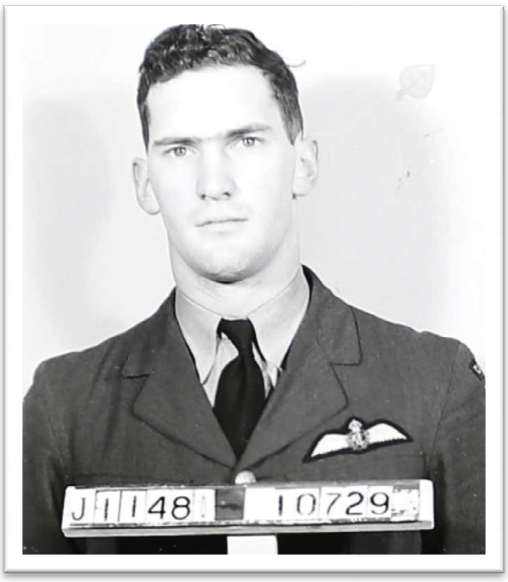
The Making of a WWII RCAF Spitfire Pilot

P/O Gordon Hill J37340

Part Five

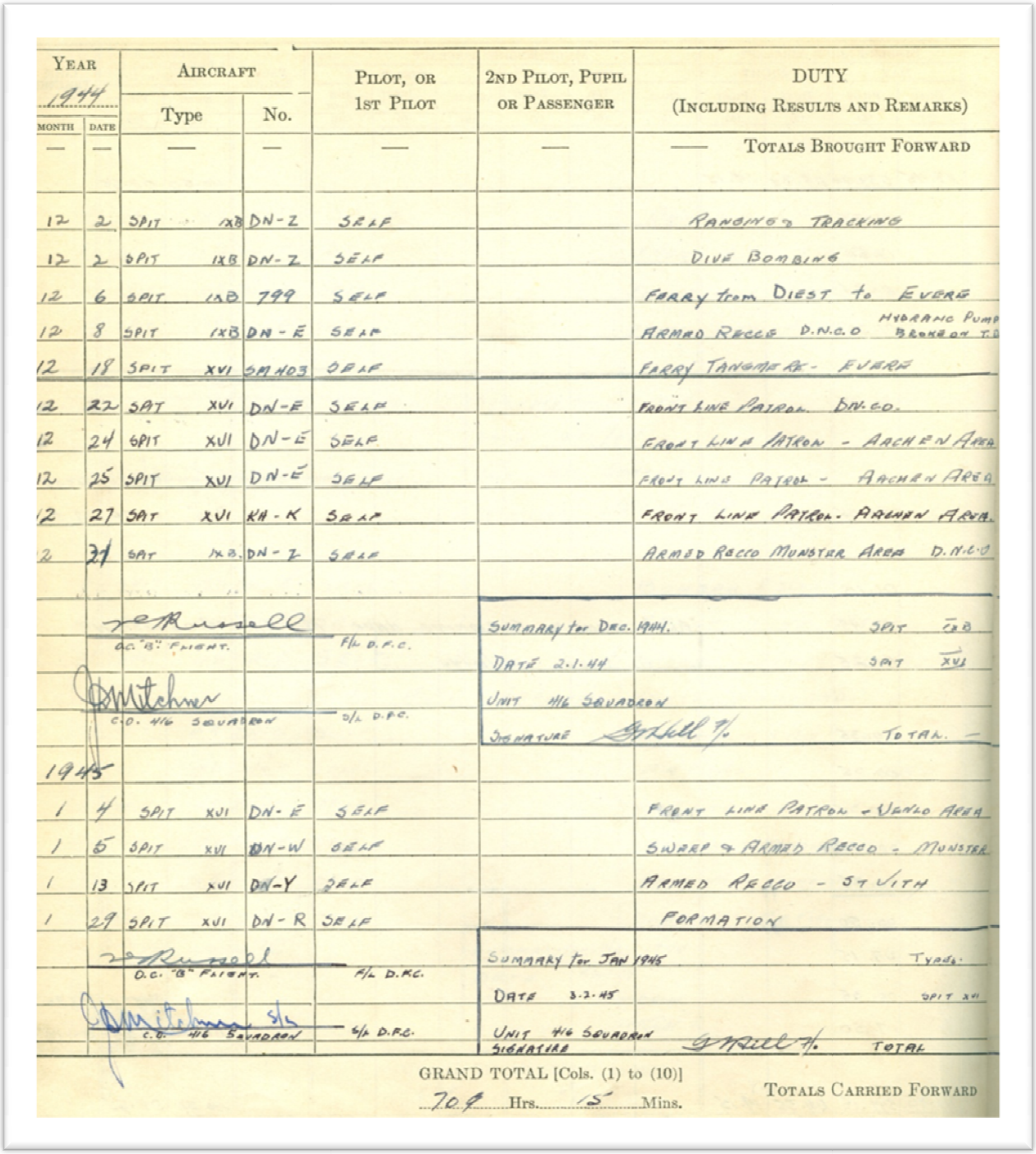
From 1 January 1945 to January 16, the squadron were operational for 44 sorties, 64 hours and 40 minutes. On 1 January F/L David William Armstrong Harling DFC, took off to attack 30 German fighters who were strafing the airfield, but was killed when he was shot down and crashed in Brussels, Spitfire SM304. Harling came from Westmount, Quebec, age 23 years, buried in the Brussels Town Cemetery, Belgium, on 3 January 1945, with most of squadron attending to pay their respects.



