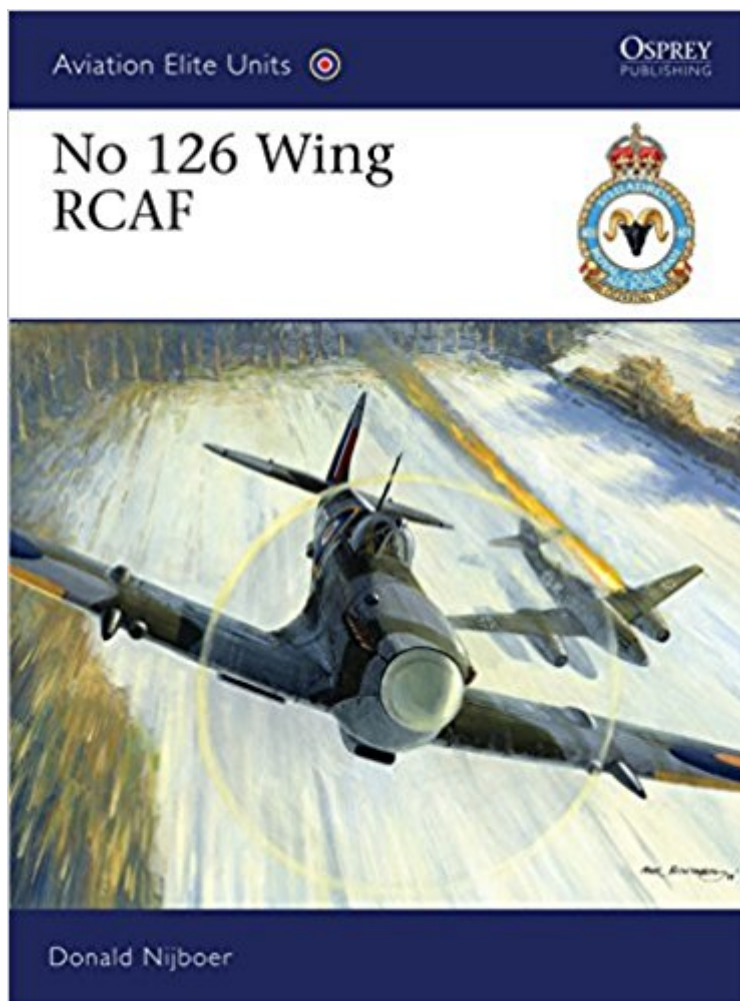


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No 126 Wing RCAF (Aviation Elite Units)



Synopsis

The success of No 126 Wing began before the D-Day landings, but its phenomenal performance after the Normandy invasion has no simple explanation. True, it profited from being in all the right places at all the right moments during the war - D-Day and the breakout, Falaise Gap, Operation Market Garden, the winter offensive in the Ardennes, and crossing the Rhine into Germany. But other wings with 2nd TAF participated in the same operations, without achieving nearly the same success as No 126. As a self-contained unit, the five squadrons of Spitfires of No 126 Wing were self-sufficient in everything they did. When the order came to move - men, fuel, ammunition and everything vital for its operation picked up and drove to the next farmer's field or suitable meadow. Often traveling in the dark on bombed out roads, these ground units did an amazing job of not only finding their new bases of operation, but preparing the field for the fighters ready for the next day's flights. Every landing strip was temporary and just miles from the frontline. Home was a tent, a slit trench a place of safety. Dysentery was a common companion, making some pilots too weak to fly. Often they were shelled by German artillery and mortars, and many times they found themselves behind enemy lines. This is a truly unique look at one of the most effective air force units ever devised. Before D-Day 1944, a mobile fighter wing had never been tried before, but after the Normandy landings the ground forces could not move without their valuable support. This book examines the wing's operations chapter by chapter as defined by the major ground operations. It also highlights the effectiveness of the Spitfire in the fighter-bomber role, as well as in its more familiar air-superiority mission - the Spitfire clearly dominated the skies over the advancing armies and proved itself once again to be the most effective fighter of World War 2. But as successful as the wing was, it was only as strong as the young men who gave so much of their physical strength, intelligence and courage to make it happen. Squadron biographies, therefore, are also included, as well as biographies of the top aces and a close examination of the day-to-day operations of a mobile fighter wing.

