

PEOPLE AND PLANES

*Stories from the
Bomber Command Museum of Canada*



Dave Birrell

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**These
Stories from the
Bomber Command Museum of Canada
are those of a wide variety of people who all
have a direct connection to the museum.**

**Through these stories, the history presented at
our museum is told –the wartime history of
Bomber Command and the British
Commonwealth Air Training Plan, the history of
our aircraft, and the history of the
Bomber Command Museum of Canada itself.**

NANTON LANCASTER SOCIETY

PEOPLE AND PLANES





for
The Ten Thousand

PEOPLE AND PLANES

STORIES FROM THE
BOMBER COMMAND MUSEUM
OF CANADA

Dave Birrell

www.bombercommandmuseumarchives.ca

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**Published by
The Nanton Lancaster Society
Box 1051
Nanton, Alberta, Canada
T0L 1R0
www.bombercommandmuseum.ca**

**First Edition, 2006
Second Edition November, 2006
Third Edition, 2011**

Canadian Cataloguing Information

**Birrell, Dave
People and Planes -Stories from the Bomber Command Museum of Canada**

ISBN 978-0-9680440-6-3

**1. Bomber Command Museum of Canada - History - Anecdotes 2. Bombers
3. Royal Canadian Air Force - History
I. Birrell, Dave II. Title**

Front cover photo: The Warren Twins at No. 5 Elementary Flying Training School at High River, Alberta in 1941.

Back cover photo: Ex-Air Gunner Doug Penny DFM (left) with museum restoration shop volunteer Charlie Cobb and the restored Bristol mid-upper gun turret at the museum's "Salute to the Air Gunners" event in 2004. [photo: Kathy Taerum]

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The Nanton Bomber [ca. 1980]

INTRODUCTION

BOMBER NEEDS COMMUNITY SUPPORT

*by Herb Johnson
Nanton News -September 26, 1985*

Back in the days of World War II, Canadians listened faithfully each week to a CBC radio program called, "L for Lanky" that followed the adventures of a squadron of Lancaster Bombers that made regular forays deep into enemy territory.

Each week the fate of one particular Lancaster hung in the balance as it limped home across the English Channel, guided safely back to base by a crew that never gave up and supported by some unseen spirit that simply would not let that Lancaster plunge into the sea.

While the parallel may not be precise, Nanton's Lancaster Bomber now faces a similar situation. Battered by the elements and suffering the effects of vandalism, the old girl won't last too much longer without some help.

Help is on the way, but it may not be the kind of assistance local citizens are looking for. The bomber is now very rare and a lot of people would like to give her a good home . . . somewhere else.

The town office received a letter, read at Monday's council meeting, from CFB Comox which would like to buy the bomber, suggesting that if a deal could be arranged a Voodoo jet or Starfighter might be found as a replacement.

At the same council meeting, municipal administrator Lila Todd reported she'd received a phone call that same day from a gentleman in Manitoba who would like to buy the plane.

Just how the situation is handled will depend to a great extent on local involvement in finding a way to restore the bomber to flying condition and maintain it in a suitable building.

George White, who along with Howard Armstrong and the late Fred Garratt bought the plane and brought it to Nanton twenty-five years ago has been asked to see if he could form a local society that would take on the job.

Right now Mr. White is assessing the extent of local support and investigating ways of getting the funds and expertise that would be needed.

Anyone that wants to contribute time and support should get in touch with Mr. White . . .

We'd borrowed a ladder but George wasn't sure where the key to the padlock on the crew door was. He couldn't remember the last time anyone had been in the airplane. It was the spring of 1986 and members of the fledgling Nanton Lancaster Society were curious. None of us knew anything about Lancasters or Bomber Command but it was a neat looking airplane and we all wanted to see inside.



Pilot's instrument panel [Spring, 1986]

It had to be a fairly long ladder because the crew door in the rear fuselage of the airplane was fifteen feet above the fenced off rectangle of lawn below. The Lancaster had been placed on the supports that held it in a horizontal position in 1963. Other Lancasters that were placed on display had been mounted on concrete plinths. Their floors had been cut away, concrete poured into their bomb bays, and their main wing spars partially cut. George and his friends had mounted the Nanton Lancaster properly so the aircraft would not be damaged.

George found the key. As we explored the fuselage with flashlights, we found a somewhat dusty but otherwise fairly clean interior. There were no instruments or interior equipment in the Lancaster. It had all been stolen or vandalized shortly after the aircraft arrived in Nanton in the fall of 1960.

Harry Dwelle had done a great job back in 1962. He had carefully removed all the broken plexiglass and covered the turrets and canopy with perfectly shaped pieces of tin. There wasn't a sign that even a single bird had been able to manoeuvre its way through Harry's work. Harry and others had ensured the plane would be protected.

The following spring we were back inside the Lanc again, this time getting ready for "Open Bomber Days." Using tin-snips we cut some rectangular windows in Harry's cockpit canopy, filling the holes with plexiglass to let some light in. Stairs were built so that the crew door could be safely reached and a ladder placed to access the escape hatch in the bomb aimer's position in the nose of the aircraft.

"Open Bomber Days" was a huge success. Some seven hundred people of all ages stood in



Installing plexiglass for Open Bomber Days

long lines to climb up the ladder to reach the cockpit of the Lancaster and then make their way through the fuselage to the crew door and down the stairway. A few of us were stationed at various locations in the plane to chat with the visitors. What we found during this weekend was that there was a powerful connection between many of the people and the plane.

Some of the visitors were former Lancaster aircrew. One gentleman seemed familiar with some aspects of the aircraft and I asked him how he knew about it. He replied that he'd, "flown them a bit." We later found out that he had completed 54 operations over enemy territory. We were learning of the self-effacing modesty that characterizes those who survived. A former navigator told us how he manned the fuel selector levers and the flight engineer's instrument panel while the engineer assisted the pilot with the take off. He wanted us to understand the teamwork that was necessary between members of a bomber crew. Another former Lancaster crewmember demonstrated how a fellow crewman, terrified as their aircraft was going down, held onto the sides of the door and refused to jump. He stayed with the plane and was killed while his friend survived -one of many stories we heard of terror in the wartime skies. Later in the day two veterans who had been part of the same crew actually met inside the airplane, having not seen each other since World War II. One had already toured through the plane when he noticed the other's name in our guestbook. He returned saying, "There's a guy in here I've got to meet," and there was an emotional reunion inside the fuselage. We were learning of the strong bonds that had formed between members of a Bomber Command crew.



Jon Spinks assists Open Bomber Days visitors up the stepladder and into the Lancasters' bomb aimer's position [Spring, 1987]

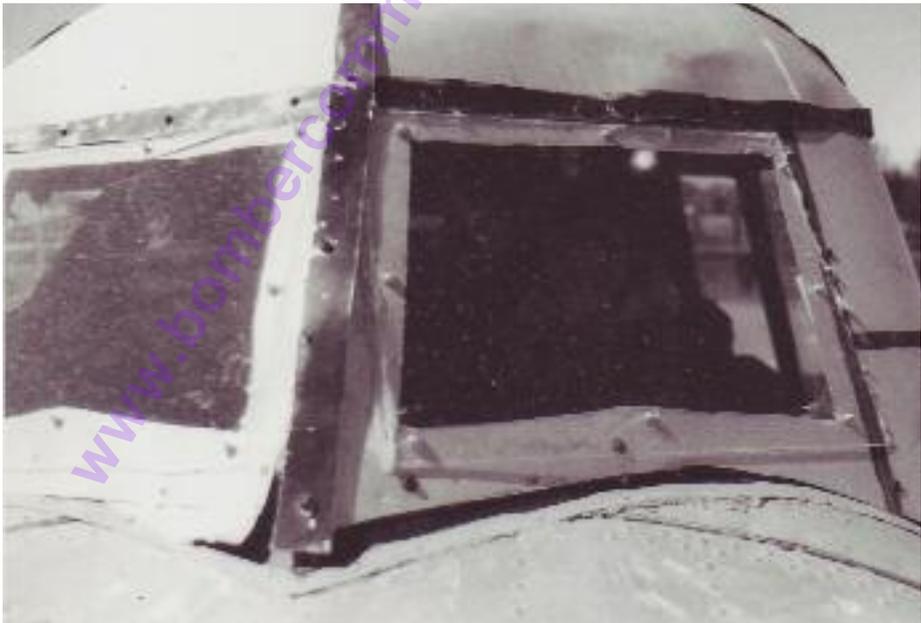
Brothers and sisters of Lancaster aircrew toured through the plane. One lady had lost her brother during the war when he was shot down and killed. He had been a navigator and his sister wanted to know all about Lancaster navigators and what they did. We told her what we knew, not much at that time, and pointed out the navigator's position in the cockpit. She turned to her friend and said sadly, "Isn't it nice to know where Henry sat." We saw a hint of the pain that still lingered from a family's wartime loss and how important the airplane could be to them.



Touring the Lancaster's cockpit during Open Bomber Days

Sons and daughters filed through the aircraft. Many said that their father had flown in Lancasters but hadn't told them anything about his role during the war or what it had been like. Some vowed to bring Dad to Nanton so that he could go through the plane with them and tell about his wartime experiences. We found that this generation was very interested in learning about what their parents had gone through.

As one pilot's son from Calgary went through the plane he asked if he could work on it, to help restore it. It was heartening to see that people from outside Nanton were willing to get their hands dirty and help out. Fred



Plexiglass windows placed into Harry Dwelle's tin cockpit canopy



Wearing World War II flight jackets, flying helmets, and parachute harnesses, Jon Spinks (left) and Milt Magee welcome visitors to Open Bomber Days

Hollowell has been travelling to Nanton on a regular basis ever since. As part of the Merlin engine restoration team, he watched with pride as the starboard-inner started and the Lancaster came to life during the summer of 2005.

A lady waiting patiently in line pointed up to an engine nacelle and said proudly, "I put those rivets in." She told us what it was like to work in the Victory Aircraft plant in Malton, Ontario with a team that reached the point of being able to roll-out a new Lancaster every day. We learned of the massive effort that went into producing Lancasters and other aircraft in Canada during the war and the pride felt by the individual workers and the country.

Jon Spinks drove up from Lethbridge to help with Open Bomber Days. A history student at the University of Lethbridge, Jon had made us aware of the dozens of Lancasters that had been sold to farmers in southern Alberta following the war. He told us about the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan stations where Avro Ansons and other training aircraft had served and then were sold to farmers as well. Jon showed us how we could collect valuable parts from wartime aircraft right in our own back yard. He thought we should collect training aircraft too and we soon began to do just that. Although barely out of his teens, Jon was a true enthusiast and had even approached the Town of Nanton, prior to the formation of the Lancaster Society, with the hope of buying the Lancaster. Through Jon we learned that

there were other people who were interested in preserving vintage aircraft and their history.

The people who attended Open Bomber Days in 1987 provided inspiration to the founding members of the Nanton Lancaster Society. We saw the need and the reason to carry on, to strive to see the Lancaster become the centrepiece of a museum that would honour, not the aircraft, but the people who contributed to Bomber Command during World War II—the people who built the aircraft, the people who kept them flying, the people who served with the BCATP to train the aircrew, and the people who flew. It was a tall order for a town with a population of fewer than 2000 people.

Although the Society's initial vision and goals have been met and exceeded, the Bomber Command Museum of Canada continues to operate on the premise that it is the people who lived the history that we present at the museum that are paramount. Today, visitors to our museum or our website soon become aware that a number of individuals are intimately connected with the aircraft, artifacts, artwork, and displays in the museum. Through a focus on these remarkable individuals, the museum honours all who served. The stories of forty-three of these people are told in this book.



Visitors descending the recently built stairway following their Open Bomber Days experience

LYLE JAMES

-Flak over the River Canard

Lyle and Gladys James visited the museum late one afternoon. As a couple of us showed them through the museum, we learned that Lyle had flown a tour of 32 operations as a Lancaster pilot with No. 101 Squadron, Royal Air Force. This was a "Special Duty" squadron and Lyle's crew included a German-speaking radio operator who transmitted false orders to enemy fighter pilots.

Later we found out that Lyle had been awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his service, the citation reading, "Throughout his operational tour Flying Officer James has displayed the utmost determination and courage which, combined with skilful airmanship and unflinching devotion to duty have set a commendable example to all. He has completed many operational sorties which have included attacks against heavily defended targets. His aircraft has been damaged on seven occasions. In spite of this, he has always remained cool and undaunted. While engaged on an attack against Bremen, although the rear turret of his aircraft was rendered unserviceable and the mid-upper turret was damaged by anti-aircraft fire, he successfully completed his mission. The following day Flying Officer James participated in a sortie against Emmerich. His aircraft was again damaged by anti-aircraft fire and two of the fuel tanks were holed. Yet again he pressed home his attack and flew his aircraft safely back to base."

Lyle and Gladys invited us to join them for supper at the local Truck Stop and, over dessert, Lyle told us an incredible, hilarious story that involved his being shot while training in a Tiger Moth aircraft in Ontario. Perhaps he thought we didn't believe him because after finishing his story, he showed us a few bumps on his hand where the shot pellets still remained, five decades later.



Lyle James

Since this initial visit, Lyle has become an staunch supporter of the museum. He remains intensely proud of his crew and has purchased "square-footer" memberships in each of their names. The plaques have been placed together on the Square-Footers' Board at the entrance to the museum.

"Flak over the River Canard," the story that we had the pleasure of hearing over dessert in the Nanton Truck Stop, was written by Lyle and first published in the April 1996 issue of the Legion magazine.

The day was November 21, 1942, the place was No. 7 Elementary Flying Training School, Windsor, Ontario. Course No. 65 of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan was rapidly coming to the end of the eight weeks that had been allocated to turning 36 keen young airmen into pilots sufficiently trained to warrant being passed on to the Service Flying Training Schools of the Royal Canadian Air Force.

We had all thoroughly enjoyed our stay at Windsor, myself possibly more than anyone else, as it was while at No. 7 EFTS that I met Gladys. It was a very brief meeting, as a few days later I was posted to Camp Borden and then overseas. We were married in 1949, and she is still as sweet and pretty as she was in 1942!

The weather had been perfect, the instructors were all superb gentlemen, and the students were among the finest fellows that one could ever have wished to be associated with. By this stage of our training, we had amassed about 65 to 70 hours of flying time, were very proud of ourselves and, I suspect, not nearly as good as we thought we were!

Our postings had come through, and those who were to advance to twin-engined aircraft were to be posted to No. 8 SFTS at Centralia on Ansons. Those who would be flying single-engined kites, (Harvards) were posted to No. 1 SFTS at Camp Borden. I was one of the latter. These postings were effective December 6th, and all students were to be given a seven day leave before reporting. As most of us had only a couple of assignments to complete before our course graduated, our commanding officer, Flying Officer Edwards, as a reward for the good record our course had set, decreed that as soon as we had completed all assignments, we were free to leave! This amounted to a five day bonus and was received by the students with great glee, and forged a bond of undying devotion to F/O Edwards!

I needed only a cross-country and my instrument test, and I would be out of there! However November 21st dawned very stormy, with a low ceiling, and poor visibility. Solo flying was washed out, but dual flying with an instructor in charge was authorized. Therefore, our Flight Commander, Mr. Tommy Calladine, checked me out for a dual cross-country with my instructor, Sgt. Al Boden as safety pilot. The cross-country was to be a triangular one, from Windsor to Leamington, to Amherstburg and back to base. We took off at about 9:00 a.m. in Tiger Moth No. 9660, and I set course on my first leg. So

far, so good. Then the devil squeezed into our cockpit, and in his insidious way, suggested to Sgt. Boden that instead of proceeding on a long tedious cross-country we should do a little unauthorized low flying and enjoy ourselves instead! Never loath to a little fun and excitement, I was a willing accomplice to this plan.



De Havilland Tiger Moth
photo: Maynard Norby

As soon as we were away from the airport, we set course for the river, crossed over into Detroit (strictly taboo!) circled the vast Ford complex at River Rouge, then came back out over the Detroit river. Seeing some traffic on the river, we started to buzz whatever we could see, and received some waves and hand signals, (mostly friendly, but one I remember was in the form of a clenched fist waving most menacingly at us from the bridge of a tugboat whose super-structure we missed by about three feet). Tiring of this, we spotted some ducks on the water and started chasing them at nought feet. As we flew abreast of River Canard, we saw a fairly large group of birds on the water, close to the shore, and near a large body of marsh reeds. Circling in over the land at about ten feet of altitude we came back towards the flock, diving off most of the ten feet. Just as we crossed the edge of the reed patch, there was a thud, and we were over the birds who, instead of flying off in panic as the others had done, just sat there, perfectly docile and contented. They were the most realistic decoys I had ever seen!

Pulling up to about thirty feet, I mentioned to Sgt. Boden that we had hit something with our tail wheel. He thought it had been an engine misfire. However, we decided that we should go back and take a look around. That was our second mistake! As we came around, again at about ten feet off the deck, and crossed over the decoys, I saw three hunters standing in what remained of a duck blind. The lower part of it seemed all right, but the whole upper part of it was gone! I also noticed something else. Each of the hunters had double-barrelled shotguns, which they had brought up to shoulder level, and were aiming right at us! Then, before you could say "Jack Robinson," I saw flames come from the barrels of each gun, then felt red hot needles hitting my hand, leg, and most embarrassing, my derriere! From this, I realized two things. One, that light travels faster than buckshot, and secondly, that we were in deep trouble!

With one volley, the Duck Hunters won the Battle of River Canard, as that old Tiger Moth left there just like a scared jack rabbit! Climbing to a decent height, we took stock of ourselves. Sgt. Boden had blood running down his face from a hit just over his eye, and had fifteen other slugs in him. I had come off a little better, only having collected nine pieces of number two bird shot in my carcass. The aircraft was running well, but had over two hundred holes in it that weren't there when we left the base a half hour before.



courtesy Stephen Snider [www.stephensnider.net]

As I said earlier, F/O Edwards was a most enlightened and understanding c/o, but we were both pretty certain that he was not going to see any humour in this particular situation. Here I should point out that as the facts stood, we would be charged with the serious offence of low flying, intentionally damaging one of His Majesty's aircraft, and possibly incurring self-inflicted wounds, any one of which could result in a court martial and our being washed out of aircrew. Also, if apprehended, a most dire fate awaited the unfortunate hunters. Therefore, it was necessary that we come up with a plausible (but not necessarily truthful) explanation of what had happened. Sgt. Boden, as instructor and aircraft captain was understandably quite concerned, and couldn't seem to come up with any kind of a plan that would hold water so I thought up the following story. While it didn't seem too convincing, it was the only one we had.

We had left the base on the preset course for Leamington with myself, Sgt. Lyle James, flying and navigating, Sgt. Boden acting as safety pilot going along for the ride and to assess my flying and navigational abilities. As stated, the weather was only marginal, with a very low cloud base. As we progressed, the ceiling lowered to about two hundred feet. Not wishing to abandon the flight, I climbed up into the cloud, and flew for about twenty minutes on a compass course of 135 degrees. At the estimated time of arrival, I let down through the cloud, and came out over lake Erie, about six miles off shore. The cloud base was still about 200 feet, so in accordance with the King's Regulation, Air, which states that the minimum height to be maintained below a cloud level is 65 feet, I started flying a reciprocal course and we reached the shoreline almost dead on track! As we crossed the shoreline, I felt a stinging sensation in my hands and legs. Sgt. Boden was bleeding from the face, and we realized that we had been shot! Therefore, I abandoned the cross-country and returned immediately to Base, where we landed and reported to the commanding officer.

Well, you cannot begin to imagine the consternation that our return caused! Two wounded aircrew, two hundred holes in 9660, police and reporters all over the place. The two medical officers who, until now had treated nothing more serious than hangovers and athlete's foot, took over and, because Sgt. Boden was bleeding, devoted their attention to him. Our Flight Commander, Mr. Tommy Calladine, an old bush pilot who had flown forestry patrols in Gypsy Moths back in the thirties, seeing me surrounded by all types of questioners, came to my rescue and bundled me into Tiger Moth 9657 and away we went for my final instrument test. This suited me fine, as it got me away from my inquisitioners, and gave me some time to collect my thoughts. However, by this time, the M.O.'s came for me, only to find that I was up flying again. They then started to vent their wrath on the system for, in their words, "sending up a wounded boy for a test, when he should have been in sick bay." Mr. Calladine, (whose picture hangs in the 7 EFTS room at the Windsor Air Force Association Club) was kind enough to pass me, and I was ready to go to SFTS.



courtesy Stephen Snider [www.stephensnider.net]

There was, however, the matter of the buckshot to be removed. The M.O.'s decided that we would be better served at Grace Hospital, Windsor, than in their sick quarters, so away we went in the c/o's station wagon, no less! At Grace Hospital we received the utmost care and attention, and were thoroughly enjoying ourselves, surrounded by pretty nurses and attentive doctors. The next day they started removing the slugs, but after taking a few of them out, the doctors in their wisdom decided that they would do less harm if they were left in us. This turned out to be strictly to our advantage, because afterwards, when relating this story and seeing the disbelief of some doubting Thomas, it does help to say, "If you don't believe me, here is the evidence." Our stay at Grace came quickly to an end and we left, Sgt. Boden to go back to the base and me, on my interrupted leave, to bask in the notoriety that this event had brought me. Needless to say it had been big news, published in all of the national papers right across Canada.

Well, it seemed that all had blown over and we were in the clear. However, I received a telegram ordering me to return to Windsor on December 5th for a Court of Inquiry. No sweat. So on the morning of Dec. 5th I crossed over to Port Huron, Michigan and proceeded to hitch a ride to Detroit. This was no problem, as any one in uniform didn't stand on the side of the road very long in the United States! Almost the first car to come along was a big Chrysler with a rather elderly lady school teacher driving. We had a most pleasant drive to Detroit, and as we were rolling down Gratiot, she decided she'd like a drink. She was driving in the right lane and promptly wheeled across the intervening lanes, and, so help me, a Buick piled right into

the side of us! The driver was a big 250 pound individual who was most irate! However, he must have mistaken me for a general in my foreign uniform, for he immediately started calling me "Sir" and "Your Honour," assured us that he was a citizen of good standing, and that he would take care of everything! Agreed! Now, if that lady needed a drink before that, you should have seen her by then! After a couple of whiskey sours she settled down and I caught a bus the rest of the way downtown, and from there through the tunnel to Windsor. What a start for the day of my Court of Enquiry!

I immediately reported to the c/o, who informed me that I had done exceptionally well at No.7 EFTS, and was leaving there with a recommendation for a commission upon graduation, therefore, if I was entirely truthful in what had actually transpired, all would be well. I assured him that was exactly what I intended to be. However, he did not know that I had already been out to the hangar, contacted Sgt. Boden, and refreshed our story with him.

The Court of Enquiry opened at 2:00 p.m. with Sgt. Boden and myself on one side of a deal table and F/O Edwards and an LAC clerk on the other side. I related to him exactly what I had said regarding the trip to Leamington, backed up with the route map that I had started our trip with. Sgt. Boden verified my statements, and after a rather cursory cross examination, the court was over. But now the fun really started! F/O Edwards then told me that Mr. Al Lewis, the chief flying instructor, was going to fly me to Leamington where an RCMP cruiser was waiting. I was to show Mr. Lewis where the shooting had taken place, he would then buzz the cruiser, and the Mounties would investigate it. No problem. Mr. Lewis, whose picture also hangs in the Windsor Air Force Club room, was a grand gentleman who was later to lose his life as a flying missionary in Venezuela after the war, took off and we flew down to Leamington, located the cruiser, then started off for the scene of the crime.

Now, I had never been to Leamington, (which, incidentally, is about forty miles from the River Canard), but I wasn't unduly worried, as all I had to do was pick out a plausible location, point it out to Mr. Lewis, and leave it up to the Mounties. However, when we crossed the shoreline at the point so neatly delineated on my route map, I was in for both a shock, and a surprise! Instead of a normal lakeshore that would be selected by duck hunters, this part of the Lake Erie shore was completely filled with the luxurious and well-manicured estates of American millionaires from Detroit! There wasn't a place where a small rabbit could hide, let alone a full size duck blind! What to do? As I frantically scoured the horizon for any spot at all that would be better than what I was looking at, I spotted the only place that would offer salvation. A small stream flowed down into the lake, and its ravine had a very tall stand of scraggly spruce trees and rocks. Tapping Mr. Lewis on the shoulder, I smiled at him as convincingly as possible, and pointed down most emphatically to this oasis. In short order we were once again over the RCMP cruiser, guided

them to it, and left for the flight back to base. A couple of hours after landing, the unbelievable happened! The Mounties phoned the c/o to tell him that they had found two freshly fired shotgun casings on the ground of this ravine! Case closed! After receiving the congratulations of all round, I left for Camp Borden, never to hear any more of this adventure that was unique in the training annals of the RCAF!

Four years after the war ended, Mr. Gerry Lynch, an engineer at No.7 EFTS contacted me and turned over the elevator trim tab of 9660 to me. This aluminum tab, 10 inches by 2 inches, has twenty holes in it. This gives an indication of the close proximity of the business end of those shotguns to our poor old Tiger!

In conclusion, I have always been very thankful that this thoughtless prank did not injure the three hunters who were part of the story. The ending could have been very tragic had we been a few inches lower! It has always been my most sincere wish to someday meet those three gentlemen and apologize for our actions on that far away November day when we ruined what was likely a good day's hunting for them!

ADDENDUM

DAILY DIARY - No. 7 EFTS; Windsor, Ontario (21/11/1942)

An unusual incident happened today. R111251 Sgt. Boden, A.P., instructor and R90011 Sgt. James, L.F., student, were on a cross-country flight to Rutliven, Tilbury, and return. At Union it was necessary for the pilot to drop the aircraft (Tiger Moth No. 9660) to a low altitude to get an accurate position due to low ceiling. Someone unknown fired at least two shots at the aircraft with a shotgun. The shot entered the aircraft, the occupants being slightly injured. The pilot received about 18 gun shot wounds and the student three or four. The aircraft was flown back to the station. The damage to the aircraft was assessed as "C" category. The RCMP and Provincial Police are



Lyle James with Tiger Moth 9660's trim tab



Lyle James (back row, fourth from right) and his No. 101 squadron crew

IAN BAZALGETTE

-An Alberta-born Victoria Cross Recipient

Shortly after the formation of the Nanton Lancaster Society in 1986, members became aware that a similar, but much more ambitious project was underway in Hamilton, Ontario at the Canadian Warplane Heritage Museum. This group was restoring a Lancaster to flying condition. An important part of their plan was that the aircraft would become the "Andrew Mynarski Memorial Lancaster," dedicated to a Winnipeg native who had been awarded the Victoria Cross for his bravery during an operation aboard a Lancaster in 1944.



Ian Bazalgette

With this in mind a society member was at the Nanton Library one evening, browsing through a book that listed all the Canadians who had been awarded the Victoria Cross and other medals for bravery. We were hoping to find an individual with which the Nanton Lancaster could be associated. A page was turned and there was a photograph of Ian Bazalgette, not only another Canadian VC recipient who flew Lancasters, but one who had been born in Alberta and only eighty-five kilometres north of Nanton. Here was the perfect man to associate with the Society's objectives that included building a museum, preserving and restoring the Nanton Lancaster Bomber, and honouring all those who served with Bomber Command.

But little information could be found about Ian Bazalgette. Like many other Canadian wartime heroes, he had been virtually forgotten in his home province. There was a mountain named in his honour near Jasper and a school in Calgary, but nothing more could be found out about him. There were no Bazalgettes in the Calgary phone book and the project was put on the back-burner.

Over the next two years however, through successful detective work and good fortune, some wonderful contacts were made. Baz's (we learned that Ian had been referred to as "Baz" during his air force

career) rear gunner, wireless operator, and flight engineer were contacted as was his sister, Ethel Broderick. Larry Melling, a fellow pilot from No. 635 Squadron was located as was Hamish Mahaddie, the RAF officer in charge of recruiting and training the "Pathfinders" and who had known Ian well. We even found out that Bazalgette rhymes with "jet" and not "spaghetti."

And so the markings of S/L Bazalgette's aircraft, "F2-T," were placed on the Nanton Bomber and on July 27, 1990, with Baz's relatives, friends, and crewmembers looking on, the Nanton Lancaster was dedicated and became the "Ian Bazalgette Memorial Lancaster." Since then, every visitor to the museum has been introduced to Ian Bazalgette VC DFC and through him, to the courage of all Canadians who served with Bomber Command during World War II.



Ethel Broderick, Ian Bazalgette's sister, unveils a plaque at the dedication of the Ian Bazalgette Memorial Lancaster in 1990

photo: Frank McTighe

“You’ll have to put her down Baz, we’re badly on fire.” Flight Engineer George Turner told his pilot what he must have already known. The bomber was 1000 feet above the ground, the starboard wing was a mass of flames and both its engines had been knocked out, and now one of the port engines had failed.

“Bail out Boys,” ordered the pilot and four parachutes opened beneath the mortally wounded Lancaster. But before leaving his station, F/S Turner was ordered to fix the pilot’s crash belt tightly around him. Baz had no intention of bailing out and leaving his two injured crewmembers who were still aboard. Now alone in the cockpit, the pilot fought desperately to control the aircraft.

Baz must have known that the odds of him being able to crash-land the flaming Lancaster on one engine without sustaining serious injury or having the aircraft explode were very low. Even if this first step was successful, his chances of being able to drag his two wounded crewmembers from the burning wreckage to safety were probably even less. Baz’s decision not to escape the burning aircraft with the others was likely instinctive. He just could not leave his injured crewmembers.

After flying low over the tiny French village of Senates, Baz banked to port as he descended to attempt a landing. “I could see it all,” said Godfrey, the wireless operator. “He did get it down in a field... but it was well ablaze and with all the petrol on board it just exploded.” The huge fireball killed the three on board instantly.

Ian Bazalgette was born in Calgary, Alberta. Educated in Ontario and England, he joined the Royal Air Force in 1941. By mid-1943 he had completed a tour of thirty operations and been awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. He then arranged with Group Captain Hamish Mahaddie to be assigned to the elite Pathfinder Group which marked targets for the main bomber force and was posted to No. 635 Squadron stationed at Downham Market in Norfolk.



Baz’s crew (l-r) Ian Bazalgette (pilot), Geoff Goddard (navigator), Ivan Hibbert (bomb aimer), Chuck Godfrey (wireless operator), Bob Hurnall (mid-upper gunner), Douglas Cameron (rear gunner), George Turner (flight engineer)
F/L Hurnall was not aboard on the Victoria Cross flight, his place having been taken by F/S V.V. Leeder.

The target on August 4th, 1944 was a V-1 site at Trossy St. Maximin near Paris. It had been bombed on each of the previous two days and, as rear gunner Douglas Cameron recalled, "A solid sea of flak filled the width of the bomb run" as Baz approached the target. This flak shot down the Master and Deputy Master Bombers as they approached the target, leaving Baz with the responsibility of placing the target markers. Flak then struck the starboard wing setting it on fire and knocking out both engines. Despite the damage and risk of explosion, Bazalgette stuck with his course and successfully marked the target before spinning. Regaining control, he turned west toward the Allied lines. The fires in the starboard wing continued to burn and then the port engine failed. "I could not believe my eyes," Doug Cameron remembered, "The starboard wing was like a herringbone after all the flesh has been eaten off it. I could hardly believe we were still flying. I knew we were a doomed aircraft." At 1000 feet, with no hope of regaining altitude on a single engine, the Lancaster's starboard wing ablaze, and two wounded crewmembers on board, Bazalgette gave the order to bail out.

F/S Larry Melling DFC joined No. 635 Squadron about a month after Ian. He clearly recalls being impressed by him on his first day at the squadron when he walked into the flight office. "He had a tremendous sparkle in his eye is the best way to describe it. He stood out amongst the people who were there. He was an inviting sort of a person, a person that you wouldn't hesitate to approach. He was always the first to volunteer for a job, no matter what sort of job it might be. Even though he was a Squadron Leader he wasn't above pushing a car to get it started or pumping up someone's bicycle tire."

Douglas Cameron remembers Ian Bazalgette as, "an officer who was equally at home with his peers and other ranks; who earned the respect of all by his pursuance of carrying the offensive to the enemy; who won the affection and gratitude of his subordinates for his care and promotion of their



V-1 Flying Bomb being launched



(l-r) George Turner, Chuck Godfrey, and Larry Melling at the dedication ceremony in

welfare, not less than the approval of his fellow and senior officers.”

Ian kept a bible by his bed during his days in the Royal Air Force and had other interests which were generally not shared by his contemporaries on the squadron. One of these was collecting classical music, upon which he had written essays while at school prior to the war. He was a connoisseur, comparing different orchestras and conductors before choosing a recording. He wanted each work in his collection to be performed by the musicians he felt were most suited to the particular piece of music and to the composer.

Ian's sister, Ethel Broderick, remembers that her brother, who the family referred to as “Will,” was very enthusiastic about gardening, in particular flowers. He planted all the roses in their mother's garden and, “was always very keen to see how they were doing when he came home on leave.” She recalled that when she visited the site where her brother's Lancaster had exploded, “the plane bits were scattered everywhere but all amongst it were these purple crocuses. I think it was the heat of the explosion that had brought them up. With Will's interest in flowers it was lovely that they were there. It gave me a wonderful feeling that this had happened for him.”

Ethel mentioned an example of Ian's more flamboyant side. “I was with the American Eighth Air Force stationed near Ascot and one morning a bomber came over, very low, buzzing the camp and I just knew it was Will. Out came the General and all the others and they were looking up at this aircraft. That evening Will called me and asked, “Did you see me?” It's a wonder they didn't take his number or something because it was quite wrong what he did actually. But that was his sense of humour.”

Clearly, Ian Bazalgette was a well-rounded individual, an exemplary Royal Air Force officer, a talented pilot, and a gifted leader who exuded confidence. Off duty, he could relate well with and enjoy the company of



Ian Bazalgette with his mother, Marion



Charles Bazalgette, Ian's nephew (left), with Deryck Bazalgette, Ian's older brother, and Deryck's wife Ruth next to The Ian Bazalgette Memorial Lancaster

his fellow airmen and ground crew. Privately, he had his own challenging cultural interests that he pursued and probably sought comfort in, especially during his terrifying wartime duties.

S/L Bazalgette's Victoria Cross citation concludes by noting, "His heroic sacrifice marked the climax of a long career of operations against the enemy. He always chose the more dangerous and exacting roles. His courage and devotion to duty were beyond praise."

Following the explosion of the aircraft, citizens of the Senantes area hid the remains of S/L Bazalgette from the occupying Nazis. After the liberation of their village, permission was obtained to bury Baz in their churchyard. A ceremony was held at which Ian's sister was present. Since that time the citizens of Senantes have cared for the grave and regularly held ceremonies to honour S/L Bazalgette's memory.

On the sixty-fifth anniversary of the Victoria Cross Flight, the Town of Nanton and the museum were pleased to host a delegation from the Village of Senantes. During their visit, the mayors of Senantes and Nanton signed a twinning document that, "acknowledges that a firm bond exists between the two communities," and refers to the hope that S/L Bazalgette VC, "will not be forgotten and that a special relationship between the citizens of the two communities will continue to develop into the future."



Christian Gavelle, Mayor of Senantes and John Blake, Mayor of Nanton, signing the Twinning Agreement.

