

STRONG, PHILIP HENRY

420405

[4895]

AWM 65

AUSTRALIAN ARCHIVES  
ACCESS STATUS

OPEN

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE

OFFICERS AND AIRCREW

missing  
 Sage 13-6-42  
 H.B.H. 2-11-42

The following Biographical details are requested for use at R.A.A.F. Overseas Headquarters, LONDON,-

PD 5/6/42  
 Avs 420405

Surname... STRONG. ..... Number... Avs 420405 .....

Christian Names... PHILIP HENRY. .....

Air Force Rank and Mustering... P/O FLT PILOT .....

Degrees, Decorations, etc... NIL. DFC .....

Present Appointment and Location... R.A.A.F. P.R.C. BOURMOUTH. .....

Date of Birth... 9.2.1919 ..... Place... LONDON. ENGLAND. .....

Educated... LONDON. ENGLAND. .....

Date of Entering Service... 7.11.41 .....

Previous Service Experience... 8 months attached to 1st. Div. SIGNALS .....

AUSTRALIA.

Places of Training in R.A.A.F. N.I.T.S. - Somers. Victoria. .....

N.E.F.T.S. - Narrandera N.S.W.; N% S.F.T.S. - Durrville Conada.

Civilian Career and Activities... Standard Telephones & Cables - London .....

and Australia. De Havilland Aircraft Co. Australia.

Postmaster General Dept. Sydney Australia.

Clubs, Recreations, etc... Rugby, Sking, Soccer, Hockey. .....

Golf, Cricket, Sailing, etc.

S.T.C. Athletic Club.

Fathers name... S.W. Strong .....

Wifes name... .....

Children... .....

Home Address 41. MILLFIELD RD. EDWARE HUXY ENGLAND. .....

Signature P. Strong .....

Date 16.1.43. .....

Date Embarked Australia 23.6.42. .....

Destination UNITED KINGDOM. .....

*Personal file F/lt. P. Strong*  
AS BROADCAST:

"WITH THE AUSTRALIANS IN BRITAIN"

by

Aus. 263 Wing Commander J. Dowling of Beaufort, Victoria. (458 Squadron.)

and

Aus. 420405 Flight Lieutenant P. Strong, of Sydney, N.S.W. (182 Squadron.)

PRODUCED BY MRS. E.J. DAVY  
CHECKED BY: HEC NEWS ROOM M.O.I &  
J. STURGE-WHITING & G. IVAN SMITH.

PRE-RECORDED ON DCX 37716 (W/C. Dowling) Duration 7'10"  
DCX 37398/A (F/lt. Strong) Duration 3'20"

TRANSMISSION: Pacific Service, Tuesday August 29th, 1944, 0515-0530 GMT.

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"WITH THE AUSTRALIANS IN BRITAIN". The story of the invasion of Europe emphasises the part played by the men of the Allied Air Force. Today we have two speakers, who are going to tell you how some of the Australian airmen taking part in these operations live. Both speakers belong to the Royal Australian Air Force and both are stationed outside England. The first is Wing Commander J. Dowling of Melbourne. Until recently he was in charge of an R.A.A.F. squadron based in the Mediterranean. He begins by giving a general picture of the work of his squadron. Wing Commander Dowling:

W/C. DOWLING. Since the fall of Sicily the protection of Allied convoys in the Mediterranean theatre has been one of the many functions of the Mediterranean Allied Coastal Air Force. Mine was one of the squadrons which forms this Air Force - an R.A.A.F. squadron, based in North Africa, flying Wellingtons. It was the responsibility of this squadron to see that Allied shipping passing through its area was unharmed by U-boats. Headquarters would issue instructions that a convoy would be passing through our area at a certain time, and during the passage of that convoy aircraft of the squadron stayed with it, day and night, irrespective of the weather. We used to see aircraft on the decks of some of these ships, and tanks, lorries, and crates containing all manner of supplies. The most interesting convoys to escort were troop convoys. With the naval escort's permission we could sometimes fly low enough

to get a wave from the men on deck.