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Customer Reviews

Donald Nijboer is a freelance writer who lives in Toronto, Canada. He teaches courses in radio broadcasting at Humber College of Technology and Advanced Learning. His four books, *Cockpit: An Illustrated History of World War II Aircraft Interiors*, *Gunner: An Illustrated History of World War II Aircraft Turrets and Gun Positions*, *Cockpits of the Cold War* and *Graphic War - The Secret Aviation Drawings and Illustrations of World War Two* have been published by the Boston Mills Press. He has also written articles for *Flight Journal*, *Aviation History* and *Aeroplane Monthly*. The author lives in Toronto, Ontario.

Created on July 1943, initially as the No. 126 Airfield HQ and shortly before the D-Day landings, from May 1944 until deactivation on April 1946, as No. 126 Wing RCAF. was one of the most distinguished units in 2nd TAF during WW2, enjoying great success in all the campaigns after Normandy, namely the battle for the Falaise Pocket, Operation Market-Garden, The Bulge - Bodenplatte - the crossing of the Rhine into Germany and with the Occupation Forces. Made up of five RCAF fighter squadrons, nos. 401 "Ram", 402 "Winnipeg Bear", 411 "Grizzly Bear", 412 "Falcon" and 442, curiously enough, No. 126 Wing have had no badge officially assigned to it, the same happening to the latter squadron. A translation of the latin mottos in the Squadron's badges (pg. 76 color plates) could have been helpful. Besides being a very comprehensive and interesting reading, there are additional bonuses in the form of small entries about Exercise Spartan. ALG-Advanced Landing Grounds, German flak defenses and the Spitfire XIV performance numbers, making this book a very nice addition to my bookshelf.

The RAF's 2nd Tactical Air Force was the unit designated to supply air cover and ground attack for British and Canadian units thrusting into Europe after D-Day. The most successful 2nd TAF fighter unit was No. 126 Wing RCAF. By war's end, 126 Wing had downed 330-odd e/a in air combat and destroyed over 4,400 German tanks, trucks and other MET. Donald Nijboer relates the history of

this hard-hitting unit in this 2010 Osprey release, #35 in their 'Aviation Elite Units' release. As documented in Nijboer's well-balanced, wide-ranging account, 126 Wing racked up quite a record of destruction. Yet, this record was compiled despite the fact that the Spitfires 126 Wing flew had great limitations as a fighter-bomber. The Wing's IXB fighters were deficient in range, bomb-load - usually just one 500-lb. bomb - and hard-hitting armament - 2 20mm and four .303 pop-guns. Likewise, the Spit's Merlin engine had a glass jaw and could not absorb the flak or small-arms damage that a P-47 or Typhoon could. Despite those limitations, 126 Wing pilots like Don Laubman, Dick Audet, Hugh Trainor, Rod Smith, Bob Hayward, Les Moore and Phil Charron tore into Luftwaffe units and ground targets in the months following the D-Day invasion. Since it was a mobile fighter-bomber wing, 126 Wing followed closely behind British units. Given the endless base-hoppings, Nijboer points out that the unit enjoyed the success it did, in part, because of its hardworking ground crews and also the radar controllers that directed 126 squadrons onto targets. It was a team effort. Nijboer does a fine job of relating 126 Wing's life and times, interweaving combat reports, official documents and personal reminiscences in the nicely-paced narrative. The book features over 100 b&w photographs and 10 pages of marvelous Chris Davey color profiles of the wing's IXB and XIV Spits. It's interesting to note how non-descript 126 Wing Spits were - little nose art or kill markings. Apparently the unit ran through Spits so quickly, there wasn't much time for fancy paintwork! In any case, NO. 126 WING RCAF is an excellent chronicle of this top-scoring RAF unit and an excellent addition to the Osprey Elite Units series. Recommended. ****2,200 Helpful Votes.

As a general rule I really enjoy all of Osprey's offerings. However, this one I found to be just a simple recitation of the the unit's daily reports. About half way through, I found myself hurrying to get through it so I could move on to one of Osprey's more interesting titles. Hopefully, someday soon some author will treat us to a better researched, more thorough book on this subject.

Donald Nijboer's NO 126 WING RCAF offers a fine combat history survey covering the Royal Canadian Air Force's No. 126 Wing. From the wing's exploits to its fighter status and pilots who achieved acclaim, it's an excellent, in-depth survey.

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