[photo: Ian Watson]



"Beyond Praise -Baz over Senantes" by Len Krenzler

GEORGE WHITE, HOWIE ARM- STRONG AND FRED GARRATT

-A Lancaster for Nanton



George White



Howie Armstrong



Fred Garratt

The Bomber Command Museum of Canada is the legacy of George White, Howard Armstrong, and Fred Garratt, three prominent Nanton citizens of their day. They were visionaries. While others saw an old aircraft as scrap aluminium -a source of pots and pans, George, Howie, and Fred saw it instead as a tourism attraction, a memorial, and perhaps some day, even more.

George had the idea. He was a soft-spoken farmer and rancher who lived west of town near the foothills on land his family had homesteaded. He always had a weakness for airplanes. This interest may have been kindled during the war when pilots training at the nearby No. 5 Elementary Flying Training School at High River landed Tiger Moths on the family farm in order to visit his sister. The pilots, of course, were supposed to be practicing flying not visiting girls, so in order to burn off the necessary fuel they would chock the wheels and leave the engine running while they chatted with George's sister. Eventually George obtained his private pilot's license but was generally

too busy with the farm work to do much flying.

When George mentioned his scheme to Howie Armstrong, the response was an instant, "Count me in." Howie owned Armstrong's Department and Variety Store in Nanton. It was his idea to declare that the spring water that was piped to town from the nearby foothills was, "Canada's Finest Drinking Water." The title was never disputed and Howie's declaration led to Nanton acquiring the nickname "Tap-Town" after he and friends made



the water available to passing motorists. This, in turn, led to Nanton Water Ltd. becoming one of the first companies in Canada to bottle and sell drinking water. Howie was a tireless promoter of the town and his efforts directed towards acquiring the Lancaster and "The Tap" were only two of many initiatives he took to champion the town he loved.

Fred Garratt operated McKeague and Garratt Hardware in Nanton with George McKeague. Like Howie, Fred needed little encouragement to get involved. When the Lancaster was being vandalized and thieves were stealing anything of value from the interior, it was Fred who worked diligently to try to protect the aircraft.

In 1986, when no one seemed to know what to do with the Nanton Lancaster, George White took the lead in organizing the Nanton Lancaster Society. He became its founding president and continued to play an active role on the Board of Directors until his death in 2003. Howie Armstrong was a strong supporter as well until he passed away the following year.



The official sod-turning for the construction of the museum in 1991 (l-r) George White, Kay Garratt (Fred's widow), and Howie Armstrong



Lancaster FM-159 being prepared for its trip to Nanton at the Royal Canadian Air Force base southwest of Vulcan

During the spring of 1960, a number of Royal Canadian Air Force B-25 Mitchell bombers were flown into the RCAF base near Claresholm, Alberta to be stored pending disposal. After hearing of the availability of these aircraft, George White wrote a letter to Crown Assets Disposal Corporation dated June 30, 1960 inquiring as to the possibility of acquiring a B-25 as a tourist attraction and memorial for the Town of Nanton. Crown Assets replied that indeed a B-25 was available and, in fact, was "all tuned up and ready to go." However the cost of \$2500 was more than George had planned on. Crown Assets advised that as an alternative, George might consider one of a number of Lancasters that were due to be put up for tender in the near future at the RCAF base southwest of Vulcan, Alberta.

During World War II, the Vulcan base had been the home of No. 19 Service Flying Training School and No. 2 Flying Instructor School. When the schools closed down in April 1945, the station became a long term storage facility from which a great many aircraft were sold as surplus. Still in use in 1959, RCAF Vulcan was to receive four recently retired No. 407 Squadron Lancasters. FM-159 was one of these and on Feb. 12, 1959 a civilian crew flew the aircraft from Calgary and FM-159 touched down for the last time at the old aerodrome. The other three Lancasters that were to be disposed of were KB-894, KB-949, and FM-136. By March 16th the engines and propellers had been removed and placed in storage and the airframes were stored as well, awaiting uncertain futures.

But luck was with Lancaster FM-159. The Nanton delegation made an offer of \$513 for the aircraft and it was accepted on August 11th with the

aircraft to be made available on September 1. Later a group in Calgary purchased FM-136 but no interest was shown in KB-894 and KB-949. They were eventually broken up on the ramp and scrapped.

George recalled that since the Lancaster's main wheels were too far apart to permit travelling along the roads and telephone poles might pose a problem as well, the first thing that had to be done was to plan a route through the fields and secure the permission of the farmers along the way. George led this project and with the help of a few others the planning was completed. The transfer of FM-159 to Nanton was then forced to wait until the crops were all harvested. Finally on September 27th, a crew of Nanton volunteers arrived at the base to take possession of the aircraft and escort it to its new home.

Archie Clark of Nanton had considerable experience moving large vehicles and was hired to do the towing. The tail wheel was firmly secured on the back of one of his trucks and the bomber was towed backwards on its main wheels with two logging chains fastening the landing gear to the rear of the truck for additional safety. Two fencing crews were organized, one to take down the barbed wire fences ahead of the aircraft and a second to put them back up again after the Lancaster had passed. Forbes Henry and Almer Kjinserdahl bulldozed crossings over the deeper roadside ditches where it was necessary. Sheldon Wilson, Gerald Loree, and others left their farm work at a busy time to give a hand, one of Gerald's jobs being to ride on top of the



Lancaster FM-159 fording the Little Bow River

aircraft to help ease it under telegraph lines. One of the more interesting challenges along the route was when FM-159 had to descend into the valley of the Little Bow River, through a ford, and up the other side.

Late in the day, FM-159 passed between the south end of Silver Lake and Mosquito Creek and reached the Canadian Pacific Railway's tracks just three kilometres north of Nanton where the strange procession stopped for the night. The permit from the railway to cross the tracks had been issued for the next morning. Fred Garratt and others kept guard over the Lancaster through the night.

Early the following morning the bomber was pulled across the tracks and up onto Highway No. 2. It was smooth sailing from there and triumphantly, but likely somewhat uncomfortably, Lancaster FM-159 entered the Town of Nanton and was parked by the side of the highway.

When the aircraft arrived in Nanton it was complete and could have flown had the engines and propellers not been removed. Two years later it was a gutted shell, thieves having removed the instruments and interior equipment and vandals having broken the cockpit, turrets, and bomb aimer's perspex, and torn the fabric of the control surfaces. The aircraft was on the edge of town at the time and despite efforts by Fred Garratt and others, there was no stopping the vandalism.



Lancaster FM-159 preparing to cross the railway tracks just north of Nanton, with Silver Lake beyond at right



Lancaster FM-159 arriving in Nanton [September 28, 1960]

In 1962, a group of volunteers led by George, Howie, and Fred began to put FM-159 back on the road to recovery from its sorry state. Engines and propellers were purchased and installed. The aircraft was placed on steel mounts, its tail high in the air to limit access. Fortunately those in charge took the time to ensure that the aircraft would not be damaged. Steel mounts were fabricated and the aircraft continued to rest on its landing gear.

Harry Dwelle fabricated aluminum “windows” to cover the broken perspex. This was most important as bird droppings cause rapid corrosion to an aluminum airplane. Ray McMahon, together with his family and friends, repaired the exterior as much as possible and painted the aircraft.

George White, Howie Armstrong, and Fred Garratt then donated the Lancaster to the Town. Over the following twenty years volunteers and service clubs did what they could to keep FM-159 looking its best as millions of people drove by on Highway No. 2 and the “Nanton Bomber” became a symbol for the town.



Ray McMahon was a devoted volunteer during the 1960's and 1970's

JOCK PALMER

-The Grandfather of Alberta Aviation

The museum's 2002 special event was a, "Salute to the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan." The "Plan" had been one of Canada's major contributions to the war effort. At its peak, 94 schools were operating at 231 sites across the country, 10,840 aircraft were involved, and the ground organization numbered 104,113 men and women. 3000 trainees graduated each month. With the massive presence in the country of the BCATP, the Royal Canadian Air Force was the service of choice for tens of thousands of young Canadians. A total of 131,553 aircrew were trained in Canada, 55% of them Canadians. As the war progressed, this major commitment to the war overseas, and in particular to Bomber Command, inevitably exacted a very heavy toll in Canadian casualties during operations.

As part of the museum's commemoration, there was a special focus on No. 5 Elementary Flying Training School that operated at High River, just 25 kilometres north of Nanton, from June 1941 until October 1944. The one name that seemed to dominate the story of No. 5 EFTS was that of "Jock Palmer" and we were pleased to have his family join us for our event and unveil a model of "Jock's School" at High River.

Aviation in High River began with the establishment of a Canadian Air Force base northeast of the town in 1921. When word spread that the base was to be built, some of the town's citizens were very concerned. One was quoted in the High River Times as wondering, "Have you figured out what you would do if you were driving along a road with a nervous horse and an aeroplane from the High River Aerodrome suddenly swooped down and frightened the horse into a runaway that smashed your wagon and injured the animal and yourself?" However the base was established. Four former World War I hangars were erected, and with the presence of ten aircraft the



Jock Palmer
Drawing by Irma Coucill
[Canadian Aviation Hall of Fame]

station was the largest in Canada. Its main purpose was to patrol the nearby foothills and mountains with the hope of spotting any forest fires in their early stages.

Although the air force had left in 1931, the hangars were still in place when Jock Palmer and No. 5 EFTS were transferred from their original base at Lethbridge to the High River field in June 1941. Initially, Tiger Moths were used as primary trainers but they were replaced by Fairchild Cornells in late 1942. Jock and his fellow instructors did well, graduating a total of 106 classes and overseeing in excess of 250,000 flying hours during the existence of the school.

John Enderby "Jock" Palmer was born in Cambridge, England in 1898 and moved to Lethbridge in 1905. It is said that in 1911 he watched as E.B. Ely's Curtiss biplane was assembled at the Exhibition Grounds for what was the first flight of an aircraft in Lethbridge.

In October 1914, Jock joined the Canadian Expeditionary Force serving in the 10th Battalion. He was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for gallantry as a corporal machine gunner at Festubert in May 1915. In June 1916, Jock was wounded and when released from hospital, transferred to the Royal Flying Corps. After becoming a pilot, he flew observation aircraft over the trenches in

France, and was credited with nine "Victories" over enemy aircraft. In 1917 and 1918, he instructed in England where he also flew channel patrol flights. Upon the formation of the Royal Air Force, he was automatically transferred and served with the RAF until November 1919, when he returned to Lethbridge.



**(l-r) Lieutenants Macdonald, Jock Palmer, and Hay
in 1916 or 1917**

Glenbow Archives [na-3206-7]

Between the wars, Jock flew extensively as a barnstormer, commercial pilot, and instructor. From 1920 until 1922, he was involved with the Lethbridge Aircraft Company, test flying the company's Curtiss JN-4 after it arrived in the city by train. He then proceeded to take passengers for flights and gave a flying exhibition over the city to advertise the Locklear film, "The Great Air Robbery" that was showing at a local theatre. He was issued with Commercial Pilot Certificate #64 in September 1920. By the end of 1921, the Lethbridge Aircraft Company reported that they had flown over 30,000 miles during the year and that they would be giving up exhibition flying in favour of

operating a school to train new pilots.

In 1922, Jock organized the first mail plane flight from Lethbridge to Ottawa to advertise the City of Lethbridge and promote his company's flying school. However, the aircraft was wrecked in Minot, North Dakota when a car was driven in front of it during a landing. An investigation revealed that the car had been operated by a woman learning to drive and that she was unaware that she had driven in front of the airplane.

Palmer had learned about radio during the war and in 1926 he obtained a license for the first radio station in Lethbridge, forming a partnership with Bill Grant to get a license. He was assigned the call letters CJ by the license office and used the letters OC to make it sound like his nickname, "Jock." CJOC radio began its broadcasts from the kitchen of Jock's mother's house but was soon moved to a shed behind the house. He sold the station in 1928 but it continues to broadcast today.

In 1927, Jock returned to flying with Lethbridge Commercial Airways. He appears to have had lots of interesting ideas to promote his business. For example, on September 12, 1927, in order to publicize a weekly flight to Waterton National Park, Jock dropped tickets over the City of Lethbridge. The person who picked up the winning ticket was to receive a free flight to Waterton. Another money-maker was advertising for the local brewery by having, "Drink our Beer -Without a Peer" painted on the bottom of his wing.

Jock flew the first six-place cabin plane to be operated in western Canada. It was purchased by Emil Sick of the Associated Breweries and for some time they operated the plane for the brewery. Jock then moved to Calgary, flying with Great Western Airways until 1930. Later he formed two companies of his own, Western Flying Service and Skyways, but both fell victim to the difficult economic times. In 1937, he moved to the Windermere area where he spent six weeks cutting down over 200 trees and grading a runway. With others, he operated a flying service in the Columbia Valley until the war broke out.

After his years as a barnstormer and commercial pilot he was able to claim to have flown 98 types of aircraft when he joined the Royal Canadian Air Force when war broke out again. He attended Flying Instructor School



Jock Palmer [ca. 1930]
Glenbow Archives [na-1111-3]



The original instructors at No. 5 Elementary Flying Training School in Lethbridge, Alberta [1940]
(l-r) Joe Patton, Homer Thomson, Bill Roy, Jock Palmer, Bill Smith, Ken Piper, Frank Hawthorne, Fred Lasby

Glenbow Archives [na-3277-25]

in Trenton, Ontario in June and July, 1940 and became one of the eight original flight instructors at the newly formed No. 5 Elementary Flying Training School in Lethbridge.

When the school was transferred to High River, Jock went with it and a newspaper article written when it opened indicates that he was by then the assistant chief flying instructor. The article goes on to say that Jock, "is believed to have rolled up the highest number of flying hours of anyone in Canada. He has officially logged 9782 hours and put in about 1500 more hours that he didn't take time to log.

On October 26, 1943 Jock Palmer was awarded the Air Force Cross, a medal presented to officers and warrant officers for an act or acts of valour, courage, or devotion to duty whilst flying but not in active operations against an enemy. The citation read, "Having been connected with flying training for the past twenty years, this officer, for the past two years, has capably fulfilled his duties as assistant chief flying instructor and chief flying instructor. His experience and unflinching devotion to duty have inspired confidence and respect in both trainees and Instructors. Through his untiring efforts as chief flying instructor all courses graduated on time with all sequences completed despite the difficulties that had to be overcome."

Jock went on to serve as the commanding officer of the school for a time. The No. 5 EFTS History notes that he, "was well-known and liked by all the staff and by hundreds



Jock Palmer
at High River [1941]



Tiger Moth at No. 5 EFTS

The De Havilland Tiger Moth was used as a primary trainer at the school from its opening in early 1940 until late in 1942.



Cornells at No. 5 EFTS

The Fairchild Cornell replaced the Tiger Moth and was used at High River until the school closed in the fall of 1944.

of students who passed through his hands.”

After the war Jock remained at High River where he had an electrical business. He ended his flying career in 1955 with over 18,000 hours, receiving the unofficial title, “Grandfather of Alberta Aviation”. In 1988, he was inducted into Canada’s Aviation Hall of Fame.



Looking southwest to the Town of High River from the roof of a No. 5 EFTS hangar



Looking south to No. 5 Elementary Flying Training School [1943 or 1944]



This model of No. 5 Elementary Flying School at High River, Alberta was built for the museum by Larry and Debra Kunz of St. Gregor, Saskatchewan



Members of Jock Palmer's family at the museum's "Salute to the BCATP" in 2002

photo: Bob Evans

ALBERT PRINCE

-The First of the Ten Thousand

To commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the beginning of World War II, it was decided that the museum should honour the first of the approximately 10,000 Canadians who were killed while serving with Bomber Command. Determining that the individual was Albert Stanley Prince was straightforward enough. Finding his family that we hoped would participate in the commemoration was more difficult and required some good fortune.

According to "They Shall Grow Not Old," the wonderful book published by the Commonwealth Air Training Plan Museum located in Brandon, Manitoba, F/S Prince was from Vancouver, British Columbia. So we contacted Don Currie, a long-time museum supporter and former No. 635 Squadron navigator living in North Vancouver and asked him to see what he could do. Don went through all the Vancouver newspapers of the day but could find no mention of Albert Prince. Others from Vancouver who had been killed during the early weeks of the war were mentioned, but not Prince.

Don then contacted John Mackie of the Vancouver Sun. With the hope that there might still be family members in the city, Mackie wrote an article in which he asked his readers for information about the person that we thought must have been the city's first casualty of the war. His call was answered by Jim Foster of Squamish, British Columbia who was Albert Prince's cousin. We were, of course, delighted to have had the good fortune to have contacted a family member but later we were to learn that we were much luckier than we had thought we had been.



Albert Stanley Prince

It turned out that Prince wasn't from Vancouver at all and had never even visited the city. He was from Montreal and it was only through a lucky coincidence that his cousin Jim was living in the Vancouver area and had noticed the newspaper article. Jim was able to put the museum in contact with Bill Prince of Stoke-On-Trent, England. Bill had been a very young child when his father had been killed attacking the German battleship, "Admiral Scheer" on September 4, 1939.

Bill provided us with wartime photos and information about his father. Together with his wife Margaret, he joined us in Nanton for the special event honouring his father on September 4, 1999, exactly sixty years after his death. The museum's display honouring his father was made more special when Bill presented his father's wings and squadron crest to be added to it.

Four years later, the museum was contacted by the Department of Veterans Affairs in Ottawa who had come across our information about Albert Prince on our website. They thanked us for bringing him to their attention as his name had, for some unknown reason, never been entered into the Books of Remembrance in the Peace Tower.

So as well as having Albert Prince's name finally entered into the Books of Remembrance, we were pleased that we had focused some attention on this brave Canadian who had been the first of ten thousand of our countrymen to be killed serving with Bomber Command during World War II.

The following article was first published in the Summer-1999 issue of Airforce magazine.

The fifteen young men of No. 107 Squadron sat in their flying gear as the message from the King was read. It was meant to inspire patriotism and confidence. "The Royal Air Force has behind it a tradition no less inspiring than those of the older Services, and in the campaign which we have now been compelled to undertake you will have to assume responsibilities far greater than those which your service had to shoulder in the last war... I can assure all ranks of the air force of my supreme confidence in their skill and courage, and in their ability to meet whatever calls may be made upon them."

By the end of the day, four of the five aircraft which set out from RAF Wattisham on the squadron's first operation of the war had been



F/S Prince in his flight suit

destroyed and one of the pilots had become the first of almost ten thousand Canadians to be killed while serving with Bomber Command during the Second World War.

Albert Stanley Prince was born in Montreal, Quebec on November 22, 1911, the son of Eliza and Harold Braithwaite Prince who had seen service with the Royal Highlanders of Canada. Following the Great War, the family moved to Neston, in England. Albert's late grandfather had operated the water works for the town which is near the Irish Sea, just north of the Welsh Border. Albert's father took over his duties of water works engineer for the local Council.

Known as "Nab" to the family, Albert attended Caldey Grange Grammar School. A tall, athletic looking young man, he played tennis and captained the Neston Nomads football team. After completing his schooling, he spent seven years working for the Neston Council, performing various clerical duties. Highly thought of by his employers, he was presented with an engraved gold watch and cufflinks upon his resignation in 1935 following his decision to join the Royal Air Force.

After initial training at Bristol, Prince attended the Martin School of Navigation at Shoreham by Sea where he trained on the twin-engined De Havilland Dragon Rapide aircraft. He married Winifred Mary on November 21, 1936 and the couple had a son, William.

As a pilot with "B" Flight, No. 107 Squadron, Royal Air Force, F/S Prince was based at Wattisham, Suffolk. Granted leave



Albert Prince (right) at the Martin School of Navigation

on August 15, 1939, he returned to base on September 2nd, listened to news of war being declared on the 3rd, and was ordered to fly on the first bombing operation of the war on the 4th. The squadron operated Bristol Blenheim IV aircraft which, with its distinctive scalloped nose, was one of four twin-engined bombers which were ready for action at the beginning of the war. Together with the Wellington, Hampden, and Whitley, they would carry the load for Bomber Command until the four-engined Stirlings, Halifaxes, and Lancasters took over.

F/O Andrew McPherson and crew were the first members of the RAF

to fly into enemy airspace. Their reconnaissance flight in a No. 139 Squadron Blenheim on the day war was declared had observed the German pocket battleship Admiral Scheer, cruiser Emden, and other warships anchored at the German naval base at the entrance to Wilhelmshaven on Germany's north coast. Flying at an altitude of 24,000 feet, the crew also confirmed that the ships were well away from shore so that there was no risk of enemy civilians being injured or killed, an important consideration during the opening stages of the war. No. 2 Group of Bomber Command issued orders that fifteen Blenheims were to attack the warships, five from each of No. 107, No. 110, and No. 139 Squadrons.

The morning of September 4, 1939 was cloudy over southern England and as the message from the King was read the skies had become heavily overcast and stormy with a strong northwest wind. Shortly before the scheduled take-off, deteriorating weather required changing the already loaded bombs to 500 pounders with 11.5 second delay fuses so that the crews could attack at a low level and by doing so, ensure that no bombs would fall on land where civilians might be injured. Together with the other four crews from No. 107 Squadron, F/S Prince took off from RAF Wattisham at 16:00 hours. His aircraft was serial #N6240 and carried the markings OM-K.

Weather conditions were unchanged over the English Channel as the fifteen aircraft of Bomber Command flew just above the wave-tops through mist and cloud, struggling to see during periods of heavy, continuous rain. The five aircraft from No. 139 Squadron jettisoned their bombs and turned back after failing to locate the warships.

However the No. 110 squadron aircraft found the targets. P/O Selby R. Henderson from Winnipeg, Manitoba was the navigator in the lead aircraft and, as he sat in the very nose of the aircraft, was the first member of Bomber Command into action during World War II. His pilot, Squadron Leader K.C. Doran, led the attack as the five Blenheims attacked the enemy warships at low level.

The German sailors likely mistook the attacking aircraft for Luftwaffe Ju-88's until the RAF markings became apparent. Clearly surprised, the ships' crews were later reported, "to have looked up as if watching an airshow." The Blenheims hit the Admiral Scheer with at least four bombs, none of



This drawing of the RAF attack on German warships at Wilhelmshaven appeared in the Illustrated London News shortly after the raid

which exploded probably because of the extremely low altitude of the attack and the battleship's thick armour plating. Later, S/L Doran gave an interview in which he described the raid as follows: "We could see a German warship taking on stores from two tenders at her stern. We could even see some washing hanging on the line. Undaunted by the washing, we proceeded to bomb the battleship. Flying at 100 feet above mast height all three aircraft in the flight converged on her. I flew straight ahead. The pilot of the second aircraft came across from one side, and the third crossed from the other side. When we flew over the top of the battleship, we could see the crews running fast to their stations. We dropped our bombs. The second pilot, flying behind, saw two hit. We came round, and the ship's pom-poms began to fire as we headed for home. My navigator saw shells bursting almost on the tail of the aircraft."

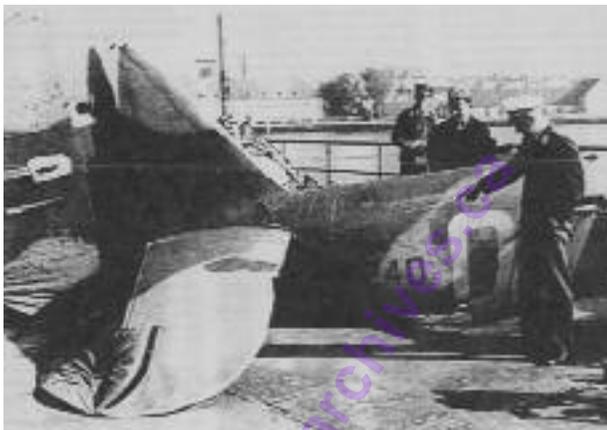
S/L Doran had bombed accurately, two of his bombs hitting the battleship. The first became imbedded in the armour-plated deck and the second bounced off, neither exploding. A second aircraft scored a direct hit as well only to see its bomb bounce harmlessly off the ship's thick armour. The enemy reacted quickly and the remaining aircraft of No. 110 Squadron came under fire. Blenheim N6199 was struck by flak and crashed directly into the bow of the cruiser Emden killing all four aboard the aircraft. The pilot, by way of a remarkable coincidence, was F/O H.L. Emden. The impact resulted in the German Navy's first casualties of the war as nine sailors aboard the warship were killed as well. As the four surviving No. 110 Squadron Blenheims headed for their base Albert Prince and the No. 107 Squadron aircraft



"The First of the Ten Thousand" [A commissioned painting by John Rutherford]

prepared to attack.

There was no element of surprise when F/S Prince arrived over the target. The German flak was heavy and well directed. Three of the four bombers that attacked were shot down during their low level bombing runs. A German witness reported the fate of a fourth: "The crew of one Blenheim attacked at such a low level that the blast of their own bomb on the warship destroyed the RAF aircraft." Apparently the delay fuse must have malfunctioned.



German naval personnel inspect the wreckage of F/S Prince's aircraft (Blenheim 6240) after it was recovered at Wilhelmshaven

With its bombs still on board, a single No. 107 Squadron aircraft returned to base after being unable to find the target, landing safely at Wattisham. A Blenheim wireless operator/air gunner later recalled, "There was tremendous excitement when "A" Flight (No. 110 Squadron) returned and consternation when the lone Blenheim of No. 107 landed. It occurred to us aircrew that if this was to be the pattern of future operations we were in for a very short career."

The aircraft flown by Albert Prince was one of the three that appear to have been shot down by flak. In an interview with a German journalist, F/S G.F. Booth, Prince's observer (navigator) whose position was in the nose of the Blenheim, was asked, "if he noticed how the aircraft was brought down." He answered, "We hit something...I was looking forward. I just saw the water and heard the crash."

It appears that the aircraft went down quickly but Prince must have had some control as the bomber was ditched in the harbour. All three crewmembers were successful in getting out of the aircraft and were picked up by a pilot boat. But Prince had been mortally injured and died later in hospital. Booth suffered a broken foot and the wireless operator/air gunner, AC1 L.G. Slattery, had his jaw dislocated when his face was dashed against the machine gun in his turret. F/S Booth and AC1 Slattery become the first allied Prisoners of War and remained in confinement until liberated from Stalag 357 by Allied forces in the spring of 1945, five years and eight months later.

The enemy honoured F/S Prince and the fifteen other RAF aircrew who died during the raid with full military funerals. Their coffins were draped

with the Union Jack and taken by hearse to the grave site in Geestemunde Cemetery. A naval honour guard stood at attention as they were interred. Later, their remains were transferred to Becklingen War Cemetery at Soltau, Germany.

Initial reports stated that the raid was somewhat successful in that the Emden was put out of action for two or three months although the Admiral Scheer appears to have escaped unscathed.

However the raid had provided the British public with the first heroes of the war. The Ministry of Information reported that the Blenheim pilots and crews were, "proud to have been chosen to strike the first blow at the German war machine." F/O McPherson, the Blenheim reconnaissance pilot, and S/L Doran were awarded the war's first Distinguished Flying Crosses.

The first Canadian serving with Bomber Command to be killed during World War II, Albert Prince was also the first Canadian casualty in any of the services. Before the war in Europe ended over five and one half years later, some ten thousand young Canadian aircrew had been killed serving with Bomber Command in what has been described as the most continuous and



The Germans held a full military funeral for F/S Prince complete with an honour guard. Chivalry played a role in the early days of World War II. The RAF aircrews avoided targets where civilians might be injured.





Bill Prince, son of F/S Albert Prince, speaks at the museum's commemoration of "The First of the Ten Thousand"



F/S Prince's wings, squadron badge, and identification tags are on display at the museum

AL HYMERS

-Sole Survivor

The statistics regarding those who served with Bomber Command are daunting. Of every 100 airmen who joined Bomber Command, 45 were killed, 6 were seriously wounded, 8 became Prisoners of War, and only 41 escaped unscathed (at least physically). Of the 120,000 who served, 55,573 were killed including over 10,000 Canadians. Of those who were flying at the beginning of the war, only ten percent survived. During the RCAF's Halifax operations between March 1943 and February 1944, the average loss rate was 6.05%, producing a mere 16% survival rate (for a tour of 30 operations).



Al Hymers

When a bomber went down over enemy territory, fewer than 20 percent of the aircrew survived. Of those who did not, some were killed by the flak, bullets, and cannon shells, others died in huge explosions when their bomber was hit, many were burned in their flaming aircraft, others fell to their deaths as the aircraft broke apart, and many were trapped by "G-forces" within the spinning, out of control bomber. Many aircrew who successfully escaped the aircraft drowned in icy waters and others were set upon and killed by infuriated civilians seeking revenge. Hundreds of pilots, rather than getting out themselves, controlled the doomed aircraft for as long as possible so that their crew might have a chance to successfully parachute from the plane.

Al Hymers of Bruderheim, Alberta has been a regular visitor to the museum, attending almost all of our summer events. He was one of the lucky twenty percent who escaped from an aircraft that was going down. During the museum's "Salute to the Air Gunners" event in 2004, he described how he became the sole survivor of Lancaster LM-213.

My hometown is Winnipeg and that's where I joined the RCAF when I turned eighteen. At the time I joined they were not taking aircrew so I wound up ground crew and it took a few years before I finally got to re-muster. I tried out for a pilot but didn't make it. The war was getting on towards the end and I had to get into it so I volunteered to be a gunner. I went to Mont-Joli, Quebec where I took my gunnery training. We flew Fairey Battles with Bristol turrets. I went overseas and eventually wound up on an RAF squadron, No. 12, who were flying Lancasters which was fine with me. The Lancaster was the bird that everybody wanted to fly.

Our first trip was to Essen in the Ruhr Valley. That first trip -the flak and the searchlights and the bombs going down. It was absolutely beautiful - better than any fireworks display I've ever seen. As the trips progressed you began to realize that we were killing them and they're trying to kill you and the fear sets in. You don't really let that bother you because it's a short duration thing, eight to ten hours and you're back home. You go to the pub, get drunk, and have a good night's sleep in a bed with sheets. The food is fair and then away you go the next night to another hair-raising experience.

On my tenth trip we went to a German city called Zeitz -very deep into Germany. It was an oil refinery. We had a bad feeling about this trip -a premonition. We all had it. We discussed amongst ourselves whether we'd put the aircraft unserviceable. We decided, no, we'd go ahead and fly it. Who believes in premonitions? Anyway, we were over the target. We'd bombed and it was quite different there. There was a layer of thin cloud over the target and the fires below and the searchlights, there were hundreds of them playing on the cloud layer, made a glowing screen and every plane in the bomber stream was clearly visible from above. We knew there were fighters around because they were dropping fighter flares and the photoflashes were going off. It was quite spectacular.

Anyway, I had a nasty feeling we were being hunted. I was desperately looking around. I swung my turret around and looked down and there was the hunter, a Messerschmitt 410. He was tilted up about 25 yards away. I directed my guns down immediately and opened fire. At the same time I yelled for the skipper (F/O William Kerluk RCAF) to corkscrew. This all happened within a heartbeat. The fighter opened fire. I could see his four cannons blink once. One cannon shell took the two guns out of my turret on the left side. One hit under my feet and blew out the pipelines (the hydraulic lines that powered the turret) and the intercom. One hit the tail and one I'm sure went up the fuselage and killed the navigator. All this happened just like that. I opened fire. I yelled for the skipper to corkscrew starboard. All he heard was, "Corkscrew," before the cannon shell cut off the intercom. He's yelling, "Which way? Which Way?" I could hear him but he couldn't hear me. It was all over in seconds.

I opened fire when this happened and I could see my tracers bouncing off him. Then he broke away down and it was all quiet. I used the

hand crank to turn my turret and my intercom came back on. So I told the skipper the enemy fighter was directly below us and we had about ten seconds to live. I told him to corkscrew or dive to the clouds or do something. The last words he said were, "I'm afraid to move it. The controls are shot up." I said, "Here he comes!" and he tilted up and opened fire. He hit us in the gas tanks and we started to burn. The flame was coming down the fuselage and out through my turret.

Luckily I was wearing the new seat pack –I was sitting on my parachute (Previously the rear gunner's parachute was stowed on a hook in the fuselage and the gunner had to reach behind into the fuselage and clip the parachute pack on). Now when you parachute out of a gun turret you unplug your intercom, your oxygen mask, your oxygen mask heater, and your heated suit. The flames were hitting me in the face. I tried to get my face out of the flames so that I could unplug. I leaned out the doors while I was doing this. The wind caught my parachute harness and I couldn't get back in to unplug anything. So I let go and everything pulled loose which was something of a miracle because they told you if you didn't unplug it usually breaks your neck.

Anyway there I am. It's about 15,000 feet at eleven o'clock at night and 50 below zero. I'm falling on my back. I could see the Lancaster going away. I could see the Messerschmitt 410 coming back. I reached for the ripcord with my right hand but I couldn't reach it because my Mae West had inflated. So I reached with my left hand and got my thumb in the D-ring, pulled it, and after a long pause the parachute opened. I looked down and there's my boots disappearing into the clouds. It seemed like a long, long time that I came down. As soon as I got below the clouds I realized that it was snowing quite heavily.

I couldn't see the ground but I kept looking down and all of a sudden there I was, "Bang." I landed in my stocking feet in a foot of snow. My Mae West had inflated so I couldn't reach the risers to deflate my chute and it was blowing me across the field. So I dug my hands in to think about what I was going to do next. I thought I'd get up and I'd run around the chute but the snow was too deep and in my stocking feet I couldn't do it.

So I was lying there and I saw a light coming. I knew I was in the middle of Germany so I thought, 'Well, I'll dig my hands into the snow and wait until this guy walks by and hope he doesn't see me in the falling snow.' He got behind me but a gust of wind blew me right into him and it turned out to be my wireless operator (F/S G.J. Harris). He was very badly burned. I grabbed him and I said hang on. I turned the quick release on my parachute. You bang it with your fist to release everything except that it was jammed. I kept banging it and banging it but it wouldn't open. So I got him to sit on my legs while I got my knife out and I cut away the parachute harness.

I looked at him. He was pretty bad. So I decided to give him a shot of morphine. I got my first aid kit out and I got the needle. I said, "Come on. I'll

give you a shot of this and you'll feel a little easier." He'd have nothing to do with it. He was wild with pain and whatever. He was fighting me off. Finally I gave up and threw the thing away. He said, "There's a farm house over there. I'll give myself up and get some first aid." So I said, "Ok, I'll see you back in England." He disappeared into the snow. A while later I heard shots.

I knew I was in Germany but I didn't know where in Germany. I must have looked pretty damn conspicuous. I had cut off the legs of my electric suit and wound them around my feet. The sleeve of my electric suit had been burned off and so had my battle dress so everything was hanging by a thread here and a bunch of strings there. My face was burned so I got out the first aid kit. The first aid for burns was a dope called Gentian Violet. It was bright purple. So I got this purple ointment and smeared it on my face. I now had raggedy clothes and a purple face so I must have looked just a little suspicious.

Al's escape from the doomed aircraft was just the beginning of his adventure. He evaded for several days, spending the daylight hours in haystacks, barns, and manure piles. At one point, while travelling cross-country at night, he stumbled across an anti-aircraft battery and found himself face-to-face with a sleeping sentry. Al was eventually captured. He was then subjected to mild forms of torture and his life was threatened during interrogation by the Gestapo. While travelling by train to a prison camp, he survived three attacks by Allied fighters.

Together with thousands of other POW's, Al was marched for hundreds of miles as the war came to an end. During the march the prisoners were strafed and bombed by a group of fourteen American Thunderbolt fighter aircraft. Al recalled that he weighed 175 pounds when he was shot down and only 100 pounds when the war ended.

Curious as to the fate of his wireless operator, Al inquired at the RAF casualty department in London after he returned to England. He was told that the Nazi's had reported that they, "found everybody else in the wreckage. I said, 'including the wireless operator?' 'Yes, including the wireless operator.' Now that's a lie. They murdered him."