These convoys, both British and American, were going to Italy - some of the supplies they carried were for use in the Italian campaign and others - though we didn't know it then - were intended for the invasion of the South of France. Early in June we were transferred to another base and since then, of course, all our work has had a direct bearing on this invasion. Our primary role was still the same - the protection of Allied shipping from attack by U-boats whenever detected within our area. But in addition we now undertook attacks against the little enemy shipping which crept along the French coast and the Gulf of Genoa - always by night. There were barges and small coastal vessels, escorted by destroyers and E-boats. Although these patrols were a nightly effort, there were many occasions when no enemy shipping was seen, and the crews dropped their bombs on alternative land targets which usually consisted of a railway-yard, or an oil storage depot. So one way or another, our nightly trips were bound to be a nuisance to the enemy.

By this time U-boat warfare in the Mediterranean had definitely slackened off. The Germans had lost a number of U-boats here in the early part of the year through the combined action of the Navy and the Coastal Air Force, who had put out a very determined effort to remove this ever-present menace to our troop-ships and convoys. The effort was successful - no further submarines had been sighted by the squadron up to the time I left about a month ago.

Occasionally, we were called out for air-sea rescue operations. On these jobs we flew at a very low altitude so that we'd be able to see a man in his life vest in the water...and that's a very small thing to locate... or the dinghy from the crashed aircraft. Once we'd located the crew to be rescued, we remained with them and directed an air-sea rescue launch to their position.

The aerodromes that we're using now were built by the Italians and had been used by the Germans prior to our occupation. The permanent buildings were in the usual ornate and elaborate Italian fashion - parquet floors, marble staircases, and every possible luxury in the way of hot and cold water, cocktail cabinets, panelled cupboards, and so on. For an operational aerodrome, built in wartime, such luxurious accommodation seemed very much out-of-place. We're

sharing an aerodrome with several other squadrons, and living as a self-contained unit under canvas. Our camp site is on the side of a hill overlooking a fine bathing beach - it looks very like a holiday camp at home - at Lorne or Ralm Beach, except for the lack of trees, there are no trees here at all.

Everybody - without exception - spends his spare time on the beach. The water is exceptionally clear, and often quite cold. Bathing is good and we've made a regulation length swimming pool - thirty three and a third metres - we did it by cutting in half the fuselage of a crashed Me.323, a six-engined German transport. There's a swimming carnival every Sunday afternoon. I think we're very fortunate in being able to have some organised sport while we're on operations. So often this isn't possible because of locality and the nature of the operations on which the unit is engaged, and often the boys do nothing but work and sleep. Recreation plays a very important part in keeping up health and morale in a squadron.

Several of the lads have hired boats from the local fishermen and it's a common sight to see four or five of them racing each other out to the Point at the end of the Bay and back. They're very old, very non-descript boats, about 14 feet long, with a mainsail and a jib only.

Our camp is sited just near a little fishing port. The local inhabitants are carrying on much as they did before the war - fishing and farming they have always been more or less self-supporting; and they seem to us to be exceptionally primitive. We had no contact with them except to barter for fish, vegetables and fresh fruit. These could be readily obtained for a few cigarettes, or biscuits, which the native preferred to accept rather than money. Today, he finds money hard to spend, and welcomes the opportunity of getting cigarettes and biscuits which otherwise would be quite unobtainable.

Some units of the Italian Army are still about. They don't seem to have any military duties and some of them are only too willing to come and work in our messes for their food and a few cigarettes. We find them quite efficient and exceptionally willing workers.

About sixty per cent of this squadron - air and ground crews - are Australians. Then there are three Canadians, two New Zealanders, and a South African - the rest are from Britain. Many of the Australians, particularly the ground crews, have been overseas for three years or longer. Air crews

finish their tours and are transferred to other duties; but the ground crews, in the main, are the same chaps who joined the squadron when it was formed. To these men must go a considerable amount of the credit for the good name the squadron has, for they have been responsible for a high percentage of serviceability - of serviceability maintained under the most trying conditions. Living conditions, are good, but maintenance conditions certainly are not. If it's windy at all, such clouds of dust blow up from the Aerodromes that visibility is literally only a few yards. To service an aircraft under these conditions is no mean feat but the ground crews have always managed to keep our aircraft in a first-class state.

As I said, I left this squadron about a month ago when everything was very quiet....we were seeing no U-boats and very little enemy shipping, but now I suppose that both the air crews and the ground crews are extremely busy. They'll be doing their old familiar job of protecting our convoys, and these convoys are going in to the beaches of the Riviera.

