can bet they didn't give us their best Wimpy's either. Now the

Squadron actually felt like a squadron and they had the planes to prove it. The aircrews could now start shaking out and get familiar with their jobs together. At least that was the plan.

The squadron's first 4 aircraft were declared unserviceable for a period beyond 48 hours on landing. The squadron The groundcrew had not yet received any spare parts for the aircraft, because of this the planes were not allowed to take off. So back to classroom training for everyone. Up until the squadron did it's first operation on 21 Jan 43 there were 52 days for training available however because of the weather and few serviceable aircraft there was only 21 days where flying was conducted.

During November there were only 2 days when training flights were done during the day, Nov 25th for 2 sorties totaling 45 minutes and Nov 30th, 1 sortie for 55 minutes.

The Squadron's main focus was to get aircrews fully trained for the day when the Bison's would be declared operational. The Wireless Section did ground training on the use of the Marconi Transmitter and Receiver. The WAG's were given a test on Jan 8, 1943 to upgrade their classification training, out of 24 tested 22 passed.

The AG's did manage to get some live firing at the air to sea firing range at Filay Bay. There was also some fighter affiliation training for the crews as well. Because of the lack of proper equipment, bus turret trainers and other necessary equipment there was no practice ground training conducted for the AG's. Classroom instruction included the Servo Feed Mechanism and Aircraft Recognition.

The Bomb Aimer ground training included Link Trainer Instruction, Air Ministry Bomb Trainer training and ground and air Astro Training. Due to the bad weather and unserviceability of the aircraft the Bomb Aimers were only able to drop 12 practice bombs.

Flying training in the Navigation Section was carried on as much as the weather and serviceability permitted. Ground instruction for the Navigators was sped up in accordance with the Squadron training policy of getting into operations as soon as possible. F/L CE Campbell conducted ground training in Astro and other special aids to navigation. Special attention was given to those Navigators not yet declared operational.

The pilots were given classes in Rotol Aircrews, SD 158, Fighter Affiliation, Operational Procedure and Aerodrome Control Procedures. When the aircraft were serviceable the pilots with their crews did day and night flying practising cross country flights and circuits & landings (better known as circuits and bumps).

In addition to the specific training for the aircrew trades a regular series of lectures and educational films for all aircrews was continued.

Jack Kerr said that in the period prior to going operational all the crews became fast friends and a squadron spirit developed that was a joy to behold. The squadron spirit was fostered by Sunday night Sergeant's Sociables in which all joined with gusto including the Wingco! One of the most

common requests in the Daily Routine Orders after the Sunday Night Socials was a request for the return of the Wingco's hat and swagger stick. This ritual would reoccur until Owen left the Squadron.

On the 3rd of Dec 42, the four Wellington Mk III's were declared serviceable along with twelve Wellington Mk X's that arrived on the Squadron. Oddly enough eleven of the twelve Mk. X's were transferred out on the squadron on the 7th.

P/O "Charlie" Awad would receive a pleasant surprise on Dec 3rd as well. When Sgt RF Conroy's crew reported in, P/O GR Densmore was the Bomb Aimer on Conroy's crew. Densmore and Awad grew up in Truro together and attended Colchester County Academy together.

On 7 Dec 42 F/L C.S. Campbell left for London to be decorated with the Distinguished Flying Cross by King George VI at Buckingham Place.



Sgt John Black (P), RCAF, Age 23, involved in the sqn's first aircraft crash on 21 Dec 42. He would die of exposure on 5 Mar 43 after being shot down on a gardening op.

Jack Kerr and the rest of their crew had been told by the Wingco when they reported in on 11 December 1942 that they were selected to be a priority crew, because of the lack of aircraft, and needing to get trained as quickly as possible, to be on the squadron's first operational mission when it happened. The weather was very miserable and permanently foggy allowing Lancaster and his crew to fly only twice in December.

The Squadron would be up to its full allotment of aircraft, 18, on the 11th of Dec 42. Of these 18, 10 including the one Wellington Mk X was unserviceable but repairable.

On Dec 12 P/O Rawson flew a 2nd dickie trip with 76/78 squadron to Turin. Unfortunately, they ran into problems with the hydraulic system failing enroute and they had to return early.