The weather throughout the end of the month was unfavorable and few operations were flown. In five armed recons several German transports were destroyed.

On 13 January, F/O William Frederick Bridgman failed to return from patrol, when his Spitfire SM279 was hit by flak. Bridgman came from London, Ontario, and is buried in the War Cemetery, Hotton, Luxembourg, Belgium.

P/O G.W. Haines and F/Sgt. McGregor were posted in as replacements for the two pilots killed in action.



Year 1944 Month	Date	Aircraft Type	No.	Pilot, or 1st Pilot	2nd Pilot, Pupil or Passenger	Duty (Including Results and Remarks)
—	—	—	—	—	—	— Totals Brought Forward
12	2	SPIT IXB	DN-Z	SELF		RANGING & TRACKING
12	2	SPIT IXB	DN-Z	SELF		DIVE BOMBING
12	6	SPIT IXB	799	SELF		FERRY from DIEST to EVERE
12	8	SPIT IXB	DN-E	SELF		ARMED RECCE D.N.C.O HYDRANG PUMP BROKEN T.O
12	18	SPIT XVI	SM403	SELF		FERRY TANGMERE - EVERE
12	22	SPIT XVI	DN-E	SELF		FRONT LINE PATROL DN.CO.
12	24	SPIT XVI	DN-E	SELF		FRONT LINE PATROL - AACHEN AREA
12	25	SPIT XVI	DN-E	SELF		FRONT LINE PATROL - AACHEN AREA
12	27	SPIT XVI	KH-K	SELF		FRONT LINE PATROL. AACHEN AREA.
12	31	SPIT IXB.	DN-Z	SELF		ARMED RECCO MUNSTER AREA D.N.C.O
		J.R. Russell		F/L D.F.C.	SUMMARY for DEC. 1944.	SPIT IXB
		O.C. "B" FLIGHT.			DATE 2.1.44	SPIT XVI
		J.M. Mitchell		D/L D.F.C.	UNIT 416 SQUADRON	
		C.O. 416 SQUADRON			SIGNATURE J.R. Russell F/L	TOTAL. —
1945						
1	4	SPIT XVI	DN-E	SELF		FRONT LINE PATROL - VENLO AREA
1	5	SPIT XVI	DN-W	SELF		SWEEP & ARMED RECCO - MUNSTER
1	13	SPIT XVI	DN-Y	SELF		ARMED RECCO - ST VITH
1	29	SPIT XVI	DN-R	SELF		FORMATION
		J.R. Russell		F/L D.F.C.	SUMMARY for JAN 1945	Types:
		O.C. "B" FLIGHT.			DATE 3.2.45	SPIT XVI
		J.M. Mitchell S/L		S/L D.F.C.	UNIT 416 SQUADRON	
		C.O. 416 SQUADRON			SIGNATURE J.R. Russell F/L	TOTAL
					GRAND TOTAL [Cols. (1) to (10)] 709 Hrs. 15 Mins.	Totals Carried Forward