INTERMEDIATE ANNOUNCEMENT: That talk was by Wing Commander J. Bowling of Melbourne. The second speaker is Flight Lieutenant P.H. Strong of Sydney. He is with a Rocket Typhoon squadron based in Normandy.

FLY/IT. STRONG: Like most of the units in France we found ourselves one of those small orchards and pitched our wigwags and dug out holes. We always endeavour to find a spot as far as possible from the landing strip with its day long cloud of dust and ceaseless din of engines roaring from well before dawn to well after dusk.

Our tents are pitched in no particular order under the trees, each with its separate gaggle of wash basins, water buckets, fire places and assorted tins. Slit trenches were essential in the earlier stages but now, they're more useful as defence positions against attack by apple-throwing Typhoon pilots. These apple wars flare up almost every evening - it's no trouble to start one at all.

In the middle of our little camp we erected a chicken run from odd pieces of runway track. The occupants until a short time ago - were mostly ducks. They made a welcome change from tinned stew. The hens we had were mostly clapped out cacklers who did nothing but sit in the improvised laying

houses making hopeful noises - often with a few lads looking at them even more hopefully. However, we've had one or two small hen fruits to liven our tinned breakfasts. We collected both ducks and hens from an ex-German strong-point near Caen.

Our farmyard is completed by cows and geese belonging to our farmer and some ex-German cavalry horses we acquired.

After sunset when flying has ceased the chaps wander back to their billets and gather in groups to discuss the day's work with the usual complement of French children hanging around in their unending request for bon-bone and cigarette for Mon Pere. However, they come in very useful when clothes need washing and eggs are short. I think the first French phrase that everyone learns is "Avez-vous un oeuf?" S.V.P. "Have you an egg?" The final wind up of the day is usually over the old boiling billy.

We give the lads an occasional day off - their main interest still seems to be a visit to the forward area, and they thumb their way down the roads in quest of the inevitable German luge pistol, binoculars, sub-machine guns or anything else they can beg, borrow or buy.

My particular interest is in acquiring German horses. I have one rather fine stallion which we've named "Bandit" and in the course of these searches I've gathered together quite a large personal armoury of pistols and machine guns. There's plenty of excitement about these excursions: the chaps often return with tales of mortar firing and shells bursting around them - it's not surprising in this rapidly moving and flexible warfare.

Around the camp we've already got several amenities - portable showers, a cinema we've named the ODEON - shows twice a week, the entrance fee being nil (the only catch is we don't have much time to go). For a Mess we have a rather fine old French chateau - with tapestry covered walls, broken windows and no furniture. Then in the grounds there's a lake and a fountain. We have, of course, installed our own Bar - beer for which is not particularly plentiful but is occasionally boosted by our own Typhoon dray which is often flown across from England fitted with two long-range full tanks of beer. So far we've seen nothing of French wine.

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Copy of Citation of Award of Distinguished Flying Cross. Immediate

Gazetted. 24/11/44.

Acting Flight Lieutenant Philip Henry STRONG (Aus. 420405) No. 152 Sqn.

Flight Lieutenant Strong has completed many sorties against the enemy with great success. In August, 1944, as flight commander, this officer led his squadron against a tank formation in the Vasse-Condé area. In spite of intense heavy and light anti-aircraft fire, Flight Lieutenant Strong repeatedly led the squadron in to attack until six tanks were destroyed and he had exhausted all his ammunition. His great courage, skill and accurate shooting were a magnificent example to his squadron.

Spare

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FOR AUSTRALIAN PAPERS  
2nd TAF/FB/AIR INF. 623

25/10/44

NEW SOUTH WALES PILOT "TOPS" HIS CENTURY

(192 Sqn)

This is the story of how Flight-Lieutenant Phil Strong, former technician with the Telephone Department in Sydney, New South Wales, reached the century in operations with a rocket-firing Typhoon squadron of RAF and TAF, based in Holland.

He was sent out to lead the squadron on an armed reconnaissance of north-west Germany on his 99th sortie. They found and attacked five trains and three locomotives blowing four of the engines up, damaging the other four and destroying about 200 trucks and carriages.