Al Hymers and the Lancaster rear turret at the museum
photo: Bob Evans

FRANCES WALSH

-A Teacher becomes a World War II Hero

During World War II, heroic action sometimes took place in the most unexpected of locations and by the most unexpected of people. Maureen Poucher and other members of her family introduced our museum to the story of Frances Walsh, a twenty-nine year old teacher who went to work at her one room school in southwestern Alberta one morning but before the day ended had engaged in heroics that resulted in her being awarded a prestigious medal for valour.

On behalf of her family, the museum is honoured to display the George Medal that was awarded to Frances Walsh and to tell her story.



Frances Walsh

On November 10, 1941, a Tiger Moth aircraft piloted by Flying Officer James Robinson from No. 2 Wireless School in Calgary crashed in the yard of Big Spring School northeast of Cochrane, Alberta, narrowly missing the school building itself. BCATP training planes often flew over the school but when this one crashed and exploded the students and their teacher were out of the door in seconds.

Unaware that F/O Robinson had been instantly killed in the crash and despite the fact that he had been severely injured and his clothes were on fire, LAC Karl Gravel, the eighteen year old student wireless-air gunner aboard the aircraft, attempted to pull his pilot from the burning wreckage.

Frances Walsh, the teacher at the school, "displaying great personal courage and coolness," rushed from the schoolhouse and into the fire, dragging LAC Gravel from the burning aircraft, and rolling him on the ground to extinguish the flames which by this point had completely enveloped his clothing. She then attempted to remove F/O Robinson but the flames prevented her. After dispatching her oldest pupil, Lloyd Bowray, to bicycle to the nearest telephone, Mrs. Walsh and her students carried the injured airman to the schoolhouse and rendered first aid.

Staff arrived as quickly as possible from Calgary's No. 3 Service

Flying Training School. Although Walsh suffered burns to her arms, hands, and face, she insisted that the medical officers care for the injured airman prior to treating her. Sadly, LAC Gravel died four hours later in Calgary's Colonel Belcher Hospital. LAC Gravel was posthumously awarded the George Cross for his heroic attempt to save his pilot.

A newspaper report reads, "Anyone would have done exactly the same as I did," stated the pretty schoolteacher modestly, "My only regret is that such a thing had to happen. Karl was only concerned with what had happened to the pilot, F/O Robinson. His last words were, 'Did I get Jimmy out?'"

Ms. Walsh was awarded the George Medal, the second highest civilian award available at the time, for her unselfish acts. Instituted in 1940, the medal can be awarded both to civilians and to military personnel for acts of bravery not in the face of the enemy. The presentation was made at Rideau Hall in Ottawa by the Governor General. It was the first time a Canadian woman had received the George Medal.

Like most women in Canada, Frances wanted to do all she could to assist in the war effort. During at least one summer, she travelled to Ajax, Ontario to work in a munitions plant. An article in the local newspaper described the actions that led to her being awarded the George Medal and continued, "Frances is now doing something else, perhaps not quite a brave as her actions on that November day but still worth mentioning. She didn't have to take her holiday and work but she feels every Canadian should make an all-out effort for victory and a lasting peace. Her brother, who has been in the navy about seven years, was recently badly wounded overseas. That brings the war awfully close so Frances is spending her holidays working on Line No. 3 in the TNT room and liking it very well. If shells are still being filled next year, Frances expects to come back as she finds the work extremely interesting and she



Frances Walsh's school has been moved and is now a private residence
photo: Brent Armstrong

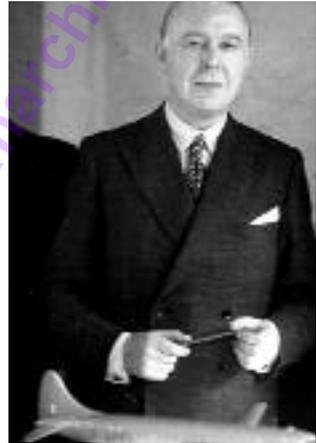


In 1985, this Memorial on Highway #567 was placed by Sgt. Daniel Fitzgerald who was an air cadet at the time
photo: Brent Armstrong

ROY CHADWICK

-Architect of Wings

When the Nanton Lancaster Society was incorporated in January 1986, very few people in Nanton, and no one in the infant Society, knew much at all about the Lancaster Bomber that had been in town for the past twenty-six years. However in June of that year, a recently published book was presented to the Society by Don Hudson of Calgary. "Architect of Wings" was the biography of Roy Chadwick who, amongst a great number of other accomplishments, had been the designer of the Lancaster. Don informed the Society that he was Roy Chadwick's nephew. The book was the museum's introduction to one of the most renowned aircraft designers of all time and to how his greatest aircraft came to be.



Roy Chadwick

"Architect of Wings" included a tribute from Marshall of the Royal Air Force Sir Arthur Harris, the famous wartime chief of Bomber Command. It had been taken from a letter written to Chadwick's daughter Margaret and read, "Your father never received a tithe of the recognition and honours due from the nation for his services. The Lancaster took the major part in winning the war with its attacks on Germany. On land it forced the Germans to retrieve from their armies half their sorely needed anti-tank guns for use as anti-aircraft guns by over a million soldiers who would otherwise have been serving in the field. The Lancaster won the naval war by destroying over one-third of the German submarines in their ports, together with hundreds of small naval craft and six of their largest warships. Above all, the Lancaster won the air war by taking the major part in forcing Germany to concentrate on building and using fighters to defend the Fatherland, thereby depriving their armies of essential air and particularly bomber support. But the Lancaster was Roy Chadwick, and it was he who did all that for his country."

Through the book and this quote, the Society became aware of

the significance of the Lancaster and the potential the “Nanton Bomber” had to help tell the story of Bomber Command and as well, to tell the story of its designer.

The following year, Roy Chadwick’s daughter, Margaret Dove, was invited to become the Society’s honorary president. We were delighted by her acceptance and she fulfilled this role for twenty-one years. Following her death in 2008, Don Hudson took over the role of honorary president.

Margaret sent us numerous letters and photographs and documents that pertain to her father’s career. As well, she has provided several taped messages for our annual special events. Most importantly, Margaret has offered encouragement, inspiration, and appreciation to the museum’s volunteers.

Margaret is the author of the following article titled, “Father of the Lancaster.” It was first published in “Wingspan International” in November 2003.

My father was a Lancastrian and very proud of this. The name Chadwick is a familiar one in the Manchester area. Roy’s father, grandfather, great-grandfather, and great-great-grandfather had all been engineers on various projects over the years so it was not surprising that Roy followed in that profession. His father, Charles, had been apprenticed to the United Alkali Company as a mechanical engineer and later moved to British Westinghouse as head of the foreign apprentices department.

Roy was born on April 30, 1893, and attended St. Clement’s School where he became interested in the new art of powered flight. His heroes were all the early aviation pioneers. Roy began to make model aircraft, his mother helping by stitching silk from blouses to cover the wings and fuselages.

At the age of fourteen, Roy joined British Westinghouse to train as a draughtsman in the drawing office under George Bailey. At the same time he began to attend evening classes three times a week where he studied pure and applied mathematics, mechanical engineering and other allied subjects. At the end of his apprenticeship, Roy wanted to pursue a career in aviation. He applied for an interview with A.V. Roe, who engaged him as his personal



Margaret Dove attends the unveiling of a painting of her father at the Aviation Heritage Centre at East Kirkby in 1990

assistant in the fledgling firm of A.V. Roe and Co. in Brownsfield Mill, Ancoats, Manchester. Alliot Roe and Chadwick got on extremely well. The older man took Roy under his wing, give him ideas to draught and presentations to make to the Admiralty. In the early years he was like a father to Roy.

Under A.V. Roe's inspired leadership, Roy Chadwick took a major part in the design of Avro aeroplanes during the First World War. He told me he was personally involved in the Friedrichshafen raid and that, at 21 years of age in 1914, he had 100 men under him to whom he had to impart all the knowledge he had learnt.

When Roe built the Experimental Works at Hamble in 1916, Roy went down and was in charge with Reginald Parrott. As the war ended, my father became Avro's chief designer, officially. He designed over 200 aeroplanes, 35 of which became production models. The Avro 540K was an RAF trainer and later gave many thousands their first flights. My father collaborated with the inventor Senor Juan de la Cierva to mount his autogiro rotors upon a 504K fuselage.

In 1921 Roy had a near fatal crash on his Avro Baby, the world's first true light aeroplane. He crashed into trees surrounding the Rev. Everage Verdon-Roe's vicarage at Hamble. After extensive surgery, Roy recovered from his injuries. He designed the "Antarctic" for Sir Ernest Shackleton's 1921 expedition; the "Aldershot," the world's largest, single-engined bomber; the "Ava" torpedo bomber; the "Andover;" the "Avis;" the "Avenger" all-metal fighter, and the "Avian."

In 1923 Roy Chadwick married Mary Gomersall who was from an old Yorkshire family. She had her first flight in an Avro Avian with Bert Hinkler as pilot. It was in 1928 that Hinkler made a record solo flight of fifteen and one half days to Australia in his own Avian.

Back in Manchester in 1928, the design team headed by Chadwick produced the Avro ten passenger aircraft with a welded-steel tube fuselage. Australian pioneers Charles Kingsford Smith and Charles Ulm bought several for their airline, Australian National Airways Ltd. Two variants followed and then the Avro Tutor emerged and replaced the 540K as the standard RAF trainer.

In 1933, Imperial Airways ordered the four-passenger monoplane Chadwick had designed,



Roy Chadwick with the Avro Aldershot in 1921

the Avro Anson. Shortly afterwards, this aeroplane matched government requirements for coastal reconnaissance work and nearly 11,000 Ansons were ultimately built.

As war loomed, Roy Chadwick designed the Manchester twin-engined bomber and laid down a four-engined version. Immensely strong, the Manchester was powered, because of wartime shortages, by the untried Rolls-Royce Vulture engine which proved unreliable. A Ministry official told me Chadwick showed them how he could lengthen the Manchester wing and install four Rolls-Royce Merlin engines and in January 1941 the Lancaster was born.

Totally committed during the war, Roy would often visit two nearby Avro factories en route to the office, direct his staff of over 250 draughtsmen and tracers, and visit the Air Ministry and various RAF stations. Each night he would drive over twenty miles home to the family he loved –in winter, through black-out and fog. Then he often designed into the early hours. The Lincoln, York, and Lancastrian, modifications to the Lancaster for special roles, flowed from his drawing board.

In 1943, my father was honoured with the CBE after the Dambuster Raid. He had worked closely with Dr. (later Sir) Barnes Wallis redesigning the Lancaster bomb bay to take the Wallis mine (the weapon used by the Dambusters). Also Britain's first pressurized, trans-Atlantic passenger aircraft, the Tudor, was designed in 1943. Anxious that Britain should match the USA in post-war aviation, Chadwick flew to America in November 1943, visiting Avro Canada and the Lockheed and Boeing companies. In the winter of 1945/46 I remember my father telling us they had named his coastal reconnaissance machine the Shackleton. This famous long-lived aeroplane was in the mock-up stage when he died.



Roy Chadwick (left) and test pilot Bill Thorn in a Lancaster cockpit [1942]



Roy Chadwick (left) with Guy Gibson

The City of London made Roy Chadwick an Honourary Freeman of the City and Manchester University and Technical College also honoured him. His last thoughts on aviation were to spearhead the RAF Bomber Command for over a quarter of a century. During Christmas 1946/47, he sat and schemed the brilliant delta wing which became the Vulcan.

In July 1947, as the Ministry were preparing to approve the Vulcan tender, my father enjoyed a brief, delightful business visit to the Isle of Harris. Then at 11:00 hrs on August 23, 1947, after a servicing error the previous night, the Avro Tudor II with Roy Chadwick aboard crashed just after take-off on a test flight. He was killed. In the words of the Rubaiyat, which he often used to quote, "Fate turned down an empty glass where had been his honoured life."



Commissioned painting by John Rutherford depicting Roy Chadwick at the first flight of the Lancaster

Margaret Dove remembered her father's special invitation to join him to watch the first flight of the Lancaster, "Would you like to drive to Woodford with me?" he asked his eighteen year old daughter. "With luck, it's going to be a special day because Sam is likely to fly the new big bomber."

She recalled, "It was a lovely day, with blue sky and a few scattered white clouds, but very cold, so we were well wrapped up. All the way there we chatted happily in his car. . . We always turned down the small lane of Woodford Church that led directly to the Club House and the Avro hangars and tarmac apron where my father parked the car. A few hundred yards away

stood the huge new Avro, its four engines already ticking over. Sam Brown and Bill Thorn, distinctive in white overalls, could be seen sitting side-by-side in the cockpit high above the ground.

“We strolled across to a crowd intently watching the proceedings and were greeted by Roy Dobson and Mr. Fielding with whom my father talked for a while as we stood together at the left-hand side of the group. Presently the engines began to roar, and as the plane moved forward my father turned and walked away with me for quite a distance. Though he seemed calm and expressionless, I’m sure he was very tense. Then the plane began its run and soared upward, climbing into the blue between the occasional large white clouds, and sailed away into the distance. Presently it returned and circled the aerodrome. Then with impressive din it flew low in front of us, climbed up again and made smoothly banked turns to left and right before magnificently rumbling in and landing. We all began to move across the field to where it rested. As we approached, the fuselage door opened, and Capt. Brown, his white overalls brilliant in the sun, appeared in the doorway. There was an eager cry, ‘How did it go, Sam?’ and smilingly he said, ‘It was marvellous – easy to handle and light on the controls.’ Then he descended the steps and everyone was talking to him.

“When we were in the car going home, I turned to my father and said, ‘Well Daddy, you must be very pleased that this new aeroplane is such a success.’ He replied, ‘Yes I am –but in this business one cannot rest on one’s laurels. There is always another and another aeroplane’”



Nanton Lancaster Society President Dan Fox with Don Hudson at the opening of a display honouring Roy Chadwick



Bomber Command Museum of Canada curator Bob Evans having tea with Margaret Dove on the Isle of Mann

MURRAY PEDEN

-A Thousand Shall Fall

"I consider it not only the best and most true to life 'war' book I've ever read about this war, but the best about all the wars of my lifetime" -Marshall of the Royal Air Force, Sir Arthur Harris

"The best account of Bomber Command of which I have yet read. . .this book will be acknowledged as a classic" -Dr. Noble Frankland CBE DFC, Imperial War Museum

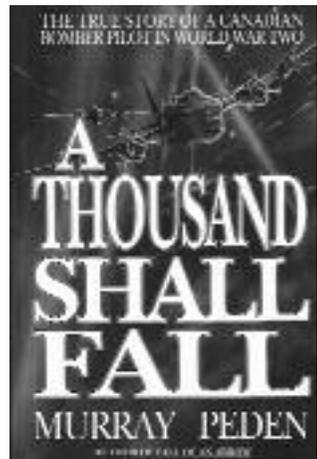
"The best book any Canadian has written about his war experiences, and one of the best books about the war that has been written anywhere" -The Canadian Historical Review



Murray Peden

Having completed 31 operations as a Bomber Command pilot, being awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, and receiving commendations from his superiors such as, "excellent leadership and brilliant flying when attacked by enemy aircraft," "shown on all occasions outstanding leadership, courage and determination," "a very efficient captain who, throughout his tour of operations, has inspired the greatest confidence," and "fought a most successful engagement against determined enemy night fighter attacks, bringing his damaged aircraft, with wounded crewmembers, safely back," Murray Peden had all the experience necessary to know what a wartime career as a bomber pilot was like.

But what sets Murray apart is having the wonderful talent to be able to weave his



wartime experiences into what is generally regarded as the finest book written by a Bomber Command pilot about the campaign. Our museum has always stocked and recommended his book, "A Thousand Shall Fall."

One of thousands of young Canadians who were inspired by the legendary Billy Bishop, Murray's book opens with, "I saw Air Marshall William Avery Bishop only once -at a recruiting rally in the Winnipeg Auditorium in the spring of 1941. I was seventeen, impatiently awaiting my eighteenth birthday so that I could join up. My classmate at Gordon Bell High, Rod Dunphy, sat beside me, both of us exhilarated by the pugnacious speech of the short, stocky flyer who, at that moment, was the greatest fighter pilot alive, with a score of seventy-two confirmed Victories."

Murray learned to fly on Tiger Moths at No. 5 Elementary Flying Training School at High River. He came to know of the Town of Nanton, just 25 kilometres south of the school. In his book, he writes of how he and his friend Francis Plate, "frequently managed to get solo sessions at the same time. We would enliven



Tiger Moths at No. 5 Elementary Flying School

these by arranging to meet over some town in the aerobatics area - usually Nanton - where we would proceed to take turns topping the other's performance. He liked to start the ball rolling by doing three or four loops in a row then flying alongside, taking his hands off the controls, and shaking them modestly over his head like the heavyweight champion of the world . . . I would hold my nose in disgust, dive into a slow roll and follow it with a stall turn, after which he would waggle his wings to claim the spotlight again and launch a new series of evolutions. After one of these sessions we would carefully separate before landing, approaching the field innocently from different directions."

On several occasions, Murray has combined a visit to his old aerodrome with a tour of the museum. Many of us have been able to enjoy lunch with Murray during these visits and we treasure our autographed copies of, "A Thousand Shall Fall."

The following excerpt from his book is a thought-provoking account of what it was like to fly with Bomber Command and experience, "The Strain of Operational Flying."

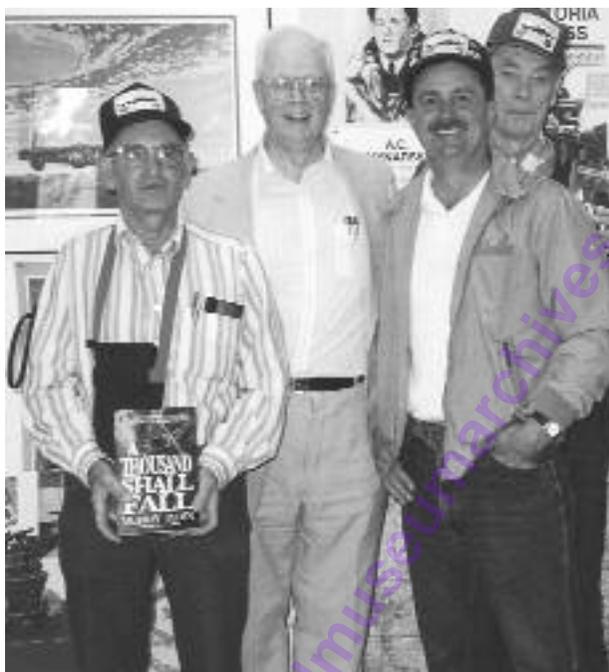
THE STRAIN OF OPERATIONAL FLYING

Each time I found myself on the battle order the ordeal of waiting - an ordeal punctuated by the ritual of air test, briefing, and flying meal - seemed intensified, the muscles of the abdomen hardening until they felt like the extended ribs of a miniature umbrella. The tension would ease briefly as we finally got started and raced down the runway on takeoff, then it returned with redoubled force as we approached hostile territory, to reign supreme and worsen progressively as the trip wore on. Time moved with the glacial slowness that overtaxed nerves can occasion, making operational flying an exacting test of nerve and self control.

To a person wanting to visualize how intense the strain could become, how suppressed fear could swell and gnaw inside, I offer the following as a comparison, perhaps easier to imagine than the unfamiliar surroundings of a darkened bomber cockpit framed in faintly luminous dials.

Imagine yourself in a building of enormous size, pitch black inside. You are ordered to walk very slowly from one side to the other, then back. This walk in the dark will take you perhaps five or six hours. You know that in various nooks and crannies along your route killers armed with machine guns are lurking. They will quickly become aware that you have started your journey, and will be trying to find you the whole time you are in the course of it. There is another rather important psychological factor -the continuous roar emanating from nearby machinery. It precludes the possibility of your getting any audible warning of danger's approach. You are thus aware that if the trouble you are expecting does come, it will burst upon you with the startling surprise one can experience standing in the shower and having someone abruptly jerk open the door of the steamy cubicle and shout over the noise. If the killers stalking you on your walk should happen to detect you, they will leap at you out of the darkness firing flaming tracers from their machine guns. Compared with the armament they are carrying, you are virtually defenceless. Moreover, you must carry a pail of gasoline and a shopping bag full of dynamite in one hand. If someone rushes at you and begins firing, about all you can do is fire a small calibre pistol in his direction and try to elude him in the dark. But these killers can run twice as fast as you, and if one stalks and catches you, the odds are that he will wound and then incinerate you, or blow you into eternity. You are acutely aware of these possibilities for every second of the five or six hours you walk in the darkness, braced always, consciously or subconsciously, for a murderous burst of fire, and reminded of the stakes of the game periodically by the sight of guns flashing in the dark and great volcanic eruptions of flaming gasoline.

You repeat this experience many times -if you live."



Murray Peden at the museum
(l-r) Bob Evans, Murray Peden, Dan Fox, Steve Sears



The museum's Tiger Moth has been dedicated to Murray Peden and carries the number of the aircraft that Murray soloed on at High River in 1942. Murray's son, Roderick Peden (at right), attended the Dedication Ceremony in 2009.

HARLO TAERUM

-A First Class Man

"Our family thinks that your museum is where this should be." Over the years, and more and more, we hear words similar to these. As the museum has grown, both in size and in stature, very special personal mementos, artifacts, artwork, and even entire airplanes have been presented to the museum.

One of these special gifts was the material we received from the Taerum family in 1993. And of this material, the Distinguished Flying Cross presented to F/L Harlo "Terry" Taerum by Queen Elizabeth in recognition of his role in the legendary Dambusters Raid is held with the greatest pride and trust.



Harlo Taerum

The DFC would have been welcomed by the Royal Air Force Museum in London. It could have been offered to a museum in a large city such as Calgary, or it could have been given to a national institution such as the Canadian War Museum. The reason that it is on display at the Bomber Command Museum of Canada is likely because of the "small town" nature of our museum and the fact that the Taerum family has its Canadian roots in nearby town. We are pleased that we have a continuing relationship with the Taerum family and with the families of numerous other Canadians who are honoured at our museum.

The following article was first published in the Spring-2003 issue of Airforce magazine.



Members of the Taerum family present Harlo Taerum's uniform, photograph, and Distinguished Flying Cross to Society president Dan Fox

In early 1943, the Allies needed a hero and something to celebrate. Britain, Canada, and other members of the Commonwealth had been at war for three and a half long years and although the tide seemed to be slowly turning, Bomber Command was still the only offensive punch that was capable of making itself felt within Hitler's European fortress.

The story of the raid on the dams of the Ruhr Valley is well known. The creation of the specialized bouncing bomb by the brilliant Barnes Wallis, the special squadron, hand-picked by Guy Gibson to deliver it, and the successful low level attack by nineteen specially modified Lancasters that breached the dams has been thoroughly documented in books, numerous documentaries, and the highly acclaimed 1950's movie, "The Dambusters." It is an enduring tale and, sixty years later, few stories of the Second World War stand out so prominently.

Guy Gibson -his name has a flair to it, the ring of a hero's name. He has been described as dashing, tenacious, and a born leader. Awarded the Victoria Cross following the raid, the accompanying citation stated that his, "personal courage knew no bounds" and that, "He has shown leadership, determination and valour of the highest order." Arthur Harris, the commanding officer of Bomber Command, wrote that, "His personal contribution towards victory was beyond doubt unsurpassed." The Calgary Herald referred to him as, "a mixture of brains, ability, spunk, and modesty and went on to say that, "Those are the qualities that make a hero, World War II style, if Churchill's 'Dambuster' is a fair example." Guy Gibson became one of the war's most recognized individuals, a hero whose name was known to virtually everyone on the Allied side

Guy Gibson's navigator, the lead navigator on the Dams Raid, was a farm boy from southern Alberta. Gibson described his, "great pal," as having, "a soft Canadian accent" and



**W/C Guy Gibson VC (right)
arriving in Calgary on
September 11, 1943**



**Harlo Taerum
18 years old**

“probably the most efficient navigator in the squadron.” Harlo Taerum’s mother, like millions of other wartime mothers, kept an album and it provides poignant insights into the connections between herself, her son, Guy Gibson, and the Dams Raid.

The album is dark green, with an embossed pattern on the cover and “Scrap Book” in large gold letters. The somewhat yellowed pages are held together with green cord. It’s an ordinary looking album until the first page is turned and one sees that it is signed, “Guy Gibson, September 1943.”

Harlo’s father, Guttorm Torger Taerum, had emigrated from Norway and established a farm near Milo, Alberta. Tragically, he drowned in nearby Lake McGregor while attempting to save the lives of two boys who had fallen from their raft. Harlo was only ten years old at the time. Despite having to play a major role on the family farm and in the raising of his two younger brothers and sister, he excelled at school in Milo, the newspaper reporting that he, “obtained the highest number of passes during a single term since the school’s inception.” After Harlo completed high school, the family moved to Calgary where, according to the Calgary Herald, he was a, “track, baseball, and rugby football star.”

Harlo had never visited Norway but his father had often spoken to him about his beautiful homeland. His mother recalled that, “When Norway was invaded by the Germans and reports began to filter through of the manner in which his father’s people were being treated, Harlo enlisted in the RCAF.”

After commencing training at No. 1 Air Observers Training School at Malton, Ontario during February 1941, Taerum went on to train at No. 1 Bombing and Gunnery School at Jarvis, Ontario, and completed the Advanced Air Navigation course at Rivers, Manitoba. Like many young aircrew, he was honoured to have his wing presented by Air Marshal Billy Bishop VC upon the conclusion of his training.

Hilda Taerum’s album includes photos of Harlo as a baby, a child, and as a young man. His high school marks are carefully filed and various photos taken during his air force training are there as well. Mother’s Day cards, telegrams with birthday greetings, and thank you cards for gifts are included and then a telegram that reads, “LEAVING MONDAY NO ADDRESS NOT PHONING LETTER FOLLOWING LOVE –HARLO.” Her son was on his



Hilda Taerum’s scrapbook

way across the Atlantic and to war.

The vast majority of novice aircrew crossed the Atlantic by sea but Harlo Taerum made the trip as the navigator of a Lockheed Hudson. Capt. H.C. Moody was the pilot and the non-stop flight was completed in a record-breaking time of 10 hours and 44 minutes from Gander, Newfoundland to Prestwick, Scotland.

Taerum commenced his operational training aboard Ansons and Hampdens at No. 16 Operational Training Unit in Upper Heyford, Oxon during August 1941 and flew his first operation against the enemy in a No. 50 Squadron Hampden on January 2, 1942. His brief logbook entries record being, "caught in searchlights," "severely hit by flak," and on March 25th, "crashing at Rose Vedne." During March, the squadron began flying Manchesters –the twin-engined predecessor to the Lancaster. Taerum's first flight in a Lancaster was on May 14th, an instructional sortie, but he continued his operations against the enemy in the Manchester until June 25, 1942.

Assigned to the squadron's conversion unit, Taerum spent time as a navigation instructor and continued to fly operations but now in Lancasters, the last two to Berlin with F/L H.B. "Mick" Martin, an Australian who was said to be a magnificent pilot and who had gained a considerable reputation for his skill at low-flying at night.

When Guy Gibson began selecting the airmen for his special squadron, he had not been told the exact nature of the role that it was to play. However, he had been ordered to concentrate exclusively on low-level night flying training so Mick Martin was a natural choice. It was likely because of the impression he made on Martin that Taerum was also posted to No. 617 where he made his first flight as the c/o's navigator on April 4, 1943. To have been hand-picked to be W/C Guy Gibson's navigator is likely the greatest compliment that could have been paid to a Bomber Command navigator at that point in the war.

As the squadron prepared for the attack on the Ruhr Valley dams the "great problem," according to Gibson, "was the height." The solution was to place two spotlights on the aircraft that converged at the required sixty feet. According to Gibson's book, "Enemy Coast Ahead," when this was announced to the squadron his bomb aimer, P/O F.M. "Spam" Spafford interrupted, "I could have told you that. Last night Terry (by this time Harlo had come to be known as "Terry" Taerum) and I went to see the show at Theatre Royal, and when the girl there was doing her strip-tease act there were two spotlights shining on her. The idea crossed my mind then." Some versions of the story claim that Spam and Terry came to the squadron with the idea after the show but the idea of using spotlights was nothing new. After some experimentation lights were placed so that the beams would form a figure eight just forward of the starboard wing. This allowed the navigator to see them through the perspex blister on the starboard side of the cockpit.

Hilda Taerum received a telegram on May 9th, just one week before

the raid. There was no indication of the impending action. Although he would not be told of the exact target until May 15th, there had been extensive low-level training at night and Harlo knew that he would soon be participating in a very dangerous operation. The message was simply, "BEST WISHES FROM YOUR LOVING SON EVERYTHING FINE –HARLO." The telegram was carefully placed in the album.



Guy Gibson (entering crew door) and crew depart for the Dams Raid (Terry Taerum at right)

As darkness approached on May 16th, Gibson prepared to lead the first group of three Lancasters to the Dams. Taerum recorded the take off at 9:40. Mick Martin, his former pilot, and F/L "Hoppy" Hopgood were the other pilots in the trio. The winds were stronger than anticipated as the Lancasters roared over the North Sea at the lowest possible altitude in order to avoid detection by enemy radar. Taerum found himself off of the planned route when the coast was reached. Gibson wrote, "We pulled up high to about 300 feet to have a look and find out where we were, then scrambled down on the deck again as Terry said, 'O.K. –there's the windmill and those wireless masts. We must have drifted to starboard. Steer new course –095 degrees magnetic, and be careful of a little town that is coming up straight ahead.'" From this point the navigation was partly in the hands of P/O Spafford who was using a special roller to identify important features such as railway lines and canals and to avoid high-tension lines. Taerum and Spafford lost their way at one point and according to Martin's rear gunner, F/S T.D. Simpson, his aircraft arrived over the Mohne Reservoir first and then, "Hoppy and Wingco turned up."

When all was ready, Gibson maneuvered into position and announced, "I am going in to attack." Taerum's duty as the aircraft approached the dam was to make sure the aircraft was at the required sixty feet and he took his position at the perspex blister on the starboard side of the cockpit. As they approached the dam he switched on the spotlights at 00:25 and began giving directions to Gibson, "Down –down –down," and then, after the lights converged on the water, "Steady – steady". As the Lancaster hurtled towards the dam at 230 miles per hour, the lights made the huge aircraft an easy target and it came under fire from enemy guns in the sluice towers on

the sides of the dam. Gibson's bouncing bomb was delivered slightly short of the target, Hopgood's Lancaster was shot down, and Martin's weapon veered off course. However the aircraft piloted by S/L H.M. Young and F/L David Maltby placed their bouncing bombs perfectly and the dam



The Mohne Dam, breached by the Dambusters

crumbled. Taerum then led the remaining aircraft to the Eder Dam that was breached as well before Gibson returned to Scampton.

The daring gamble had been successful and the British made the most of it in the press. In a letter to his mother, Harlo said very little about the raid itself, "because you've probably heard more about it in the papers than I can say." He did write that, "It was by far the most thrilling trip I have ever been on and I wouldn't have missed it for anything. We all got back in the mess about 5:30 in the morning and then we really did relax. . ."

Shocked by his sudden notoriety, Taerum wrote that, "A couple of days later five of us went to the factory where they made Lancasters and gave the workers a pep-talk. Can you imagine me giving a speech? We were just about mobbed for autographs afterwards. The next thing was five days of leave in London and all the boys were down there, so we really had a time. At the end of five days, we were ordered back to our station to meet the King and Queen. They had lunch with us in the Officers' Mess and afterwards came out and inspected us. I was very lucky because I was introduced to both of them. The Queen is most charming and gracious. It really was quite a day."

A telegram reading, "AWARDED DFC AS W/CDR GIBSON'S NAVIGATOR EVERYTHING FINE LOVE -HARLO" was placed in the album and Mrs. Taerum received a letter stating, "One morning, they woke me up and told me that I had been awarded the DFC. Later I had the ribbon sewn on my tunic. Can you imagine me strutting around town with it afterward."

On June 22nd, the Queen presented the Victoria Cross to W/C Gibson and numerous other



Distinguished Flying Cross

medals to those who had distinguished themselves on the raid. She pinned the Distinguished Flying Cross on Harlo Taerum's tunic. At the dinner following the presentation the words, "Dam Busters" appeared on the menu and the term that would be forever associated with the attack was born.

In a letter that described his visit to Buckingham Palace, Taerum wrote, "The next day Sir Archibald Sinclair, secretary of state for air, came to see us. Wing Commander Gibson was away from the station so I had to reconstruct the details of the raid for him. I then got two weeks leave. When I told the c/o I was going to South Wales, he hooked me for a "Wings For Victory" speech at Bridgeend and I'm getting good at speeches now."

By this time, Hilda Taerum had added numerous photos and clippings related to the Dams Raid to her album. The attack, together with her son's participation, had been front-page news in the Calgary newspapers with headlines such as, "Alberta Fliers helped blast German Dams." The album includes a front page photo from The Montreal Standard that features Harlo examining documents and photos related to the raid with Sir Arthur Harris, Air Officer Commander-in-Chief of Bomber Command and Air Vice-Marshal the Hon. R.A. Cochrane, and other high level officers.

The medal presentations were big news in Calgary as well. The Calgary Herald's front page article was headlined, "Calgary Flier Receives DFC from the Queen -P/O H.T. Taerum Honoured for Raid on Dams." The paper also reported that Mrs. Taerum was invited to watch her son being presented with his medal on the "moving picture screen" in a newsreel and that, "Mrs. Taerum, accompanied by her younger son and daughter, was a guest of the Capitol Theatre."

Harlo's invitation to the investiture had been sent home and this special letter was placed in the album. Photos taken following the presentation of the medals to the Dambusters, including one of Gibson with Taerum and the other six members of the RCAF who were on the raid, were carefully placed in the album. As well, there is an undated telegram, "CHIN UP MOTHER AND STOP WORRYING EVERYTHING WILL BE FINE YOUR LOVING



Guy Gibson with RCAF airmen after the investiture
(l-r) Joe McCarthy, Revie Walker, Ken Brown, Guy Gibson,
Stefan Oancia, George Deering,
Don MacLean, Harlo Taerum

SON HARLO.”

W/C Guy Gibson, now VC DSO and Bar DFC and Bar had certainly earned his status as the Commonwealth's premier war hero. But he continued to fly and, “resisted or avoided all efforts to rest.” This concerned Arthur Harris who, “had to make a personal appeal to another warrior of similar character - Winston Churchill - who then and there ordered Gibson down to Chequers and took him with him on a highly publicized visit to North America.” On his 25th birthday, Guy Gibson arrived at Quebec City aboard the Queen Mary as a member of Churchill's delegation to the Quebec Conference with U.S. President Roosevelt. Upon his arrival, Gibson was asked by reporters if the prime minister called him by his first name. With his reply, “He calls me Dambuster,” the term was introduced to Canadians and further entrenched in World War II lore.

During the news conference, Air Minister Power said that Guy Gibson had been “loaned” to the Royal Canadian Air Force for a time in order to visit British Commonwealth Air Training Plan facilities in the country, “so the men in the camps may be inspired to follow his example.” As he crossed Canada, he very likely did inspire the young airmen with words such as, “We are all damn good. That's why we're winning this war.” As the headquarters of No. 4 Training Command, Calgary was a natural stop on Gibson's tour, but of course he had a personal duty to fulfill there. Terry Taerum's mother was looking forward to meeting her son's pilot and getting some up-to-date information on how Harlo was doing.