On 15 Dec 42 things started to improve a bit when the Senior NCO's moved to their own mess for meals starting today. The final renovations of the Senior NCO's Mess were completed and there was finally enough staff posted to the squadron to be able to run this mess.

The squadron lost its first Wellington in a crash on 21 December, 1942. The squadron could least afford to lose one at this point since there were only 8 serviceable Wimpy's out of seventeen on the squadron. Many of the ground crew complained how the Wellington's sent to the squadron were "clapped out" - fit for the scrap heap.

On 21 Dec the crew of Wellington III DF624 included Sgt. J.W. Black (P), Sgt. A. Napier (N), Sgt. P.G. Rothera (B), P/O J. Bastian (WAG), Sgt. J.H. West (2nd WAG) and Sgt. R.G. Moore (AG) who were on a training flight that evening. During the flight, Sgt Black stated the

accumulators failed, the lights in the aircraft went out and the propellers went into a fully fine position causing the engines to overservice and therefore overheat. They were starting to lose height. Because they were over top of the clouds Black didn't see they could descend through the clouds safely. He ordered the crew to bail out. They bailed out and the aircraft crashed at approximately 2150 hours 2.5 miles SSE of the village of Stokesley, Yorkshire.

Sgt. Moore was admitted to hospital with a serious back injury. It appears Sgt. Moore never flew an op with 429 Sqn after this accident. The ORB notes that East Moor Station took all proper steps on receipt of the news of the crash. Transport was dispatched to collect the crew, W/T staff to destroy the secret equipment and a guard mounted at the scene.

Later investigation showed that it was a technical defect of the accumulators and the breakers failed to hold the pitch of the propellers.

Sgt Black had served for 51 days in the Army in May 1941 before enrolling in the Air Force. Before that he had attended 1 year at the University of British Columbia studying an Arts Degree. During his air force enrollment interview it was noted that he was alert, intelligent and



tense. He has a tendency to blow up under pressure. He made it through pilot training with some amount of difficulty. While he was at No. 10 SFTS he was charged under military law for coming in as if to land in a Cessna Crane with the wheels retracted. He received 14 days confined to barracks for the infraction. His course report from SFTS says he is very enthusiastic about flying though he progressed very slowly and was inclined to be forgetful. He was rated as below average. On 16 Nov 1942, while at 29 OTU he was detailed for a night flying exercise. During take off he hit a petrol bowser and sustained a slight cut on the forehead. For his final course report at 29 OTU S/L A.K. Cook remarked that Black was keen but not too confident. He gives the impression of slight nervousness. He was not recommended for a commission. It appears the issues in training are manifesting themselves at 429!

PL15398 Hot coffee is welcome at any hour of the day and here three members of a Canadian Bomber squadron do a spot of laughing at a fourth member as he pours himself a drink. The laugh may be because it is English coffee which is being poured and English Coffee has only a faint similarity to the coffee the boys are used to back in Canada. That similarity they maintain is merely coincidental. From left to right in the group above are: F/O Doug Wiley of London, Ontario; Sgt. Les Rodgers (KIA 27 Jan 43) of Brisbane, Ontario; P/O John Elliott (POW 26 Jul 43) of Newark, NJ and Sgt RC Ellison (KIA 12 Jun 43) of Newcastle, England. The little whistles that they wear in the lapel of their flying jacket is for use if they are forced down by night, particularly in the sea.

Sgt J.H. West is a mystery person on this flight and the squadron. There is no indication of when he was posted it (a common occurrence with the early months of the squadron), no indication of why he was a 2nd wireless operator on the flight, perhaps to check out Bastian and make sure he was doing things ok. Sgt JH West also never flew any ops on the squadron. A Sgt H West, RAF Ser # 948124 was posted out of the squadron on 17 Mar 43 to 1658 Conversion Unit (CU). Could this be the Sgt JH West involved in the crash?

Sgt. Rothera, would be involved in 3 crashes on the squadron. He would have to bail out again on 2/3 Mar 43 with Sgt. Black as the pilot in the Channel (See the story further down). They were recovered 3 days later. Sgt Rothera was involved in his 3rd and last crash when he was with the crew of F/L Brinton and they FTR'ed on 3/4Jul 43 on an op to Cologne.