Two of the trains were near Deventer. One was stationary and the other moving, so Strong decided to attack the moving one first. By the time they had finished with that one, the second started to move and raced for "cover" in a nearby town. The Typhoons attacked just as it was pulling into a station, and the whole train blew up covering half the town with smoke.

Strong was again leading the squadron on his 100th sortie, but the German train drivers would not co-operate, so the squadron blasted and set on fire a timber factory in Germany.

On his 101st sortie, the squadron, with Strong again leading, knocked out three engines and 40 trucks.

Not only was it a fine century but in two days he had helped to destroy seven engines and 240 trucks and carriages and damage another four engines.

Strong has led the squadron on more than 40 different occasions. It is a real mixed squadron with men from England, Scotland, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa and Australia. He has shared in the destruction of 21 trains, 15 tanks, 75 motor vehicles, 200 horse-drawn vehicles, 40 barges, ferries, tugs and dredges, and more than 20 anti-aircraft guns.

"It is all team work, though," says Strong. "Every man does his bit, and it's an all-Empire effort."

F/Lt. Strong was shot down near Caen on D plus 1, the first time he led a flight. He made a forced landing between two German strongpoints, but English commandos dashed out and rescued him.

His "score" now is 109 sorties, and he is still hitting out. On his 109th, when he led the squadron again, he managed to score a lucky hit while attacking a train near Dorsten, in Germany. A pair of rockets landed on the line just in front of the moving train. The train capsized and then the squadron poured rockets and cannon shells into it. Then they attacked another train and left it blazing.

F/Lt. Strong comes from Kirribilli, New South Wales.

17.10.44

FBI AUSTRALIAN PAPERS

2nd TAF/FAIR INF. 597

SHARPENING THE GERMAN FRONT

Quarantining the German front, harassing all the Nazi efforts to bring up supplies and reinforcements for their front-line troops, is one of the tasks of RAF rocket-firing Typhoon squadrons based on advanced airfields in Holland <sup>and</sup> Belgium.

Australians, flying with RAF squadrons, take part in these daily sweeps, and they have shared in many successful attacks.

Flying Officer Terry O'Connor, of Strathfield, New South Wales, who has more than 100 "ops" to his credit was leading his section when they came across 50 railway trucks in Rosenthal station.

"They must have contained ammunition, because the explosion which followed our attack was seen by another section flying 30 miles away", said O'Connor.

<sup>4 2 0405 182 Spts.</sup>  
Flight Lieutenant P.H.Strong, of Sydney, New South Wales who also has taken part in more than 100 operations, led the same squadron when it got five trains one morning and three the next.

Flying Officer Keith Goddard of Edgewood, New South Wales, was flying with another RAF squadron when it attacked more than 200 railway trucks in a marshalling yard at Dorsten in the Ruhr. They claimed 150 destroyed by the time they had finished with them.

Pilot Officer J. Rendell, of Liverpool, New South Wales joined in an attack on four trains near Clove in Germany.

Trains, motor transport and barges, in fact anything that can carry supplies and men have been attacked by Australians flying with RAF Typhoon squadrons.

Other Australians who have shared in these attacks on transport include:-  
Flying Officers J. Gates, of East St. Kilda, Victoria, N.J. Manfred, of Goulburn, New South Wales, D.W.D. Guest of Geelong, Victoria and Warrant Officers J.A.Horne of Ipswich, Queensland, N.F. Swift of Warrawee, New South Wales, and M.J. Whitby of Cowra, New South Wales.

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420405. F/LT P. STRONG

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BROADCAST

" WITH THE AUSTRALIANS IN BRITIAN "

FILED UNDER MISCELLANEOUS UNITS. FOLIO NO 2241

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Personal file - F/26. P.H. Strong

R.A.A.F. Release No. 757

August 25, 1944.

2226

ROCKET TYPHOON PILOT'S EXPERIENCES ---

"THEY'RE HEROES TO THE ARMY"

Shot down in enemy territory and rescued by commandos, sniped at while he slept in a slit trench from which he had removed a dead German, strafed and bombed by enemy aircraft, shelled by long-range guns --- these are flashes from the experiences of an Australian rocket Typhoon tank-buster pilot, Flight Lieutenant P.H. Strong, of RAAF Sydney.

