

Primary Evidence Research

Research Activity: Students will conduct extensive research in order to complete the biography of a pilot killed during an air operation in 1943

KEY KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS



What key knowledge and skills will student acquire as a result of this activity?

- **Learn** how to complete primary and secondary research for a military biography.
- **Compare** sources to confirm available evidence.
- **Interpret** different types of evidence as part of their historical research.
- **Establish** research questions as part their inquiry

CONCEPT FOR HISTORICAL THINKING



Primary Evidence

History is the interpretation of events, based on inferences made from primary sources. Exploring evidence requires the researcher to develop guiding questions about sources.

BACKGROUND

The Second World War air campaign was essential to winning the war. Control of the skies provided support to the army and navy, while also disrupting Germany's ability to supply armaments and materiel to their land, sea and air forces. The goal of this activity is to explore Bomber Command through the life of a Bomber Command crewmember.

Flying Officer Ralph Perry Davies was a graduate of the British Commonwealth Air Training Program, which trained pilots and air crews in Canada. He flew air operations over parts of Europe, and was shot down over the Netherlands on June 12, 1943. Flying Officer Ralph Perry Davies' service personnel file can be accessed from the Second World War section of the Lest We Forget Project at Library and Archives Canada at: www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/second-world-war/second-world-war-dead-1939-1947/Pages/item.aspx?IdNumber=8465&. This primary documentation can be explored and interpreted to start your research. Working with Davies' service personnel file and other sources of information, a more substantial biographical sketch can be created. For the purposes of this exercise, the biography has been started, but is incomplete.

The following link to a list of military abbreviations will help with terminology during the completion of Flying Officer Ralph Perry Davies' biography. www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/Pages/military-abbreviations.aspx

Use the links within each section to help build and complete the biography.



PO. Ralph P. Davies, son of Mr. and Mrs. J. P. Davies, of South Edmonton, who is missing after air operations overseas, according to word received by his wife, the former Daisy Keen, 11427 73 st. PO. Davies enlisted in Edmonton in August, 1941, and went overseas the following year. He received his wings at No. 7 Service Flying Training School, Macleod. He won top honors for his class at the elementary flying training school in Edmonton.

Edmonton Journal clipping courtesy of Operation Picture Me

The following biography is incomplete. Your job as a historian is to gather additional information and complete the work that has been started. You will use both primary and secondary sources.

**Flying Officer
Ralph Perry Davies
Royal Canadian Air Force 429 Squadron**

In the early hours of June 12, 1943, 51 Handley Page Halifax aircraft from 408, 419, and 427 Squadrons were joined by 63 Vickers Wellingtons from 426, 428, 429, 431, and 432 Squadrons, in an attack on Düsseldorf, Germany. According to the night report, the crews were over the city at an altitude of between 3,660 metres (12,000 feet) and 4,572 metres (15,000 feet), releasing 65,770 kilograms (145,000 pounds) of high explosives, and 124,747 kilograms (275,000 pounds) of incendiaries. Davies and his crew, flying Wellington bomber HE542, would be shot down on the German-Dutch border near the city of Arnhem, in the Netherlands.

Personal Information: Ralph Perry Davies was born to Gladys Watson in Kitscoty, Alberta on November 11, 1918. **(Can you find his father's name?)** Ironically, this is the official date that ended the Great War (1914-1918). He enlisted in Edmonton, Alberta on August 13, 1941, leaving his job as a clerk in Edmonton. He would marry his sweetheart Daisy Keen on March 18, 1942.

What other personal information would you add to this section?
(Please replace this question with additional information.)

Primary Evidence: (Click on the link below)
Lest We Forget Cenotaph Research Project: www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/second-world-war/second-world-war-dead-1939-1947/Pages/item.aspx?IdNumber=8465&

Military Movements: After enlisting in Edmonton, Davies also began his pilot training there. From September 1 to October 10, 1941, Davies lived in Lethbridge, Alberta, where he was enrolled in the Elementary Flying Training School, before being transferred back to Edmonton on January 3, 1942. **(For more information on the British Commonwealth Air Training Program, please explore the lesson on the BCATP in Capsule One.)** Davies would remain there until he was given leave to marry Daisy Keen, and stayed in the city until April 1942.

His service records indicate that his superiors evaluated him as having above average ability, and that he was eager to be trained but had lower than average airmanship. **(What additional information can you add to this section? Can you establish what is meant by "average"? Please replace this question with additional information).** Davies sailed to Europe from Halifax, Nova Scotia, on November 5, 1942.

(A Google map has been created [Going to War lesson] to help piece together the military movements of Flying Officer Davies. See what you can discover.)