R.C.A.F. MESSAGE
CYPHER

S.19-10-8

TO RCAF HQS OTTAWA

162
1945 JAN 24 PM 9:01

COMP 416
JAN 24 1945
456/24 JAN

FROM ROYCANAIRF

Number	Date		Reference and Date
CXT5[illegible] A149	23 JAN	MY	YOUR

(Use Double Space Typing)
SECRET

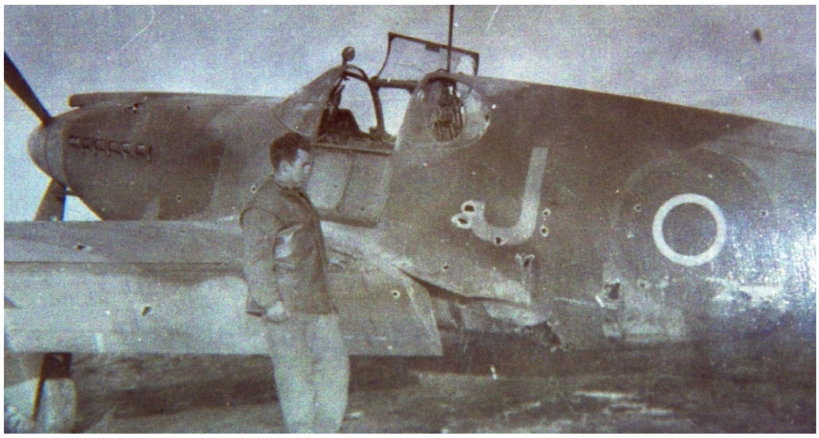
PROGRESS REPORT ONE TO FIFTEEN JAN 416 SQUADRON STATIONED BELGIUM A/C SPITFIRE XVI OFFICER COMMANDING S/L JD MITCHNER DFC RCAF OPERATIONAL FLYING 64 HRS 40 CONSITED 44 SORTIES ON PATROLS AND ARMED RECCE. ONE JAN F/L DWA HARNING DFC RCAF TOOK OFF TO OPPOSE E/A STRAFING A/D AND WAS KILLED WHEN PLANE CRASHED IN BRUSSELS/ 13 JAN F/O WF BRIDGMAN FAILED TO RETURN. TRAINING 24 HRS. PERSONNEL ON STRENGTH AIRCREW OFFICERS RCAF 25 TOTAL 25 OR RCAF ONE TOTAL ONE GROUND OFFICERS RCAF THREE TOTAL THREE OR RCAF TWELVE TOTAL FOURTEEN. PILOT STRENGTH 26..

This picture was taken at the end of December 44.

On the left is F/O M. R. “Mush” Sharun. On the wing is F/L D. W. Harling . Below is F/O W.F. Bridgman, then F/O W.D. “Wally” Hill and F/O Gordon “Gord” Hill, W/O L. J. “Lou”Jean, F/L W. R. “Webb” Harten, F/O J. Leyland and F/O R.W. “Tap” Tapley.

Colorised picture by Pierre Lagacé

On 1 January 1945, the Germans attacked all RCAF fighter units.



On New Year's Day, 1 Jan. 1945, No. 416 Squadron were taxying out when 30 German fighters attacked the base. F/L Nault, F/O Williams and F/O Lou Jean were shot on the runway. F/L David William Armstrong HARLING, DFC, J11481, age 23 years, flying Spitfire SM304, was the only fighter to get airborne and he was shot down over Brussels. Buried Town Cemetery, Evere-les-Bruxelles, Belgium.

Twelve days later, fellow pilot F/O William Frederick BRIDGMAN, J25799, age 23 years, was killed flying Spitfire SM279, when it was hit by flak over St. Vith, Belgium. Buried in War Cemetery, Hotton, Luxembourg, Belgium.