The RCAF was planning to make as much as they could of Guy Gibson's visit to Calgary and the public was very interested as well. By this time it was well known that his navigator was an Albertan and Hilda Taerum had been invited to be an important part of the visit. As the big day approached, she was both excited and likely very nervous about meeting the great Wing Commander Gibson VC DSO and Bar DFC and Bar.

Her album contains a paper with five type-written lines on it. She was obviously rehearsing what she would say to Gibson:

“I am really very thrilled Wing Commander Gibson. I have been looking forward to meeting you.”

“I feel as though I had known you for some time. Harlo has said so much about you in letters.”

“How was Harlo when you last saw him?”

“When you go back to England, Wing Commander Gibson, tell Harlo that we are all well at home.”

“This has been a real privilege, and one I will never forget.”

The plans for the day were front-page news in the September 11th Calgary Herald. The headline read, “V.C. Dam Buster Arrives Here Today.” Gibson was to land in Calgary at 6:00 pm on September 11th. Calgaryans

were to be admitted to No. 3 SFTS, "So that the public can 'Hail the air hero.'" Gibson was to be welcomed by AVM G.R. Howsam, Air Officer commanding No. 4 Training Command, and Mayor Andrew Davison. The ceremony was to include a march past by station personnel to the band from No. 2 Wireless School. Then Gibson was to give a radio interview over CFAC. The route by which W/C Gibson would travel from No. 3 SFTS to the Palliser Hotel was outlined in great detail to provide the public, "another opportunity to see him." At 8:30 there was to be a second interview over CFAC, "during which he is expected to tell in detail how the famous raid was organized and carried out."

Upon being introduced to Mrs. Taerum, Gibson was quoted as saying, "I'm awfully glad to meet you. You are the living image of him, you know –or should I say he is the living image of you? Terry is a great boy and a great navigator. He got the whole squadron to the dam."

The Calgary Herald's headline the following day was, "Terry got Dam Busters to the Job W/C Gibson Tells His Mother Here" and "Modest Dam Buster Hero Gets Enthusiastic Welcome."



Hilda Taerum meeting Guy Gibson in Calgary

Much was made of the presence of Hilda Taerum at Gibson's arrival, saying that, "Calgary has a special and 'hometown' interest in W/C Gibson's visit, for it was a young Calgarian who navigated his aircraft on the history-making raid." Gibson's modesty was noted as he, "spoke little of the escapades which won for him the VC, DSO and Bar, and DFC and Bar. Rather, this young airman, probably the most famous hero yet to emerge from the present war, led the conversation to the splendid job Canadian fliers are doing and to his, 'great pal,' Flying Officer Harlo 'Terry' Taerum DFC, of Calgary."

Gibson spent the next day in Banff and upon his return to Calgary spent several hours at the Taerum residence during the evening. It was likely at that time that Mrs. Taerum showed him her treasured album and had it autographed. As well, a newspaper photo of the two of them was signed by Gibson. The next morning he left for Vancouver by train. Hilda Taerum summed up her experience by saying that it was, "one of the proudest and

happiest times of her life" and the numerous photos and newspaper clippings were placed in the album.

Four days later the telegram arrived, "REGRET TO ADVISE THAT YOUR SON FLYING OFFICER TORGER HARLO TAERUM DFC J ONE SIX SIX EIGHT EIGHT IS REPORTED MISSING AFTER AIR OPERATIONS OVERSEAS SEPTEMBER FIFTEENTH STOP LETTER FOLLOWS -RCAF CASUALTIES OFFICER."

No. 617 Squadron Lancaster AJ-S had taken off from RAF Coningsby at 23:56 on September 15th to bomb the Dortmund-Ems Canal near Ladbergen. It was to be the first time that a 12,000 pound (high capacity) bomb was to be used against the enemy. AJ-S had a most distinguished crew. Its pilot was the recently appointed c/o, S/L G.W. Holden and included four who had flown with W/C Gibson on the Dams Raid. The decorations of those aboard totalled a DSO, two DFM's, and six DFC's, including F/L Taerum's. Their aircraft was flying low-level over Holland when they came upon the little town of Nordhoorn. Holden pulled up to avoid a church steeple and was hit by a burst of flak. The fuel tank erupted in flames and the Lancaster disintegrated as it and the huge bomb exploded when it struck the ground. All aboard were killed.

Again, Harlo Taerum was front-page news in his hometown newspapers, this time the headline reading, "Calgary's Dam Buster is Reported Missing." Guy Gibson, who was in Montreal at the time, sent a message to Mrs. Taerum, referring to his navigator as, "A first class man." Hilda Taerum dutifully placed the telegrams, clippings, and letters in the album.

Harlo Taerum's logbook, which opened with details of a map reading flight in an Anson on February 10, 1941 was closed by his friend Mick Martin who, upon the death of S/L Holden, became the temporary Officer Commanding No. 617 Squadron. As one looks at the signature in the logbook, the emotion with which it was placed can only be imagined.

A year later on September 19, 1944, Gibson himself was lost. He had become a staff officer but managed to fly on some operations. His last was aboard a Mosquito as Master Bomber on a raid to Rheydt and Munchen Gadbach. After completing his duties he was heard to say, "Okay, that's fine, now home." 45 minutes later his Mosquito crashed near Steenbergen. Gibson and his navigator were killed.

And then on February 11, 1944, another devastating telegram was delivered to the already battered Hilda Taerum, "DEEPLY REGRET TO ADVISE YOUR SON FLIGHT SERGEANT LORNE CLIFFORD TAERUM PREVIOUSLY REPORTED MISSING IS NOW REPORTED TO HAVE LOST HIS LIFE ON ACTIVE SERVICE OVERSEAS FEBRUARY THIRD STOP PLEASE ACCEPT MY PROFOUND SYMPATHY STOP LETTER FOLLOWS -RCAF CASUALTIES OFFICER.

Terry's younger brother, only eighteen years old, had been killed on his sixth operation when his Lancaster was attacked and downed by

ROBERT CLOTHIER

- “Relic’s Crew” and Canada’s Bomber Command Memorial

The photograph to be etched onto Canada’s Bomber Command Memorial had to be of a Royal Canadian Air Force Bomber Command crew. It had to evoke the youth and the spirit of the young Canadians who served and it had to be of excellent quality so that it would reproduce well on the polished granite. We went through the crew photos we could find and finally came up with one that had all the above attributes.

It was of a No. 408 “Goose” Squadron crew. All were young in appearance and smiling and behind their faces was the black wing of a Halifax bomber, resulting in good contrast for the reproduction on the granite.

We found out later however, that there was a wonderful, unexpected bonus that went along with our choice. It turned out that the captain of this Halifax was someone who you would somehow never have expected to have been a Bomber Command Halifax pilot. The very young-looking man with the jaunty expression and wearing a scarf was Robert Clothier, who went on to play the role of “Relic” in “The Beachcombers.” Through this photo of “Relic’s Crew,” the point is made that even those who one might not have expected to step up and volunteer for Bomber Command were there when duty called.



Robert Clothier



Arguably the most successful CBC Television drama of all time, *The Beachcombers* was the longest running drama series in Canadian television history. It ran from 1972 until 1991, has been translated into five languages, and shown in 37 different countries. The program, which included a good measure of comedy, featured the small town exploits of a group of competitive seafarers who tried to salvage logs that drifted onto the beaches of British Columbia. Filmed on location in Gibsons, British Columbia, it starred Bruno Gerussi as Nick, Rae Brown as Molly, and veteran Canadian actor, Robert Clothier as "Relic," an unscrupulous adversary and rival beachcomber to "Nick."

In his crew picture, F/L Clothier looks almost child-like, certainly very young as were most Bomber Command pilots. Even then he appears to have been a bit of a character. In the photo he is wearing a scarf and has a pistol in his hand.

Robert Clothier was born in Prince Rupert, British Columbia in 1921 and attended St. Georges School in Vancouver. Like many of his contemporaries, he joined the Royal Canadian Air Force at an early age. He learned to fly at No. 1 Elementary Flying Training School in Malton, Ontario and No. 4 Service Flying Training School in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.



Relic's Crew: (l-r) F/O L. Corbeil (bomb aimer), F/S J. McCart (flight engineer), F/L B. Austen (wireless operator), F/O Santo DeZorzi (navigator), F/L Robert Clothier (pilot), F/L T. Murdoch (mid-upper gunner), F/O B. Fitzgerald (rear gunner)

Clothier was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross on December 5, 1944, the citation reading, "This officer has completed numerous sorties in the role of pilot, involving attacks on most of the enemy's heavily defended targets. On all occasions he has pressed home his attacks with great determination and by his personal example of courage, coolness and confidence has set an example which has inspired all with whom he has flown."

On December 23, 1944, while serving as an instructor with No. 5 Operational Training Unit at Boundary Bay, British Columbia, F/L Clothier was the pilot of a B-25 Mitchell that crashed on takeoff. Three on board were killed and Clothier was the only survivor. He was severely injured with a broken back and was paralyzed from the waist down for two years. At the time of his injury, Clothier had some 1204 hours flying time in Tiger Moths, Cranes, Ansons, Hampdens, Oxfords, Wellingtons, Lysanders, Martinets, Halifaxes, Lancasters, and Mitchells.

F/L Clothier's navigator, Santy De Zorzi, was convinced "Relic" was, "the best pilot in the Royal Canadian Air Force."

Following the war, Clothier studied architecture at the University of British Columbia and also attended the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts in London. As well as having a successful television career in which he played more than fifty roles, Clothier was a highly regarded stage actor. He was also an accomplished artist and sculptor. His first exhibition was at the University of British Columbia in 1956 when he won first place for "Three Forms."

Clothier was a longtime resident of the Capilano Highlands area of North Vancouver. He suffered a stroke in 1996, but afterwards taught himself to paint with his left hand.

Robert Clothier passed away in 1999. He was described as a modern-day renaissance man. Jackson Davies, who worked with Clothier on *The Beachcombers*, said that he and his late friend often shared a great laugh over the fact that the character of Relic was very different than the actor. Said Davies, "He was a very dignified man... a true professional to work with." Clothier was married to actress Shirley Broderick.

The image of "Relic's Crew" is featured on the centre panel of Canada's Bomber Command Memorial. Dedicated on August 20, 2005, the forty foot long Memorial Wall lists the names of 10,659 airmen who were killed serving with Bomber Command. It includes all the Canadians who died as well as those of other nationalities who were killed while wearing the uniform of the Royal Canadian Air Force. During the Dedication Bill Graham, Canada's Minister of National Defence, said of the men of Bomber Command,



Robert Clothier, 1962
UBC Archives

"They never faltered because they were proud, because they were courageous, and because they never forgot what they were fighting for. Ladies and Gentlemen, we must never forget them and what they gave for us."



**Bill Graham, Canada's Minister of National Defence,
speaking at the Dedication of
Canada's Bomber Command Memorial**
photo: Kathy Taerum



Canada's Bomber Command Memorial
photo: Brent Armstrong

BILLY BISHOP

-The Clayton Knight Committee

During World War I Billy Bishop became Canada's most famous war hero. Officially credited with destroying seventy-two enemy aircraft, he was the top allied ace of the war, and a recipient of the Victoria Cross.

After the war, Bishop gave lectures and did stunt flying prior to establishing an air service with fellow ace William Barker. However the venture failed after legal and financial problems and a serious crash. Bishop then became quite successful in a British-based business but after losing all his money in the stock market crash of 1929, he returned to Canada and started again with an oil company.

In 1938, Billy Bishop was put in charge of recruiting for the Royal Canadian Air Force with the honorary title of Air Marshal. He attacked his new job with relish, helping to create a system for training pilots across Canada and became instrumental in setting up and promoting the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan. The young Canadian men loved him and flocked to recruiting stations after each of his speeches. Anxiously awaiting his eighteenth birthday, Murray Peden attended a recruiting rally at which Bishop spoke. He recalled, "being exhilarated by the pugnacious speech" but also that he (Bishop), "exuded as much dignity as daring." He helped sell war bonds, conducted endless inspection tours, and socialized in the mess with the young pilots. He even appeared in the Hollywood film, "Captains of the Clouds," playing himself while pinning wings on the graduates of an RCAF Service Flying Training School class. Some feel that Bishop's recruitment effort during World War II was his finest hour.

During World War I, Bishop had become friends with American artist and fellow WW I pilot Clayton Knight who flew with No. 44 and 206 Squadrons of the Royal Flying Corps. This friendship would lead to the formation of the Clayton Knight Committee.



Billy Bishop



Air Marshal W.A. "Billy" Bishop VC pins wings on Leading Aircraftman R.N. Harrison of Montclair, New Jersey upon his graduation from No. 2 Service Flying Training School at Uplands, Ontario (31 July, 1942).

During the fall of 1938, Billy Bishop and four other Canadian aviators were hand-picked to form a new honorary Air Advisory Committee. The committee provided the Canadian Government with independent advice on Royal Canadian Air Force matters. With war clouds gathering in Europe, Bishop understood the upcoming need for pilots and recognized the potential of including and training Americans for the RCAF.

Clayton Knight was born in Rochester, New York in 1891. He embarked on a career in painting, studying under three well-known artists.

It was not until the United States entered World War I in April 1917 that their government realized the extent to which their air power had fallen behind that of Europe. To speed up training, some 2,500 future pilots were sent to England and France for advanced pilot training.

One of the original 150 pilots sent to England during the summer of 1917, Knight began his training with No. 44 Squadron of the Royal Flying Corps. His Commanding Officer was Major Arthur T. Harris, who later became Marshal of the Royal Air Force and the officer in charge of Bomber

Command. During September 1918, Knight was posted to No. 206 Squadron which was serving on the Western Front in France. The squadron flew four bombing raids daily as well as providing reconnaissance and photographs of the front lines. Their main aircraft was the British de Havilland 9, which Clayton Knight was flying on 5 October 1918 when he was shot down by Harald Auffahrt, a top ace who scored 26 kills during WW I. Knight was wounded but survived the crash behind enemy lines. When the war ended a month later, Knight was a prisoner of war in a German hospital.

Following his recovery in a British hospital, Knight returned to New York and resumed his aviation art career. During the post-war period,

Clayton Knight's work graced many celebrated books. From 1939 until 1942 he was a special correspondent for the Associated Press, but this was mainly a front for his main job – working with Billy Bishop and operating The Clayton Knight Committee.

When war was declared on 3 September 1939, America's President Roosevelt made it clear that although the United States would remain neutral, he understood that, "Even a neutral cannot be asked to close his mind or conscience." Although there was significant opposition to America's involvement in the war, particularly in the Congress, Roosevelt would do what he could to assist Britain and her Allies.

Billy Bishop recognized the potential of involving Americans in the RCAF and, in particular, the need for instructors to support the training plan that Canada would play the major role in. He knew that the RCAF would not be able to enlist and train all the instructors required, particularly during the early start-up phase. His main concern was not that Americans might not want to join the war effort but that the pool of experienced Americans should be tapped as efficiently as possible without violating the American law that stated that recruiting American citizens on American soil to fight in a foreign war was a violation of the United States Neutrality Act.

Bishop began working on his plan, first by contacting Homer Smith, a Canadian WW I veteran who flew with the Royal Naval Air Service and after the war fell heir to an oil fortune. Bishop then contacted his old friend Clayton Knight, telling him that, "American boys will want to help Canada as they did in the First War. But this time they must have direction and be screened. We



April 1931 magazine cover by Clayton Knight

need someone in the States to sort them out before they cross the border." With his broad ties to aviation in the United States, Knight would be key to the public relations involved in Bishop's initiative. The two pilots formed a bond that would eventually see over 8800 young Americans join the RCAF prior to December 7, 1941.

Despite being advised that smuggling American pilots into Canada was unquestionably illegal, Bishop, together with Homer and Knight, began to implement his plan by undertaking a survey of potential recruits. Smith, who had been granted a commission as a Wing Commander in the RCAF in order to conduct the survey, rented office space in the Waldorf Hotel in New York and soon he and Clayton Knight were on a tour of American flying schools.

Through the "Phoney War" phase of the conflict, the RCAF displayed little urgency regarding the project but the air battles that followed the German conquests in France during May, 1940 changed things. Smith then revealed that the Committee had accumulated a list of 300 American instructors. These were experienced pilots, with instrument flying qualifications and many with multi-engine time, and all eager to come to Canada.

The Canadian Air Staff were thrilled and the Clayton Knight Committee was instructed to immediately direct qualified American pilots to Canada, although in a way that would not upset the American Government. Concerns regarding recruits having to pledge allegiance to the King, something that could result in forfeiture of citizenship for Americans, were removed when the Canadian government passed an Order in Council replacing this "oath" with an agreement to obey RCAF rules and discipline. It was also agreed that the Americans would have the right to transfer to their own armed services should the United States enter the war. But nevertheless, the law against recruiting in the U.S. still stood.

The Clayton Knight Committee continued its work based at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York. Soon, pilot friends of Clayton Knight were employed as recruiters in other American luxury hotels based in San Francisco, Atlanta, Spokane, Los Angeles, Dallas, San Antonio, Cleveland, Memphis, and Kansas City. Recruiter-interviewers were paid \$150 per week, but, unable to advertise in the media, could only promote the cause by word-of-mouth. The Canadian Government sent the expense money to the RCAF who passed it on to a bank account opened in the name of Homer Smith.

By September 1940, 197 pilots had been sent to Canada and the number reached 321 by the end of the year. Word of the Clayton Knight Committee was spreading effectively and was reinforced by the response of those Americans serving in Canada which was overwhelmingly favourable.

During September and October 1940, Canadian authorities advised Bishop and Knight to use caution until the American elections were over. Charles Lindbergh had made strong anti-Roosevelt speeches and Canada did not wish to embarrass the President before the election.

During November 1940, a note from the American State Department



Many of the Americans in the RCAF wore this patch on their shoulders.

was released stating that the Clayton Knight Committee was openly spending Canadian government funds to lure Americans to Canada to serve in the RCAF and that this was in violation of American law. In response, the Canadian government created the Dominion Aeronautical Association (DAA) as a buffer between the Clayton Knight Committee and the RCAF.

Homer Smith was appointed chief executive officer and Clayton Knight became director of publicity. American volunteers were now passed on to the newly-formed DAA, which was a civilian agency so it would appear Clayton Knight was not breaking any American law. It was no coincidence that the DAA offices were located right next door to RCAF Headquarters in Ottawa. This was not advertised and Clayton Knight made sure that the American press emphasized that the DAA was recruiting civilian pilots.

Of course the situation changed completely following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour on December 7, 1941 and the United States' entry into the European War. The Clayton Knight Committee had done its job and ceased to function during February 1942.

During May 1942, a "Recruiting Train" crossed Canada and picked up 1759 Americans who wished to transfer from the RCAF to the United States armed forces. By the end of the war an additional 2000 of the 8864 who had enlisted had transferred to the American forces. However 5067 Americans completed their wartime service with the RCAF.

Of the 8864 Americans served in the RCAF, many went on to serve with Bomber Command and about 800 were killed in training or combat. Americans from all 48 states were killed serving in the RCAF.

According to Spencer Dunmore, author of "Wings for Victory," "They were colourful, those volunteers -professionals and playboys, convicted felons and husbands on the run, idealists and mercenaries, kids seeking adventure, youngsters seeking nothing but an opportunity to fly, middle-aged men looking for work -and to all of them, the RCAF's need was their golden opportunity.

The most significant accomplishment realized by Billy Bishop and the

Clayton Knight Committee was the successful recruiting of the hundreds of pilots who were able to serve as flying instructors, allowing the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan to operate at greater capacity much sooner than anticipated.

Following the war, a letter of gratitude for the services these Americans rendered to Canada was sent to the United States by Air Ambassador C.G. Power that read, "It is with sincere regret, but pride in the role that they played, that we part with the Americans who fitted into our organization and formed such a formidable team with our own Canadian airmen."



Clayton Knight, Leslie Roberts, and the legendary Canadian fighter pilot, George "Buz" Beurling



One of the most renown of the Americans who joined the RCAF early in the war was P/O John Gillespie Magee who, while a Spitfire pilot with No. 412 Squadron, wrote the iconic aviation poem, "High Flight."

REG LANE

-The Legendary Canadian Pathfinder

In his book, "Above and Beyond," highly acclaimed author and historian Spencer Dunmore refers to Reg Lane as, "one of Canada's two leading bomber pilots of the war" (the other being Johnny Fauquier). As the culmination of an extraordinary wartime career, Reg Lane commanded the Royal Canadian Air Force's only Pathfinder squadron over some of the most heavily defended targets in Germany and occupied Europe.

Lt. General Lane visited the museum a number of times prior to his death in 2003. He was a most articulate and knowledgeable individual who had completed three tours of operations and flown with Bomber Command for four years. Reg became a Group Captain at 24 years of age, commanded an operational pathfinder squadron, served with No. 6 Group Headquarters, and became one of Canada's most highly decorated airmen. The museum was honoured to have him as guest speaker at the official opening of the museum in 1992 and welcomed him again as a special guest at our "Salute to the Pathfinders" tribute in 1994.



Reg Lane

Reginald John Lane was born in Victoria, British Columbia in 1920. He had no particular interest in aviation but simply walked into an RCAF enlistment office on a, "spur of the moment decision" in 1940. It soon became apparent though that he was a natural flier as he completed training at No. 8 Elementary Flying Training School in Vancouver and No.10 Service Flying Training School in Dauphin, Manitoba where he received his wings in June 1941.

Following operational training flying the Whitley bomber, Reg joined No. 35 Squadron in the fall of 1941. S/L Leonard Cheshire was his first flight commander. The squadron was in the process of converting from Whitleys to the new Halifax bombers and P/O Lane converted to the aircraft while on the squadron. His first operation was a long flight to Berlin in a Halifax through

storm clouds and severe icing conditions. In December, he carried out two dangerous, low-level daylight attacks against the German battle cruisers Scharnhorst and Gneisenau while they were in the French port of Brest. The bombers approached at an altitude of 150 feet. During the first attack, he watched as his squadron commander was shot down by flak.



**Reg Lane (third from left) with his
No. 35 Squadron Halifax crew**

On March 27, 1942, Reg attacked the German battleship Tirpitz that was moored in a Norwegian fjord near Trondheim. The attack was thwarted by heavy anti-aircraft fire and a smokescreen. Lane's Halifax returned to base after a nine hour flight, but three other Halifax bombers did not.

The squadron attacked the battleship a second time -a mast height attack by moonlight. The enemy defences were ready however and Lane's Halifax was hit repeatedly as he attacked at an altitude of 150 feet. Flak smashed into the main spar and there was concern the aircraft would break apart but he managed to return to base. Four other Halifaxes were lost, including that of W/C Don Bennett who evaded to Sweden, eventually returning to England to become the commander of the Pathfinder Force. On another operation, Lane returned with 120 holes in his aircraft's fuselage and wings.

Reg participated in two "Thousand Bomber Raids," the first to Cologne on May 30, 1942 and the second to Essen two nights later. These raids were designed by Air Marshal Arthur Harris to overwhelm the enemy's defences and also to impress both the enemy and the Allies with the growing strength of Bomber Command.

By the end of June and at the age of only 22, the "fair haired young man with the ready smile and friendly manner" was already a veteran and was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. The citation reads, "This officer has carried out a total of 23 operational sorties involving a total of 137 flying hours. Targets attacked include Berlin, Hamburg, Cologne (3), Mannheim, Bremen (3), two daylight raids on the Scharnhorst and Gneisenau at Brest, and two low level attacks on the German battleship Tirpitz in Aason Fjord at Trondheim. These attacks were carried out from a height of 150 feet . . . in the face of intense opposition from the battleship and gun batteries on both sides of the fjord.

“Flight Lieutenant Lane’s tour of operations has proved to be one of steadfast determination to reach his target. The operational work of his crew has been outstanding for the accuracy and consistency with which it has been carried out. His skill as a pilot and his coolness under enemy fire and also in bad weather conditions has inspired his crew with extreme confidence and made him a captain who is of outstanding value to his squadron.

“For this record of fine service, courageous devotion to duty, and his unquestionable fine qualities of captaincy, Flight Lieutenant Lane is strongly recommended for the award of the Distinguished Flying Cross.”

The completion of his first tour of operations during the summer of 1942 coincided with the formation of the Pathfinder Force. Known as No. 8 Group, the PFF was to mark the target prior to the arrival of the main force of bombers that would come in behind them. No. 35 was one of six RAF squadrons chosen to form the nucleus of this new Group.

The idea of using an elite corps of crews with high navigational ability evolved from the somewhat limited accuracy of bomber crews during the early years of the war. As well, the more sophisticated navigational aids being developed were more difficult to use. Although originally opposed by Arthur Harris, the officer in charge of Bomber Command, hand-picked crews from operational bomber squadrons were transferred to the Pathfinders. The PFF was



Pathfinder Flares

commanded by veteran Australian bomber pilot, D.C.T. Bennett, who retained command throughout the war. It began operations within a few hours of its formation and continued its work of leading the main force against the enemy until the bomber offensive ceased, just prior to the German surrender. A variety of techniques for marking targets with green, red, and yellow flares were utilized depending on cloud conditions. Often an initial marking of the target was improved upon or altered as the raid progressed. The gallantry of the Pathfinder Force is legendary, and its contribution to the war effort immense as it perfected techniques for precision main force bombing

Throughout the winter of 1942-1943, Lane attacked targets in Berlin, Stuttgart, Munich, Milan, and Turin as a Pathfinder and his tenacity and courage continued. During the final operation of his second tour on April 16, 1943, he had to dive to 1000 feet to escape heavy anti-aircraft fire over Frankfurt and his Halifax was “coned” by searchlights. By early 1944 the enemy had 13,748 deployed, the largest and most powerful of which could illuminate a target 13 kilometres away with their 2.7 billion candlepower.

Being “coned” was terrifying. In his book, “Boys, Bombs, and Brussels Sprouts,” former Nanton Lancaster Society member J. Douglas Harvey wrote, “I had just closed the bomb doors when I went blind. Absolutely blind.

Terrified, I realized we had been coned. The world was a dazzling white, as though a giant flashlight was aimed directly into my eyes. I couldn't see my hands on the control column, couldn't see the instrument panel, couldn't see outside the cockpit. I was naked, totally exposed, helpless. We were a very bright and shiny target in the apex of fifty or more beams that were radar directed. They weren't going to let go easily." After diving for seven minutes at speeds reaching 350 miles per hour, Doug was able to out-distance the lights and escape.

Numerous No. 35 Squadron crews had been lost but Reg Lane, the "amiable, soft-spoken Canadian" kept coming back and seemed able to handle the strain of operational flying better than most. After eighteen months of continuous operations, Lane was awarded the Distinguished Service Order with the citation, "Squadron Leader Lane has been engaged in operational duties for a long period and over a wide range of targets. His missions have been marked by unvarying success. As a flight commander, Squadron Leader Lane has rendered most valuable service and his leadership and example have been inspiring to all the aircrew with whom he has come into contact. This officer has recently been on operational sorties to such targets as Berlin, Stuttgart, and Munich and by his courage and devotion to duty has achieved many outstanding successes."

Following the completion of his second tour, Reg was posted to the Pathfinder Navigational Training Unit.

Lane was then selected to return to Canada and fly the first Canadian-built Lancaster, KB-700 -"The Ruhr Express," across the North Atlantic to England. He recalled that he, "was delighted to return to Canada because it gave him a break." Prior to preparing to fly KB-700, Reg visited Victoria, returning to his home city with the rank of squadron leader and a reputation as a brilliant bomber pilot -a veteran of over fifty bombing operations and having returned at least a dozen times on three engines.

During the early years of the Second World War, the British and their

Allies were building as many aircraft as possible. In a surprisingly short time, thousands of aircraft of several types, including four-engined Lancaster bombers, were being manufactured in Canada. For a country still largely agrarian and just recovering from a decade of depression, the challenge that was met was immense.



The "Roll-out" of the first Canadian-built Lancaster

Eventually Lancaster production reached the level of one aircraft per day and the project employed ten thousand people. A total of 430 were built in Canada at Malton, Ontario and 105 of these were lost in action.

The departure to war of the first Canadian-built Lancaster on August 6, 1943 was a huge media event with the now-



Reg Lane (far right) and crew with KB-700

legendary Lorne Green providing coast-to-coast radio coverage. Lane recalled that he was, “not given the opportunity to flight-test KB-700” and when he settled into the cockpit he found that the engine instruments were not working. He felt that, “In front of all the workers, officials, and media it would have been an un-mitigated disaster not to take off. As well, it would have had an adverse effect on morale.” The rest of the controls seemed fine so he started the engines and took off to the cheers of thousands. He landed in Dorval, near Montreal, but it was another month before the “Ruhr Express” actually made it to England.

After delivering KB-700, S/L Lane returned to the PFF Navigational Training Unit. Then during the winter of 1943-1944, and after only four months off of operations, S/L Lane was given command of No. 405 Squadron, the Canadian Pathfinder squadron formerly commanded by Johnny Fauquier, and began his third tour of operations. He was often assigned to be the “Master Bomber” during major Bomber Command Raids, arriving over the target prior to the main force and then circling as the raid developed, broadcasting over a special frequency to the other aircraft and making adjustments as the raid developed. During the “Battle of Berlin” he circled the city for up to 40 minutes while directing a main force of more than 500 aircraft and being under ceaseless attack from German night fighters.

With his promotion to Group Captain at the age of 24, Lane completed his third tour of operations, flying his 65th and last operation just prior to D-Day as master bomber on a raid to Caen. Following this he was awarded a Bar to his DFC, the citation reading, “Group Captain Lane has completed many attacks on heavily defended targets in Germany. He has constantly displayed a fine fighting spirit throughout his operational career and has proved himself an officer of outstanding ability whose courage, cheerfulness, and keen sense of duty have been an inspiration to his crews.”

Reg then served at No. 6 Group Headquarters until the end of 1944

when he become part of the planning team for “Tiger Force” that was to be the combined British/Canadian/Australian bomber group to attack Japan. He was getting on a bus to travel to the airport to fly to Okinawa to become Chief of Bomber Command Operations in that theatre when the first atomic bomb was dropped. Soon afterwards, the war in the Pacific ended and “Tiger Force” was no longer required.

Reg’s postwar career was equally brilliant. Amongst other positions, he served as the officer commanding Air Transport Command, No. 1 Air Division in Lahr, Germany, and upon his promotion to Lieutenant General, he was appointed Deputy Commander in Chief NORAD.



(l-r) Duke Warren, Melba Warren, and Reg Lane at the Official Opening of the Nanton Lancaster Air Museum in 1992



Nanton Lancaster Society President Dan Fox (left) and Reg Lane unveil a commissioned painting depicting No. 405 Squadron in action over Montzen, Belgium at the museum’s “Salute to the Pathfinders” in 1994.

SHERE LOWE

-A Dambuster's Daughter

"I am a flight attendant with Calgary based WestJet Airlines. I have recently become very interested in your Society. My father was in the RCAF and was a bomb aimer with Squadron 617. His aircraft, AJ-M, was the second aircraft in the raid after Gibson's. Could you please contact me. I would like to learn more about my father and this incredible mission. I am in Calgary a lot because of my work and I hope that I may be able to help you with the information that I have.

Thanks, Shere - November 21, 2002"

Shere posted the above entry in our guestbook after an Internet search led her to our museum's website where she learned of our plans to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the Dambusters Raid. Since then, our museum has been privileged to share a wonderful journey with Shere. She has come to know the details of her father's story and, together with her mother, Doris Fraser, travelled to Europe several times to connect with her father's wartime career and to become involved with an international network of Dambusters and their families. As the story unfolded, the museum incorporated her father's incredible experiences into our Dams Raid displays, both in the museum and on our website.

The following is based on an article written by free-lance journalist, Tamara Stecyk that first appeared in the July 2003 issue of, "Airlines," WestJet's inflight magazine.



Shere Lowe with Dams Raid veteran Fred Sutherland at the museum's sixtieth anniversary commemoration of the Dams Raid.

Shere Lowe has fond memories of her father, but sadly he died flying a float-plane near Saltery Bay, British Columbia when she was only six years old. "For most of my life, the painful memories of my father's tragic plane crash and death filled me with such a sadness that I rarely spoke of him. Memories of plane rides with 'Daddy' and working with the animals on our farm were overshadowed with grief."

But Shere went on to follow her father's love of flying by becoming a flight attendant. However it wasn't until 2003 as an employee of WestJet that she discovered her father's true heroism and his role in the legendary Dambusters Raid.



John Fraser

"Operation Chastise," the daring night attack on the great dams of western Germany, was the most brilliant air attack of the Second World War. "Highly experienced crews had to face the danger of flying at night in heavy Lancaster bombers at sixty feet over water and what made it so dangerous at that level were high tension wires and all kinds of obstacles," says Lowe. "There was no room for error in flying because if you dropped a wing at 60 feet, it would be on the ground."

Shere's father, John Fraser, was a Royal Canadian Air Force bomb aimer from Nanaimo, British Columbia. He had completed numerous operations with No. 50 Squadron prior to being selected to join No. 617, a special squadron that was being formed to attack the Ruhr Dams using the newly developed and untested, bouncing bomb. W/C Guy Gibson was the squadron commander and he was given the unprecedented right to choose the individuals he wanted to have on this special squadron. He chose only the most highly regarded aircrew.

Five weeks of intensive training was all the squadron had as



John Fraser and his bride, Doris

the raid had to be scheduled for the full moon and when the reservoirs held their maximum capacity. Fraser likely felt very fortunate that W/C Gibson granted him leave to be married on April 29. He returned to the squadron's base at RAF Scampton the next day and didn't see his wife Doris again until May 1945.

Lying on his chest in the nose of the aircraft, Fraser would be responsible for pointing out high-tension lines and other hazards to the pilot as they flew to the target at extremely low level. During the attack he was to take command of the bombing run and direct his pilot to the target for an accurate release of the bomb.

John Hopgood was F/L Fraser's pilot. Highly regarded, he was selected from No. 106 Squadron, having served there under Gibson who wrote, "As soon as I saw him I thought, 'What an ideal squadron type. I like that chap.'"

At dusk on May 16, 1943, the attack was launched. Hopgood flew Lancaster AJ-M across the North Sea at sixty feet and upon reaching the enemy coast, Fraser and the navigator directed him over northern Germany to the Ruhr Dams, still maintaining the extremely low level. At one point the rear gunner, Tony Burcher, saw a looping arc of high-tension cable above his line of vision. It then seemed to drop away behind the aircraft as Hopgood gained height. "Right under the bloody things!" exclaimed the front gunner. "Sorry about that," said Hopgood.



John Hopgood

Soon after that, AJ-M was raked by ground fire. Burcher was hit in the groin and stomach. A searchlight blazed onto the aircraft but Burcher shot it out. Then a shell burst alongside and Hopgood feathered an engine that had been set on fire.

As well as the rear gunner being wounded, John Minchin, the wireless operator, had been hit in the leg and the front gunner did not respond over the intercom, having been seriously injured or killed. The flight engineer shouted, "Christ, look at the blood" as he held a handkerchief to his pilot's head. "I'm OK," shouted Hopgood. "Carry on and don't worry."

It was still an hour to the Mohne Dam and F/L Hopgood and crew could certainly have returned to base with honour. But their character and determination was typical of those chosen for No. 617 Squadron and they pressed on to the target. Five Lancasters were lost en route to the dams.