Google Map:
https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1R5su6zjDd6xp93H9kk49bR_Mr_k&ll=50.81555219475288%2C-114.31224833124998&z=7

British Commonwealth Air Training Program (List of BCATP schools): www.bombercrew.com/BCATP.htm

Medical Records: During his time in the Air Force, was Davies ever sick? Was he ever admitted to hospital, or was he in good health?

When Ralph Davies enlisted, he was 171 cm (5 feet 7-1/2 inches) tall, and weighed 65 kilograms (144 pounds). He had hazel eyes, light brown hair, and a fair complexion. In November 1941, he was admitted to No. 4 Stationary Hospital in Edmonton for two days, for a condition identified as lymphangitis (a swelling of lymphatic vessels) in his left hand and arm.

What other information can you add to this section? Use Davies' service personnel file (above) for additional information. (Please replace this question with additional information).



Photograph courtesy of Imperial War Museum: ©IWM (C 3574A)

THE FINAL SORTIE (MISSION)

On the evening of June 11-12, 1943 the city of Düsseldorf was the target of a sortie that included Davies' crew. The goal was to hit the area identified in this photograph, taken by a bomber crew to document the damage. Destruction of the centre of the city — known as the Pempelfort district — was extensive. In total, more than half a square kilometre (130 acres) of the city centre was destroyed in what would be the most damaging raid of the war for the city of Düsseldorf. The railyard (top centre left) was heavily damaged.

(You are the historian. Use the resources listed to develop the history around Flying Officer Davies' last day. Make sure to cite the sources you use.)

ONLINE SOURCES

Primary Sources

Service personnel file of Ralph Perry Davies: Library and Archives Canada:

www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/second-world-war/second-world-war-dead-1939-1947/Pages/item.aspx?IdNumber=8465&

The bombing raid on Düsseldorf: Night Raid Reports

Lancaster Bombers: lancasterbombers.com/lancaster_bombers_143.htm

Photographic Reconnaissance of Air Operation:

www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205023166

Secondary Sources and Related Links

Veterans Affairs Canada — Canadian Virtual Memorial:

www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/memorials/canadian-virtual-war-memorial/detail/2648368?Ralph%20Perry%20Davies

No. 6 Bomber Group:

www.6bombergroup.ca/June43/june11-1243.html

Air Crew Remembered:

aircrewremembered.com/rcafnotes-surnames-d-e.html

Royal Canadian Air Force 429 Squadron:

www.429sqn.ca/

Veterans Affairs Canada — Bomber Command:

www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/history/second-world-war/canadians-bomber-command/backgrounder

For context and a specific account of the night of the June 11-12, 1943 mission: Historical Section of the R.C.A.F., *The R.C.A.F. Overseas, Volume 1: The First Four Years*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1944: www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/dhh-dhp/his/docs/RCAF_Overseas_vol1_e.pdf (pp. 247-249)

THE FINAL SORTIE (MISSION) (SUB-SECTION): THE CREW

Who flew with Flying Officer Ralph Perry Davies? What was each responsible for doing during the mission? Can you discover where each crew member trained in Canada, under the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan?

You can search for information about each of the crew members using the following links:

www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/memorials/canadian-virtual-war-memorial

www.429sqn.ca/ops0643.html

The crew flying with Flying Officer Ralph Perry Davies included:

- Flying Officer Ralph Perry Davies
- Flight Sergeant Rudolph Zeidel
- Flight Sergeant Navigator Duncan Eric Campbell
- Flight Sergeant Rear Gunner Albert James MacLachlan
- Warrant Officer Class II Air Gunner Louis-Phillippe Roma Taillefer

The files can be ordered from Library and Archives by accessing the Library and Archives Canada link at: www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/second-world-war/second-world-war-dead-1939-1947/Pages/files-second-war-dead.aspx#e

THE FINAL SORTIE (MISSION) (SUB-SECTION) WELLINGTON AIRCRAFT**What aircraft was he in when he was shot down?**

Royal Canadian Air Force 429 Squadron:

www.429sqn.ca/acwellp01.htm

Bomber Command Museum:

www.bombercommandmuseum.ca/wellington.html

Wikipedia — Vickers Wellington

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vickers_Wellington

Where did 429 Squadron train in England?

Bomber Command Museum:

www.bombercommandmuseum.ca/6group_airfields/airfield_eastmoor.pdf

6 (RCAF) Group Bomber Command:

<https://www.friends-amis.org/index.php/en/document-repository/english/research-papers/14-6-rcaf-bomber-group-command/file>

What was a “typical” sortie (mission)?