Gordon Hill flew with both pilots and took this image in late December 1944

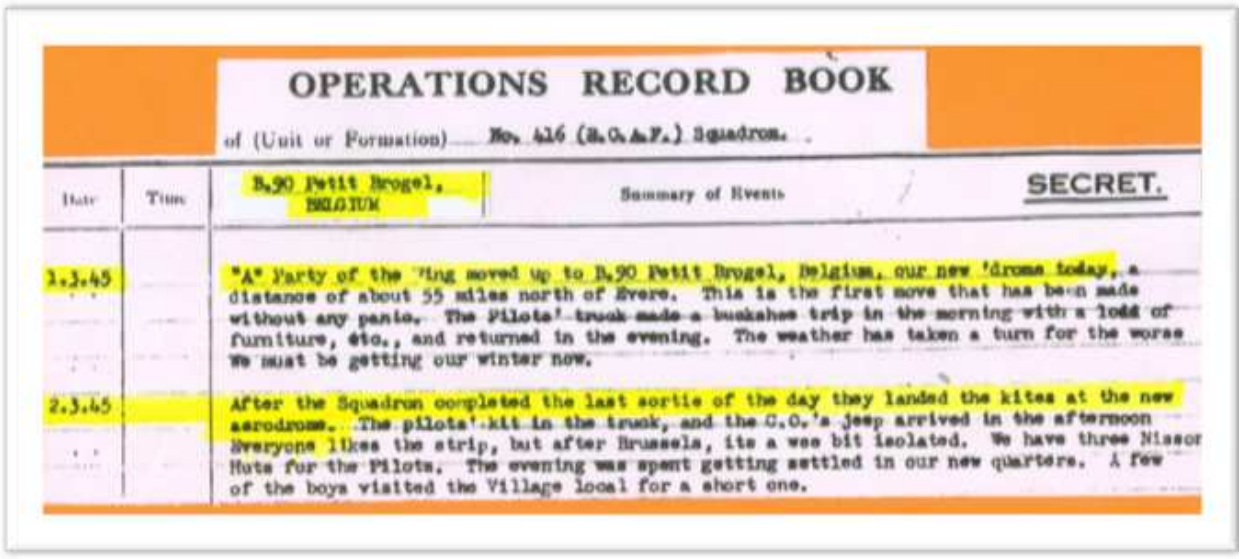
“Harpy” was code letter H, with black outline under nose, TB756. Next is the Spitfire of American F/L Steve Straub.

Seen above is a cold morning Spitfire start for "Sweet Sixteen" in late January 1945. F/O Gordon Hill flew 14 sorties in January, assigned seven different Spitfire fighters. SM466, [twice], SM404 [four times], SM248, SM389 [[twice], SM503 [three times], SM191, SM308, and his SM403.

Photo – B.56 Evere, Belgium, after 15 Jan. 45.

P/O C.W. Haines, F/O R.C. Brouillard, F/O Hill, F/O C. Preston, F/L J. Leyland, F/L W.N. Douglas [front].

On 1 March 1945, Lynx Squadron moved by road 55 miles north to Base 90 at Petit Brogel, Belgium. The squadron 17 Spitfire Mk. XVI aircraft were flown in the next day.



OPERATIONS RECORD BOOK

of (Unit or Formation) No. 416 (R.C.A.F.) Squadron.

Date	Time	B.90 Petit Brogel, BELGIUM	Summary of Events	SECRET.
1.3.45			"A" Party of the Wing moved up to B.90 Petit Brogel, Belgium, our new 'drome today, a distance of about 55 miles north of Evere. This is the first move that has been made without any panic. The Pilots' truck made a buckshee trip in the morning with a load of furniture, etc., and returned in the evening. The weather has taken a turn for the worse We must be getting our winter now.	
2.3.45			After the Squadron completed the last sortie of the day they landed the kites at the new aerodrome. The pilots' kit in the truck, and the C.O.'s jeep arrived in the afternoon Everyone likes the strip, but after Brussels, its a wee bit isolated. We have three Nissor Huts for the Pilots. The evening was spent getting settled in our new quarters. A few of the boys visited the Village local for a short one.	