After reaching the Mohne reservoir and rendezvousing with the other first wave aircraft, W/C Gibson manoeuvred into position and announced, "I am going in to attack." As the Lancaster hurtled towards the dam at 230 miles per hour, the downward pointing lights that were used to determine the precise altitude necessary made the huge aircraft an easy target and it came

under fire from enemy guns in the towers on the sides of the dam. Gibson's bouncing bomb was delivered slightly short of the target. It exploded creating a huge tower of water and spray. After the mist subsided Hopgood was the next to attack.

John Fraser recalled, "Gibson got away with it because he had the element of surprise. They (the guns in the towers) crossed up on us and the light flak battery came in on the side. We had to fly through the middle of it. I released the bomb. We were put on fire in the starboard wing. The one engine came on fire immediately. We flew on and the pilot gave the order to abandon the aircraft within about 25 seconds after we passed over the dam."

Fraser's bomb had cleared the dam wall, completely destroying the power station which "blew up with a large sheet of flame," immediately causing a power failure over the entire valley area.

"Get out you damn fool," Hopgood shouted to the rear gunner, "If only I could get another 300 feet. I can't get any more height." He was struggling to gain enough altitude so that some of his crew could escape. He knew that he would not survive. Rear gunner Burcher was struck by the tail plane as he jumped from the crew door. His back was broken but he survived.

Fraser recalled, "I knelt facing forward over the escape hatch and I saw that the trees looked awful damn close. I thought there was only one thing to do and that was to pull the rip cord and let the pilot chute go out first and then let it pull the chute out and me after it and that's what I did. I rolled out and the tail wheel whizzed by my ear. I swung to the vertical and within two or three seconds I touched the ground. While I was in the air,



The Mohne Dam following the raid

before I touched the ground, the aircraft crashed about probably 1500 or 2000 feet away from me." A voice overheard on the squadron radio lamented, "Poor old Hoppy." It would take three more bouncing bombs, but the Mohne Dam was breached.

A note in the family album written by Fraser's wife Doris reads, "I received a letter from John on June 29 telling me he was safe and well and a Prisoner of War in Germany. He baled out at 300 feet and landed uninjured. F/L John Hopgood was his pilot and to him John owes his life." Hopgood had sacrificed his life in order to maintain the necessary altitude so that some of the crew could escape.

Shere Lowe only discovered the history behind the raid when she mentioned to a few WestJet pilots that her father was a Dambuster. They encouraged her to learn more about Fraser's role in the raid. Another flight attendant placed a 1982 book by John Sweetman titled, "The Dambusters

Raid" in her mailbox. Inside, all the places where her father is mentioned had been highlighted. Lowe had no idea that the name "John Fraser" was so highly regarded.

"My father was such a modest man," she says.

She began researching the Dambusters Raid through the Internet and contacted our museum.

Museum director Dave Birrell told Lowe about plans for a sixtieth anniversary commemoration of the raid that was planned for August and asked for copies of any memorabilia that her family kept after her father's death. Lowe, impressed that others were interested in her father's story, approached her mother Doris about the Dambusters and a flood of information about her father was revealed for the first time in 40 years.

"Once Dad was killed, she put everything away," Shere says. Newspaper clippings, her father's 180 Prisoner of War letters, and a letter from Guy Gibson, the commanding officer of No. 617 Squadron, were brought out and Lowe began piecing the story of the Dams Raid and her father's involvement together.

Lowe says her father's escape has never been documented correctly and several books incorrectly state that he was captured immediately at the crash site.

After his harrowing, low level parachute jump, John Fraser found himself in a wheat field. He hid his parachute in a culvert and, at dawn, watched from a hiding place as hundreds of Germans came to see what had happened to the Mohne Dam. Sneaking through the cordon that enemy soldiers had put in place around the area, Fraser headed towards Holland. He managed to elude enemy soldiers for ten days as he walked 200 miles, surviving on turnips and potatoes from farmer's fields. Finally he was caught only thirty miles from the border and sent to a Prisoner of War camp.

"He was so exhausted and was caught trying to walk past one too many policemen near the border," says Lowe.

Her father was in solitary confinement for seven days, but his spirit remained unbroken. After intense interrogation, Fraser revealed some information on the raid. However he refused to give details of the practice location and defiantly told his captors, "I'm proud of my part in the dams attack!"

Fraser was in four different camps over two years, one of which was Stalag Luft III where he played a role in the Great Escape. He was one of the "penguins" who distributed sand from the escape tunnels by releasing it throughout the camp from bags in their trousers.

When Fraser returned from the war, he told his wife that the Dambusters Raid was a suicide mission, says Lowe. But he never forgot how Hopgood traded his life for those of his crewmembers and named his oldest son, John Hopgood Fraser. His daughter Shere was named after Hopgood's birthplace and his youngest son after Guy Gibson.

As Lowe learned more about her father's story, she continued to keep in touch with her new friends in Nanton. Coincidentally, her employer is a major supporter of Canadian aviation history, providing significant discounts for museum delegates from across Canada to attend an annual conference each year.

"This whole connection with Shere, WestJet, and our museum is a neat little triangle," said Birrell who finally met Lowe and her mother during a visit to Nanton in March 2003. Lowe's first trip to the museum was an emotional one. Her 79 year old mother climbed into the pilot seat of the Lancaster and Lowe was able to visualize what her father experienced during the attack. "Once I was able to climb inside it, I could see how he managed to escape from the hatch," she says.

Further research on the Internet connected Lowe with the Canadian No. 617 Squadron Association and she was put in contact with surviving Canadian participants in the raid and the families of others. Through this connection, Lowe and her mother were invited to attend the Sixtieth Anniversary Reunion of No. 617 Squadron in England in May 2003. The reunion was held in Woodhall Spa at the Petwood Hotel, which was the mess hall for No. 617 Squadron. Although the squadron is most famous as the Dambusters, it continues to be an operational Royal Air Force squadron, having flown the huge delta-wing Vulcan bomber, and more recently the Tornado.

Lowe says that she was asked to play the Dambusters' March on her flute for the memorial service prior to the fly-past by the Royal Air Force's Lancaster and a formation of four Tornado jet fighters.

"The sun was shining, the birds were singing, and as I looked up to the sky just prior to playing my flute, I reflected on how my father is my hero and a silent voice inside me said, 'This one is for you, Dad!'"

During the eight-day trip, Lowe was overwhelmed by the hype and media attention that the Dambusters received. But there were quieter moments too, such as when she and her mother had a touching reunion with Hopgood's two sisters. "That was emotional and so rewarding. We were able to take my father's story to them and tell them what my father saw. They never knew what happened when the plane crashed," she says. Photos of John Hopgood were taken out, and for the first time, Lowe had a clear picture of the man who had saved her father's life.

During July 2003 Lowe returned to Europe with her mother to visit the Mohne Dam site and take a special sixtieth anniversary tour. She took her



Shere with actor Richard Todd at the Sixtieth Anniversary Reunion of No. 617 Squadron. Todd played Guy Gibson in the classic 1954 film, "The Dambusters."

flute on this trip as well, playing O'Canada and the Dambusters March on the Mohne Dam itself. Later, an oak tree in memory of her father was planted in her mother's hometown of Doncaster, England.

The commemoration of the Dambusters' anniversary at the Nanton museum the following month. During this event, Shere was delighted to meet Fred Sutherland of Rocky Mountain House, Alberta, the front gunner on the aircraft that breached the Eder Dam, and family members of the numerous other Canadian Dambusters' families who were in attendance.

John Fraser's family played a major role in this memorable afternoon in Nanton. The museum unveiled an addition to the Dambusters exhibit that focuses on Fraser's compelling story. As well, Doris Fraser presented the museum with a magnificent photo of No. 50 Squadron taken during her husband's service with them. Shere again played the Dambusters' March on her flute and her son, John, an air cadet, held the audience spellbound with a speech about his grandfather, John Fraser.

Commenting on this new relationship with her father, Shere said, "I was so impressed that Nanton Museum was focused on honouring those who served with Bomber Command. I had a great desire to honour and preserve my father's memory and through making contributions of my father's war memorabilia to the museum, this was made possible.

"One of the greatest things I have longed for all of my life was the opportunity to get to know my father. The journey began three years ago, I came to know my father as a war hero and through that, my eyes and heart were opened and today I dearly embrace him in my life."



John Lowe speaks of his grandfather's role in the Dams Raid at the Sixtieth Anniversary Commemoration in Nanton



Doris Fraser listens as Shere plays the Dambusters' March on the Mohne Dam



A Dambuster Family Reunion at the museum in 2005
(l-r) Joe McCarthy jr. son of pilot Joe McCarthy; Doris Fraser, widow of bomb aimer John Fraser; Hartley Garshowitz, nephew of wireless operator Abram Garshowitz; Rob Taerum, nephew of navigator Harlo Taerum; Shere Lowe
photo: Kathy Taerum



Shere Lowe, Dams Raid veteran Fred Sutherland, and Marg Sutherland at the museum in 2003

JOE ENGLISH

-Operation Manna

**An airplane skims over the land
The low country called Holland
Country of hunger, persecution, and sorrow
In the streets people gaze at the sky
An airplane circles around
The pilots drop their food!
People cry, people cheer to the skies
Food, food, food!**

Joe English and his wife Claire were quietly operating an art shop when the Nanton Lancaster Society was formed in 1986. As the only ex-Lancaster pilot in town, Joe was quickly prevailed upon to play a leadership role in the development of the museum, becoming one of the founding directors and serving on the Board of Directors for seventeen years. As well, Joe and Claire framed several dozen paintings and prints and prepared hundreds of museum display panels over the years.

“Nanton’s Lancaster Pilot” was called upon to be in the cockpit during special occasions such as in 1991 when the bomber moved for the first time in over thirty years as it was towed into the newly constructed museum building. Joe was in the cockpit again in 2003 when our newly installed doors enabled the Lancaster to be rolled outside again. His next assignment was to be present in the cockpit during the summer of 2005 to oversee the starting and running-up of the bomber’s starboard-inner Merlin engine.

Through his association with the Nanton Lancaster Society, Joe and his surviving crewmembers became the main “characters” in “Bomber Boys,” a four hour History Channel television production that



Joe English

was released in November 2005.

In 2009 the museum's theatre was named, "The Joe English Room" in his honour.

Joe enlisted in the RCAF in 1942. After training at No. 15 Elementary Flying Training School at Regina, Saskatchewan and No. 12 Service Flying Training School in Brandon, Manitoba, he was posted overseas. Joe completed his training flying Wellingtons at No. 83 Operational Training Unit at Peplow, Shropshire and then Halifaxes and Lancasters at a Heavy Conversion Unit at Blyton. His crew was then posted to No. 625 Squadron at Kelstern, where he completed a tour of thirty operations on Lancasters.

Joe's closest call was when he narrowly avoided a mid-air collision. Bomber Command attempted to overwhelm enemy defences by having a compact "stream" of aircraft with as many as thirty bombers per minute passing over the target. Joe recalls, "It happened as we were approaching a turning point. Another aircraft had already turned and passed directly across our path at the same elevation that we were at. I still have a vision of it and I think I saw the markings on the fuselage. I pulled back so hard to get over the top that I completely stalled the aircraft."

During the final days of World War II, Joe and his crew participated in "Operation Manna."

By April of 1945, the Canadian Army had liberated much of the Netherlands but 120,000 well-armed enemy soldiers were cut off in the western part of the country. The Allies didn't have enough troops available to conquer the area without terrible losses. After making the decision not to invade, the Allied commanders faced the problem of how to help the 3.5 million Dutch citizens who remained in the enemy controlled portion of their country and were starving after four years of occupation, including the recent difficult winter.

J. Vrouwenfelder, who lived in the Hague at the time, recalled, "I queued for hours to get some salted endive or some beans. Always that hunger... And then there was less and less. There remained nothing, not even in the black market, just sugar beets from which we first made syrup and then some kind of cookies from the leftovers. Impossible to eat, but it kept many people alive. Fried tulip bulbs were the last resort."

As the war progressed, the Dutch people had heard the aircraft of Bomber Command passing over their country in increasing numbers en-route to and from enemy targets. Sometimes a fire would be seen falling from the sky -another bomber shot down. In May of 1943, the Americans became an effective force and the Dutch watched their aircraft passing over Holland to make daylight attacks. Then on April 29th, 1945, the bombers flew over Holland again, not at 20,000' but so low that the aircrew could be seen in the cockpit and gun turrets.

The Dutch first heard of the plans for Operation Manna on April 24th when they were announced by the British Broadcasting Corporation. Then on April 29th, the people of Holland heard the BBC announce, "Bombers of the Royal Air Force have just taken off from their bases in England to drop food supplies to the Dutch population in enemy-occupied territory." Arie de Jong, a seventeen year old student at the time, wrote, "There are no words to describe the emotions experienced on that Sunday afternoon. More than 300 four-engined Lancasters flying exceptionally low suddenly filled the western horizon." Arie's diary recorded, "One could see the gunners waving in their turrets -a marvelous sight. One Lancaster roared over the town at 70 feet. I saw the aircraft tacking between church steeples and drop its bags to the south. Everywhere we looked, bombers could be seen. No one remained inside and everybody dared to wave cloths and flags. What a feast! Everyone is excited with joy. The war must be over soon now."

It was a memorable day for the Bomber Command aircrew as well. Although there had been discussions with the Germans, an agreement to allow the Lancasters to drop the food supplies had not been finalized. On the first day of Operation Manna, the enemy soldiers were manning their anti-aircraft guns as the bombers flew over, so low that they could have been easily shot down. But the Germans held their fire.

The approaches to the drop zones were made at very low altitude in order not to damage the food any more than necessary as it was dropped in gunny sacks without parachutes. One Canadian pilot recalled, "flying by a windmill, and people waving at us from its balcony. You understand, we had to look up to wave back!" F/S Ken Wood, a rear gunner remembered, "People were everywhere -on the streets, on the roofs, leaning out of windows. They all had something to wave with -a handkerchief, a sheet. It was incredible." F/S Gibson wrote, "I will always remember seeing 'Thank you Tommy' written on one of the roofs and I recall those flights as a beautiful experience, it was as if we brought the liberation closer to reality."

Joe English's was one of several crews of No. 625 Squadron that flew on the first day of Operation Manna. Joe remembers, "This was our first trip to the Dutch Coast in daylight and I recall we were all apprehensive because of the presence of enemy troops despite the 'Truce' that we were informed was in effect. Four days previous to this my crew had taken part in a daylight raid



Joe's crew: (l-r) Burke Thomas (mid-upper gunner); Mike Chalk (wireless operator); Jack Munday (flight engineer); Joe English; Colin Roe (bomb aimer); Harvey Gotfried (navigator); George Stowe (rear gunner)

to the famous 'Eagle's Nest' - Hitler's Bavarian retreat in Berchtesgaden with other bombers from many squadrons. I believe that this was actually the last real raid of the war and we encountered token resistance from anti-aircraft batteries during the run up to the mountain target from the valleys below. So we were a little nervous going into the Dutch city of The Hague knowing that there was always the possibility that some dyed-in-the-wool 'Nasty' down below hadn't heard about the truce.

"My recollection of the Dutch trip was that we took off into clouds but broke into nice, sunny weather as we approached the Netherlands. There definitely was a holiday atmosphere right from the beginning of the briefing we received. All of us were very happy that we could be a part of something like a Red Cross type program as we had heard that people in Holland were in some extreme cases surviving on tulip bulbs, tree bark or anything with a little nutrition in it. We checked the big gunny sacks being loaded into the bomb bay of Lancaster M-2 in which we did our two drops.

"There were lots of other aircraft in sight as we approached the race track on which we were to drop our food. Most of our operations had been done at night and at an elevation of 20,000 feet so we felt as though we had a 'ring-side seat' for this one. Even Harvey, our navigator, who had never emerged from his curtained off station to watch the flak, searchlights, and fighters over our previous targets, came out to have a look. But at an altitude of 250 feet, I was too busy watching for church steeples to really enjoy the view. As well, rather than our bomb aimer releasing our load using the bomb-sight from his station in the nose, I had to drop the food by simply opening the



**"Operation Manna" [A commissioned painting by John Rutherford]
The painting depicts Joe English's No. 625 Squadron Lancaster**

bomb doors.

“On May 2nd we went again on another fine sunny morning, this time to drop food at Rotterdam. I only recently received a copy of the squadron’s operational records and to my great surprise, my crew were first over the drop site. We had flown out over the North Sea, fairly low according to our instructions, and had dropped down even lower over the city as we lined up to drop the food alongside a dyke. I was on the port side of our leader, Squadron Leader Fry, and as we turned left on the run into the drop zone I gained a little on Mr. Fry and according to the records did do my ‘bombing’ first. Our claim to fame!

“We all agreed that truly it was the ‘best raid of the war.’ We did hear that one Lancaster was damaged by small arms fire from the ground and I have no doubt that it’s true. No good deed goes unpunished as some cynic put it! The trip into Rotterdam was the last wartime entry in my logbook.”

A total of 3100 flights were made by Bomber Command and an additional 2200 by the American Air Force that joined the operation on May 1st. Operation Manna ended with Germany’s surrender on May 8th. Although over 11,000 tons of food were dropped in the ten days of the operation, some 20,000 people had died of starvation before Holland was finally liberated.



Then I dived down to 300 feet and released 2000 loaves of bread!



Joe English at the museum



Joe English in the cockpit as the starboard-inner Merlin is run-up during the Dedication of Canada's Bomber Command Memorial in 2005

DOUG CAMERON

-122 Operations and three VC Pilots

"Time and distance tend to distort the perspective of my memory of particular persons with whom I served and of the experiences we shared almost half a century ago, but as most veterans will agree, there are those whom we could never forget, nor would we wish to. S/L Ian Willoughby Bazalgette VC DFC was such a person."

Upon reading this introduction to an article by Douglas Cameron in the Winter, 1989 issue of Airforce Magazine, we knew we had finally found someone who could not only tell the story of Ian Bazalgette but who could perhaps lead us to his relatives and other crewmembers.

Members of the Nanton Lancaster Society were learning of the career of S/L Ian Bazalgette (known in the RAF as "Baz") prior to the dedication of the Nanton Lancaster in his memory. Doug Cameron became the contact that led to information about Baz and the Victoria Cross flight, successfully meeting with Baz's family and other crewmembers, and to their participation in our dedication event in 1990. As well, Doug provided us with letters and an audio tape that included his memories of Baz and the Victoria Cross flight.

But we also learned that F/L Cameron had a most impressive career of his own as a rear gunner, completing four tours of operations totaling 122 sorties. As well, he had the distinction of bailing out of two aircraft, the pilots of which were both awarded the Victoria Cross for their actions during the operation. He also flew with a third pilot who went on to receive the VC.



Doug Cameron

A native of Perthshire, Scotland, Douglas Cameron had been a gamekeeper prior to joining the Royal Air Force in September 1939. Upon the completion of his training, he was posted to No. 58 Squadron based at York and flew two tours in twin-engined Whitley bombers. It was with this squadron that he first experienced combat and shot down an enemy FW190 fighter.

After a third tour with Coastal Command, Doug was posted to No. 149 Squadron based at Lakenheath where he joined the crew of F/S R.H. Middleton of the Royal Australian Air Force. The crew was then briefly assigned to No. 7 Squadron PFF but then posted back again to No. 149.

On the night of November 27/28, 1942 they flew to Turin, Italy to attack a military aircraft factory. Their Stirling aircraft was hit by flak and severely damaged. The co-pilot was completely incapacitated for a time and Middleton lost an eye and had half his jaw blown away. After receiving some first-aid, the co-pilot was able to take over while his pilot was attended to. Middleton then took over the controls again while ammunition and anything that could be dumped was thrown out to assist the plane back over the Alps and finally back to the English coast. Middleton said he didn't want to crash land in case they endangered civilians. He ordered four of the crew, including Cameron, to abandon the aircraft. Middleton then turned the plane out to sea where it crashed killing the three crewmembers still aboard. Middleton was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross for his efforts and Douglas Cameron the Distinguished Flying Medal.

The rear gunner on a Lancaster had the coldest, loneliest position in the aircraft but, if his turret remained operational, one of the easiest to escape from in an emergency. Upon hearing the order to abandon the aircraft, the rear gunner simply had to turn the turret so that it was pointing directly sideways, open the turret doors behind him, and then let himself roll backwards out of the turret. Unlike jumping from the forward escape hatch or particularly the crew access door, there was no chance of any part of the aircraft striking him as he exited.



George Turner, Ian Bazalgette's flight engineer, (left) and Doug Cameron at Doug's home in Scotland in 1990

Following his tour with No. 149 Squadron, Doug was assigned to No. 20 Operational Training Unit at Lossiemouth as Gunnery Leader. Occasionally, crews training at an OTU would fly on operations but the day-to-day training was dangerous enough in itself. Of the 10,643 names on Canada's Bomber Command Memorial, 1064 (almost exactly ten percent) were killed during this stage of their training.

While at No. 20 OTU, Doug flew with S/L Robert Anthony Maurice Palmer who went on to be awarded the Victoria Cross after being shot down after flying over one hundred operations. As a member of the Pathfinder Force, he had two engines set on fire while leading an attack on Cologne. Somehow he managed to keep the Lancaster on course, releasing his markers and bombs accurately before spiraling to the ground in flames.

Cameron recalled the day that Ian Bazalgette invited him to join his crew, "Baz came into my office and asked if I was quite happy at the OTU. I told Baz that I would like to go back on ops but that the air force had told me that I had done enough and to let some others operate against the Germans. Baz told me that he had friends in high places and if I would like to come he would like to have an experienced crew." Through the efforts of Group Captain Hamish Mahaddie, both Baz and Cameron were assigned to the Pathfinder Force and soon began operating with No. 635 Squadron.

On August 4, 1944, their aircraft was struck by flak as they attacked a V-1 rocket launching site. Bazalgette attempted to return on two engines but when a third failed he ordered the crew, including Cameron, to abandon the aircraft. S/L Bazalgette was killed as he landed the flaming Lancaster on a single engine in an attempt to save the lives of two injured crewmembers who were unable to jump. Bazalgette was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross for his action.

Following his successful parachute jump, Cameron escaped into a forest with Nazi soldiers spraying machine gun fire in his direction and tracking dogs baying behind him. Perhaps his experience as a gamekeeper contributed to his success in evading his pursuers. Emerging from the trees early the next morning, he avoided the French civilians, finally making contact with the Maquis (the French underground organization). He then became



The museum's rear turret has been restored to operational status although the .303 calibre machine guns will not fire

involved with their sabotaging operations. Dressed in civilian clothing, capture by the Nazis would mean certain execution and Doug was given a deadly pill to use so that he would not be taken alive. The allied armies finally liberated him and he was flown home.

Following the war, Doug Cameron settled in his native Scotland to continue his career as a gamekeeper. He named his only daughter Margaret Middleton Bazalgette Cameron as his lasting tribute to the pilots he had flown with on Victoria Cross flights.

“Margo” visited the Bomber Command Museum of Canada in July 1996 and was thrilled to have a chance to operate the museum’s operational rear gun turret, an example of the type in which her father had flown 122 sorties. She left a message in our guestbook stating, “I’m so proud to have been here and seen the reconstruction of Baz’s Lancaster.”



The museum’s rear turret was dedicated to the memory of Douglas Cameron DFM at the “Salute to the Air Gunners” event in 2004.

S/L Ian Bazalgette’s nephew, Charles Bazalgette (left) and museum president Dan Fox participated in the dedication.



Margo Cameron of Dundee, Scotland (left) and friend at the museum in 1996

DOUGLAS TWEDDLE

-Sinking the Tirpitz

"Mom, mom! Look, it's Daddy's airplane." Maggie Tweddle was visiting the museum with her mother in 1992, just a year after the Lancaster was finally put indoors and our displays were set up in the new building. Maggie knew that the Lancaster model she was looking at was, "Daddy's airplane" because it carried the markings WS-Y and it had very distinctive nose art as well. It was titled, "Getting 'Y'ounger every Day" and featured a little old man drinking a pint. This character was found on advertisements for Younger Beer. The fact that the model-makers featured Maggie's father's Lancaster indicated that this was a special crew and a special aircraft.



Douglas Tweddle

Following this introduction, the museum became closely connected with the story of the sinking of the Tirpitz through Dr. Tweddle of Edmonton, Alberta, and her family. As a Lancaster pilot, Maggie's father, Douglas Tweddle, had attacked the huge German battleship on three different occasions.

Maggie officially opened the museum's "Sinking of the Tirpitz" display on November 12, 1994, the fiftieth anniversary of the final, successful raid. A decade later, in July 2004, Dr. Tweddle was joined at the museum by John Tweddle, her brother from England, as we commemorated the sixtieth anniversary of the raid. Two weeks later Maggie brought her sister Anne and their mother Margaret, who were visiting from England, to visit the museum and view our Tirpitz Display that features Doug Tweddle's story and a mock-up of the Tallboy bomb that put an end to the battleship.

The Tweddle family presented the museum with a copy of a limited edition print of a painting showing the Tallboy being loaded into the bomb bay of F/O Tweddle's Lancaster prior to the successful attack.

Douglas Tweddle was born in 1916 at Workington on the Cumbrian coast of England. After leaving school he joined the post office and started training as an engineer. His job was a “reserved occupation” but he joined the Royal Air Force the day that the government lifted the ban on people in reserved occupations in August 1941. After basic training in the UK, he was selected to come to Canada for flight training but instead ended up stationed at Bulawayo, Southern Rhodesia where he received his pilot’s wings. Following his posting to an operational Bomber Command squadron, his wartime career became focused on the Tirpitz.



The Battleship Tirpitz in Kaffjord, Norway
courtesy John Asmussen [www.bismarck-class.dk]

Commissioned in 1941, the German Navy’s mighty 42,900 ton Tirpitz posed a grave threat to Allied shipping. Sister ship to the more famous Bismarck, the battleship carried a main armament of eight, 15 inch guns. She saw limited action, spending her wartime career in Norwegian waters where she was a constant danger to Allied convoys bound for Russia. Her presence obliged the Allies to maintain a large fleet in the northeastern Atlantic to guard against her and repeated attempts were made by both the Royal Air Force and the Royal Navy to sink her.

Bomber Command played a major role in the war at sea, carrying out 18,725 mine-laying operations that the crews referred to as “gardening” flights. The mines were dropped by parachute into enemy shipping routes. As well, according to a letter written by Arthur Harris, wartime chief of Bomber Command, the Lancaster, “won the naval war by destroying over one-third of the German submarines in their ports, together with hundreds of small naval craft and six of their largest warships.”

Twin-engined bombers of the Royal Air Force made their first attack on the Tirpitz in



Gardening

January 1941 while it was being completed in a dry dock at Wilhelmshaven. Crews reported that bombs had “straddled” the battleship but no damage was inflicted. Other attacks by similar aircraft were made later in 1941 and in April 1942, the Tirpitz was located and attacked by Halifaxes and Lancasters, at times at mast-top height. But again the Tirpitz escaped un-harmed. As well as these attacks by the RAF, the Royal Navy attacked the battleship on a number of occasions using miniature submarines and carrier based aircraft.

But little effect on the battleship’s armour plate was possible until British inventor, Sir Barnes Wallis, built a special bomb that could do the job. Wallis had previously developed the bouncing bomb used in the Dambusters Raid. In 1944, he devised the “Tallboy,” a 12,000 pound weapon capable of piercing the Tirpitz’s armour plating. This classic shaped bomb was 21 feet long, 38 inches in diameter, and contained 5200 pounds of Torpex explosive. Its hardened steel case had a thickness of four inches in the nose and was designed to penetrate deeply into a target. Detonation could be delayed for as long as one hour. The Lancaster was the only aircraft capable of carrying such a weapon.



A Tallboy bomb in a Lancaster’s bomb bay

Doug Tweddle was serving with No. 9 Squadron of the Royal Air Force when he took part in the three Bomber Command attacks on the Tirpitz that used Tallboys. His Lancaster was one of 38 from No. 9 and No. 617 Squadrons that took off on

September 11, 1944 to fly to an airfield in northern Russia which would then be used as a base for an attack on the battleship which was at anchor in Kaa Fjord in northern Norway. His aircraft was, of course, carrying a Tallboy and reached the general location of the airfield after a very



Doug Tweddle in the cockpit of Lancaster WS-Y

long 11 hour and 20 minute flight. Tweddle recalled that some of the Russians, "didn't seem to know we were coming because they fired at us which didn't please us because we were getting very tired." The area was covered in fog and Tweddle heard, "kites on our own wavelength saying they were in trouble and they were going down to do a forced landing, so I told Paddy my wireless op to switch it off saying, we had enough problems of our own without listening to other people who were in trouble." An airfield was finally located after Tweddle saw a light aircraft in the vicinity, and he landed the Lancaster safely.

However several bombers crash-landed, fortunately with no fatalities, and one was "standing up on its nose" when Tweddle's aircraft arrived. It turned out to be the wrong airfield but after encountering some difficulty getting the message across to the local Russians that they needed fuel, Tweddle flew a short distance to the correct airfield. Here, rather than being fired upon, there was a band to greet them and a big red banner that welcomed, "The Glorious Fliers of the Royal Air Force." Over the next three days Tweddle recalled that they played football with the Russians and that, "They entertained us with 'killer vodka,' dancers, and accordion players."



The RAF were provided with accomodation on what Doug Tweddle described as a "Mississippi River Steamer" at Yagodnik, Russia
photo: Stan Henderson

Only 27 of the 38 aircraft took off on September 15th to complete the attack. The Lancasters approached at low-level and with mountains screening their approach from enemy radar, the Tirpitz was caught by surprise. Her smoke-screens were late in starting although they were still somewhat effective in hiding the battleship. One Tallboy smashed through the vessel's forecandle and burst deep in her hull. The shock caused by the explosion of this bomb, or possibly other bombs which were near misses, damaged the ship's engines. All of the Lancasters returned safely to the airfield in Russia and eventually to Britain. The Germans decided that it was not practical to make Tirpitz fully seaworthy again and she was moved to Tromso, further south in Norway, but only for use as a semi-static, heavy artillery battery.

The British were not aware of the extent of the damage and the

Tirpitz was attacked again on October 29th. Doug Tweedle piloted one of 37 Lancasters that were dispatched from Kinloss, Scotland. With the battleship anchored farther south, and the removal of the Lancaster's mid-upper gun turrets and the installation of extra fuel tanks, the Tirpitz could now be reached directly from Britain, although it required a 2250 mile operation.

Tweedle recalled, "There was a radar gap on that coast which we hoped that if we went through we'd get away with it. We also flew at about a thousand feet to try to fly below his radar cover and then do a swift climb over the coast and get up to about 16,000 –at that stage we were obviously discovered, and then fly from a rendezvous point, north-northwest down the fjord, quite a long fjord with the Tirpitz at the end." The weather was ideal for the attack until an unexpected wind shift covered the Tirpitz with cloud and smoke-screen just thirty seconds before the first Lancaster was ready to bomb. When Tweedle arrived, "We couldn't see a damn thing so we just came back. We brought the bomb back." However, 32 aircraft released Tallboys on the ship's estimated position but no direct hits were scored. Tweedle landed safely following an incredible 13 hour and ten minutes in the air. The Germans responded by basing a fighter wing at a nearby airfield.

As far as British intelligence knew, the Tirpitz remained a threat. Tweedle recalled, "While it was there, four battlewagons (battleships) of the largest kind were in Scapa (Scotland) because the navy got such a scare when the Bismarck came out, and with the Tirpitz being the sister ship, they were terrified of the prospect of it getting loose in the Atlantic."

The final attack took place on November 12, 1944. Thirty Lancasters from No. 9 Squadron and No. 617 Squadron took off, this time from Lossiemouth, Scotland. They were led by Wing Commander J.B. "Willie" Tait DSO DFC. Doug Tweedle was flying Lancaster WS-Y. He recalled, "We knew it would be third time lucky. . . We took off from Lossiemouth at 3:00 a.m. in very poor weather conditions. In fact several of the aircraft failed to get off the ground because they were iced over. We flew north at only 1000 feet to get to the Norwegian coast below radar. Then we went into a climb (to bombing height –between 12,000 and 16,000 feet) over the coast to a rendezvous lake (a lake above which the attacking force was to meet and organize itself) about eighty miles from our target. I was wind-finding so I flew out a little earlier and



Tirpitz in Skjomen Fjord, Norway

[www.bismarck-class.dk]
courtesy John Asmussen

reached the rendezvous lake two or three minutes early in order to do the wind-finding which meant a two or three minute orbit. Then we ran down the fjord and I fell in towards the back having wind-found and passed on the information. So 617 bombed first and 9 came in behind.”

For some reason, despite frantic calls for air cover to the German fighter base at Bardufoss, not a single fighter seems to have taken off. Had the fighters attacked, it is almost certain that several of the Lancasters would have been shot down, given the ideal visibility that day. There was no smokescreen as the Tirpitz came into view. When the bombers were about 13 miles away, the anti-aircraft guns of the Tirpitz opened fire and were then joined by shore batteries and two flak ships. The bombs were released and the crews waited thirty long seconds for the results. The first bombs narrowly missed the target, but then a great yellow flash burst on the foredeck and the Tirpitz was seen to tremble as it was hit by two Tallboys. A column of steam and smoke shot up to about 300 feet.

Doug Tweddle continues, “I saw that there had been a hit fairly early on in the attack so 617 had the first hit. The second hit was one of ours (No. 9 Squadron) towards the end of the sortie.” An analysis later indicated that it was probable that it was Tweddle’s Tallboy that struck the Tirpitz. “By the time we turned port, we got a glimpse from the port side of my kite. I could see Tirpitz and as I was watching it I could see the freeboard (the distance between the waterline and the deck) increasing and I concluded it was slowly capsizing. When we got back and were debriefed, I was one of the few that was very confident that the thing was sunk. I suppose given the amount of time we’d spent chasing this thing we were a little reluctant to be too positive about it.”



Bombing photo taken from Doug Tweddle’s WS-Y on the final raid

Tweddle was correct. Within a few minutes the ship had started to list badly. It then suffered a tremendous explosion as the ammunition stores magazine went up. She rolled over to port and capsized. About 10 minutes after the first bomb struck, the Tirpitz had completely turned turtle with only the hull visible from the air. Approximately 1000 of her crew were killed. None of the Bomber Command aircraft were lost and Tweddle landed after another extremely long flight -12 hours and 40 minutes.

With the sinking of the Tirpitz, Hitler lost the last influential ship of his surface battle fleet and this marked the end of Germany’s naval war in

northern waters.

F/O Tweddle was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his part in the operations against the Tirpitz. The citation reads, "This officer has taken part in all three attacks on the battleship Tirpitz. He has shown great determination and the keenest enthusiasm to operate and bomb his target in spite of all the hazards of enemy opposition and bad weather. In the first attack he made the long and arduous journey to the Russian base, and in the actual attack made every effort to bomb the target, despite cloud and smoke-screen. In the second attack he made the same endeavours to bomb the ship, and on the third occasion, unhampered by weather, launched his attack successfully.

"F/O Tweddle has always displayed courage and cheerful enthusiasm which has been of utmost value to his crew, whilst his captaincy and airmanship have consistently been of the highest order. In addition, F/O Tweddle undertook the extra hazard of wind finding for the squadron, a task he accomplished most successfully, thereby contributing to the success of the operation even further."

Following his tour of operations, Doug Tweddle volunteered for a second, completing 37 sorties before the end of the war. After V.E. Day he participated in Operation Exodus -flying POW's back from Germany in his Lancaster.