By their devastating attacks against enemy tanks, and daring low-flying onslaughts on strong points resisting the Allied advance, M Typhoon pilots have become heroes to the soldiers in France.

"The army is rocket Typhoon mad," Strong says. "They call us up on anything --- tanks, dug in or hidden in the woods, six-barrel ("Manning Minnie") rocket mortars, anti-aircraft gun concentrations, enemy-occupied village strong points. We have often to go in close to their lines, ~~and they shoot~~ ~~red smoke over the target to guide us~~. We come back from the target at ground level over their heads --- and get a terrific reception. On days off they come M to the landing ground to see us.

"It makes us feel that we are really doing something," he said.

"Like a point-blank broadside from a 6-inch cruiser" is how Strong describes the fire power of rocket Typhoons. They carry eight rockets --- and each is equal to a 6-inch shell in explosive power. Two will blow a tank to pieces.

Strong was shot down on D-Day plus 1. Two direct hits by a 40 m.m. Bofors ack-ack battery damaged the engine and fuselage of his aircraft, and the wings were badly holed, but the ~~RAF~~ Typhoon still flew. Strong knocked out one tank in his first attack. Apart from abnormal instruments readings, his aircraft still seemed all right, so he went in to attack again.

"I was in the dive ~~at about 1000 feet~~ when the engine packed up completely," he said. "I yanked hard away and headed for the beaches, and ~~glided for~~ <sup>Several</sup> ~~six to eight~~ miles, and, having jettisoned the hood, crash-landed in a field.

I was lucky --- I picked about the only field not mined."

Smothered in dirt and dust, but unharmed, he ran towards the Allied lines, but was stopped by barbed wire fences with big notices bearing the words "Mminen". He turned back, trying to find a way out, when commandoes came out in a jeep to get him. He went back with them to their advance post, but returned later and destroyed everything of value in his aircraft.

Unable to get back to his squadron, Strong slept in a slit trench, from which he first removed a dead German. "There were anipers everywhere," he said, "and we were bombed and strafed."

His squadron had been installed in Normandy only 24 hours when the enemy began to shell their airfield with long-range guns. The weather was also bad, so the squadron <sup>had to leave</sup> ~~went back to England~~, but Strong remained, in charge of half a dozen pilots and all the ground crew. His party organised dispersal areas, dug in the sleeping and office tents, and dug slit trenches around the strip. They also visited the front line, where they saw Tiger tanks which had been knocked out by rocket Typhoons. Mistaking the ~~dark blue~~ dust-covered blue for field grey, the

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"We took them completely by surprise, he added, "and when I flew past the leading tank the German commander was still standing in his turret, with his head sticking out."

The tanks answered the attack with intense light and medium ack-ack but, due to the poor light and the surprise of the attack, no Typhoon was lost. The squadron claimed six tanks destroyed.

Two days later, when the Germans counter-attacked against the Americans at Mortain, the Typhoons had their greatest day.

"All available Typhoons were called into the air," Strong said. "What followed must have been the strangest fight ever seen. It was like air-to-air fighting rather than air-to-ground. Usually, when we attack ground forces, we have a definite bomb line, and attack anything beyond it, but nothing within it --- or else a specified target. This day it was an 'open slather'. American tanks were milling around, with German tanks well inside our bomb line. We had to fly down on the ground to identify before attacking. ~~We would fire at anything which did not have the big white star.~~

"The sky above the battle was seething with Typhoons. It was impossible to keep the squadron together, and after a while we gave it up, and operated in pairs. Thunderbolts above were dropping bombs alongside us as we went in, and Me.s were streaking out of the clouds, trying to 'jump' us. Everyone was shooting at everything. We stayed over the battle area until we had used all our rockets, then streaked back, loaded up and returned. The battle went on from mid-morning till late afternoon. It was a complete shambles --- but we won."

Strong's squadron did about 60 sorties that day. The ground crews worked magnificently, he said. "They are very keen when they know we are handing it out. What they can't stick is having nothing to do. They don't mind any amount of work."

THE squadron claimed 16 tanks that day.

Strong has flown <sup>nearly 100</sup> ~~80 or 90~~ operational hours in 70 sorties.

Twenty of these were on bomb-carrying Typhoons, 50 on the rocket firing type. When he joined the squadron they Typhoons were operating mainly on long-range fighter sweeps deep into enemy territory. They also carried out several attacks on flying bomb sites.