By the time the squadron celebrated Christmas it was almost at their full strength for air and ground crew. The Christmas Dinner was celebrated in traditional military style. The officers and Senior NOC's waited on the other ranks and served them a traditional Christmas meal. Over the Yuletide week several social and recreational events were organized and did much to contribute to the general spirit of merriment in the camp. Much appreciated Christmas boxes by war services organizations in Canada were distributed to all RCAF personnel by the Protestant Chaplain, F/L H. Lowry. The protestant personnel attended the Christmas morning service in Sutton-On-the-Forest Anglican Church. The padre also conducted a Christmas Eve carolling session at the Church as well. S/L Kennedy, the Roman Catholic priest stationed at Linton-On-Ouse held Mass on Christmas morning. After the Christmas holiday and cheer it was back to work getting ready for operations.

Training for the squadron resumed on 27 Dec 42 with the objective of preparing all crews for full operational duties as soon as possible. All sections were given weekly examinations both written and oral in all subjects. The groundcrew continued to carry out all daily training inspections of all the aircraft. Ground training in the Wireless section. All the wireless operators were given daily instruction on their Marconi Transmitter and Receivers, instructed in proper procedures for IFF (identification Friend or Foe) and radio transmission procedures. This training ended with a test to upgrade their classifications, 22 out of 24 WAG's passed. The two were later retested.

On Dec 28th F/O GA Lunn (RCAF) Air Gunnery, arrived at the Squadron to assume duties as the Squadron Gunnery Leader

The AG's expended fifteen thousand rounds firing in air to sea practice at Filey Bay. Fighter Affiliation flying training was also conducted during this time period with Mustangs and Spitfires. Fighter affiliation flying involved the fighter attacking the Wimpy and the AG calling out proper evasive manouvers. The AG's couldn't conduct any ground training because of the lack of proper equipment on the squadron so classroom lectures were conducted on the tactics, the FN20 turret used in the Wimpy's and other Gunnery subjects.

The Bomb Aimers classroom instruction included Link Trainer, AMBT training and ground Astro training (navigating by the stars). The Navigation section, under F/L Campbell, DFC continued classroom training as quickly as possible in Astro and other special aides to navigation. Any flying training was carried out when weather and serviceability permitted. A total of 46 day and 19 night sorties were conducted up to 11 Jan 43 which included cross country flights, circuits and landings. Pilots were given instruction in the Rotol Airscrews and SD 158 as well as the same classes as the Navigators.



AVM Carr, AOC 4 Gp
1941-45. He was originally
from New Zealand



F/O Ian Johnson
RNZAF, Age 30, while
taking his pilot training
in New Zealand 1942.
Pilot of the 1st crew lost.

Because of the poor weather and unserviceability of the aircraft almost no air training was done from 27 Dec 42 to 11 Jan 43, although 12 practise bomber were dropped.

The ground crews had some excitement on 30 Dec 42 when someone spotted a fire around 1800 hours in Wellington BK430 while they were working on it. The groundcrews had portable heaters to warm up the aircraft and for some reason someone fired up oil heater but did not remove the shield attachment. This caused the heater to overheat and the fire broke out. The fire burned off the nose cover, damaged the upper geodetic structure of the plane and all wiring and instruments in the nose as well. The officer commanding Linton-On-Ouse officially commended four ground crew members for their quick action in detecting and dealing with the fire was largely credited with saving the aircraft from total destruction. The groundcrew members were LAC L. McLachlan, AC J. Ward, AC E. Phillips, AC A. Accombe.



P/O Ian Stirton RAFVR
(with his wife and
daughter), Age 41,
bomb aimer on
Johnson's crew the first
crew lost at 429.

W/C Owen's summary for December states that at several points in the month little or no flying was carried out for several days at a time, this being entirely due to weather. Several flights had to be cancelled due to thick fog and rain. During the month lectures and training films were held in order to prepare aircrews for operations as soon as possible. During this period aircraft serviceability was considerably hampered due to difficulty in obtaining spare parts.

During the month of December there was an average of 17 aircraft on strength with 9 being serviceable and 8 being unserviceable. There were only 12 days when training sorties were flown during the day for a total of 47 sorties and a total of 44 hours and 27 minutes of flying time. There were 7 nights when flying was done for a total of 19 sorties totaling 41 hours and 25 minutes. For 10 of these 12 days less

than half of the aircraft were used for flying training.

