

# Royal Air Force Germany

SUSTAINING THE NATO SHIELD—Part 2\*

By HUMPHREY WYNN

**L**AARBRUCH airfield is a post-war one, cut out of a forest near the Dutch border and constructed by German labour in a year and a week. Three squadrons are based there—No. 5 (Meteor NF.11s), No. 16 (Canberra B(I).8s) and No. 31 (Canberras PR.7s)—and thus its operational equipment conforms to the three-type pattern of the Rhine area "clutch" airfields, i.e., all-weather fighter, light bomber and medium-range P.R. squadrons. Also based at Laarbruch is the R.A.F. Germany modification unit. As with the units at Gutersloh, there is divided operational control, Sector Operations Centre controlling the fighters and Tactical Operations Centre the bombers. There is also a division of control between R.A.F. Germany and 2nd A.T.A.F. as part of NATO. The airfield, that is the runway, dispersals and perimeter track, is a NATO base; domestic accommodation belongs to the R.A.F. As the station commander picturesquely put it: "The A.O.C. Germany gives directives for training; but as soon as the hooter goes he has no power and we come under NATO." He added that Laarbruch originally held a reconnaissance wing, with four squadrons; but under the policy of "not having all one's eggs in the same basket," squadrons of different types are maintained at each of the four clutch airfields. These have been constructed to a NATO pattern so that they can be used by all the Allied air forces. Standardization is maintained as far as possible, for example in fuel, AVTAG being in almost universal use at military airfields throughout Germany. In addition to the squadrons at Laarbruch there is an Army unit, No. 12 Air Formation Signals Regiment, which is responsible (like the G.P.O. in the United Kingdom) for landline communications; and a mobile field photographic section which works with No. 31 Sqn. in processing reconnaissance photographs. There are approximately 1,700 personnel at Laarbruch and plentiful recreational facilities are provided (as at other R.A.F. stations in Germany), including 17 football pitches and heated swimming pools, while there is a school for 440 children staffed by English teachers.

Air traffic control at Laarbruch presents some fairly complex problems, both from the pilots' and controllers' points of view.

*Air Marshal Sir Humphrey Edwardes Jones, Commander-in-Chief of the 2nd Allied Tactical Air Force and of R.A.F. Germany*



I.L.S. is being installed and so are crash-barriers similar to those in use at Gutersloh, thus increasing safety factors at the airfield; but geographically it is situated in a very busy airspace which demands the utmost vigilance from all concerned. There are the Dusseldorf and Hamburg airways and Dutch control centre in the vicinity, and squadron maps are marked with a complex of blue, orange, yellow and red patterns, indicating control zones, let-downs, low-flying and danger areas.

The perimeter track around the airfield is about ten miles long, so in an emergency all crews would live at their dispersals (a procedure which is practised during exercises). The operational rôles of the squadrons are clearly defined, though in No. 16's case variety is the keynote. Now equipped with the versatile Canberra B(I).8, the unit has had a mixed career since it was first formed from No. 5 Sqn. in 1915 for Army co-operation duties. It started the Second World War with Tiger Moths and ended it with Spitfires; it got its standard in 1956 and was disbanded in 1957, then re-formed on March 1 last year. Its functions now include high-level bombing, shallow bombing, toss-bombing using the LABS manoeuvre and air-to-ground gunnery: thus the term "jack of all trades" is correctly applied to No. 16 Squadron's aircraft and crews, who are capable of performing these varied duties by day and by night. Approximately one-third of the unit's monthly flying total is made up of night hours; and at the time of our visit to the squadron it was reported that all the crews

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*A Canberra B(I).8 of No. 88 Squadron, one of the light bomber units in 2nd A.T.A.F. and based at Wildenrath, flying over a German town in a setting reminiscent of Second World War operations*

"Flight" photograph