Tirpitz being broken up for scrap following the war



Anchor chain link from the Tirpitz on display in the museum



Maggie Tweddle and her brother John present the museum with a print of a painting that depicts the Tallboy being loaded aboard their father's Lancaster.
photo: Bob Evans



**(l-r) John Tweddle, John Birrell, Maggie Tweddle, and Dorothy Birrell
John and Dorothy were responsible for the building of the museum's replica Tallboy bomb.**



The museum's Tallboy replica below the Lancaster's bomb bay

DON CURRIE

-The Real Story about the Bouncing Bomb

Don Currie was among the first to purchase a lifetime membership in the Nanton Lancaster Society. During the museum's opening ceremonies in 1992, he spoke as a representative of the museum's lifetime members who had assisted with funding for the construction of our initial museum building. Don had travelled from his home in North Vancouver with his wife Jeannie. During his speech, Don recalled how he had been on oxygen regularly during his wartime career with No. 635 Squadron of the Pathfinder Force and, noting the portable bottle of oxygen at his side, that he was still on oxygen. For health reasons, Don has not been able to return to Nanton but he has continued to be one of the museum's most steadfast supporters. He generously supported the building of Canada's Bomber Command Memorial and has provided artwork, photographs, and documents for our displays and archives. Another contribution has been the successful detective work that he has undertaken on the museum's behalf.



Don Currie

In 1998, when the museum was trying to locate family members of Albert Stanley Prince, the first Canadian to be killed with Bomber Command, Don was called upon to assist. Our only information was that Prince was from Vancouver. This turned out to be incorrect as he was actually from Montreal. Nevertheless, Don tracked down Prince's cousin who lived in Squamish, British Columbia, and eventually F/S Prince's son in England who, the following year, was able to join us at the museum for the tribute to his father. Prior to our "Salute to the Air Gunners" event in 2004, Don successfully located the family of Gordon Gillanders, an air gunner we were honouring who was a native of the Vancouver area.

Always proud of his old squadron, Don kindly passed along the following valuable piece of Bomber Command history that we have reprinted from the museum's archives.

You have probably heard about the famous No. 617 Squadron Dambusters Raid which blew up two of the dams on German rivers. This was done by a so-called “bouncing bomb” invented by Barnes Wallis. What is not generally known is that it was his reading of the exploit of a crew of No. 635 Squadron (PFF) that gave him the idea. It happened this way.

We were in our good old Lancaster Mk I, T for Tommy, getting near our target with a full bomb and flare load, flying through a lot of heavy German ack ack. Over the Ruhr Valley a piece of flak went through the starboard undercarriage door and blew out the tire.

We were near the target and all pretty busy, but Len, our pilot, came on the intercom and said, “Chuck, you’ve got nothing to do for the next little while. I’ll lower the undercart, you go out and change the tire.” Chuck was our wireless op and having slept through briefing, had been busy trying to get Lord Haw Haw on his radio to find out where we were going.

So Chuck reeled in his trailing antenna, tied the end around his waist, grabbed the spare tire, put it around his neck, climbed down under Willie our flight engineer, and went out through the front turret. Because his intercom cord was too short, he had to use hand gestures toward Willie to show how he wanted Len to bank and turn, or climb and dive, until he was positioned under the now-lowered undercarriage.

Unfortunately these manoeuvres had caught the eyes of the German gunners on the ground and they coned us in their searchlights and began firing. Unfortunately it also attracted a couple of Luftwaffe fighters. Between George in the rear turret and Mac in the mid-upper, working with his flare pistol, they were driven off.



Now Chuck, using the tire iron which was part of the Lanc repair kit, pried the blown tire off the rim, and let it fall. Then, with the spare in position around the rim, he signaled for Len to roll the Lanc violently to port, which literally jammed the new tire on the rim. Operation accomplished, the undercart came up and we resumed course, while Geoff, our plotter, went to Chuck's position and reeled in the antenna, bringing Chuck back in through the front turret.

He went back to his normal rest position in front of the radio. Said he was a bit winded, as he had not been on oxygen out there, but by being in the slipstream, there had been enough air forced into his lungs to keep him going.

It was only later, when a damage report came back out of Germany, that we found out what had happened. When the blown tire landed, it was upright on the Frieden River reservoir, and this together with its forward speed, caused it to bounce and roll along the full length of the reservoir on top of the water, knocking out a dam control tower and its ack ack crew at the end. The tire wound up in the Frieden River some 100 feet below.

When he heard of this, Barnes Wallis immediately saw the possibility of using a bomb like this on German dams and set to work to perfect it. The world famous Dambusters Raid was the result. Unfortunately he was not aware of the squadron or crew who had done the "op" in the first place, which had given him the idea, so No. 635 and ourselves were never given credit.

Actually, as this was an RAF station, because we didn't bring a spare tire back after signing one out, we were accused of losing it and stores got its cost added to our bar bill. This left us so impoverished we had to survive on NAAFI beer for a month!



Don Currie recalling the incident at his home in North Vancouver, B.C.



Don Currie, representing the Lifetime Members of the Nanton Lancaster Society, speaking at the official opening of the museum in 1992

STEWART ROBERTSON

-A Calgarian in the RAF

On the golf course one afternoon I overheard one of Stew's friends ask him, "You were in the war weren't you?" Stew replied, "Yes. You know it probably sounds strange, but I rather enjoyed it."

At least outwardly, like most veterans of Bomber Command, Stew focused on the good times -the camaraderie and the fellowship. If his children or grandchildren heard anything of his experiences, it was light-hearted stories of humorous events, the humour generally being at his own expense. Stew would tell one brief anecdote and then change the subject.

Losing good friends on a weekly basis, flying a bomber over blacked out enemy territory for ten hours and forty-five minutes with the constant possibility of being attacked by enemy fighters, searching for a hole in the fog with fuel tanks on empty, diving 4500 feet in a four-engined aircraft after having been attacked, landing a damaged heavy bomber on three engines, flying through thunderstorms at night over the Alps, and standing in a control tower as a bomber crashes into it were not the types of experiences he readily talked about.

There was little or no indication that he had lived through an adventure that was extremely challenging and at times terrifying, or that he had played a significant role in what was probably the greatest event of the twentieth century. Nor was there any indication that he had risen to a very high rank in the Royal Air Force, retiring as a Wing Commander in charge of a Royal Air Force Station and responsible for 1500 airmen and support staff and several dozens of aircraft.

Stew returned to his home in Calgary, attended university, and went on to a very successful career in the oil industry, making use of the determination, work ethic, "can-do" attitude, and many of the other talents he developed with the Royal Air Force. During his retirement he spoke more of his wartime experiences and it became apparent that



Stewart Robertson

these were very special years. Stew Robertson's wartime career with Bomber Command was clearly the highlight of his life but he knew the odds -of those in Bomber Command at the beginning of the war, only ten percent survived. Like thousands of other young Canadians, he lived an adventure that those of subsequent generations can only imagine. He supported the museum during its early years, visited often, and was quietly pleased and proud of what was being accomplished.

David Stewart Robertson was born in Ogema, Saskatchewan but the family moved to Calgary when he was a young boy. After graduating from Western Canada High School, he was employed by the Royal Bank for almost two years. The bank thought highly of him and in a letter dated May 8, 1937, he was referred to as, "a young man of excellent integrity, and of good ability, and his character and habit are of high order." But Stew was leaving the bank to travel to England with the hope of joining the Royal Air Force. Three weeks after the letter was written, he had been accepted by the RAF.

Stew's flying training began on July 12th at No. 2 Flying Training School and he soloed eleven days later in a Blackburn II aircraft. Completing his initial flying training on September 4th, he entered advanced flying training on the Hawker Hart. On January 3, 1938, he was presented with the coveted Royal Air Force wings.

Over the next year, Stew flew eight different types of aircraft

in a variety of roles and acquired a great deal of experience. This included target towing for No. 6 Armament Training School, numerous air tests at a maintenance unit, fighter attack training, and air firing.

His association with the Armstrong-Whitworth Whitley began in February 1940, and he soloed in the twin-engined bomber on February 24th. The first out of the ordinary event noted in his logbook occurred a month later when he force landed in a Whitley at Upavon following an engine failure.

Although war had been declared on September 3, 1939, it began as the so-called "phony war" with very little happening. But in March 1940, things were about to change. Before the end of the conflict, some 55,000 Bomber



Stew Robertson in a Blackburn II trainer

Command aircrew, including 10,000 Canadians, would be killed. Of those like P/O Robertson who were flying at the beginning of the war, fewer than 10% would survive.

In April 1940, Stew was assigned to No. 10 Operational Training Unit at Jurby to be prepared to fly bombing operations in the Whitley aircraft. He was then posted to No. 51 Squadron that was operating out of Dishforth in Yorkshire. He flew with "B" Flight that was commanded by Willie Tait who would go on to become one of the most renowned pilots of Bomber Command, eventually leading the famous No. 617 Squadron when they participated in the successful attack on the Battleship Tirpitz. Tait completed the war as a Group Captain with the DSO and three Bars, DFC and Bar.

Stew remembered Willie Tait well, and in particular how he would handle the stress of operational flying by "going into a trance" once he was in the aircraft. On one occasion Stew entered Tait's cockpit prior to take off and tried to speak with him. Willie didn't respond at all.

Stew's first operation was to Dusseldorf on May 24th. On this, and all his operations with No. 51 Squadron, he flew as second pilot with S/L Richard K. Wildey. They completed 13 operations during the following 27 days. Most of the flights were in the six to seven hour range, requiring a lot of very demanding flying.

Many of the operations were in support of the British Army that was retreating through France. On June 9th, the crew was ordered to destroy a bridge. However they couldn't locate it in the mist but managed to score direct hits on a main road instead. Railway marshalling yards were attacked, as were oil plants, troop and transport concentrations, and arms dumps. As well, industrial centres in cities as far away as Frankfurt were targeted. One of P/O Robertson's first operational challenges was on June 17th when, after experiencing engine trouble on a raid to Gelsenkirchen, he returned to base after only an hour and six minutes, landing his Whitley on one engine.

The most significant raid during this period was an attack on Turin, Italy on June 11th. Italy had declared war the previous day and obviously Churchill wanted the Italian leaders to realize there would be consequences. As the 36 Whitleys assigned to the raid would be pushing the limits of their range, they took off from Guernsey in the Channel Islands.

The runways on the Channel Islands were only 2400 feet in length, far less than ideal for the operation of fully laden bombers. The crews were concerned and in order to flag their failing confidence, Wing Commander "Kong" Staton demonstrated a successful take off to them. Those waiting to take off were said to have, "watched with bated breath" as the bombers disappear from sight over the one thousand foot cliff at the end of the runway and then finally reappeared in the distance, flying just above the waves of the English Channel.

Only 23 of the aircraft were able to cross over the Alps and bomb due to thunderstorms. Stew's crew reported that they, "encountered extremely bad

weather shortly after leaving Guernsey and, as the port engine iced up, were forced to return before reaching the Alps.”

Following this intense period of operations, Stew didn't fly for three weeks while he was presumably on leave. On July 19th, he and his crew began flying with No. 78 Squadron. Stew participated in 25 operations with his new squadron, still based at Dishforth. His logbook, the squadron's "Operation Record Book," and other materials which detail Bomber Command operations all note much more enemy opposition than during his flights with No. 51 Squadron. Stew's reports often mention "heavy flak", "searchlights", "evasive action", and "flak damage" to the aircraft.

F/O Robertson's crew remained the same for his first three operations with the new squadron. After that, Stew was "captain" of the aircraft, flying with a number of different second pilots.

His first operation with No. 78 was flown on July 19, 1940, a raid to Recklinhausen during which a squadron Whitley was attacked by two fighters. Stew reported "very heavy a.a. fire." During the next four months he participated in raids to a wide variety of locations and targets

One memorable trip was on July 28th when, on a raid to Wismar, enemy aircraft dropped flares to illuminate the attacking bombers as they made their bomb runs. Five fighters were seen by the four Whitleys of his squadron. But the next operation, six days later, was clearly one of the most exciting of his career.



Stew's No. 78 Squadron crew in 1940

Upon completing what must have been a gruelling nine hour raid to bomb an oil refinery near Cologne, the three No. 78 Squadron Whitleys returned to find their base and the surrounding area blanketed by fog. Two of the three force-landed in fields. Stew described flying around in the fog with fuel running out and abandoning the aircraft and parachuting a real possibility. Finally he found enough of a break in the mists to make a wheels up approach and put the aircraft down in a field, neatly removing a couple of hundred yards of hedge and the Whitley's port rudder. The aircraft stopped at the edge of the field, only twenty feet from a railway track, its front turret's gun literally projecting over the fence. There were no injuries but the aircraft was badly damaged. After approaching a farmhouse and having some difficulty convincing the occupants that his was a Canadian accent and he really was on the British side, F/O Robertson and crew were told that they had landed near the village of Pickering.



**On the back of this photo Stew wrote,
“Illustrating how not to land an airplane”**

On August 19th, Stew piloted a nine hour trip to attack an electric power station near Berlin. Heavy flak and “intense searchlight concentrations” were encountered. Searchlights were a real menace to Bomber Command aircrew. When caught, a pilot was blinded by the dazzling light. Often other lights would converge on the unfortunate bomber and follow the aircraft until a fighter attacked or evasive action by the pilot was successful. Stew recalled one night they saved a single bomb for a particularly troublesome searchlight. Although operating regulations did not permit it, they attacked the light at low level and extinguished it.

On August 25, 1940, Stew participated in what was one of the most significant raids of the war and one that many feel may have changed its course. Following attacks by German bombers on London the previous night, the War Cabinet authorized Bomber Command to attack the German capital, Berlin. Ironically, the bombing of London had been a mistake. German crews were under strict orders to avoid such actions while concentrating on destroying the RAF fighters and their airbases. Thus Churchill was given the heaven-sent opportunity to change the complexion of the war.

52 aircraft, including five Whitleys from No. 78 Squadron, participated in the operation. Severe headwinds were faced on the return flight and six aircraft were lost, some probably due to the “atrocious” weather. Stew was flying for over nine and a half hours that night, as usual on instruments with no visual aids and with only a compass and assumed winds as navigational aids.

After the struggle to reach the city, F/O Robertson reported that he was unable to bomb due to "10/10" cloud all the way from the Dutch coast and over the target. Instead, "nickels" were dropped. This was the term for propaganda leaflets.

But other aircraft did bomb and the raid so infuriated Adolf Hitler that he ordered Luftwaffe daylight attacks to be directed at London. This action removed the pressure from the

hard-pressed Fighter Command airfields, enabling them some time to recover and become capable of defeating the Luftwaffe in the Battle of Britain.

On September 23rd, Stew was over Berlin again, this flight taking an astonishing ten hours and forty-five minutes of flying time. This was a unique raid for this period of the war in that Bomber Command, for the first time, concentrated 129 aircraft on a single target.

During his time with No. 78 Squadron, F/L Robertson managed to complete two of three raids to Milan, Italy. His November 5th logbook entry notes, "Ice; not able to climb over 10,000 feet" and he returned to base after six hours of flying.

This was the period of the war when an invasion of England was a real possibility. Bomber Command was ordered to attack the enemy's invasion barges and associated oil installations that were being prepared in occupied ports. Stew participated in three flights, bombing under severe opposition at Bologne but failing to reach the target on two other flights probably due to bad weather.

One of his most challenging raids was a nine hour flight to Kiel where F/L Robertson and several other aircraft attacked the battleship Scharnhorst.

On November 8th, Stew took off on his last operation with No. 78 Squadron and in the Whitley aircraft. Four other squadron aircraft were prevented from leaving as the base found itself under attack by enemy "intruder" aircraft. For F/L Robertson, this last flight with the squadron was a demanding ten hour and fifteen minute raid to Milan, Italy.

During his time based at RAF Dishforth, Stew and his crew would have become a close-knit unit and he would have made many friends on the station. One of the most demanding aspects would have been the contrast experienced by all Bomber Command crews between the hours in which they were operating and the remainder of their time. One day Stew and his friends would be enjoying an evening in a pub in the relatively peaceful English countryside, the next experiencing the terror of flak, fighter attacks, and searchlights over Berlin or some other target several hours away.

Upon the completion of his tour of operations, W/C Whitworth, Officer



No. 78 Squadron in 1940

Commanding No. 78 Squadron, noted in Stew's logbook that he was "above the average" both as a heavy bomber pilot and as a pilot/navigator. It was likely W/C Whitworth who recommended the awarding of the Distinguished Flying Cross that was presented to F/L Robertson by King George VI on February 8, 1941. This award is presented for "acts of valour performed in active operations against the enemy." Joining Stew on that special day was S/L Richard Wildey with whom he had flown on his first 16 operations and who was quite likely a good friend.

Stew had survived a tour of some 38 operations. Most of his friends had not. He once told me that, "When I left the squadron, of all the chaps there when I started out, there were only three or four of us left –all the rest had, 'got the chop.'"

Just two weeks after his final operation with No. 78 Squadron, F/L Robertson was back in the air, flying twin-engined Avro Ansons at No. 10 OTU at Abington. After spending two weeks at a "Beam Approach" training course flying Whitleys, he was again flying Ansons at No. 2 Navigation Instructors Course at Cranage. Like most who had completed a tour of operations, Stew was being prepared to become an instructor and on August 8, 1941, he made his first flight at No. 24 Air Observer's School at Moffat, Rhodesia in Africa.

For the next fourteen months, he trained pilots using the reliable Anson, referred to as "Faithful Annie." During one period however, there is a three month gap in his logbook. It was during this interlude that Dorothy Kreller arrived after a long and hazardous journey from Calgary. Stew and Dorothy were married on November 15th. They honeymooned at Victoria Falls.

During his service in Africa, Stew's leadership ability became apparent. He left Rhodesia during October, 1942 with the rank of Squadron Leader, having been assessed as, "exceptional in staff pilot duties" by the officer commanding the station.

Following his return to England, S/L Robertson began training as a Stirling pilot on December 22, 1942. Just one month later he commenced operations with



Stew and Dorothy Robertson in Rhodesia

No. 149 Squadron based at Lakenheath in Suffolk. Stew was immediately placed in charge of "B" Flight, one of two groups within the squadron.

Bombing operations had changed dramatically from what Stew had experienced in 1940. Not only was the aircraft he was flying two and a half times as heavy as the Whitley, the raids now involved

several hundred aircraft flying against a single target in a concentrated stream to attempt to overwhelm the defences with their numbers.

His second operation with No. 149 Squadron must have been memorable. After the target was marked by the Pathfinders, 263 aircraft bombed Hamburg. Stew reported that he bombed on "Sky Marker Flares." The crew saw, "red fires under the clouds over an area of twenty miles." His aircraft was one of the lucky ones as a staggering twelve percent (eight of the sixty-six Stirlings on the raid) were lost, almost all to enemy night-fighters.

Weather conditions were not good that night and the operations record book reports that six of the thirteen aircraft dispatched by the squadron returned early due to severe icing. As well, the enemy fighters were active and effective. S/L Roberston succinctly noted, "engaged Luftwaffe" in his logbook.

The "combat report" filed by his gunners elaborated on Stew's rather terse logbook entry, "Our aircraft was flying at 14,000 feet when attacked three miles east of Maffan. The enemy aircraft was not seen and the first indication of the attack was tracer coming from below and astern. Before, during, and after the attack, the enemy aircraft was not sighted by our crew. The enemy aircraft opened fire at point blank range, as far as it is possible to ascertain, and fired two bursts. It is thought by our crew that the attacking aircraft was right below and slightly to port.

"Violent evasive action was taken as soon as the enemy aircraft opened fire, consisting of a steep diving turn to starboard whilst at 14,000 feet. The Stirling was pulled out at 9,500 feet. During this action the enemy aircraft was lost.

"Our aircraft was hit in the port wing, port outer engine, and port outer propeller. Splinters also entered the aircraft around the pilot's seat. The port outer engine became u/s and the aircraft had to return on three engines.



The Short Stirling was the first of the four-engined bombers to come into service with Bomber Command

There were no casualties.”

The “evasive action” taken by S/L Robertson would have involved dropping the starboard wing and placing the Stirling into a near vertical dive for 4500 feet. Clearly this must have been a terrifying experience for all on board.

For two and one half hours Stew flew the aircraft on three engines. This, and the recovery from the dive, would have involved a considerable physical effort as the controls were manual with no hydraulic assistance. He recalled that his arms were sore for a long time after they returned to base and he successfully landed the damaged aircraft.

W/C Robertson’s aircraft was attacked by a Luftwaffe pilot who exploited the “blind spot” of almost all of the RAF bombers. The fighter pilot would slowly manoeuvre his aircraft into position below the bomber where the mid-upper and rear gunners could not see the aircraft. The enemy aircraft may even have been equipped with 20 mm cannons mounted on the fighter in an upward firing angle although this technique was not common until later in 1943.

Two nights later, Stew flew a “gardening stooge” in the vicinity of the Friesien Islands. “Gardening” was the term used for dropping mines into waters frequented by enemy shipping and a stooge was a diversionary raid which, it was hoped, would divert the attention of enemy fighters away from the main bomber force. Of the nineteen Stirlings sent on the “stooge,” two failed to return.

W/C Robertson’s next operation was on February 26th and again he returned on, and landed with, only three engines operating. This time however it was due to mechanical problems.

On February 28th, S/L Robertson flew on the largest raid in which he had participated when he was one of 437 aircraft that caused widespread damage to an enemy submarine base at St. Nazaire. Stew’s report noted, “Visibility good. Red markers in bomb sight and concentrated fires seen in target area.”

Stew’s 44th and last operation was his longest Stirling flight, a six hour and fifty-one minute trip to Berlin and back. No. 149 Squadron sent six Stirlings as part of a 302 aircraft raid that caused more damage to the enemy capital than any previous attack. Stew’s report stated that, “The glow of the fires were visible from Hanover, 150 miles away. However the loss rate was high -5.6% of the bomber force including four of the fifteen Stirlings dispatched and two of the six from Stew’s squadron.

S/L Robertson was then posted to another instructional role, but with an increasing level of responsibility and management. He was placed in charge of “D” Flight at No. 81 Operational Training Unit at Tilstock, again flying the Anson aircraft he had become so familiar with in Africa. Tilstock was located in the midlands of England in the northern part of the county of Shropshire, considerably removed from the excitement of eastern England



Whitworth Whitleys at RAF Sleaf

where the operating squadrons were based. His leadership and management abilities continued to develop and by June 1, 1943, he had been assigned the role of chief flying instructor for the OTU.

On July 12, RAF Station Sleaf became operational as a satellite station to Tilstock. Stew was promoted to the rank of Wing Commander and became the commanding officer of the station. Together, Tilstock and Sleaf were home to some three thousand RAF personnel.

A flying accident at the station occurred on August 26th. A Whitley ran into the control tower killing the Canadian pilot and another airman aboard the aircraft and injuring three men in the tower including W/C Robertson. Stew was admitted to Station Sick Quarters at Tilstock. His logbook notes however, that he was flying again on September 3rd.

On January 1, 1943, RAF Tilstock and Satellite Station Sleaf were transferred from No. 93 Group Bomber Command that oversaw aircrew training to No. 38 Group Allied Expeditionary Air Force. It retained the designation No. 81 OTU but its new function was to train crews to tow gliders for airborne troops. The aircraft to be used was the Whitley and Stew's experience with this type would have stood him in good stead in this new assignment. The gliders were Horsas, and they were to play important roles on D-Day (the invasion of France) and in other battles on the continent including the crossing of the Rhine.

As the commanding officer of the Station, W/C Robertson became more and more involved in the operation of the base but, as was expected of a c/o, he familiarized himself with all the things his staff were expected to do. He learned to take off in the huge Horsas, be towed to altitude behind Whitleys, and then to land the gliders.

Stew's desire for flying and adventure continued as well. During July 1944, a Hawker Hurricane, one of the front-line fighter aircraft that was

operational throughout the war, was on the base. Stew recalled that he decided that since he was the c/o of the station and the fighter was there, if he wanted to, he could take it up. He had not flown a single-engine aircraft since his initial flying training days and never one that could perform like the Hurricane.



Preparing to go parachuting

The following month he made two parachute jumps, landing in water on both occasions. On March 1, 1945, he made the last entry in his logbook as officer commanding RAF Sleaf. With the change of command, a ceremony was held at the station and W/C Robertson took the salute as the officers and men of the station marched past. The war was over for Stew and he was



W/C Robertson's last day at RAF Sleaf

repatriated to Canada.

On March 19, 1949, Stew began flying again with No. 403 RCAF (Reserve) "City of Calgary" Squadron based at Lincoln Park in Calgary. He flew regularly with the squadron until December 17, 1950.

The single-engined Harvard trainer was the aircraft in service with No. 403. Stew participated in various training activities including formation flying, and air-to-air and air-to-ground combat exercises. These involved visits to Gimli, Manitoba, Suffield, and Penhold. One of his favourite memories of flying with the squadron was racing just above the waves of Lake

Minnewanka in Banff National Park and scaring fishermen.

His final two flights with No. 403 Squadron were in the high-powered Mustang fighter.

Stew Robertson's final logbook tally includes flying nineteen different types of aircraft and a total of 1,887 hours of flying time, 1,095 of these in multi-engine aircraft.



This photo of Stew (left) and another Canadian in the Royal Air Force was taken by the RCAF and published in Canadian newspapers.

PHIL BLACK

-A Halifax for the Lancaster Society

The Halifax was the second of the four-engined heavy bombers to serve with the Bomber Command. The huge Stirling was already in service, but the prototype Lancaster was still undergoing preliminary flight testing in March, 1941 when No. 35 Squadron began operating what became affectionately known as the "Halibag."

As the war progressed, the Halifax became overshadowed by the Lancaster which appeared capable of carrying ever-increasing bomb loads without serious degradation of its performance and handling capabilities. The Halifax, however, operated successfully within Bomber Command until the end of the war and was clearly superior to the Lanc in its multi-role capability. It was operated by nine squadrons of the RAF's Coastal Command for anti-submarine, meteorological, and shipping patrols. RAF Transport Command used the aircraft as casualty, freight, and personnel transports. As well, two "special duty" squadrons, which had the task of dropping special agents and supplies into enemy territory, flew Halifaxes. The Hali was also able to tow the large Hamilcar glider and Halis towed these and other glider types at the invasion of Sicily and Normandy as well as at Arnhem and the final crossing of the Rhine.

With the Lancaster as its centre-piece, the Bomber Command Museum of Canada has regularly been reminded that there were other heavy bombers, besides the Lancaster, in the service of Bomber Command and that the majority of operations flown by the Canadian component within the Command, No. 6 Group, were flown in the Handley-Page Halifax.

Noting the lack of a Halifax in the museum, Dr. Black contacted us during the spring of 2005 and offered to donate his model. He seemed to appreciate our excitement that followed his offer and before long arrangements had been made to transport the model from his



Phil Black

home in Surrey, British Columbia. Soon "Halifax MZ-516" was on display in the lobby of the museum. We were pleased that Phil, who had visited the museum previously, felt that our facility was worthy of his very special model.



Handley Page Halifax

We were delighted to welcome Phil when he arrived on August 20, 2005 for the dedication of Canada's Bomber Command Memorial and, we think, to check to be sure that his Halifax was being well looked after.

Tragically, Phil was killed when the private aircraft he was travelling in crashed while returning to the west coast. The Bomber Command Museum of Canada enjoyed an all too brief, but rewarding relationship with Dr. Black. His model is not only a memorial to those, like Phil, who served in Halifaxes during the war, but also to Phil himself.

Halifax Mk III (serial number MZ-516) was on strength at No. 76 Squadron of 4 Group Bomber Command based at Holme-upon-Spalding Moor, south of York, England. With markings MP-V, it was known as "Vera the Virgin" and carried appropriate nose art, although bottles were used in lieu of the more conventional bomb symbol for operations flown. Vera is depicted with her left hand on her hip and with two fingers raised on her right hand, but not quite in the style popularized by Churchill. As nose art was not common on RAF squadrons, Phil thought that the aircraft may have previously served on a Canadian squadron prior to being replaced by a Canadian-built Lancaster.

MP-V took off at 22:09 on February 1, 1945 for a raid on Mainz. While homebound and flying at 7000 feet over East Anglia, the starboard outer engine began vibrating. Attempts to feather the motor were unsuccessful and with the situation deteriorating rapidly, the order to abandon the aircraft was given. Three of the crewmembers were able to get out before it crashed at Jones Farm, Heath Road, Banham, six miles northwest of Diss in Norfolk. This had been the aircraft's 77th operation.

Born in Ottawa, Ontario, Phil Black trained as a navigator in Oshawa, Ontario. He then went overseas, completing 29 operations with No. 76 Squadron. His crew flew in MP-V on a raid to Stuttgart in late January, 1945.

During his visit to the museum on August 20, 2005, Phil recalled, "We

went away on a short leave and came back and it wasn't there. You don't worry about that too much until I found out what happened to it. The dear old beast struggled back to England and they had to abandon the aircraft over Diss in Norfolk. It crashed taking four of the people with it and three got out. It's interesting to know they got out through the hatch in the front of the aircraft on which I had a folding seat to do navigation. The bomb aimer, the wireless operator, and the navigator got out. The rest didn't."

Phil "scratch built" the model with Bruce Guest providing substantial input, especially regarding authentic camouflage and markings. The scale is 1:12 with a wingspan of 96 inches and the model weighs 28 pounds. It features retractable undercarriage, operational flaps and bomb bay doors, and was powered by two .90 cubic inch engines.

While in Nanton, Phil described the building of his model. "It started over ten or eleven years ago. I've always been interested in models and had done a little bit of radio control. We built it up and I got great help from Bruce Guest. We tried to fly the thing with just the undercoating on it –gray paint. Rollie Martel was the pilot. He went back up and down the runway three or four times to see if it would be okay. We said, 'Let's go' and he loved the plane after that -twenty trips before it crashed. It flew like a dream. We dropped parachutes, flares, bombs and everything like that. The reason it crashed was because of the maintenance –I'm at fault. We picked up first prize in the static competition at a Canada-wide competition but then we flew it and it went down. I rebuilt it and we were going to fly it again but we decided, 'No.' We'd better put it on static display."



Phil Black's 1:12 scale model Halifax being flown by Rollie Martel



Phil Black's model of Halifax MP-V on display at the museum
photo: Jim Blondeau



While Phil Black was at the museum in 2005, nose artist Clarence Simonsen promised to paint a replica of "Vera the Virgin" for Phil. Clarence fulfilled this obligation and the replica is on display at the museum.

RON GROENEVELD

-Hiding out with the Dutch Resistance

Like most who were involved in World War II, Ronnie Groeneveld doesn't talk much about it—but he will never forget. And he is not alone, some sixty years later, in wanting to ensure that the story of what happened is told. Like most, he is self-effacing and reluctant to talk about his own experiences but determined that the stories of those who suffered, and in many cases, died during those horrific years is recorded and that future generations are made aware them.

One day in 1997, Ron drove down to Nanton from his home in High River, just 27 kilometres to the north. He spent some time looking at the aircraft and the displays before speaking with one of our directors. He told of a gun that he had, a carbine that he had used while with the Dutch Resistance.

Some Bomber Command and other special squadrons played an important role by supplying the Dutch Resistance and similar groups in other occupied countries with weapons and other necessary materials and equipment. Flying at low-level to a pre-arranged rendezvous location, the aircrew would strain to see signals from hand-held lights on the ground and then drop their loads by parachute. Those on the ground would have little time to gather the supplies and hide them. Capture by the enemy meant facing the Nazi SS branch and in all likelihood torture and death.

Ron said that he'd like the carbine to be displayed in our museum and that the story of the Dutch Resistance that had come to the assistance of hundreds of Bomber Command aircrew be told in the museum as well. He was sixteen when the Nazis invaded his country. Here is Ron's story:



Ron Groeneveld

It was 4 o'clock, May 10, 1940, when we all woke up to the noise of German airplanes flying over and the noise of the Dutch army trying to shoot the planes down.

The Germans had bombed the airport at Rotterdam and captured it in no time. But the Dutch kept shooting and were quickly informed by the Germans that they would bomb the city of Rotterdam if our army kept fighting. So on the 14th of May the heart of Rotterdam was bombed. The Hague would have been next, but by the 15th Holland surrendered after five days of fighting. We lost our freedom for five years.

In 1941, the Germans started to arrest the Jews. Through the years it got worse. They were packed in trains to be taken to Germany to concentration camps where almost everyone lost their life. Two of my friends and I went by train to Leeuwarden which is in the very north of Holland. What we saw at the station was unbelievable. There were groups of Jews, tied to each other by ropes waiting for the right train to take them away. The SS was all over the place to watch if everybody behaved, and you'd better otherwise your life would be gone in a minute.

In the summer of 1942, I got a letter in the mail which ordered me to go to Rotterdam to get my papers to go to Germany. Everyone between the ages of 18 to 46 was ordered to go to work for the Germans in the factories. But we knew by then that the English air force went over every night in airplanes to bomb those factories. So there were two things a person could do, either work for the enemy or go underground, which meant to go somewhere to work in another town, which I decided to do. I got in contact with the "underground." They found me a place where I could work on a farm. I had to bring my bicycle and clothes etc. and somebody would bring me there. So at 10 o'clock in the morning I had to be at a certain place and there was policeman who, after four hours of biking, dropped me off at a house where he left me after a quick handshake with the owner who brought me to the farm.

Without papers I couldn't go anywhere so it was pretty lonesome. My parents didn't know where I was so if someone came to look for me, they couldn't tell because they did not know. I knew later I had done the right thing because a cousin of mine the same age as I, did go to Germany and nobody has seen or heard from him since.

Now after about six months I wanted to go home, to be home for Christmas, but how to do it was a problem. I thought maybe if I asked the person who brought me here he might have an idea. But he didn't. It was too dangerous he said. I knew it, but I wanted to try. I was nineteen at that time but had never been away from home. Once in a while I went to the town, always only on a Sunday because on Sundays it was not too dangerous. So on this Sunday I went to the harbour where the freight ships were loading with freight to bring to other towns on their route through the rivers and canals. Before I knew it I was talking to a couple of girls. I don't remember who spoke

first, but it was good to talk to somebody. So I asked if they knew where those ships were heading. One of the girls said you want to go home don't you? I had seen her before at my boss's place. Then one of those girls told me that her dad went to Rotterdam on Fridays. So I went to my contact man again. A week later I was on my way home. They gave me some old clothes and made me look about twenty years older. I had to keep the deck clean and was not allowed to talk to anybody. I had to act as a deaf person. We stopped at different towns to deliver freight, but finally ended up in Rotterdam. But I was on the wrong side of the river and had to cross on a ferry. There was a big chance of being recognized, but everything went o.k. Then I had the choice to take the bus home or walk for about twelve kilometres. I decided to walk. By then it was dark and there were no streetlights and no light shining through people's windows. We had to block out the lights so the planes going over at night wouldn't be able to see the towns and cities. So I made it home safely. I walked into the house and gave everyone a big scare. They wanted to know where I came from, where I had been, and how I got home. I said, "I will tell when the war is over." From that time the whole Groeneveld family set out to work for safety and rights.

To begin with my Dad told me that I couldn't sleep at home. So for about a month I slept wherever there was room for me. In the meantime, the enemy would block streets in the middle of the night and went from door to door to see if there were any men between 18 and 46. They took them right on the spot and transported them to Germany where they would be put to work in factories. The Germans set out to get 40,000 men in September of 1942 and another 35,000 in November of that year. It got more and more difficult to stay out of the Germans' hands. So I was thinking more and more about a way to stay out of their hands.

