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## 418 (City of Edmonton)

### Squadron

Two years into the Second World War, on November 15, 1941, the Royal Canadian Air Force formed 418 Squadron at Debden, England. In March of 1942 the Squadron was fully operational, equipped with the **Douglas Boston Mk III**, and assigned to Night Intruder duty. Their role grew in scope through the war, with Night Intruder missions targeting supply trains, shipping, and factories, or dropping propaganda leaflets on Occupied



Europe. In 1943, they converted to the newer and faster **de Havilland Mosquito**, and added Day Ranger missions to their repertoire. In 1944, the City of Edmonton officially adopted 418, which henceforth became known as 418 (City of Edmonton) Squadron. The city organized care packages of cigarettes, candy and gum to be sent overseas. Members of the Squadron would return to Edmonton on leave to speak about the war effort. By the war's end, 418 (City of Edmonton) Squadron became the RCAF's top scoring unit in terms of air-to-air and air-to-ground kills, during both day and night, thanks to its ace pilots, including **Russ Bannock** and **Johnny Caine** of Edmonton

No. 418 (Intruder) Squadron claimed 178 enemy aircraft and 79-1/2 V-1 flying bombs destroyed, making it the top-scoring unit of the RCAF. The leading individual score was Squadron Leader Russell Bannock, with 11 aircraft and 18-1/2 V-1s. He was also the squadron's CO from 10 Oct - 22 Nov 1944.

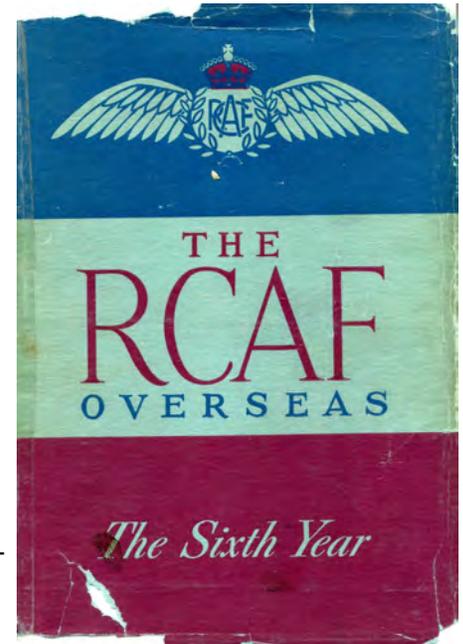


Douglas Boston Mk. III formation, No. 418 (Intruder) Squadron, RCAF, c1941-1943



de Havilland DH 98 Mosquito aircraft of 418 Squadron, with (Serial No. NT137), coded TH-H, centre.

The following excerpts are from  
**THE RCAF OVERSEAS THE SIXTH YEAR**



**INTRUDERS (SEPT. DEC, 1944)** pages 317 to 324

**INTRUDERS** *September—December, 1944*

The work of an intruder squadron consisted primarily of operations against enemy airfields. Whenever there was a raid on an enemy target by the aircraft of Bomber Command, intruder squadrons dispatched crews to patrol German and German-held aerodromes. There the intruder crew, consisting of a pilot and a navigator, lay in wait for German night-fighters taking off to attack our bombers or homing when their operations were concluded.

The aircraft used for this kind of work were Mosquitos.

Throughout September, October and the greater part of November the City of Edmonton Squadron, commanded by W/C Anthony Barker, R.A.F., operated as the only R.C.A.F. intruder squadron. At the end of August, 1944, it was stationed at in Hertfordshire and there it remained until the end of November.

Already long famous for its day and night intrusions deep into enemy-held territory the Edmonton Squadron continued to pile up a phenomenal record of victories in the air.



V-1 Flying Bomb

During June, July and August the squadron had been quite successful on anti-diver patrols, *i.e.* patrols against flying bombs. This work continued for a time but proved uneventful. Intruder sorties were more colourful, not merely by reason of the numbers of enemy aircraft destroyed but also because of the attacks on ground targets which crews undertook as they returned from their primary objectives on the Continent. Thus on September 1st F/O S. P. Seid with F/O D. N. McIntosh, intruding to Munich, obtained strikes on three trains, two of which they forced to stop, and on a truck which exploded and burned. Seid, an American Jewish boy who "wanted to get into the business of hammering Hitler", already had obtained numerous successes. He was to do much more.