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Miscellaneous

Spare

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B.A.A.F. Release No. 757

August 25, 1944

ROCKET TYPHOON PILOT'S EXPERIENCES ----

"THEY'RE HEROES TO THE ARMY"

Shot down in enemy territory and rescued by comrades, sniped at while he slept in a slit trench from which he had removed a dead German, strafed and bombed by enemy aircraft, shelled by long-range guns --- these are flashes from the experiences of an Australian rocket Typhoon tank-buster pilot, Flight Lieutenant P.H. Strong, of 182 Sqn. 420465 182 Sqn. Lieutenant P.H. Strong, of 182 Sqn. Sydney.

By their devastating attacks against enemy tanks, and daring low-flying onslaughts on strong points resisting the Allied advance, ~~the~~ Typhoon pilots have become heroes to the soldiers in France.

"The army is rocket Typhoon mad," Strong says. "They call us up on anything --- tanks, dug in or hidden in the woods, six-barrel ("Manning Minnie") rocket mortars, anti-aircraft gun concentrations, enemy-occupied village strong points. We have often to go in close to their lines, ~~and they shoot red smoke over the target to guide us.~~ We come back from the target at ground level over their heads --- and get a terrific reception. On days off they come ~~to~~ to the landing ground to see us.

"It makes us feel that we are really doing something," he said.

"Like a point-blank broadside from a 6-inch cruiser" is how Strong describes the fire power of rocket Typhoons. They carry eight rockets --- and each is equal to a 6-inch shell in explosive power. Two will blow a tank to pieces.

Strong was shot down on D-Day plus 1. Two direct hits by a 40 m.m. Bofors ack-ack battery damaged the engine and fuselage of his aircraft, and the wings were badly holed, but the ~~the~~ Typhoon still flew. Strong knocked out one tank in his first attack. Apart from abnormal instruments readings, his aircraft still seemed all right, so he went in to attack again.

"I was in <sup>a</sup> the dive ~~at about 1000 feet~~ when the engine packed up completely," he said. "I yanked hard away and headed for the beaches, and glided for ~~five to eight~~ <sup>Several</sup> miles, and, having jettisoned the hood, crash-landed in a field.

I was lucky --- I picked about the only field not mined."

Smothered in dirt and dust, but unharmed, <sup>Strong</sup> he ran towards the Allied lines, but was stopped by barbed wire fences with big notices bearing the words "Meinen". He turned back, trying to find a way out, when commandoes came out in a jeep to get him. He went back with them to their advance post, but returned later and destroyed everything of value in his aircraft.

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The M/L. arrived in Gosport and from there Strong got a lift back to Burn. He arrived at 6.30 and at 7.30 took off on the last sortie of the day as leader of one flight. The attack which was against heavy long range railways *quid* at Torigny was successful.

On D-Day plus 5, the squadron moved over to operate from the Normandy landing strips by day returning to Burn at night. Two or three days after they started flying from the strips Strong's aircraft was as he puts it "hacked about again" attacking petrol dumps at very low altitude. Several aircraft were hit by flak and were forced to land on the strips unable to make the return trip to England. The pilots spent the night at Bayeux in the Leon D'Or Hotel but got little rest as the town was bombed. The following day they contacted an R.A.F. Group Captain who rang through and had an Anson with Spitfire escort sent over to pick them up. They landed at Thorney Island.

About D-Day plus 12 the squadron moved over to a Normandy base. They had been installed twenty four hours when the enemy started shelling their airfield with long range guns. One airman was killed and several wounded and many aircraft were damaged. The weather was bad limiting operations and as it was considered useless to risk more losses the squadron was ordered back to England. All serviceable aircraft took off to fly back and Strong was left in charge of about half a dozen pilots and all the ground crew.