YEAR 1945. MONTH	DATE	AIRCRAFT Type	No.	PILOT, OR 1ST PILOT	2ND PILOT, PUPIL OR PASSENGER	DUTY (INCLUDING RESULTS AND REMARKS)
—	—	—	—	—	—	— TOTALS BROUGHT FORWARD
3	1	SPIT XVI	DN-P	SELF		DIVE BOMBING - N of WESEL
3	2	SPIT XVI	DN-N	SELF		DIVE BOMBING - S of WESEL.
3	2	SPIT XVI	DN-N	SELF		DIVE BOMBING - NEAR DORSTEN
3	3	SPIT XVI	DN-R	SELF		FIGHTER SWEEP - OSNABRUCK
3	3	SPIT XVI	DN-R	SELF		ARMED RECCO - DORSTEN AREA
3	9	SPIT XVI	DN-S	SELF		TEST WITH 25 lbs BOOST
3	9	SPIT XVI	DN-S	SELF		BOMBER ESCORT.
3	11	SPIT XVI	DN-Z	SELF		FIGHTER SWEEP
3	11	SPIT XVI	DN-J	SELF		TEST A/C
3	12	SPIT XVI	DN-S	SELF		TEST FOR 25 lbs BOOST.
3	17	SPIT XVI	DN-S	SELF		WING PRACTISE
3	14	SPIT XVI	DN-S	SELF		FORMATION & CINE CAMERA
3	14	SPIT XVI	DN-S	SELF		FIGHTER SWEEP
3	14	SPIT XVI	DN-S	SELF		FIGHTER SWEEP
3	15	SPIT XVI	DN-S	SELF		BOMBER ESCORT
3	16	SPIT XVI	DN-Y	SELF		TEST A/C.
3	17	SPIT XVI	DN-R	SELF		PATROL
3	18	SPIT XVI	DN-Y	SELF		FIGHTER SWEEP
3	19	SPIT XVI	DN-R	SELF		FIGHTER SWEEP
3	19	SPIT XVI	DN-S	SELF		A/C TEST - WOW!!!
3	20	SPIT XVI	DN-S	SELF		BOMBER ESCORT

GRAND TOTAL [Cols. (1) to (10)]

TOTALS CARRIED FORWARD

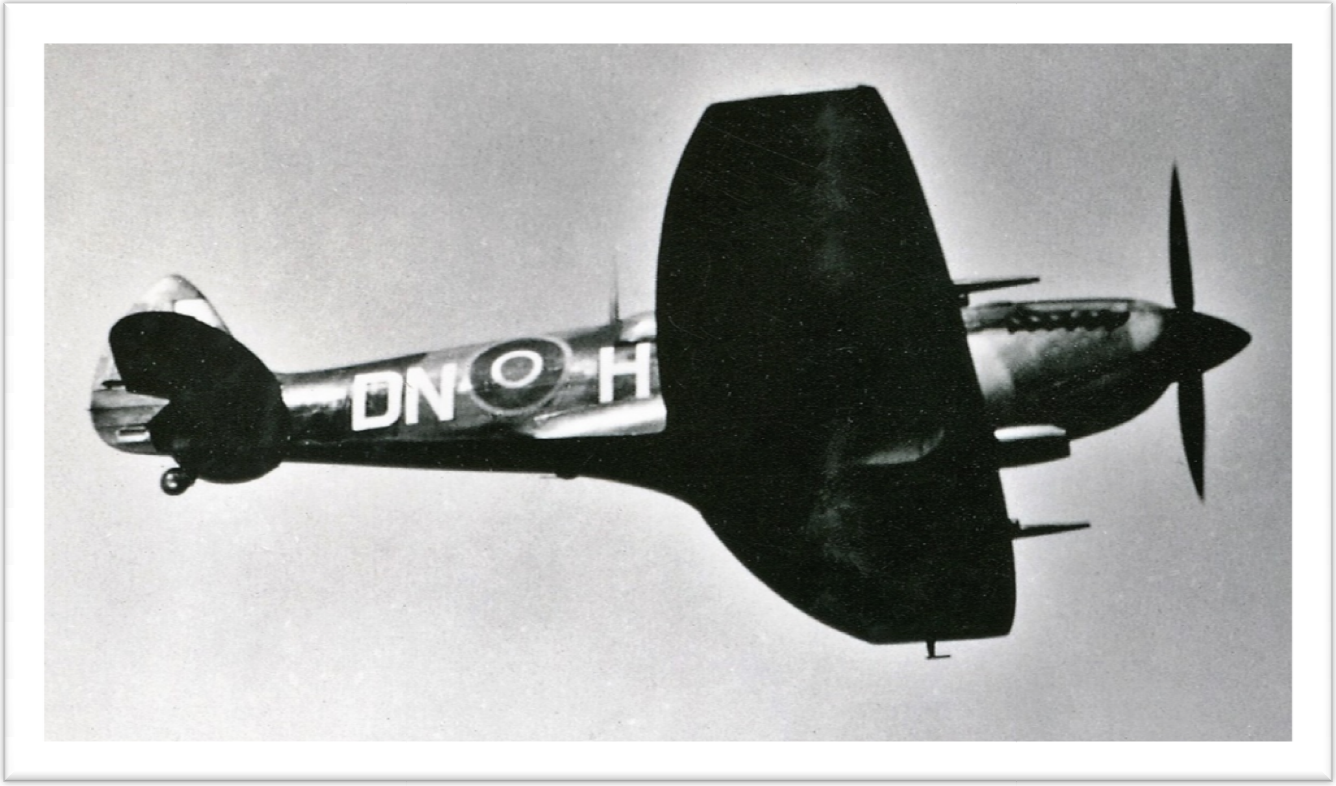
Adjutant F/O Rod J. Howe, in his tent office at B.90, Petit Brogel, Belgium.