On Jan 2nd, 1943 a new Squadron Engineering Officer, F/O SP Warren (RAF) replacing F/O GE Burton (RCAF)

The New Year was marked with the squadron's first accident on Jan. 4th, 1943. Sgt Hanan and his crew were taxiing out Wellington X3399 at 1920 hours when they collided with a floodlight. The crew were going out for a night training sortie when the kite left the perimeter track just before the start of the runway and collided with the floodlight which was not illuminated.

On Jan 5th the first VIP toured the station. The Air Officer Commanding 4 Group RAF, Air Vice Marshall Carr visited 429 Sqn. W/C Owen toured him to the various sections.

The YMCA representative for the squadron, Stan Morris, had organized motion picture shows in the Airmen's Mess twice a week and every Thursday evening the YMCA held shows in the same mess.



Sgt John Stuart, RAFVR
Age 21, Air Gunner on
Johnson's crew the first
crew lost at 429.

Up to this point half of the aircrews were considered qualified for operations. The emphasis was to get the rest qualified as soon as possible. Again, air training was hampered by bad weather and lack of serviceable aircraft. In addition to the general aircrew training, pilots were given lectures on Fighter Affiliation, Operational Procedure and Aerodrome Control Procedure. Bombadiers were given advanced training on the Synthetic Trainer and the Air Ministry Bomb Trainer. A full program of ground and atro training was done as well. The Naval Liaison Officer from 4 Group arrived at the squadron to give lectures to all crew members on the mines for Gardening ops. Ground training continued in the WAG section with daily instruction and weekly tests on all new modifications and developments. With all the WOP/AG's reclassified to Grade 1, training was in a very advanced stage. The Navigation Section continued with training in Astro and other special aids to navigation. The Gunnery section had special training in turret manipulation, and 14,000 rounds fired at Filey Bay in Air to sea exercises. They were also given lectures on the Servo feed mechanism and aircraft recognition.

Red Cross parcels were received on a regular basis and were distributed by Padre (F/L) Lowry who was also the Comforts Officer.



Sgt Alfred Dymick
and his newlywed
wife, Mary on their
wedding day, 2 Aug
1942. Their daughter,
Janette would be
born on 9 May 1943.
Dymick's body was
never recovered.

The daily flying training route, which included circuits and bumps, was broken on the morning of 21 January 1943 when the priority crews were called in for a briefing. These included dthe crews of Rawson, DeBussac, Ellison, Conroy and Bruce. They were required to do a sea search for some aircrew who had ditched in the North Sea returning from a bombing operation the previous night. As Jack Kerr described it, "it wasn't an op but we were excited anyway." Off they went on the search and 3.5 hours later they returned having seen nothing but the sea.

While the priority crews were out on the search the Squadron received orders to participate in a Mining operations. Since the "priority crews" were away, alternate crews were selected.

The squadron flew their first operational trip before they were declared operational ready. The Bisons first trip was a "Gardening Op" to Tershelling off the Netherlands on 21/22 Jan 43. A "Gardening op" was the term used for a trip to lay sea mines. The sea mines were called vegetables and most of the targets for the Gardening ops had vegetable or fruit names such as Carrots or Nectarine.

This first op consisted of 3 Wellingtons. One kite piloted by Sgt. Hanan reported that they were attacked by a flak ship, went around for a 2nd pass over the target and were not able to locate the target. They returned with their "vegetables". The crew of F/O Pentony completed the trip successfully. They were able to clearly discern the coastline and planted the vegetables as ordered. Sadly, the squadron suffered its' first casualties on this trip when F/O Johnson and his crew failed to return. Their aircraft was shot down by Kreigsmarine Flak and crashed at 1836 on 21 January 1943 into the Waddenzee off Roptazijl, Netherlands. The official dates of death for all 5 crew members is 22 January 1943. No one knew at what time the crew went down or how they were lost. The Operational Records Book commented that "no report was received of this aircraft after it left base. It was carrying two 1500 lb. vegetables." The crew consisted of F/O Ian Johnson (P) RNZAF, Sgt Charles Risingham (N) Age 22 RAF, F/O Ian Stirton (BA) RAFVR, Sgt Alfred Dymick (WAG) RAFVR and Sgt John Stuart (AG) Age 21 RAFVR.