Bomber Command Museum:

www.bombercommandmuseum.ca/lanraid.html

LEST WE FORGET

Flying Officer Ralph Perry Davies of 429 Squadron is buried in Wisch (Varsseveld) General Cemetery in the Netherlands. The cemetery is located south of the town of Varsseveld. The Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Campaign medal were sent to his wife Daisy Davies. She also received the Memorial Cross.

What happened to Daisy Davies? The Service Personnel File for Flying Officer Ralph Perry Davies contains correspondence between Daisy and various government agencies. **What do these letters reveal about Daisy's life after her husband's death?**

Veterans Affairs Canada:

www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/memorials/canadian-virtual-war-memorial

RCAF 429 Squadron:

www.429sqn.ca/ops0643.html

Additional Activities

The Milton F. Gregg Centre for the Study of War and Society at the University of New Brunswick has several additional lesson plans available on the Second World War and the Canadian Experience website, exploring various issues related to the First and Second World Wars. These lesson plans can be accessed at:

The Milton F. Gregg Centre for the Study of War and Society:

www.warandthecanadianexperience.com/education-portal.html

If you would like to research a second combatant, the Service Personal File of Flying Officer Phillip Gustave Freberg is available at: collectionscanada.ca/obj/001056/f2/f/sww-27545-freberg-philip_gustave_r-j6659.pdf. The story of his life has yet to be told—apply the skills you have learned to complete his biography.

Story Map of Flying Officer Ralph Perry Davies

The incomplete biography of Flying Officer Ralph Perry Davies is also mapped out using the ArcGIS software StoryMap. A basic map has been created to help guide students.

<https://www.arcgis.com/apps/MapJournal/index.html?appid=6c8a3b23e3e1431f8f903c8070c14a74>

A second example is provided with the permission of the students and teacher James Rowinski from Fredericton, New Brunswick.

<https://www.arcgis.com/apps/MapJournal/index.html?appid=108bd58f82a34b33b9287417d6b595df>

Additional Source

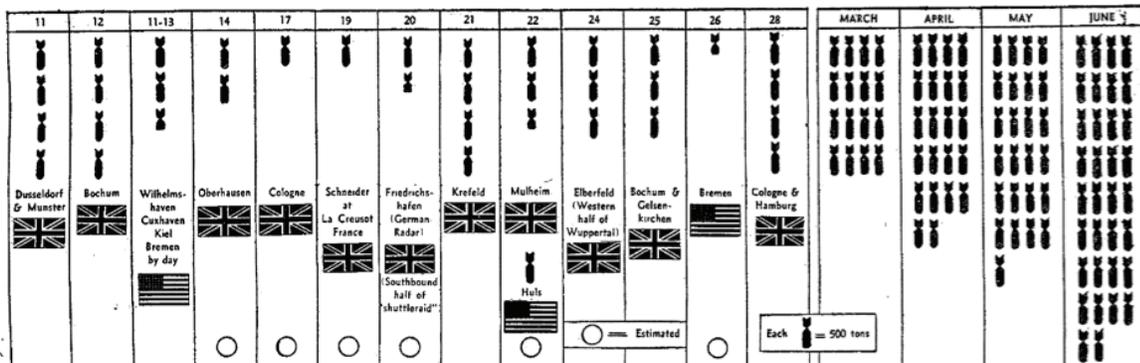
Newspapers: The newspaper clipping below provides context related to Bomber Command in 1943. This clipping and other newspaper stories can be accessed at the Canadian War Museum website at: www.warmuseum.ca/cwm/exhibitions/newspapers/operations/bomber_e.shtml