On the 3rd, an afternoon operation to the Baltic coast netted or F / L S. H. R. Cotterill, D.F.C., with F S E. H. McKenna, R.A.F., a damaged Me.109 and one goods train, while two more goods trains were strafed by F / L D. E. Forsyth, an American from Brooklyn, and his English navigator F/O R. T. Esam, R.A.F. F / L H. E. (Page 318) Miller, R.A.F. with Sgt. W. Hooper damaged two more locomotives on the 5th while the next night Stan Cotterill and Pop McKenna had great success with a train south of Verden and a road convoy of fifteen vehicles east of Linden. It was the turn of Miller and Hooper again on the 8th. They strafed a train between Arnhem and Wesel and a lorry near 01st while F / 0 S. K. Woolley and F/O W. A. Hastie got a train and two lorries at Papenburg. The same night F / 0 W. R. Zeller and F / 0 H. R. Tribbeck, R.A.F. failed to return from a sortie to Vechta and Diepholz. Then on the 12th S/L Russ Bannock, who had been informed about the award of his D.F.C. on the 2nd, and his navigator, F / 0 R. R. F. Bruce, got a "probably destroyed" near Kitzingen.

"I was coming back from an intruder trip deep into Germany," said Bannock. "Behind the Ruhr I spotted an enemy airfield with some lights showing. I went down to investigate and saw a Jerrykite taking off with his navigation lights on. He was doing a climbing turn as I went in underneath to give him a couple of short bursts. His starboard engine exploded and he hit the deck."

Attacks on road convoys were made on September 17th by Woolley with Hastie, Seid with McIntosh and by Bannock with Bruce, who also attacked a train successfully south of Meppel. Three victories and three damaged were claimed on the afternoon of the 21st by S/L R. G. Gray with F / L N. Gibbons, D.F.C. and F / L P. R. Brook with F/O A. D. McLaren. Taking off from an advanced base, St. Dizier, the two crews proceeded to Bad Aibling, near Munich, where they saw a single-engined enemy aircraft coming from the east at 600 feet with its wheels down. Gray shot down this aircraft. He then attacked the airfield, damaging two single-engine aircraft on the ground and destroying another. Intense light flak was encountered and Gray's aircraft was damaged. Meantime Brook attacked aircraft on the ground, destroying one single-engined aircraft and damaging another but his own aircraft suffered some damage from debris. On the way home he damaged a locomotive in the Munich area and then both crews attacked two stationary petrol tank-cars near Inglostadt seeing strikes but no fires. (PAGE 319) The 27th provided good hunting for Bannock and Bruce. Near Parow airfield they saw six enemy aircraft of a training type that had just taken off. From dead astern they attacked an Me. 108 which disintegrated in mid-air. In the same locality, Kubitzer Bay, they shot down another Me. 108 which dived into the sea. At one point it seemed that the enemy was trying to ram the Mosquito and it succeeded in scoring a hit on the port engine and setting it on fire.

"It seemed for a minute," said Bannock, "that we had had it but I feathered my prop and with the fire-fighting equipment put out the blaze." Staying at tree-top height the crew completed the 600 miles to base on one engine, getting back an hour and a half late. "If some one had been careless in handling that starboard engine we never would have made it," he said, and he also paid warm tribute to his R. A. F. navigator who got him back to base "dead on". Bannock was later awarded a Bar to his D. F. C. For his exploit on this occasion while Bruce got the D. F. C.



de Havilland DH.98 Mosquito with Wing Commander Russ Bannock, DSO, DFC and bar, and his Observer, Robert Bruce, 25 Sep 1944.

**PAGE 323** On the 17th F / L Stuart May and F/0 John Ritch on a sortie to German-held airfields in Czechoslovakia crash-landed in enemy territory but were picked up by Russian partisans operating behind German lines. After tramping about 1,200 miles they finally reached a Russian repatriation centre near Budapest in April, 1945. On the same night F / L Cotterill and F/0 Colin Finlayson, D.F.C. & Bar, who took off from an Italian base for an Operation to Vienna, also failed to return. Finlayson was an old timer with the squadron who had formerly served as navigator

with Lieutenant J. F. (Lou) Luma, U.S.A.A.F. At the time he was lost Finlayson had completed his tour and was on non-flying duties; he volunteered to fly in place of Cotterill's navigator who was ill. In the course of his operational career he had shared with his pilots in the destruction of 18/2 enemy aircraft, seven of them on the ground. Five days after the loss of Cotterill and Finlayson, S/L Boomer, D. F. C., and F / L Gibbons, D. F. C., failed to return from a sortie to Munich though F / L Johnson, who participated in that operation, saw Boomer account for an unidentified enemy aircraft and damage another at Holzkirchen. Word was subsequently received that Ken Boomer was killed. A veteran of the Battle of Northern France and the Aleutian operations (where he destroyed a Jap Zero floatplane). Boomer had returned to Europe to begin another tour. Johnson himself destroyed a train on the same occasion and attacked a factory at Schomberg. Subsequently Johnson was awarded the D.F.C. On the 29th F / L Miller and S/L Annan with their navigators attacked road and rail transport with success. The squadron had mixed fortune on November 1st. F/0 Hill and his navigator, FS Roach, failed to return from Giessen but Miller and Hooper, on a sortie to Langendiebach, destroyed a Ju.SBG in the air, the enemy crashing and exploding on the ground about a mile north of Uнденheim. This was the Edmonton's last victory in air combat. On the same night trains were successfully attacked by Russ Bannock (now a W / C ), who had recently succeeded W/C Tony Barker as commanding officer, and by WO G. S. Johnston. On half a dozen nights later in the month ground (PAGE 324) targets were strafed but on November 20th the squadron was declared non-operational. The next day it moved to Hartford. Bridge. Its intruder days were over and for the rest of the year it trained for close support of the land forces as part of the Tactical Air Force on the Continent. The change was also marked by the posting of W/C Bannock, who took command of the Lynx Squadron and was replaced by W/C J. C. Wickett.