I thought maybe I could make a place in our barn. The barn had two rooms of equal size, one straw and hay and one for milking cows. During the winter the milk cows stayed inside day and night which made the barn quite warm. I decided to make a room in the middle of



Ron built a model of the barn that shows the hide-out

the hay, but the difficult part was to make an entry which was invisible. We succeeded by making an opening to crawl through. Then there was the question about fresh air. Would there be enough? We had to find that out after it was all done. My father had told me to make it big enough to have room for more people. It ended up being ten feet by nine feet, enough room

for five people. There was a bunk bed and three single beds and if there were more people, then they slept on the floor. There were times when we had ten people sleeping in that place. Usually the people were from the “underground.” They were there because the Germans had caught someone else. They worried that the Germans might get that person talking. The other underground members kept themselves scarce.

I'll never forget the first night I slept in that place. I went through the opening, locked it from the inside, and there I stood with pitch dark all around me,

I felt around to find the bed. Then the feeling of being safe made it all worth it. You may ask why we didn't use a flashlight? No batteries in the stores any more. By that time everything from the hardware and clothing stores was taken to Germany. But to come back to my new bed, it was not as safe as I thought, because I saw two bright spots and heard some noise in the hay and on my bed. So I was in the company of some mice. They were my little friends for the rest of the time we spent in the hole. All we had for bathroom facilities was a pail -good thing we were still young so we didn't have to use it too often. We made an agreement to not get up until my father hit a steel pole with a hammer three times. So that was my first night.

The first few weeks were the worst. I felt so shut in and it was so dark and so quiet. But if you heard something that was no good either because there was the thought, “What if the SS is looking for me?” And there were the thoughts of a fire because the chances of getting out were pretty slim. After those first weeks a friend of mine moved in with me. His name was Gerrit van Wijk. So then we could talk together.

Soon the people from the underground came to ask my Dad if he wanted to take in somebody who was wanted by the Germans. When my



Dutch Resistance members in the hide-out
Back: (l-r) ?, Wim Byl, Joe van Hilten; Middle: Teun Groeneveld (Ron's father), Jaap Meyer (Resistance Leader), Ron Groeneveld
Front: (l-r) Dingman Groeneveld (Ron's brother), Leen Berbwerf, Teun Rosendaal
This photograph of the hide-out was taken after the liberation of the Netherlands

father asked his name, they told him it was Wim Byl. "If that is the guy who works for the Germans," my dad said, "then you better forget it. I'm not going to risk my life for him." But, why was the underground looking for a place for him? So they explained what was going on and this is the story of Wim Byl. While he was working for the Germans at the airport he was able to collect a lot of information for the English. He did get caught, but escaped before, the SS started looking for him. He was hiding in a cafe. Someone warned him. He went upstairs and made it to the top of the roof. Luckily it was a flat roof, where he layed down till after dark. He couldn't go home, so that's why they came to our house. So after father heard the story, he agreed to keep him for a couple of weeks. Those weeks ended up being two and half years.



Wim Byl and his maps in the hide out

A while after he came to stay with us, the underground people came with information about where the Germans were fighting and what they were doing. Wim would take this information and make maps which were sent to England through the underground. He also listened to radio England to know what was going on. People had to hide their radios because all radios were supposed to have been turned in along with lots of other stuff. Anything made from gold, silver, steel, and copper had to be turned in to be melted to make more weapons.

In the meantime, the underground had found out about our hiding place and asked if some of them could hide there too. And it did happen. More and more people were arrested and sent to Germany to work in factories. Lots of others joined the underground. The underground got stronger and stronger and did a lot of break-ins at offices where food stamps were stored. I.D. cards were also duplicated. They had to do this because as soon as one went underground there were no more food stamps for them. Anyone who was hiding someone had to have those food stamps in order to feed an extra person.

Coming back to Wim Byl, he had heard through the grapevine that Corrie, his wife, had given birth to their daughter. He wanted to go and see them of course. So we put a horse in front of a wagon, a wooden crate on top of the wagon, and Wim in the crate and went for a ride to see mom and baby.

In the dark of evening he came back walking on his own two feet. Not until the end of the war did Corrie find out where Wim had stayed all those years.

The next excitement we had was one morning when my father came to give us the safety signal to get out. Usually he went in the house after that but this time he was still in the barn. When we came out of the barn the first thing I saw was a horse and wagon. The horse was tied up and the wagon was full with wooden crates with a tarp over them. I walked up to it but my father told me to stay away from it. I wanted to know what it was all about. But the answer was, "Don't ask so much. Somebody brought it here, and I'm sure someone will get it back." So we went in to have breakfast and milked and fed the cows. Then at about 10 o'clock people started to come in the yard, some two together and some alone. They started to unpack the wagon. They brought all the boxes into the barn and opened them in front of our eyes. My eyes got bigger and bigger and I started to shake in my shoes. There were guns, hand-grenades, sten guns, bazookas, bren guns, and explosive material. There were enough for 25 to 30 men. This was all done under the Germans' noses. It still makes me shake. No wonder, because those Germans were not very far away. Then every one started to clean those weapons, wiping all the grease and oil off, and then put them back in the crates and on to the wagon. That was to give the impression that nothing stayed at our place. But that night two underground people came to put everything into "our bedroom" under hay and straw. That evening, before going to bed, I stopped at the house for a few minutes. I heard my mother talking to my Dad. She said, "What are you doing Teunis? This is too dangerous. If we are found out by the Germans all of us will lose our lives and they will burn this place down." Yes it was a big responsibility for my father to take this all on his shoulders. I never knew for sure if he knew all about what was taking place, but I think he must have known. I do know that my mother had many sleepless nights after this happened. The stress was so great that she experienced many headaches and battled this the rest of her life. Going to bed that night was not easy, not only for what we went through, but also we lost half of our room. The next few days we spent our time pulling out some of the hay until we had enough room for the boxes. We bagged the pulled out hay and fed it to the horses.

Ron had always wondered where the weapons that were brought to the Groeneveld family's farm came from and how they were delivered. Since writing this story, Ron has twice visited Holland to find out.

In 2004, I contacted the underground people in Berkel Rodenrijs. They told me about the weapon droppings that took place around their town. Two years later I returned to Holland and contacted the leader of the group, Jan Rozendaal. He told me that weapons were dropped eighteen different times. Spies also travelled with the weapons. Jan took me to a couple of places where droppings took place. One of these places was at a farm whose owner sold his vegetables to a market garden. The weapons were loaded



Taken after the liberation, this photo of members of the Dutch Underground include many who distributed the weapons to locations such as the barn on Ron's farm.

onto wagons and covered with vegetables. The buyer took his purchase and had them loaded onto a small river boat. The weapons were hidden on the lower deck. Now they were ready for the trip to our farm at Pernis, a distance of only 12 kilometres in a straight line but a much longer journey by boat along the networks of canals. This small boat had to pass through all the canals of Rotterdam which were controlled by police and the SS. To get to the Maas River they had to pass through the locks which were also controlled and the SS would come aboard and check the boats. The Maas River was controlled by the SS in speed boats which on occasion would stop you and come aboard. But most times they would just wave as you passed by because this boat's skipper had a special permit to ship vegetables.

The weapons and vegetables arrived at the Pernis harbour for the farmers' market but were not unloaded because the skipper felt that there were spies observing the unloading. A secure spot had to be found for the unloading. After the bombing of Rotterdam all the rubble was hauled to the river's edge which provided a perfect hiding spot for unloading. The weapons were unloaded and placed in a horse-drawn wagon. For security reasons a driver would take the wagon to a town, tie up the horses and leave. A short time later another driver would come along and continue the journey. The last driver tied up the horse at the Groeneveld farm and left.

Another thing I remember well is sitting in the kitchen with my father listening to the planes flying over. This time one seemed to be flying back and forth. We were waiting for the bombs to explode, but nothing happened. Not long after, there was a knock at the door. We didn't have a hiding place at the house but I quickly went into a crawl space we had under the floor. Dad opened the door to a foreigner who stepped inside and closed the door behind him. We knew right away that he belonged to the Allies, because we

couldn't understand him. We got in contact with one of the underground that spoke English. That's when we heard the story.

Their airplane was coming back from a trip to Germany. They had been shot at and lost their instrument panel. Then they got low on fuel, so the pilot had told him to jump out, while he would try to get to England. If he ever made it we never heard, but most likely he drowned at sea because they thought they were above France. We asked the guy what he did with his parachute because if the Germans find something like that they wouldn't rest till they found out what it was all about. I went to look for it and luckily soon found it. I rolled it up and put it in a ditch, with some dirt over it. In the mean time, through the interpreter, we told him



The airman who appeared at the door the Groeneveld's farmhouse

what we were able to do for him, to get him back to England. But he was not interested, he figured as a Prisoner of War he would get fair treatment. We knew better, but he didn't believe us. So we left him on the street, to make believe we had nothing to do with him. The police had him picked up in no time.

About a month later I went looking for the parachute again, found it, and brought it home. Later my sister-in-law, a seamstress, made herself a wedding dress from the parachute. It turned out pretty well.

We got to the year 1944. We were unable to buy anything without food distribution stamps. The stamps we got were not enough to keep people alive, especially in the big cities. People came to the countryside, walking from door to door to get a little bit of food, a crust of bread, or a piece of potato. If they were lucky to get a little more, they would take it home for their loved ones. But it got harder and harder for the people who handed it out, after all there was only so much to go around. By now there were so many men who had gone, underground and who didn't get food stamps, but still had to eat too. There were also the Jews. The guns which were stored at our place were used to attack the distribution centres. I know of one place where 180,000 coupons were stolen, another one of 135,000. There were also thousands and thousands of coupons forged.



Ron's sister wearing her wedding dress made from the airman's silk parachute

I remember well the time when I had to bring guns etc. to a place on the end of the dike where we lived (about two or three kilometres). The Germans had searchlights on that dike to search out the bombers who flew over on their way to Germany. Every time I went to milk the cows I had to pass through this restricted area. So this one day I loaded those milk containers with guns, put them on the wagon, and pretended I was going to milk the cows. Since we passed that place quite often we got to know some of the Germans there. This one man didn't even look at us, but always had a sugar lump for the horse and I had a chat with him. After that he would let us through. He must have been a farmer. Things were getting worse and worse. The only good in that was that we knew it couldn't get any worse, so there had to be an end soon. The Germans were losing everywhere and the bombers were flying over day and night. Sometimes on a clear day we would count them. Usually it was between 300 and 400 planes in an afternoon. The Germans saw the end coming too. They didn't get time to go on leave. They had to stay where they were, so they couldn't see what had happened at home because most of the big cities were badly bombed. We were not allowed to talk together with three people or more on the street, so we quickly walked on.

Also the Germans placed big poles in the larger fields, close enough together so no airplane could land in those fields. Well, try to do some plowing in a field like that. I pulled out many of those poles. That was not too wise after all, because when the fields were cleared later on, those poles were underneath the dirt. So plowing the next year was not much fun either.

It was about November 1944 that in Rotterdam and Schiedam 50,000 men were picked up for work in Germany. At the same time we had the Germans going through our farm, the house, the barn, every building on the property. Everyone except myself was able to get in our hole. I ran through the backdoor of the barn and through an orchard. Soon there were bullets flying around me. I cried out and fell in the ditch. I fooled them. They believed they shot me but I ran through the ditch, over the dike, and on to the neighbour's house. The neighbours had a windmill and they allowed me to hide in the top of the windmill.

At home everyone was worried -nobody knew where I was. They saw the Germans poking with bayonets in the hay and straw of the barn. Luckily the barn was packed after harvest and the bayonets were not long enough to reach anyone. When they couldn't find anything they went looking for me but couldn't find me either. So they told my Dad they would set the place on fire if I had not



The windmill that Ron hid in. The Groeneveld farm was in the distance at right.

showed up by evening. My neighbours had found out about this but didn't tell me. They told me to stay overnight because it was still too dangerous to go home. Thank God the Germans DID NOT come back that night. This all happened in 1944/45.

A real cold winter, there was no more coal to heat the houses, no oil for lamps, no gas for cars. Some people tried to fuel their cars with wood but that wasn't much of a success. Most people still had their bikes, but after the tires were worn out, that was the end of rubber tires. Some people tried it on wooden tires. Old rubber garden hose was another thing that was tried. Lots of houses had their wooden closet shelves and doors taken out to be cut into pieces and burned in a homemade little stove to cook what little there was left to cook. At the same time they got a little heat. Trees were cut down and the posts the Germans had set in the fields saw their end in a heating stove -until they were caught doing it. Then the older Dutch people were chartered to keep watch over these fields at night. It was just a laugh, for even when the older men did it they would turn their heads when they saw someone stealing a pole.

Around this time the hunger in the big cities got so bad and some people were so skinny, we wondered if they would be able to get up if they fell. As a matter of fact there were lots of people who died right on the street where they fell. It was a very hard time for us, especially for my father. We knew people were eating tulip bulbs. But when people came asking for sugar beets he said, "No way! No one should eat sugar beets! That's animal feed." He stood by his word for about two days but then he broke down and said, "Just take them."

That they never shot my Dad is still a wonder to me. He sold lots of milk for sick people for twenty-five cents a litre. Of course the Germans knew how much milk our cows should produce so when he was asked why there was so little milk, Dad always had an excuse. He would take his hat off, run his fingers through his hair and say he had slept in or that something went wrong, forever something else. They believed him. When they were gone, we laughed and he said, "Those people, you can tell them anything."

I remember one Saturday



Back: (l-r) Gerrit van Wyk, Ron Groeneveld
Front: (l-r) Teun Groeneveld (Ron's father), Wim Byl

afternoon that father was helping people with milk. All of a sudden there were two Germans who wanted some milk. They had two girls with them. Dad turned around and said, "You're not sick," and turned away. Dad felt a gun at his back because the guy wanted milk. We stood, as if nailed to the ground. What would happen now? Luckily the gun came down and the guys walked away without milk. There were lots of guardian angels around that day. What a relief that was!

Not too much later we heard that the guy who brought those guns in milk containers was shot to death. He was interrogated for about a week. What a scare, but he must have remained silent. Along with some more people from Rotterdam, he found his end. The underground had tried to free him, but without success. The SS were getting meaner by the day. That last winter, we were not able to get in or out of western Holland. They were trying to starve us all.

Most of Holland was liberated in 1944 but western Holland remained under the Nazis until May, 1945. It's really hard for me to write this all down and hard for anyone to understand what it is to live in fear so long and see so many people go hungry. We ourselves always had enough to eat as did my wife, who I didn't know then. She has her own story about an eight year old boy who came to the door about dinner time. She gave him her plate of food. He said a thank you Lord prayer before he ate. What faith for an eight year old boy and for her. She never forgot and never will. I will never forget the man who came to our door to ask for some food for his sick wife. My father just had to say no because we were running real low. The man took off his wedding ring and tried to trade it for some food. My dad got mad and said, "Put the ring back on." He would never do anything like that. The man was given a little bag of potatoes.

Through radio England we heard that planes were loaded with food to drop over western Holland. The Allies were negotiating with the Germans not to shoot at the planes. They kept their word. People were so happy. Pretty soon the sky was full of planes which were flying lower and lower in order not to damage their precious cargo as it was dropped. People were on top of buildings, on rooftops, and on the street with flags and anything else to wave with. The planes came so low that we could see the pilots and the rest of the



Manna

crew. They made 5,356 mercy flights and dropped 10,913 tonnes of food in ten days. I wished then that I could talk to them and say, "Thank you."

I came to Canada in April, 1954 and in 1997 I got my wish. We visited the museum in Nanton where we met Joe English. He told how he had flown over Holland during the war to drop bombs over Germany. He said, "The best bombing he ever did was when he dropped food to the starving people in Holland." So after 52 years I was able to shake hands and say, "Thank you." Also thank you to the rest of the crew and the crews of all the other planes.

When you read all this, you might wonder what happen to us. Are we still thankful? Yes, we are. Thank you to all the Canadians who gave their lives so we could live and be free.



Ron Groeneveld at the museum. To his left is his carbine, one of the weapons dropped by Bomber Command and stored in the hide-out on the Groeneveld's farm.

CHARLIE PARKER

-The Saga of the Red Deer Lancaster

Rob Taerum's Uncle Harlo was the lead navigator on the legendary Dambusters Raid. His Uncle Lorne was an air gunner who was killed over the Netherlands on his sixth operation. Like many others who had family members who served with Bomber Command, Rob has taken a great interest in our museum. His family has donated his uncles' photographs, artifacts, and memorabilia to our archives and for display.

But Rob and his wife Kathy assist in other ways. Avid photographers, they regularly document our special events and are always on the lookout for photos that the museum may be interested in.

In 2004, Rob came across a photograph of a Lancaster Bomber that had been incorporated into a service station on Highway #2 in Red Deer, Alberta. This led to further investigations and the museum's introduction to Charlie Parker.

Lancaster KB-885 was built at the Victory Aircraft Plant at Malton, Ontario and ferried to a maintenance unit in England. It was then assigned to No. 434 (Bluenose) Squadron in March 1945 and the markings WL-Q were painted on the fuselage. The number of operations flown by KB-885 with No. 434 Squadron and their details are not known. In April 1945, the aircraft was transferred to No. 420 (Snowy Owl) Squadron based at Tholthorpe, Yorkshire, England. Here the aircraft was assigned the code letters PT-Y.

However the war in Europe ended before KB-885 could fly combat operations with its new squadron. No. 420 Squadron returned to Canada on June 14, 1945, to be prepared for duty in the



Charlie Parker



(l-r) Rob Taerum, Doris Fraser, Joe McCarthy jr., and Shere Lowe
photo: Kathy Taerum

Pacific as part of "Tiger-Force." The dropping of the two atomic bombs and the surrender of Japan ended the Second World War and No. 420 Squadron was disbanded at Debert, Nova Scotia.

On September 8, 1945, KB-885 arrived at Pearce, Alberta together with 82 other Canadian-built Lancaster veterans. Over the next three months, all these aircraft were flown to different RCAF bases in Alberta and placed into long-term storage. KB-885 was flown to what was formerly No. 37 Service Flying Training School in Calgary and parked in a hangar. Then in 1947, the Canadian Government decided to sell a number of Lancasters. The RCAF struck KB-885 off strength and sold it to C.R. "Charlie" Parker of Red Deer, Alberta for \$275.00. The aircraft was flown to Penhold (formerly the site of No. 36 Service Flying Training School), where she appeared at an open-house airshow in June prior to Charlie taking possession of his bomber.

Charlie saw his new Lancaster as a potential magnet to draw customers to his service station on Highway #2, about one mile south of Red Deer. His daughter, Lois Gilmour, recalled, "Dad was always full of ideas that were different. He could fix or build almost anything, really a great inventor of machinery, etc., and loved cars and planes. I'm sure people around here wondered about him -but they were in awe when he set his plan in motion."



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Lancaster KB-885 in 1948

Mr. Parker began to tow his new bomber from the Penhold base along country roads and across farm fields. For a time it was bogged down in wet ground but finally, after the ground froze, it completed its trip to Charlie's gas station that he now referred to as, "Bomber Service."

The Lancaster's undercarriage was set on concrete supports and steps were constructed so that visitors could view the interior as part of a 25 cent tour. Later the

admission charge was dropped. Lois Gilmour recalled how much fun it was to work at the gas station and to tour people through the aircraft.

Health reasons forced Charlie to sell "Bomber Service" in 1954. Two years later, the business was purchased by Walter Mielke. Mr. Mielke was approached by Troutdale Airmotive Company of Troutdale, Oregon, who offered to purchase the Lancaster for \$6000 and convert it into a fire-fighting water bomber. The offer was accepted on the condition that Troutdale purchase a surplus P-40 Kittyhawk fighter from the RCAF base at Vulcan and move it to "Bomber Service" to replace the Lancaster.

Preparations then began to make the Lancaster airworthy and ferry KB-885 to California for licensing and then to Portland, Oregon to be modified to become a water bomber. The cost to prepare the aircraft for flight was estimated to be \$14,000. James Sproat of Portland, Oregon was to fly the aircraft to California. He was reported as saying that the bomber was to carry 4000 gallons of water and would be able to lay a 200 foot swath of water, one inch deep in the path of an advancing fire.

The weather was good during the fall of 1956 as two air force mechanics from the Penhold base assisted with preparing KB-885 for flight. New Rolls-Royce Merlin engines were fitted and run-up, the elevators, ailerons, and rudders were refurbished, new tires were installed, and a makeshift runway was bulldozed in a nearby field.

The Calgary Herald reported that, "When the engines were started, early morning motorists who probably had no thought that the machine would



Charlie Parker and daughter Lois promoting their service station in the Calgary Stampede Parade
courtesy: Red Deer and District Archives and Lois Parker Gilmour

ever fly again, stopped to confirm their disbelieving eyes. Nearly everyone who went by slowed their cars to a crawl as they watched the propellers cutting through the air.”

But a happy ending to the saga of KB-885 was not to be. As the big moment arrived in January 1957, pilot/mechanic E. Robinson taxied the Lancaster through the snow to her new runway. Just before take-off, hydraulic problems developed and while Robinson worked on the hydraulic system, a fire ignited in the interior of the nose section. Before it was extinguished, the complete front section had burned off and fallen onto the snow. The once proud bomber was towed back to the service station and later sold for scrap.

Like all Lancasters of No. 420 Squadron, KB-885 had the snowy owl painted on the outside of both tail fins. As well, PT-Y carried very distinctive nose art titled, “Hell Razor.” Clarence Simonsen believes that this design likely derived from artwork created by Walt Disney artists, one of three designs completed for United States Navy Carrier Air Group 81 in June 1944.



Lancaster KB-885 following the fire



courtesy Clarence Simonsen



Charlie Parker's "Bomber Service" in Red Deer, Alberta
courtesy Rob Taerum

BARRY DAVIDSON

-Prisoner of War

In 2000, the museum's restored Blenheim IV bomber was dedicated to the memory of Barry Davidson. A Prisoner of War for almost five years, Barry played a key role in "The Great Escape" and suffered through the "Death March" as the end of the war approached.

1849 of the 2290 members of the Royal Canadian Air Force who became Prisoners of War had served with Bomber Command. 31 died in captivity. Air Force POW's were kept in separate camps, referred to as "Stalag Lufts," administered by the Luftwaffe, the German air force.

Life as a POW was bearable until very late in the war. At worst, it could be degrading, depressing, and debilitating. Food, while not available in quantity or variety, generally met minimum standards and Red Cross parcels, with their cigarettes, chocolate, and other "luxuries," were permitted to enter the camps.

Most POW's did not make any effort to escape, learning to cope with their situation by determining to make the most of it. Although some longed to be free, statistically there was only a slender chance of success. Of the ten thousand aircrew who occupied enemy camps, fewer than thirty ever escaped and successfully reached England or a neutral country.

Some saw the barbed wire as a symbol of security. There were no responsibilities and they could read, paint, act in plays, and sleep or eat whenever they wished. Rules were rigid but easy to understand.

The museum's Blenheim carries the Royal Air Force markings of the aircraft Barry Davidson flew on the operation during which he was shot down and captured. Prior to the development of four-engined heavy bombers such as the Lancaster, crews such as Barry's set out in twin-engined Whitleys, Hampdens, Wellingtons, and Blenheims, flying operations to targets as far away as Berlin with a compass, the stars,



Barry Davidson

and assumed winds being their only navigational aids.

Several of the museum's directors came to know Barry during visits to the Thursday luncheons held by the Southern Alberta Aircrew Association. He was clearly held in high regard by his colleagues. Barry's family participated in the dedication of the aircraft and continue to be active supporters of the museum.

The Barry Davidson Memorial Blenheim honours those who flew the twin-engined bombers in the early years of WW II and also serves as a memorial to those Bomber Command aircrew who became Prisoners of War.

Barry Davidson was born in Calgary and attended school in the Hillhurst and Sunnyside districts. After serving with the Militia and later with the Canadian Army supplying relief camps that were building highways west of Calgary, Barry began work in the insurance business. He met World War I ace Fred McCall who talked him into taking up flying at the old Calgary Municipal Airport in the Renfrew district. After training in Tiger Moths, Barry received his license in July 1937.

Following the Japanese attack on China later that year, Barry wrote a letter to General Chiang Kai-shek, the political and military leader of China, offering his services to the Chinese "Flying Tigers." His offer was politely declined.

Barry then applied to join the Royal Air Force and at the relatively elderly age of 24, was accepted, two months before war was declared. After training on Tiger Moths, Hawker Hinds, Hawker Harts, and Avro Ansons and with fewer than four hours on Blenheims, P/O Davidson was assigned to No. 18 Squadron to commence operational flying against the enemy as a bomber pilot. The RAF was trying to slow the enemy's westward advance across France.

On July 6, 1940, Barry's second day with the squadron, he flew his one and only operation. He recalled, "We had found one of their forward new aerodromes that they were building. We were flying around about fifteen miles from Paris.



The Barry Davidson Memorial Blenheim carries the same markings, WV-L, as the aircraft flown by Barry when he was shot down on July 6, 1940



Barry Davidson with a Tiger Moth bi-plane trainer

Northwest of Paris we ran into this aerodrome. So we lined up on the equipment at the end of the aerodrome. They hadn't shot at us yet. So we got all the equipment quite easily with the two 250's (250 pound bombs) and then we turned around. We were only at about 1800 feet and we dove down and dropped the 500 (500 pound bomb) on the buildings. When we got up to about 1800 feet again they started shooting at us and they hit me. Shrapnel came through the centre of the plane. All the Blenheim's controls run through the centre. So we careened over and at 1800 feet there was no chance of jumping. I don't know why but I automatically reached for the tail trimmer and the wires were working on the tail trimmer –the stick was dead, it was of no use. The tail trimmer brought the plane out of the dive. I told the crew we'd head northwest.

"The compass was gyrating (because of the violent up and down motion of the aircraft) so we had to just guess. I said, 'If we see land on our left hand side it means England.' Well after a while we saw land and thought it was England. They were shooting at us again (but this time Barry thought that they were British gunners who assumed they had an enemy plane in their sights). My crew said things were getting kind of hot so I pulled my wheels up and crash-landed on the beach. I was looking at my map to see where the closest point to my aerodrome was and when I looked up there were slews of Germans. We had done a great circle and were heading south. That's why the cliffs were on my left hand side where they should have been. They got in the plane and said, 'For you the war is over.'"

After just over three hours of operational flying, P/O Davidson was a Prisoner of War. In a letter to his parents in Calgary he wrote, "Looks like I am



"For You the War is Over" [A commissioned painting by John Rutherford]

in cold storage for the duration.”

After stints in various compounds, he spent most of the war at Stalag Luft III, a vast air force prison camp near Sagan (in present-day Poland) built to house RAF POW's. Many of the prisoners, including Barry, felt that it was their duty to try to escape by any means possible in order to disrupt the enemy and to attempt to return to their squadrons in Britain.

Barry recalled that while in the POW camp it was important to keep busy. “We kept busy. I organized the ice hockey –getting skates. I wrote to Don MacKay (mayor of Calgary at the time). They got skates and hockey equipment and sent them to the camp. We flooded our rinks with buckets and they were regular sized rinks so it was a lot of work. I had one of my room-mates go nuts because he didn't get active in doing things. He finally climbed up on the hospital roof and the damn guards shot him.”

In designing Stalag Luft III, the Germans raised the prison huts above ground to discourage tunnelling. Nevertheless the POW's were able to create trap doors under heating stoves. From there they chiselled through the huts' corner foundation pillars to create entrances for three tunnels nicknamed, “Tom,” “Dick,” and “Harry.” The engineering challenges involved in the tunneling were enormous and included the building of a railway system within the tunnels, electric lighting, and air circulation systems. Sand and soil from the tunnels was transported in bags concealed in prisoners' trousers and carefully spread around in gardens.

“I tried digging in the tunnel but I got claustropobic,” Davidson said. “The tunnel was about 350 feet long, but about thirty feet straight down –and that's a long ways down! –because the Germans had sound equipment to detect digging.” It was the longest Prisoner of War tunnel ever made.

Barry specialized in bribing and blackmailing the “Goon” and “Ferrets,” as prisoners called their German guards and hut searchers. The war deprived the guards of many things so prisoners like Barry were able to exchange chocolate, Nescafe, and cigarettes from their Red Cross packages for various items that were useful such as paper, India ink, pen nibs, and even a camera which was needed for forging travel papers for those who would be escaping. As well, railway timetables, uniform insignias, passports, travel



Barry Davidson POW [1940



Prison Camp poster

permits, and even picks and timbers for the tunnels were obtained. It was through these efforts that Barry was nick-named, “The Scrounger.”

“I was number 78, I think, on the list of those going out,” Davidson said, “but unfortunately I had been seen talking to Fischer (one of the guards) shortly before the escape. We had such a good security system that the escape committee knew the Germans had seen me talking to him, so Roger Bushell (the RAF officer in charge) asked me if I’d step back and not go out.”

After a year of digging and despite the German’s discovery of “Tom,” seventy-six men made it out through “Harry.” The plan was for two hundred POW’s to escape but eventually German guards spotted the exit because the tunnel did not quite reach to a wooded area as planned.

Only three of the escapees eventually reached freedom. The rest were re-captured and, against the Geneva Convention, fifty were shot. Hitler himself gave this order.

Documented in Paul Brickhill’s book, “The Great Escape,” the breakout was later glamorized in a Hollywood film. Barry’s role was played by James Garner in the movie version of “The Great Escape.” But Barry wanted it known that much of the movie was pure “Hollywood.”

“For starters,” he stated, “No Americans were there! How’s that? And you saw where Steve McQueen got tossed in jail, with his ball glove and ball? They just did that for dramatic effect. The Germans wouldn’t have let us keep a pencil. They weren’t playing around.”

Barry remained at Stalag Luft III until January 27, 1945. The Russian army was advancing only 30 kilometres away and the sounds of battle were clearly audible. Without any warning or preparation, the entire camp was given orders to evacuate within thirty minutes. Similar orders were given at other camps and the prisoners began forced marches which were later referred to as the “Death Marches.”

In temperatures as cold as –35 degrees, the ten thousand prisoners trudged through the snow for five days. It was an extremely difficult time for the already weakened prisoners. They had only the clothes they had acquired



Hardie de Forest of Drumheller, Alberta (left)
and Barry Davidson
Glenbow Archives [pa-2934-4]

in the prison camps and were forced to eat poor quality, frozen food. Forty to fifty pound packs of supplies had to be carried. The sick fell to the back, to be shoved along with rifle butts by the guards. Some of the POW's died prior to reaching Spremburg where the prisoners boarded a train composed of cattle cars. Most of the prisoners were exhausted and many were suffering from severe diarrhea and stomach troubles.

Barry was one of the last to board a cattle car and had to be lifted on because of his weakened condition. After three days on the train during which eight of Barry's friends died, they reached Tarmstadt.

The next leg of the journey involved walking for ten days to Lubeck. After the first day they were forced to spend the night in an open field. When they reached a prison camp in Lubeck, the senior British officer refused to allow the men to enter as typhus had broken out amongst the prisoners already there.

After marching an additional 15 kilometres to the estate of a former German tobacco farmer, Barry and a group of prisoners were billeted in cattle barns. They remained there until May 2, 1945 when they were liberated by a Scottish tank regiment.

Barry Davidson kept a logbook during his time as a Prisoner of War. The empty book was provided by the "Prisoners' Aid of the Y.M.C.A." in Geneva, Switzerland. Barry's logbook contains sketches, water colour paintings, photographs, and poetry completed by himself and others during his time in the prison camps. A painting of the monument erected to the memory of the "Fifty" killed following the Great Escape from Stalag Luft III may be found in the book. The names of Barry's friends who had been killed were carefully written on another page. Also included is a design and detailed drawing of a hunting lodge Barry dreamt of building while in prison camp.

The logbook has been referred to as, "a national treasure." Author Shirlee Matheson, who included Barry's story in her book, "Flying The Frontiers Volume III," wrote that, "the drawings and poems clearly capture the emotions of men whose freedom has been snatched away -and the eternal hope to recapture that freedom." One of the poems includes these poignant lines:

"I hope that I will never know, so many days that pass so slow;
So many weeks so much the same; so many months without a name.

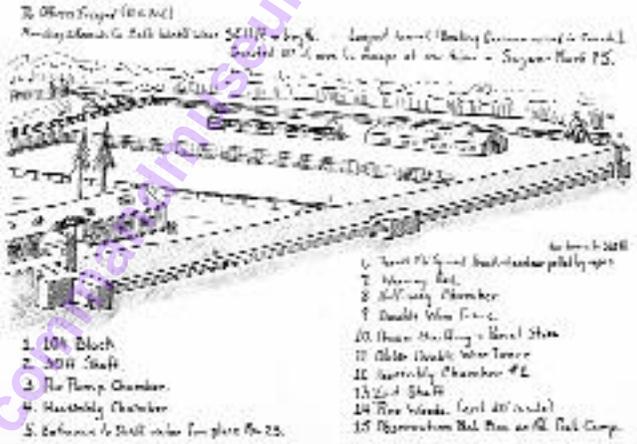
I hope my cup will overflow with all the joys I used to know,
With wine and women to be kissed, to make up for the things I've missed."

Barry returned to Calgary to work in the insurance business and raise a family. He was a charter member of the Calgary Prisoner of War Association and an active member of the Southern Alberta Aircrew Association until his death in 1996 at the age of 82.

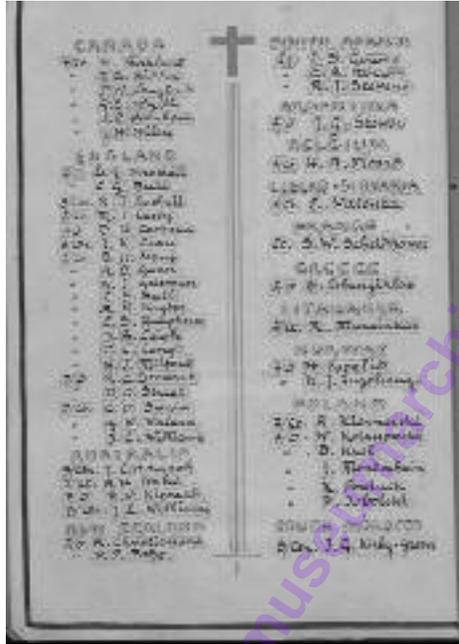


One of the first pages of Barry's Prisoner of War logbook

Obviously drawn after the escape, this page from the logbook shows a portion of the camp and the tunnel



This page from Barry's logbook depicts the hunting lodge he dreamt of building while a Prisoner of War



On this page of his logbook, Barry listed the names and nationalities of the fifty of his fellow Prisoners of War who were murdered.



Barry Davidson jr. with his sisters, Bryanne Wood (left) and Liz Harder at the dedication of the Barry Davidson Memorial Blenheim in 2000.
photo: Bob Evans

JONATHAN SPINKS

-Airplane Hunter

Jonathan Spinks studied history at the University of Lethbridge. But the history he enjoyed most was not to be found in the books of the U of L library. Jon loved to go "airplane hunting" and at this he was both an expert and ahead of his times.

At the age of fifteen he realized that there was a wealth of historical artifacts and in some cases entire airplanes, unappreciated and for the most part forgotten, in farmer's yards, sheds, and junk piles all across western Canada. Focusing on the Lancasters, he methodically mapped the locations where they had been broken up for scrap in the early 1950's and searched for the leftovers -gun turrets, instrument panels, pilot's seats, bomb bay doors, escape hatches, and anything else he could find. He also searched for aircraft and artifacts of the BCATP.