P/O Larry E. Spurr arrives on 2 March 1945.

The weather was good for two weeks and they flew 190 operational sorties, totalling 240:40 hours. They did not encounter any enemy activity, and only P/O E.D. Downer made a successful crash landing when his engine gave out. S/L J. D. Mitchner, DFC, received the Dutch Bronze Cross by Dutch authorities.

Two of the French Connection, Roland Brouillard, an unidentified ground crew, and Louis Nault.

F/L L.L. Nault, F/O F.G. Picard, F/O J.J.M. Menard, and F/O R.C. Brouillard, were called the "French Connection." by Gordon Hill. On 25 February 45, F/O Jacques "Jack" Menard had to force-land his Spitfire due to an engine failure, and became a P.O.W.



Spitfire Mk. XVI, DN-H, serial TB756, showing the clipped wing-tips.

Aerial view of B.90 Petit Brogel, Belgium

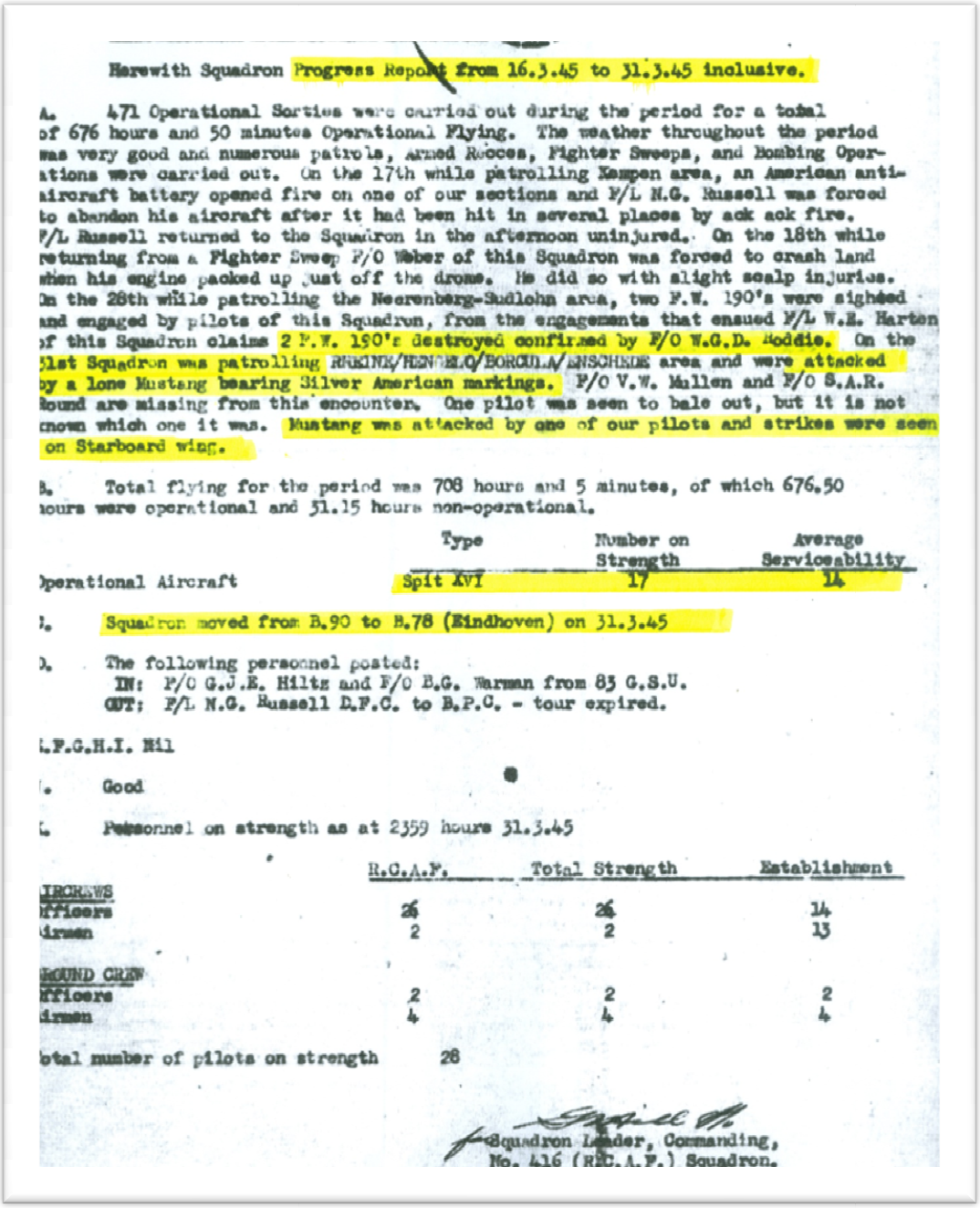
The airfield B.90 Petit Brogel, Belgium, 15 March 45.

Some of the ground crews, unsung heroes

Gordon Hill with Adjutant Howe

Stu Hartley

The squadron pilots are now living in three British Nissen Huts, a big change from the house in Brussels. Stu Hartley combs his hair.



Herewith Squadron Progress Report from 16.3.45 to 31.3.45 inclusive.

A. 471 Operational Sorties were carried out during the period for a total of 676 hours and 50 minutes Operational Flying. The weather throughout the period was very good and numerous patrols, Armed Recces, Fighter Sweeps, and Bombing Operations were carried out. On the 17th while patrolling