**As an intruder squadron 418's success had been phenomenal. From the date of its formation in November, 1941, to the time of its conversion to close support it had accounted for 105 enemy aircraft destroyed in the air, 73 on the ground and 103 damaged. From June to September 1944 it destroyed 79 1/2 flying bombs too. This record was an outstanding one in the history of the R.C.A.F**



(IWM Photo CH 7210)

Douglas Boston Mk. III (Intruder), No. 418 (Intruder) Squadron, RCAF, taxiing at Bradwell Bay, Essex, prior to a night intruder raid over France, Sep 1942. No. 418 (Intruder) Squadron, operated Douglas Boston Mk. IIIs on night intruder sorties from Bradwell Bay. Its usual targets were Luftwaffe airfields, the French railway system and occasionally factory buildings. The aircraft in the photograph carry ventral fuselage gun packs housing four 20-mm cannon.



(Library and Archives Canada Photo, MIKAN No. 4880515)

No. 418 (Intruder) Squadron members inscribing their names on linen, indicating each member of the Squadron on VE Day. From Left to Right, Flight Lieutenant C. Redeker, Flight Lieutenant A. G. Eckert, Flying Officer M. Zimmer.



**Squadron Leader Russell William Bannock**, Order of Ontario, DSO, DFC, (1 Nov 1919 – 4 Jan 2020), flew as a Canadian fighter pilot during the Second World War (photo taken in 1944), and served as the chief test pilot for de Havilland Canada.

Bannock was born in Edmonton, Alberta in 1919, and worked as a commercial pilot before the Second World War, obtaining his private pilot's license in 1938 and his commercial pilot's license in 1939.

After entering the RCAF, Bannock received his pilot's wings in 1940 and was appointed as an instructor at Trenton, Ontario. Later he was posted to RAF Ferry Command from June to August 1942. In September 1942, Bannock became chief instructor with the Flying Instructor School at Arnprior in Ontario. Bannock's request for overseas service was granted in 1944 and he joined 60 Operational Training Unit (OTU) based in RAF High Ercall, England.

In June 1944, Bannock was then transferred to No. 418 (Intruder) Squadron, RCAF, flying intruder missions over Europe with the de Havilland Mosquito Mk. VI fighter-bomber. He quickly proved adept at this type of operation and achieved his first victories. In October 1944, he was promoted to Wing Commander and took command of the squadron. Bannock also flew 'Diver' operations against the German V-1 flying

bombs launched against London and southern England. On one mission he shot down four V-1s in one hour. A bar was added to his DFC for his missions against the V-1s.

Bannock was transferred to No. 406 Squadron, RCAF in Nov 1944 as commanding officer, and was awarded the DSO. By April 1945, Bannock had destroyed 11 enemy aircraft (including 2 on the ground), 4 damaged in the air and 19 V-1's destroyed. Bannock became Director of Operations, RCAF Overseas Headquarters, in London in May 1945 until Sep 1945 when he attended the Royal Air Force Staff College.

Retiring from the RCAF in 1946, Bannock joined the de Havilland Canada Aircraft Company as chief test pilot, flying prototypes like the Beaver and various short take-off and landing aircraft. In 1950, Bannock became Director of Military Sales and later Vice President and President from 1976 to 1978. In 1968, he formed his own consulting business, Bannock Aerospace Ltd.

In 1956, Bannock was appointed an associate fellow of the Canadian Aeronautical Institute. He was also chairman of the Canadian Aerospace Industries Association's Export Committee 1964-1968, and was a director from 1976-1977. Bannock was also President of the Canadian Fighter Pilots Association, Director of the Canadian Industrial Preparedness Association, and the Canadian Exporters Association.

In the late 1990s, his wartime navigator, Robert Bruce, recorded his Symphony in B flat, dedicated to Bannock and in part inspired by the night sorties they flew together. In 2011, he was made a member of the Order of Ontario "for his contributions to the aerospace industry". Bannock died at a hospital in Toronto in January 2020 at the age of 100.



(Library and Archives Canada Photo, MIKAN No. 4542822)

de Havilland Mosquito, RCAF Intruder Squadron, ca 1944

## THANK YOU

**ALL PHOTO 'S AND Story and photo's on Squadron Leader Russell William Bannock** comes from the website belonging to **Harold Skaarup** —[www.silverhawkauthor.com](http://www.silverhawkauthor.com)

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