Sgt Stuart had been reported missing in action once before. He was on a crew taking a Wellington bomber from England to Gibraltar when, because of engine trouble they were forced down at Sintra airfield in Portugal. When they landed there they destroyed all their documents and secret equipment. Because Portugal was a neutral country they were re-patriated back to England very quickly. They landed in England on 13 Sep 1942. The pilot on that crew was P/O Harold Sydney Wilson and would be killed on 16 Sep 43 serving with 617 Dambuster Sqn. Sgt George Thomas Kennington would be killed serving on 218 Sqn on 3 Feb 43; and P/O Edward Ivor Griffiths would be killed serving on 158 Sqn on 18 Feb 43. The other two members of the crew on the ill fated trip to Gibraltar appear to have survived the war: Sgt C Hall and Sgt J Howard.

P/O Stirton's body was the first to wash ashore on 2 Apr 43. His body was found on a sea dyke near Baflo and was buried there. On Apr 4th F/O Johnson's body washed ashore at Terschelling and he was buried there. Sgt Risingham's body was the last to wash ashore on Apr 8th near Pietersbierum and buried there. On May 6th, 1943, Mrs. Mary Dymick received a letter from the Red Cross in London, saying that P/O Stirton's body had washed ashore near Baflo, Holland and they fear that a disaster befell the crew over the sea. If they find out anything more they would notify her. Sgt Stuart and Sgt Dymick's bodies were never recovered.

Jack Kerr stated that with this first op and the loss of their first crew, "We realized quickly and very definitely that this game was for keeps." Rawson and his crew, including Jack Kerr, had been due for leave on the 23rd of January, 1943 but Rawson had switched with Sgt. Johnson and his crew. As fate would have it, Sgt. Johnson had taken Rawson's place in the mining op.

Jack Kerr writes of finally being briefed for their first "op":

Finally the great day come. We were rushed to prepare for "ops" and there was a feverish excitement on the camp. Just as if we'd declared war. We groaned and moaned and worked, and the time was scarce. We just rushed and rushed and rushed. Operational meal #1 was a tragedy for me, my stomach was tied up in so many knots, and my nerves were so raw that I couldn't eat and enjoy it. It was eggs or so I was told to me and doubtless to others it tasted just like sawdust. We rushed to the Navigation Hut then rushed over our last



PL15411 L-R: W/C Owen, Lord Mayor of Bradford, J. Harrison and Squadron Padre F/L Lowry of Portage LaPrairie, Manitoba, at the official adoption by Bradford of 429 Sqn

operational meal of eggs."

preparations. We rushed through to the chute room, we rushed in our dressing and we rushed out to the crew buses. The night air was nice and cool but beads of nervous sweat trickled down my brow. We were crushed into the crew bus and out to our kites. Our nerves were raw and we bitched at each other over the most trivial things. Then the trip was scrubbed and I thanked God. I was sure we were far from ready for "ops."

We were briefed again the next night and again it was "scrubbed" at the last moment. But at each briefing and preparation we learned some new tricks and the fact that a briefing and prep didn't always mean an "op" eased up the knots in my stomach and I started to enjoy my



Training Plan in Canada and were entertained by Canadian families. In offering their hospitality they have expressed the wish to reciprocate the courtesy and in many cases have requested that they be put in touch with Canadian personnel in the locations where their relatives trained in Canada. As the ORB noted, "these kind offers have been duly publicized on the Squadron and it is anticipated that this new association will result in a close spirit of comradeship between members of this Squadron and Bradford citizens which cannot be mutually beneficial."

PL15410 Two members of a Canadian Bomber Squadron (429), recently adopted by the City of Bradford, enjoying tea at a Bradford home. Mrs. M. Sheriff, of Bradford, serves Flying Officer Owen Baker, a navigator of Preston, Ont., with cake while Flying Officer R. I Brenna, Of Preston, Ont., another navigator busies himself with the tea cup under the critical eye of Mrs. Sheriff's son Roderick. Both are part of the admin/ground crew of 429.

On 24 January 1943 the squadron received the official memo saying they were declared operational along with No. 428 Squadron. This meant they could be ordered to

participate in any Bomber Command operation from now until the war ended.