"I was considered very experienced in French adventures by then" he said. Strong's party set to work on their airfield and dug themselves in. They organised the dispersal areas and dug in the sleeping tents and office tents and dug all trenches around the strip. By way of entertainment they made a visit to the front line where they had been told there were several tiger tanks which had been knocked out by rocket typhoons. "They were about two or three hundred yards ahead of our forward troops - Canadians on this sector," he said. "Our Army Liaison Officer took about a dozen of us up. The Hun sent a patrol of about forty men down the road, but the Canadians opened up on them". The Canadians he was told later very nearly opened up on the R.A.F. party mistaking the dust covered blue for field grey. Strong said the airmen were oblivious to all this

interest and it was'nt till he climbed on top of a tiger and found himself looking down on the strongly held enemy airfield of Caen Carpiquet that he realised how close they were. "We retired hastily" he said. The Army he said were extremely happy and cheerful about everything and very friendly indeed to the airmen.

The party returned to England by Dakota. The squadron completely re-equipped and came back to France a week later. They have been based there ever since between Bayeux and Caen, <sup>living</sup> / Under canvas flying from a strip. On July 17 Strong was posted to take a fighter leader course, but was recalled to France after a few days to take over a flight.

The first great Typhoon success against enemy ground forces in which he was involved took place about two days before the Mortain battle. The Typhoons were on a late aimed reconnaissance in the last light. They came upon a collection of thirty to forty German tanks and to quote Strong "plastered hell out of them". "We took them completely by surprise" he said. So much so that when I flew past the leading tank the Jerry Commander was still standing in his turret with his head sticking out." The tanks answered the attack with intense light and medium ack ack but owing partly to the poor light as well as the surprise of the attack no Typhoons was lost. The squadron claimed six but the BBC reported that night that 20 out of 40 were put out of action.

Two days later when the Germans counter-attacked against the Americans at Mortain the Typhoons had their greatest day. "All available Typhoons were called into the air" Strong said. "What followed must have been the strangest fight ever seen. It was like air to air fighting instead of air to ground. Usually when we go in to attack ground forces we have a definite bomb line. We attack anything beyond it and nothing within it, or else we have a specified target. But this day it was open slather. American tanks were milling around with German tanks well inside our own bomb line. We had to fly right down on the ground to identify before attacking. Then we'd just bang at anything that had'nt got the big white star.

"The sky over the battle was seething with Typhoons. It was impossible to keep the squadron together, after a while we gave it up and operated in pairs. All the time Thunderbolts above were dropping bombs along side us as we went in, and Mes. were streaking out of the clouds trying to jump us.



"It was a gala day. Everyone was shooting at everything. We stayed over the battle area till we had used all our rockets then streaked back loaded up and returned. The battle went on from around mid morning till late afternoon. It was a complete shambles but somehow we won. By dinner time it was all over and they had all pulled out."

Strong's squadron did about sixty sorties that day. He praises the splendid work of the ground crews. "They worked magnificently" he said. "They are very keen when they know we are handing it out good and solid. What they can't stick is having nothing to do. They don't mind any amount of work; the squadron claimed sixteen tanks that day."

Since then the Typhoons have attacked tanks hidden in woods, in front of Canadian lines, six barrel rocket mortars ("moaning minnies"); strong points, gun positions, anti-aircraft gun concentrations, dug in tanks, mortar positions, and enemy occupied village strong points. "The army is rocket Typhoon mad" Strong said. "They call us up on anything and everything and some signals have only repeat only rocket Typhoons in them. We often to go right in close to their lines and they shoot red smoke over the target area to guide us, we come back from the target right down on the deck over their heads and get a terrific reception. If we go down to the lines and tell them we are R/P pilots they are tickled pink. On days off they come up to the drone to see us. It is grand, it makes us feel we are really doing something. The weapon seems to demoralize the enemy and have just the reverse effect on our own troops."

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The M/L. arrived in Gosport and from there Strong got a lift back to Hurn. He arrived at 6.30 and at 7.30 took off on the last sortie of the day as leader of one flight. The attack which was against heavy long range railway *guns* at Torigny was successful.

On D-Day plus 5, the squadron moved over to operate from the Normandy landing strips by day returning to Hurn at night. Two or three days after they started flying from the strips Strong's aircraft was as he puts it "hacked about again" attacking petrol dumps at very low altitude. Several aircraft were hit by flak and were forced to land on the strips unable to make the return trip to England. The pilots spent the night at Bayeux in the Leon Dör Hotel but got little rest as the town was bombed. The following day they contacted an R.A.F. Group Captain who rang through and had an Anson with Spitfire escort sent over to pick them up. They landed at Thorney Island.