Kempen area, an American anti-aircraft battery opened fire on one of our sections and F/L N.G. Russell was forced to abandon his aircraft after it had been hit in several places by ack ack fire. F/L Russell returned to the Squadron in the afternoon uninjured. On the 18th while returning from a Fighter Sweep F/O Weber of this Squadron was forced to crash land when his engine packed up just off the drome. He did so with slight scalp injuries. On the 28th while patrolling the Neerenberg-Sudlohn area, two F.W. 190's were sighted and engaged by pilots of this Squadron, from the engagements that ensued F/L W.E. Harten of this Squadron claims 2 F.W. 190's destroyed confirmed by F/O W.G.D. Maddie. On the 31st Squadron was patrolling RHEINE/HENGELO/BORCULO/ENSCHEDE area and were attacked by a lone Mustang bearing Silver American markings. P/O V.W. Mullen and P/O S.A.R. Round are missing from this encounter. One pilot was seen to bale out, but it is not known which one it was. Mustang was attacked by one of our pilots and strikes were seen on Starboard wing.

B. Total flying for the period was 708 hours and 5 minutes, of which 676.50 hours were operational and 31.15 hours non-operational.

	Type	Number on Strength	Average Serviceability
Operational Aircraft	Spit XVI	17	14

C. Squadron moved from B.90 to B.78 (Eindhoven) on 31.3.45

D. The following personnel posted:
IN: P/O G.J.E. Hiltz and F/O B.G. Warman from 83 G.S.U.
OUT: F/L N.G. Russell D.F.C. to R.P.C. - tour expired.