CANADA AVIATION
AND SPACE MUSEUM
MUSÉE DE L'AVIATION
ET DE L'ESPACE
DU CANADA

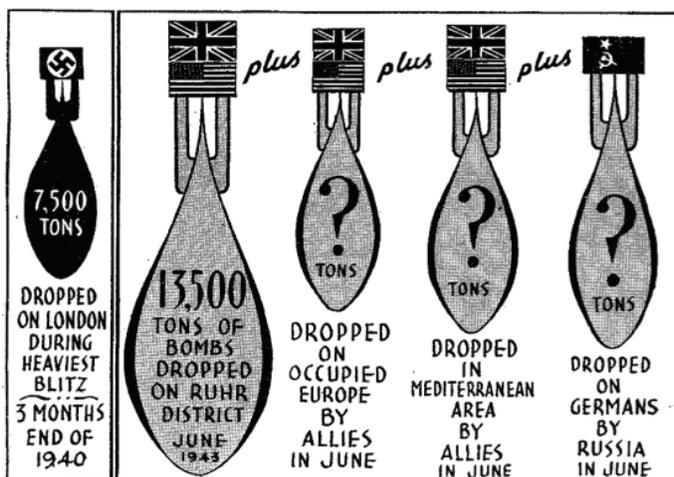
Day by Day June Bombing of Nazi Cities

Total Is Rising



Nazi Best

June Bombing of Ruhr Alone Doubles Nazi Highest



13,500 TONS of bombs dropped on the Ruhr area in June alone is almost double the 7,500 in the heaviest Nazi blitz covering three last months of 1940. The Ruhr area is only one item of the total Allied bombings of Occupied Europe, Germany and the Mediterranean region during June.

IN FIRST SIX MONTHS OF 1943

BOMBS ON BRITAIN

BOMBS ON GERMANY



THIRTY-FIVE to one is the ratio of bomb tonnage dropped by R.A.F. on Germany to that dropped by the Nazis on Britain in the first six months of this year.

19,000 AXIS PLANES BAG OF BRITISH, U.S. FORCES

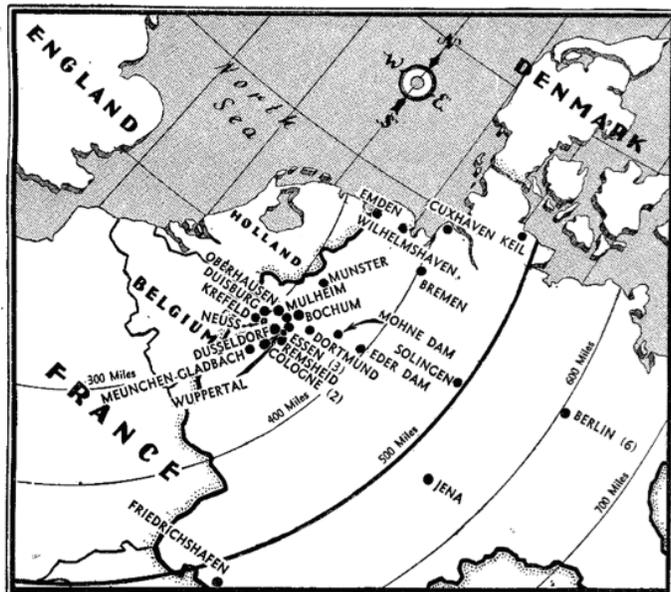
Thousands More Downed By Russians—Allied Loss Over 9,900

SCORE BY ZONES

London, July 3—(CP) — British and U.S. air forces and Allied anti-aircraft units destroyed a known total of 18,031 German, Italian and Japanese airplanes from the start of the war to the end of June. Thousands more Axis planes were destroyed by the Russians, an additional 885 by the Royal Navy, and others by U.S. navy guns and planes in the first month of the Pacific war which were not included in the total and by the French air force before the collapse of France. Accurate records of these tolls are not available. Known British and U.S. losses are 9,906 planes, but this total does not include U.S. losses in the Pacific and in Burma.

The losses by zones:

Over Great Britain			
Year	Axis	R.A.F.	
1939	23	0	
1940	3,038	847	
1941	631	40	
1942	296	10	
1943	213	3	
Total	4,201	900	
Over Europe			
Year	Axis	R.A.F.	
1939	40	32	
1940	1,016	759	
1941	839	1,517	
1942	555	1,976	
1943	323	1,452	
Total	2,814	5,736	
U.S.A.A.F. in European Theatre			
Year	Axis	U.S.A.A.F.	
1942	182	33	
1943	990	260	
Total	1,172	293	
Middle East (including Malta)			
Year	Axis	Allies	
1940	347	76	
1941	1,112	635	
1942	1,764	1,163	
1943	257	103	
Total	3,500	1,977	
Tunisia			
Year	Axis	Allies	
1942	290	124	
1943	1,941	671	
Total	2,231	795	
Far East, India and Burma			
Year	Axis	R.A.F.	
1942	2,863	69	
1943	1,179	60	
Total	4,042	149	
Scandinavia			
Year	Axis	R.A.F.	
1940	66	55	



"A FORTIFIED ZONE of enormous extent protects the Reich against all attacks," said Herman Goering in September, 1938. It has not prevented the R.A.F. from reducing the Ruhr to a gutted shambles. This map depicts the German cities and dams heavily bombed in May and June of this year. Cologne got it twice, Essen three times and Berlin six.

Courtesy of CWM:

"Day by Day June Bombing of Nazi Cities"

Toronto Daily Star, July 3, 1943