

COUNTER THRUST

*A Close-support Exercise in Germany:
Impressions from a Personal Visit*

"FLIGHT" PHOTOGRAPHS

THE aims of Exercise Counter Thrust were very clearly defined: first, to exercise an Army Corps in mobile operations on wide fronts, against superior enemy land and air forces; second, to practise the technique of Army/Air co-operation and, in particular, the correct use of air reconnaissance. These aims were achieved by grouping the major part of the Air Force with numerically smaller ground forces, and vice versa.

For ten days—from September 14th-23rd—the British Army of the Rhine and the 2nd Tactical Air Force operated alongside, or in opposition to, Belgian, Dutch, Norwegian, Danish and American formations. The two opposing countries were Blue-land, lying to the south and north respectively of the frontier represented by the Oldenburg-Bremen-Hamburg railway line. Redland (as might be supposed) was the aggressor and Blue-land fought stubbornly to resist violation of her highly industrialized interior.

The precise pattern of the exercise, and a detailed description of its unfolding, is not our concern: it will suffice to explain that a rapid advance-to-contact by Blue-land forces was followed by a fighting withdrawal. A defensive battle was then fought, against a "set-piece" Redland attack, and reorganization and exploitation brought the exercise to a close.

Direction was the joint responsibility of General Sir John Harding, Commander-in-Chief, B.A.O.R., and Air Vice-Marshal Sir Harry Broadhurst, who is commanding 2nd T.A.F. until the arrival of Air Marshal Sir Robert Foster in October. Redland's fighter/ground-attack force was three squadrons of R.A.F. Vampire 5s and two Meteor 4 squadrons of the Royal Netherlands Air Force at Wunstorf; three R.A.F. Vampire 5 squadrons and one squadron of Danish Meteor 4s at Celle; and two R.A.F. Vampire 5 squadrons, one of Belgian Spitfire 14s, one of Norwegian Vampire 52s, and one of U.S.A.F. F-84Es at Fassberg. For reconnaissance she had one squadron of Meteor 9s and one of Meteor 10s, operating from Buckeburg. Blue-land's fighter/ground-attack



General Eisenhower, Air Vice-Marshal Sir Harry Broadhurst and General Sir John Harding evidently found something to amuse them as well as interest them at Celle. British Vampires and Danish Meteors were operating side by side at this station.

wing of three R.A.F. Vampire 5 squadrons was stationed at Gutersloh. Both sides had extensive "fantasian" forces: Blue-land, for instance, could call on 20 squadrons of Liquidator bombers and the same number of Zlik IX fighter squadrons!

On the matter of realism, Sir Harry Broadhurst had something to say at the outset. Air superiority, he recalled, was regarded by the R.A.F. as a prerequisite for successful close-support operations; but in order that both armies should have the benefit of air assistance, it had been assumed that both had, in fact, achieved this superiority. As there was no opposition in the air, only a small part of the 2nd T.A.F. control system was functioning and, furthermore, the airfields in use were permanent ones, some of them in "enemy" territory. In fact, from the R.A.F. standpoint, Counter Thrust was solely a close-support exercise.

The C-in-C., B.A.O.R., was warm in his thanks to 2nd T.A.F., which would, he said, participate in Counter Thrust 100 per cent, until the final phase, in spite of the fact that this left very little time indeed to prepare for Cirrus. "We in the Army," he added, "are very grateful indeed to them for what they are doing in that respect. It is typical of the magnificent spirit of comradeship and co-operation between the two Services that exists here in Germany, which will certainly be a battle-winning factor if, unhappily, we are attacked." The truth of General Harding's words was to become clearly apparent to us on many occasions as the exercise developed.

Our own first-hand impressions date from September 18th, when we landed at Celle in an Anson of the ever-helpful Communications Squadron at Buckeburg. It seemed that we were immediately in luck, for among the silver R.A.F. Vampires and

green- and -grey Danish Meteors we saw *Columbine*, General Eisenhower's YC-121-A (Constellation). The General had been lunching at Fassberg and we watched him arrive in an R.A.F. Devon. He was quickly on his way round the various dispersal points, chatting in his robust, cheery manner with officers and men, eyeing work-detail boards and rockets (Smoke, No. 1, Mk 1) lying nose to tail by the Vampires. Spotting some Danish armourers busy at their bench he opened a discussion on a 20 mm cannon shell, asking its weight, and being given the information, we believe, in English. He was attended by General Harding, A.V-M. Broadhurst, A. Cdre. H. D. McGregor, A.O.C. No. 2 Group, and G/C. Roger Porteus. Beneath the wing of *Columbine* he spoke to us. "These are fine days for me," he said, "meeting old friends and visiting



A Norwegian Vampire 52 taxis out of its well-concealed dispersal bay at Fassberg for a strike against Blue-land positions. At Fassberg there were British, Norwegian, Belgian and American squadrons.