About D-Day plus 12 the squadron moved over to a Normandy base. They had been installed twenty four hours when the enemy started shelling their airfield with long range guns. One airman was killed and several wounded and many aircraft were damaged. The weather was bad limiting operations and as it was considered useless to risk more losses the squadron was ordered back to England. All serviceable aircraft took off to fly back and Strong was left in charge of about half a dozen pilots and all the ground crew.

"I was considered very experienced in French adventures by then" he said. Strong's party set to work on their airfield and dug themselves in. They organised the dispersal areas and dug in the sleeping tents and office tents and dug slit trenches around the strip. By way of entertainment they made a visit to the front line where they had been told there were several tiger tanks which had been knocked out by rocket Typhoons. "They were about two or three hundred yards ahead of our forward troops - Canadians on this sector," he said. "Our Army Liaison Officer took about a dozen of us up. The Hun sent a patrol of about forty men down the road, but the Canadians opened up on them". The Canadians he was told later very nearly opened up on the R.A.F. party mistaking the dust covered blue for field grey. Strong said the airmen were oblivious to all this

interest and it wasn't till he climbed on top of a tiger and found himself looking down on the strongly held enemy airfield of Caen Carpiquet that he realised how close they were. "We retired hastily" he said. The Army he said were extremely happy and cheerful about everything and very friendly indeed to the airmen.

The party returned to England by Dakota. The squadron completely re-equipped and came back to France a week later. They have been based there ever since between Bayeux and Caen, / <sup>living</sup> Under canvas flying from a strip. On July 17 Strong was posted to take a fighter leader course, but was recalled to France after a few days to take over a flight.

The first great Typhoon success against enemy ground forces in which he was involved took place about two days before the Mortain battle. The Typhoons were on a late armed reconnaissance in the last light. They came upon a collection of thirty to forty German tanks and to quote Strong "plastered hell out of them". "We took them completely by surprise" he said. So much so that when I flew past the leading tank the Jerry Commander was still standing in his turret with his head sticking out." The tanks answered the attack with intense light and medium ack ack but owing partly to the poor light as well as the surprise of the attack no Typhoons was lost, the squadron claimed six but the BBC reported that night that 20 out of 40 were put out of action.

Two days later when the Germans counter-attacked against the Americans at Mortain the Typhoons had their greatest day. "All available Typhoons were called into the air" Strong said. "What followed must have been the strangest fight ever seen. It was like air to air fighting instead of air to ground. Usually when we go in to attack ground forces we have a definite bomb line. We attack anything beyond it and nothing within it, or else we have a specified target. But this day it was open slather. American tanks were milling around with German tanks well inside our own bomb line. We had to fly right down on the ground to identify before attacking. Then we'd just bang at anything that had'nt got the big white star.

|| The sky over the battle was seething with Typhoons. It was impossible to keep the squadron together, after a while we gave it up and operated in pairs. All the time Thunderbolts above were dropping bombs along side us as we went in, and Mes. were streaking out of the clouds trying to jump us.

"It was a gala day. Everyone was shooting at everything. We stayed over the battle area till we had used all our rockets then streaked back loaded up and returned. The battle went on from around mid morning till late afternoon. It was a complete shambles but somehow we won. By dinner time it was all over and they had all pulled out."

Strong's squadron did about sixty sorties that day. He praises the splendid work of the ground crews. "They worked magnificently" he said. "They are very keen when they know we are handing it out good and solid. What they can't stick is having nothing to do. They don't mind any amount of work," the squadron claimed sixteen tanks that day.

Since then the Typhoons have attacked tanks hidden in woods, in front of Canadian lines, six barrel rocket mortars ("moaning minnies"), strong points, gun positions, anti-aircraft gun concentrations, dug in tanks, mortar positions, and enemy occupied village strong points. "The army is rocket Typhoon mad" Strong said. "They call us up on anything and everything and some signals have 'only repeat only rocket Typhoons in them.' We/often to go right in close to their lines and they shoot red smoke over the target area to guide us, We come back from the target right down on the deck over their heads and get a terrific reception. If we go down to the lines and tell them we are R/P pilots they are tickled pink. On days off they come up to the drome to see us. It is grand, it makes us feel we are really doing something. The weapon seems to demoralize the enemy and have just the reverse effect on our own troops."