E. P.G.H.I. Nil

F. Good

G. Personnel on strength as at 2359 hours 31.3.45

	R.C.A.F.	Total Strength	Establishment
AIRCREWS			
Officers	26	26	14
Airmen	2	2	13
GROUND CREW			
Officers	2	2	2
Airmen	4	4	4
Total number of pilots on strength	28		

Squadron Leader, Commanding,
No. 416 (RCAF) Squadron.

An American battery fires at them, and then an American P-51 attacks them. Two fighters lost to the Americans and none to the Germans. Trigger happy Americans again but no lives lost this time.

Arming a Spitfire in the rain and mud at B.90 Petit-Brogel, Belgium.

P/O Chuck Darrow and his German uniform

This 416 Squadron pilots photo was taken between 16-30 March 1945, showing 24 of 28 pilots. All of them were identified by Gordon Hill.

1. **F/O Chris Preston J44034, arrived 21 February 1945.**
2. **F/O Gordon Hill, [Gordie] arrived 2 October 1944.**
3. **F/O W.D. Hill J35989, [Wally] arrived 14 November 1944.**
4. **F/O K.J. Ken Williams J9261, arrived 26 December 1944.**
5. **F/O Jack Leyland J26993, arrived 18 October 1944, ex-421 Squadron.**
6. **F/O Keith F. Scott J21239, arrived 27 February 1945.**
7. **F/O S.H. Steve Straub, arrived early October 1944.**
8. **P/O Chuck Darrow, arrived early October 1944.**
9. **F/L Larry L. Spurr, arrived 23 August 1944.**
10. **F/O B.E. Parry [Bert] J14717, arrived 13 January 1945.**
11. **F/O C.W. Haines [Cliff] J49322, arrived 21 January 1945.**

12. F/Sgt. N.M. McGregor [Mac] R193516, arrived 21 January 1945.

13. F/O L.P. Comerford [Len] arrived 4 October 1944, ex-403 Squadron.

14. F/L Neil G. Russell J8136, arrived 4 July 1944, ex-Malta, 2nd tour.

15. F/O W.I. Gordon [Rocky] J6718, arrived 27 February 1945, 2nd tour.

16. S/L J.D. Mitchener DFC, [Jake] J16799, assumed command November 1944, replacing S/L J.F. McKiroy, DFC, end of tour.

17. C.O. F/O G. A. Cameron [silent Joe] arrived 3 July 1944, ex-Malta, 2nd tour.

18. F/O Vernon W. Mullen [Moon] arrived 15 March 1945. Shot down by American P-51, 31 March 45.

19. F/O L.J.R. Jean [Lou] arrived 20 October 1944.

20. F/O S.A. Round [Sam] J42360 arrived 3 February 1945.

21. F/O W. L. McCallum [Mac] J37906, arrived 3 February 1945.

22. F/O Walter Norman Douglas. [killed on 14 May 1945, accident, shotgun blast to face].

23. F/O F.G.H. Picard [Pic] arrived 29 September 1944.

24. P/O W.G.D. Roddie [Bill] J86972, arrived 9 August 1944

25. Sgt. Brechnel, ground crew member.

The squadron's ground crew and personnel, photo taken at B.90 Petit Brogel, Belgium, mid-March 1945.

A dummy German Ju 88 mock-up at B.90 Belgium 1945

The squadron pilots were up at 03:45, 24 March 45, and in the air at first daylight. The C-47s with airborne troops and paratroopers passed directly over the base to Germany, crossing the Rhine.

Crossing the Rhine

Returning to England

Trap-shooting at B.90

P/O Chuck Darrow taking bath.

31 March 1945, the new home at B.78 Eindhoven, Holland.

Batman LAC Wally Grieve

The RCAF Squadron Jeep

Fueling a Spit from “Jerry” cans

Jules, our Flemish Batman

Ken Williams and Webb Harten

Group of pilots. Pilot [second from the left] “Webb” John Edmund Harten.

John Edmund Harten, age 24, was killed in Spitfire RR256, 19 April 1945, hit by German flak and crashed in flames Wilster, Germany.

End of Part Five

Next time, The move into Germany