Clearly a visionary in the appreciation of the value of these treasures, Jon trained and inspired members of the Nanton Lancaster Society in his chosen field of "airplane hunting." His efforts and enthusiasm were responsible for the Society acquiring numerous aircraft and artifacts from the farms of southern Alberta

Sadly, Jon passed away at the young age of twenty-eight. His North American Yale trainer and collection of Bolingbroke aircraft and parts were donated to the Society by his family. We think Jon would be pleased that we are taking good care of some of the prizes of his "airplane hunting."

The following article was initiated by Tom Smith and completed by Jonathan's father, David Spinks.



Jon Spinks
photo: Bob Evans

It all began one day when Jonathan was fifteen years old, while on his way to go fishing with his Dad. At that time, all the small towns had tall grain elevators with the town's name written on their side. While driving down the road he noticed one with the name "Pearce" on it. This rang a bell with Jonathan, for he had read an article about how Lancaster bombers had been scrapped in this town after the war. So on the return trip from fishing, he talked his Dad into taking him out to the abandoned airfield where this had taken place. There he found pieces of the bombers still lying in the field. There were flaps, ailerons, access panels, and tires, still untouched. This intrigued Jonathan so much that he started researching these bombers.

Jon learned that during the late summer and fall of 1945, several dozens of Lancasters were flown to southern Alberta from Yarmouth, Nova Scotia to be stored in a drier climate. Cliff Black led a group of six that left Yarmouth on September 8th. He recalls that the former No. 2 Flying Instructor School at Pearce wasn't designed to handle aircraft such as the Lancaster. He was shocked to see the short runways as he over-flew the airfield. Fortunately there was a headwind as his group landed. Cliff touched down at the very end of the runway and managed to stop in time but a couple of his group did not and ran off the end of the runway.



Lancasters at Pearce
photo: Ray Wise

In a nearby town (Nanton), a complete Lancaster was sitting next to the road. The town had saved it from being scrapped and did all they could to preserve the bomber. In Jonathan's quest to find out as much as he could about the cut-up bombers, he contacted the people who were in charge of maintaining the Lancaster. They told him that other Lancasters had been sold to farmers after the war and gave him the name of one.

Jon got in touch with this farmer and found that he had lots of Lancaster bits and pieces and he gave him the names of other people in the area that also had parts from the planes. The Lancaster became a favourite plane for Jonathan and he began to collect Lancaster parts as well as those of other aircraft. In 1982, he even contacted the Town of Nanton in an attempt to acquire their Lancaster. As he worked with members of the Nanton Lancaster Society a few years later, Jon was always somewhat embarrassed when he made mention of this.

In 1946 and 1947, the Canadian government had begun to sell off some of their inventory of aircraft to local farmers. At a former training base near Jon's home in Lethbridge, they sold nine Lancasters along with eleven P-40 fighter aircraft. The price for a Lancaster was \$350! Most of the farmers who bought the bombers felt that they got their money back after using the fuel that was in aircraft's six wing tanks.

Jon was always fascinated with how the various parts were put to

many and varied uses on the farm as the Lancaster became the farmer's "hardware store." As well as the fuel, there was engine and hydraulic oil and hydraulic cylinders that could be adapted to various uses around the farm. The aircraft also provided a seemingly endless supply of wire, metal tubes, and sheet aluminum.



A Farmer's Lancaster [c. 1947]

Some of the more novel ideas were placing Lancaster tail wheels on threshing machines, using crew door ladders for checking the level in grain bins, placing bomb-bay doors as borders of flower gardens, using propeller spinners as plant pots, and incorporating escape hatches (with windows) into the construction of outhouses in order to brighten their interiors. Eventually, the farmers were approached by companies who purchased the aircraft from them and melted them down for their aluminum. However, many non-aluminum parts remained on the farms.

Jon took his airplane hunting seriously, documenting his work in a detailed book that listed the locations of the farms where the aircraft had been broken up, the specific identification and wartime history of the bomber, and other information about them. Jonathan eventually found a complete Lancaster fuselage. It was always his dream to have one but once he found it, he realized that the project was going to be way too big for him. It was offered to him for \$1500 but he had to turn it down.

While in his last year of high school, Jonathon began to ask around at junkyards to see if they had airplane parts. He found one man who had purchased fifteen B-24 Liberators. Twelve of the bombers had been scrapped right away. The junk dealer had kept three for himself, but they fell prey to vandals and this prompted him to melt down the remaining three. But before he did, he stripped the planes of all their hardware. No one knew of this until Jon came along and found that everything was still there. This was a major break and soon he found himself in the vintage aircraft parts business.

Jonathan's first purchase was a tail turret for which he paid \$100. He then sold it for \$500 and thought he had made a killing. Later he found out that its new owner had sold it for \$5000. Jonathan learned quickly.

The airplane hunting continued, often with his friend Richard de Boer with whom Jon shared the knowledge and the same inner love for the old warbirds. He also encouraged and worked with the fledgling Nanton Lancaster Society. Jon's restoration of the bomber's pilot's instrument panel was the first step in the restoration of Lancaster FM-159 and provided significant momentum to the Society's efforts to preserve and restore Nanton's bomber.

Following the completion of his degree at the University of Lethbridge,

Jon moved to England where he studied law. He continued to help the Nanton Lancaster Society by attending “aerajumbles” on our behalf and purchasing badly needed parts.

“Aerajumbles” attract a variety of collectors and enthusiasts and while at one of these Jon overheard a gentleman mention that he had three or four perspex domes from Lancaster mid-upper gun turrets. He had used them to grow tomatoes in. Eventually Jon arranged for the museum to acquire these rare parts.

Sadly, in March 1992, Jon was diagnosed with leukemia. During periods of remission, he returned to Canada to visit the museum and participate in more airplane hunting with Richard de Boer. On one of these trips he heard of a wing from a

Fairey Battle that had been buried under eight feet of soil behind a gas station in central Manitoba. Jon was given the phone number of the gas station owner but got absolutely nowhere. He then contacted a friend who lived in the area of the station. Jon’s friend knew nothing about that particular wing, but had an uncle that had also buried a wing from a Battle. The wing was used as a reservoir for water. The ground water would run into the wing and a pump used to pull the water out. Jonathan and his friend visited the uncle and, armed with a backhoe, dug up the rare wing. It had not been cut and was in very good shape considering how long it had been buried. The wartime camouflage could still be seen on the wing as could the serial number. The ironic thing is that the wing buried at the gas station remains to be found.

During October 1992, Jonathan made a final airplane hunting trip to western Canada, on one occasion enjoying a “Boly Barbeque” with some of the farmers from whom he had obtained Bolingbroke parts. Jon had hoped to complete a book, “Barnyard Bombers,” in which he would detail his discoveries and some of the strange and wonderful uses the parts of these old planes were used for but he passed away in January 1995.

He had no regrets, only great pleasure in recalling his searches for the planes, his admiration for those who flew them and those who now restore them, and affection for the many friends who had assisted him along the way.

In 2009 the museum instigated the “Jon Spinks Scrounger Award,” to be presented annually to the person who most assists the museum by locating and acquiring unique and valuable parts or equipment.



FM-159's restored pilot's panel
photo: Jon Spinks



Museum director Larry Wright with Jon's mid-upper turret perspex domes shortly after their arrival in Nanton

MATTHEW FERGUSON

-The greatest Canadian Nose Artist

Clarence Simonsen wrote the book on nose art. As well as being a researcher and writer, he is an accomplished artist, having painted hundreds of nose art replicas on canvas, aircraft skin from World War II fighters and bombers, and on vintage aircraft. Clarence has worked closely with the Bomber Command Museum of Canada on a number of "nose art" related projects.

Following the publication of his book, "RAF and RCAF Aircraft Nose Art of World War II," Clarence was contacted by the family of Matthew Ferguson. They had been listening to a radio program during which Clarence was interviewed and his book discussed. Through conversations with the Ferguson family, a number of the pieces of a puzzle that had intrigued Clarence for years fell into place. As they did, he realized the significance of Matthew Ferguson's contribution to the art form.

Following Clarence's declaration that Matthew Ferguson was, in his opinion, the greatest of the Canadian nose artists, the museum arranged for Clarence to paint what he regarded as Matthew's finest work on our replica Lancaster cockpit section. Together with a summary of Matthew's career and other examples of his work, the museum's nose art display featuring Matthew Ferguson's story was officially opened in 2003 in the presence of Matthew's widow, sons, and numerous other family members.



Matthew Ferguson

Matthew Ferguson practiced his craft from 1941 until 1945, painted on at least four different types of aircraft, developed station and squadron badges, pioneered placing artwork on the bomber jackets worn by aircrew, and even painted artwork on bombs. An Albertan, he was clearly the most significant Canadian nose artist of the Second World War and arguably in the history of the art form.

After emigrating from England as a small child, Matthew Ferguson was raised in Calgary, Alberta where he enlisted with the Calgary Highlanders when war broke out. Six months later he transferred to the Royal Canadian Air Force and became an airframe mechanic.

In October 1941, Ferguson was posted to the RCAF Station at Alliford Bay on the Queen Charlotte Islands, far off the coast of British Columbia. The islands are the home of a small, docile species of deer, several of which were adopted by the airmen and regularly wandered into station buildings. The official station badge incorporated the deer into its design and it is thought that the artist was Matthew Ferguson.

After spending six months at Alliford Bay, Ferguson returned to Calgary where he was married and then joined the RCAF's No. 416 (Lynx) Squadron based at Peterhead, Scotland. Here he designed the artwork for the squadron's badge that features a lynx leaping in front of a maple leaf. He also painted the design on a number of the Spitfire aircraft that the squadron was flying at the time. The maple leaf background for his artwork became a Ferguson trademark.

In October 1942, Ferguson was assigned to No. 424 (Tiger) Squadron. The unit was flying twin-engined Wellington bombers based at Topcliffe, Yorkshire but in May 1943 was transferred to North Africa. During his time with the squadron, Ferguson is known to have painted nose art on at least eight aircraft. One Wellington was painted with the name, "A-Train" and the artwork featured a very impressive black, yellow, and white tiger head. The idea had originated from the City of



Ferguson artwork on a Spitfire fighter



Wellington nose art

Hamilton's football club, the Tigercats. It was common practice during the war for a city to "adopt" a squadron and support it in various ways. The City of Hamilton had adopted No. 424. This image had a large impact on the members of the squadron and was submitted to become part of the official squadron crest.

For some reason, the Ferguson design was rejected by the British, who created a heraldic tiger head for the badge. According to Jack Dundas, a No. 424 Squadron member at the time, "The response to it was predictable and the language left little to the imagination with references to a "bloody wolf" and what the college (the British group that made such decisions) could do with it." During this time, Ferguson sent money to his wife in Calgary to order 100 cloth versions of the "unofficial" crest that were then sold to squadron members.



The "unofficial" No. 424 Squadron crest made in Calgary

Both No. 424 and No. 425 Squadrons were based at the same airfield in Tunisia and it is thought that Ferguson painted nose art on No. 425 Squadron aircraft as well.

The squadron returned to England in November 1943. Based at Skipton-on-Swale in Yorkshire, No. 424 began to fly Halifax III's. Ferguson is known to have painted nose art on at least eight Halifax aircraft. QB-A (LV-951) carried the "A Train's" tiger head, the design that had been submitted as part of the squadron's crest.

In January 1945, the squadron's Halifaxes were replaced by Lancasters. Ferguson painted nose art on at least three of these including what is considered to be one of his finest, - The "Ell Cat" on QB-L (NG-484).

Ferguson's "Victorious Virgin" flew the squadron's 2000th four-engined sortie on March 21, 1945. The 4000 lb "cookie" bomb was painted by Ferguson and labeled, "An Easter Egg for Hitler."



No. 424 Squadron Lancaster about to be loaded with a special bomb



This aircraft was Halifax QB-B of No. 424 Squadron. The name and artwork, painted by Matthew Ferguson, was chosen by Jack Dundas whose crew flew the bomber for most of their tour of operations.



(l-r) Dan Fox (museum president), Livinia Ferguson, and John Ferguson in front of "Eil Cat" at the opening of the museum's Matthew Ferguson Display in 2003

THE WARREN TWINS

-Nanton's Spitfire pilots

Douglas "Duke" Warren sent a letter to the Nanton Lancaster Society in November 1989. At that time the Lancaster Bomber was still outside and the Society operated the local tourist information booth in which we had placed some displays related to the aircraft. The first thing we saw when we opened the envelope was a photograph of two little boys, perhaps three or four years of age, and they had a dog hooked up to pull a wagon. They were obviously identical twins.



The Warren Twins

Duke had written, "I was recently sent a clipping by a friend and the clipping told about the Lancaster aircraft and your museum in general. I have a print from a painting which was done by John Rutherford, a well-known aviation artist, and have enclosed a short article about a time in the Warren Twins' careers. This may be of interest to you, for the Warren Twins were born in Nanton in 1922."

Until the arrival of Duke's letter, the members of the Nanton Lancaster Society knew nothing about the Warren Twins and they had been virtually forgotten in Nanton. However, we were to find out they were revered in the world of those who knew the history of the Canadian fighter pilots in World War II.

A few weeks after we received his letter, Duke and his wife Melba came to Nanton with the print that continues to be displayed at the museum. This was the beginning of a wonderful relationship between this highly respected gentleman, his hometown, and the Nanton Lancaster Air Museum.

Duke has returned to Nanton numerous times since then. He was Master of Ceremonies at the dedication of the museum's

Lancaster to Ian Bazalgette VC and at our "Salute to Those who Served" event in 1996. In 2001 he and his family were present at the dedication of a memorial garden to his twin and in 2003, Duke inspected the local air cadet squadron.

Arguably the most renowned of the hundreds of Nantonites to have served in Canada's armed forces during times of need, the Warren Twins have been reintroduced to their hometown through Duke's association with the museum.

Identical twin boys were born to Marie and Earl Warren of Nanton, Alberta on May 28, 1922. Although Earl farmed east of town, the family's home was in Nanton for the first six years of the twins' lives. Earl spent much of his time on the farm but came home on weekends and occasionally during the week. Duke has clear



The Warren Twins (aged 4) and Topsis on the Warren Farm east of Nanton

memories of attending the Anglican church and grade one at the local school. He also remembers that there was a lumber yard on the town side of the railway tracks near their house that he and his twin used to play in although their parents did not approve. Nor did they approve of Douglas and Bruce visiting the grain elevators. In 1928, their father decided to move the farming operation to the Wetaskiwin area.

From boyhood, the Warrens were known as "The Dukes." This term arose when a teacher, using them as an example in order to broaden the vocabulary of the class, explained that they were "duplicates." The other students then started calling them "dupes" for short. Understandably the Warrens didn't like that name and gradually had it changed to "dukes." The twins began referring to each other, and to themselves as well, by the name "Duke."

While young boys, the twins were regular visitors to the Wetaskiwin Library where they were exposed to "Flight" and "Aeroplane," two flying magazines. They were enthralled with aviation. When war broke out and they became eighteen years old, the twins joined the Royal Canadian Air Force. Enlisting in Edmonton in March 1941, they had every intention of staying together during their



air force careers.

Their flying training began at No. 5 Elementary Flying Training School at High River, just north of Nanton. Duke recalls that, "For most of our young lives we had this overpowering wish to fly. Now we were on the way and we were terribly enthusiastic, about the thrill of flying, actually learning to handle the controls, and becoming confident that we would qualify as pilots." The primary trainer at High River at that time was the De Havilland Tiger Moth and the twins were both assigned to the same instructor, a Mr. Dusenbury. He sent them solo at about eleven hours each. According to Duke he, "just couldn't tell us apart, and he was never able to tell us apart all the time we were at High River."



The Twins and a Tiger Moth at No. 5 Elementary Flying School in High River in 1941

The Warrens were then posted to No. 34 Service Flying Training School at Medicine Hat and were thrilled to know that they would be flying Harvards. Those who were trained on the Harvard generally went on to become fighter pilots. Again they were assigned to the same instructor, in this case F/O Cherrington who, according to Duke, "When he realized that we were twins, and identical twins looking very much alike, there was some discussion as to whether we should be 'split up' and one of us sent to another instructor. In the end, we were both kept as students of Cherrington's and, as it was customary to use only the last name, he called my twin 'Warren Mark I' and I was 'Warren Mark II'".

The Warrens graduated on December 19, 1941, Bruce being ranked as eighth out of the class of thirty-seven, and Douglas ninth. This created a crisis for the twins. The first eight students were granted commissions (became officers) so Bruce became Pilot Officer Warren and Douglas became Sergeant Warren. This would have led to real difficulties for the twins who were determined to keep their RCAF careers in step. They went to No. 4 Training Command Headquarters in Calgary to plead their case. According to Duke, "The gist of our argument was that our academic marks and the results of our flying tests were remarkably close, and that the arbitrary 'cut-off' would not have resulted in this problem had we not been twins. Furthermore, we argued, if it was not possible to rectify the situation by granting me a commission, we would be satisfied if the RCAF would cancel my twin's appointment and make him a sergeant." The Warrens received a sympathetic hearing but were told that by the time anything could be done about the situation, they would be posted overseas.

Regarding what it is like to be one of identical twins, Duke recalls, "From our first awareness of the world around us, there always existed an 'us and them' feeling -the special feeling that identical twins have for each other.

My twin was always of paramount importance in my life, and others were secondary. I know that he felt the same.”

Initially the Warrens were separated as they sailed from Halifax. However Bruce, after explaining the situation to the other officers in his cabin, received their permission for Douglas to sneak his gear into their quarters so that the twins could bunk together. Later they were really separated for the first time as Bruce was posted to No. 8 Advanced Flying Unit at Hullavington. Three weeks later Douglas received word that his commission had come through and, after some delay, P/O D. Warren was posted to No. 17 AFU at Watton in Norfolk. Both were to be trained as Spitfire pilots.

The Supermarine Spitfire was Britain's premiere fighter throughout World War II and one of the classic aircraft ever designed. Pilots found it to be agile and dependable, a fine air-combat plane capable of great speed and superior high-altitude performance. It was continuously upgraded so that it would match or better the best German fighters at the time. Only late in the war when jet aircraft appeared was the Spitfire made obsolete, although even then pilots in Spitfires shot down Messerschmitt Me262 jets.



Spitfires in Formation

Upon the completion of his training, Bruce was posted to No. 165 Squadron flying Spitfires at Heathfield near Ayr, Scotland. Douglas then began to try to get himself posted there as well but his flight commander was opposed to this, citing previous bad experience with brothers on the same squadron. So he had Douglas posted to No. 403 Squadron. Eventually however, Bruce was able to have his commanding officer use his influence to have Douglas transferred to No. 165.

“It was a great thrill for both of us when I arrived,” Duke recalls, “for this was the culmination of all our hopes of the past eighteen months, to be on a fighter squadron together and, equally important, here we were. . . physically together again, a wonderful feeling which is hard to understand if you are not a twin.”

No. 165 was flying convoy patrols and scrambling after unidentified aircraft. “After a short time on the squadron,” Duke recalls, “Duke and I became a more or less permanent section of two. This was the smallest fighting section of a squadron; a flight might be four aircraft, two sections of two, of maybe six, three sections of two. Generally the squadron put up twelve aircraft in three flights -red, yellow, and blue. Often it happened we flew as Yellow Three and Four. Duke was considered the most experienced since he had arrived first on the squadron, so he flew as Yellow Three and I as Yellow Four.”

In August, the squadron became part of 11 Group, Fighter Command,

the famous Biggin Hill Wing. They moved to Eastchurch near London where most of the fighter combat was taking place. "Eastchurch was one of the old permanent peacetime RAF stations," Duke recalls. "Flying had been my chief interest in life since I was a boy, and I had often read of Eastchurch in 'Flight' and 'Aeroplane.' It was a thrill just being stationed there. From circuit height, the French coast was visible on a clear day. On August 17 and 18, 1942, the squadron carried out sweeps near Le Touquet. On the evening of the 18th, we were briefed about a forthcoming action at Dieppe (where Canadian troops were to undertake a 'raid in force' -landing in occupied France but with no intention of staying). Part of the Royal Navy's briefing was that any aircraft below 7000' would be fired upon. While near our ships we were to remain above 8000'. Following the briefing we were confined to the station where security was tight.

"My twin brother and I were both on the same flight in No. 165 and were especially interested in the Dieppe operation as we were the only Canadians on the squadron. We were in the air at first light, and could see the battle area alight with tracers, with many fires on the esplanade of Dieppe. Several landing craft were grounded offshore. There was little Luftwaffe activity at this time. Enemy aircraft would appear, attack the ships, and quickly turn inland. On my first patrol I flew SK-M for 1:40 hours, a long patrol for a Spitfire. My next sortie was about lunchtime. Now there were many dogfights, and Dornier 217's were dive-bombing our ships. Our section of four attacked a Dornier from astern and rear quarter. It appeared that the pilot bailed out while the rear gunner was still firing at us! There were only two parachutes. We also engaged in many inconclusive dogfights and there was a general melee of aircraft from both sides. In the harbour below a destroyer was seen ablaze. Many landing craft were sunk or uselessly beached. We noticed our troops pinned down or dead along the ocean wall. We had no trouble appreciating what our troops were going through down below.

"The last sortie of the day was about dusk. Once again the Luftwaffe was quiet. We merely covered the withdrawal of our ships and covered a pilot who had bailed out amongst the flotilla. On the way home, my twin reported his engine temperature rising. We gained height in case he had to glide back. As we approached Eastchurch, his temperature went off the clock. He glided in and as he landed, the side panels of the engine compartment were glowing red.

"Dieppe was the largest air action in Europe since the Battle of Britain. Only later did we learn how big it was. The RAF had flown almost 3000 sorties, the Luftwaffe 945. At the time, it was thought losses were about equal, 100 aircraft on each side, but it was later found that the Germans had only lost 50, whereas the Allies lost 106."

The Twins flew operations with No. 165 Squadron for eighteen months, conducting sweeps over occupied France, escorting bombers, and upgrading their skills and those of others in various training exercises. At one

point the squadron was based at Kenley, another famous Battle of Britain station. "Duke and I roomed together in the old pre-war officers' mess which was luxurious in comparison with other quarters we had been in. We had a nice room, and the ablutions were just down the hall. This gave rise to a funny situation which, at first, we didn't know about. A few days after the squadron arrived at Kenley, the station commander, a Group Captain, came to the flight to meet the pilots. He was introduced and said how pleased he was to meet us, for he thought the squadron had a lunatic pilot. Each morning he would be in the washroom shaving, when a Canadian officer would come in, say 'Good Morning, Sir,' wash, and leave. A few minutes later the same man would return, say 'Good Morning, Sir,' wash, and leave. He couldn't understand what was going on with this chap. The reason for this was that we had only one electric razor between us, which we shared. One of us would shave first and then wash up, while the other one would wash up first and then shave. Since the Group Captain didn't realize there was a set of identical twins on the squadron, to him it was just a crazy pilot."

Whenever the twins flew, they always kept tabs on one another. If there had been a dogfight and they became separated, they would check on each other by one giving a short whistle over the radio, the other answering with a similar whistle.

In January 1944, following 18 months on operations, the Warrens spent some time at No. 58 Operational Training Unit and with No. 1687 Bomber Defence Training Flight, doing fighter affiliations to help train bomber crews in dealing with fighter attacks.



Then in July, the Warren Twins were posted to No. 66 Squadron based at Thorney Island. From there they flew numerous operations providing escort protection to heavy bombers including Lancasters. In late August, the squadron moved to a base near Caen in a recently liberated part of France. From there they took part in the Battle of Falaise in support of the Canadian and British armies. This action extended over several days. Duke recalls, "We Spitfire pilots ensured air superiority as well as doing armed recce and fighter-bomber attacks. Losses were heavy, both in the Typhoon squadrons and the Spitfire squadrons doing fighter-bomber work. The flak was plentiful and accurate. By their nature low-level attacks are dangerous, and when a plane is hit low down there is very little time to bail out.

"Operations continued. The Germans had left pockets of men in Le Havre, Calais, Boulogne, Ostend and other places. Now the Canadian army was fighting to get them out. We continued to support them with low-level attacks and bombing. We seldom saw a German fighter as they were being held back to intercept bombers or defend against the British army. What we were doing was dangerous, for all these places had lots of anti-aircraft guns,

and the gunners had been practicing with live targets since 1940 and were accurate. So we lost pilots all the while.

“On my 44th operational sortie I almost ‘bought it.’ The squadron had been detailed to bomb heavy artillery sites at Calais. We approached at about 15,000 feet and I trimmed for the dive. Then there was a loud explosion under the aircraft and sunlight came through a hole in the left side of the cockpit. An 88 mm flak gun had exploded a shell just under my left wing. A piece of flak drove the trim wheel into my leg, carried on up bending my parachute D ring as it passed, and ended up in a small tin box in my upper left breast pocket.” Duke remembers that the shrapnel was red hot and smoldered away for some time.

“One might ask,” Duke continues, “why a fighter pilot would be flying with a small tin box in his pocket. This was a special box used as part of an escape kit. If a person was shot down and trying to evade and hide from the enemy, it was difficult to get safe drinking water. In the small box was a large rubber balloon which you filled with water from a ditch or dirty pond. You popped in a chlorine sterilization tablet, shook it up well, and in fifteen minutes you could drink it. It tasted like water from a ditch, but all the bugs in it were killed. The fragment of shell had pierced the tin box deeply, but had the box not been there it would have pierced my body and perhaps my heart. . . Duke realized I had been hit, but he could tell I still had control, and so proceeded with the attack while I returned to base . . . I kept the fragment, D ring, and tin box for souvenirs.”

Bruce Warren had been appointed “A Flight” commander upon the twins’ arrival at No. 66 Squadron. In early December, Douglas was appointed “B Flight” commander. Duke recalled, “This was a great occasion for Duke and I, both flight commanders in the same fighter squadron. Every senior officer we spoke with said they had never known of such a situation before. Further, the fact that we were Canadians and identical twins at that level in the Royal Air Force was quite unique. There were many in the squadron who didn’t even try to tell us apart, because there was really no need. We were recognized by our rank and position and the pilots followed the orders that came down.”



Duke Warren holding the shrapnel and the tin box. Note the tear in his uniform where the shrapnel entered

In mid-December 1944, the Warren Twins were awarded Distinguished Flying Crosses. The citations read, "Flight Lieutenant Douglas Warren: F/L Warren, during two tours of operational duties, has shown outstanding skill and courage. His determination to engage and destroy the enemy in the air and on the ground is worthy of high praise. He has completed numerous missions on heavily defended ground targets and enemy shipping. He has participated in the destruction by cannon fire of twenty enemy vehicles and the explosion of the magazine of a large enemy strong point. By accurate bombing he has destroyed one enemy aircraft and shared in the destruction of another. On another occasion his accurate bombing severed an important rail link in Germany.

"Flight Lieutenant Bruce Warren: This officer has led his flight with such skill and determination in attacks on ground targets that more than twenty vehicles have been damaged and many probably destroyed. During his numerous sorties, he has destroyed two enemy fighters and participated in the destruction of a hostile bomber. His fine, fighting spirit and zeal have set an excellent example to all."

In mid-February 1945, the twins were declared tour-expired and taken off operations –Bruce having flown 248 sorties and Douglas having completed 253. Prior to leaving for Canada, their DFC's were presented by King George VI who remarked, "I don't believe I have ever done this before," as he invested the identical Warrens.

W/C Johnston had commanded the Warrens, both on No. 165 and No. 66 Squadrons. In his book, "Tattered Battlements," he wrote, "The Dukes were Canadian twins, known without distinction –for few could distinguish one from the other –by a name which was neither theirs nor that of their parents who had christened them Bruce and Douglas. . . They were the same height to an eighth of an inch, the same weight to a couple of pounds, always dressed alike and, though different in character, were as similar physically as two peas. Everything they did they did together, and everything they had, they shared; even their bank-balance was common to both. As pilots they had the right mixture of determination, discretion, and dash to be successful and formidable.

"On the ground, they both had vigorous enquiring minds and little patience with tradition-bound methods or ways of thought. They had remained together practically throughout their careers in the service, and liked to say that if they had not both joined up, but only one, they could have worked alternate weeks. They were typical of their trade in never taking exercise, but unusual in that they neither smoked nor drank; photography was their main pre-occupation and delight. They represented the New World at its best. And each, with an impartiality and detachment which was sometimes puzzling, called the other 'Duke.'"

Both Warrens served in the post-war RCAF, but Bruce left to become a test pilot with Avro in the early years of the CF-100 jet fighter program. On

April 5, 1951, he lost his life in the crash of the second prototype due to an oxygen system malfunction.

Douglas completed an impressive RCAF career that included flying F-86 Sabre jets in Korea, serving as chief flying instructor at the Sabre Operational Training Unit at RCAF Station Chatham, and flying Sabres in Europe where he assisted in the development of the post-war Luftwaffe and found himself working side by side with Erich Hartmann, the greatest fighter ace of all time with over 350 kills.

Following his retirement from the air force in 1973, Duke has focused his energy on community service. He was granted a “Caring Canadian Award” by the Governor General and a “Paul Harris Fellow Award” by the Rotarians plus Life Membership in The Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary and the Royal Canadian Legion. He has received the Meritorious Service Medal with Palm Leaf from the Legion for his work with the CNIB and 24 years as Legion Padre. Regarding these extraordinary efforts, Duke commented, “My twin and I had planned on doing community work together after retiring. Since he was not with me, I felt I must work for the two of us.”



F-86 Sabre jet with German markings flown by Duke Warren as an instructor with the post-war Luftwaffe



Duke Warren (left) and Erich Hartmann



The 5/8 scale Spitfire model in the museum honours Nanton's Warren Twins. The markings are those of the Twins' aircraft when they flew with No. 165 Squadron with Duke I's (Bruce Warren's) on the port side and Duke II's (Douglas Warren's) on the starboard side.



Duke Warren DFC at the museum in 2003



Duke Warren as Master of Ceremonies at the dedication of the Ian Bazalgette Memorial Lancaster in 1990

photo: Larry Wright



Duke Warren in Nanton with Officers and Cadets of No. 187 Squadron

JOHN LARDIE

-The Chaplain on the Motorcycle

Father John Philip Lardie first came to the attention of the Bomber Command Museum of Canada as the author of what we feel is a definitive piece of writing that sums up what we have found to be true of the young Canadians who served with Bomber Command during World War II:

“Three thousand miles across a hunted ocean they came, wearing on the shoulder of their tunics the treasured name, “Canada,” telling the world their origin. Young men and women they were, some still in their teens, fashioned by their Maker to love, not to kill, but proud and earnest in their mission to stand, and if it had to be, to die, for their country and for freedom.

“One day, when the history of the twentieth century is finally written, it will be recorded that when human society stood at the crossroads and civilization itself was under siege, the Royal Canadian Air Force was there to fill the breach and help give humanity the victory. And all those who had a part in it will have left to posterity a legacy of honour, of courage, and of valour that time can never despoil.”

During the spring of 2005, these words were chosen to be engraved upon Canada's Bomber Command Memorial that lists the names of the Canadians who were killed while serving with Bomber Command during World War II and stands at the entrance to the Bomber Command Museum of Canada. They were part of a speech that Father Lardie had delivered in 1985 at the dedication of a Memorial at Middleton-St. George, the wartime base of No. 419 and No. 428 Squadrons of the Royal Canadian Air Force.



Father Lardie

We knew of these words that Father Lardie had written but knew nothing of Father Lardie until the name was mentioned in the presence of one of our museum's long-time supporters, Cliff Black. Cliff had flown with No. 419 Squadron at Middleton-St. George prior to becoming the commanding officer of No. 426 Squadron at Linton-on-Ouse. Through conversations with Cliff, we learned of how devoted Father Lardie was to helping the aircrew on the base and how he even flew some "ops."

John Philip Lardie was born in Hamilton, Ontario on April 13, 1912. Although he volunteered for military service as a chaplain in 1942, it was not until April 1944 that he was sent overseas where he served as the Roman Catholic padre at the RCAF base at Middleton-St. George from June 1944 until June 1945. His "parish," as he referred to it, was made up of the Roman Catholics who were serving on the base of three to four thousand personnel. Like the two protestant chaplains on the base, his duties included providing spiritual help to the men of the squadrons and writing to the family members of those lost on operations.

If a crew was assigned to operations they would first report for their pre-flight briefing where they would receive information such as the target they would be attacking, precise courses, known defences, tactics to be employed, timing, operating altitudes, permissible radio frequencies, and weather forecasts. Maps were issued to navigators and bomb aimers. Then, after a pre-flight meal, the crews would be issued their flying gear, escape kits, and parachutes and would then be driven out to their aircraft which were stationed at various dispersal points around the perimeter of the airfield.

As part of his duties, Father Lardie visited the aircrew at the dispersals as they were preparing to take off, "to say hello to the troops and if some of them wanted to talk, I would make myself available and let them know that the church was with them in their task. Then, when they returned from the operation, those who did return, it was my job to be there again."

Father Lardie was well known as the "Chaplain on the Motorcycle." He recalled, "When I first joined the station I had a bicycle but there was an

awful lot of wind around that perimeter and it was hard going –it was a couple of miles around that perimeter and I wasn't entitled to a jeep. So I went into town, into Darlington one day, and there was a shop full of motorcycles there. So I paid £45 for a bike that was in good shape and I drove it back to the station. That served me in good stead –I was very happy with my motorbike.”

Robbie Robson recalled that Father Lardie used to hand out chewing gum and a water bottle laced with rum to air crew being marshalled before an operation. He also remembered that he flew “unofficially” on at least three operations to get an idea of what the crews had to endure. Flying with their squadrons was not the norm for chaplains -quite the contrary. Father Lardie though, wanted to see what the men were going through and he found out. He recalled, “I was scared silly.”

Cliff Black remembers a trip to the Ruhr Valley during which he was surprised to find out his aircraft had an extra crewmember on board. “A few minutes into our climb, I felt a tap on my right shoulder. I looked around to see Father Lardie standing there wearing a parachute harness and oxygen mask. I immediately knew that my crew had been in on this plan to let him on board. He was hooked into our intercom and asked me what I was going to do – would I report him when I got back? I can't remember what I said but it was something about putting his life in the hands of a Protestant pilot when he had all those good Catholic pilots to pick from. I also mentioned that his ‘special connection’ could almost guarantee that we would get back. My comments assured him that it was okay with me if he was willing to take the risk with our crew on a tough target.

“We completed our bomb run, dropped our load, and turned out of the target area. The flak barrage was moderate and the searchlights were no problem because of the weather.

“My navigator gave me my course out of the target area and we were on our way home. A few minutes into our return flight, Father Lardie came on the intercom and expressed his concern about not being at the door of the debriefing room when the aircrew returned from the raid. It was his practice to greet them and show how pleased he was to see that it was a successful



Cliff Black (second from left) while with No. 419 Squadron

trip. He then asked me if there was some way that we could be the first home. The only way to accomplish this was for us to leave the bomber stream and fly a direct course to our base. I instructed my navigator to alter course for our base and at the same time instructed my gunners to keep a sharp look-out for night fighters. I considered that there was little risk due to the weather and the fact that the German fighter controllers would be busy with the main bomber force, if they had any night-fighters in the air. We had seen none in the target area.

“As we approached the English coast, we noticed the weather was starting to clear. Our return flight was risky because the British gunners could have mistaken us for an enemy aircraft and opened fire. To avoid this happening, we carried an IFF (Identification Friend or Foe) unit which I turned on as we approached the channel. We seldom used it so I was very relieved when it came on and was recognized by our British Gunners.

“Father Lardie was at his post on time and later told me that he hadn't realized that after wearing an oxygen mask for six hours, it left a mark on his face that the airmen were used to seeing on each other. When he asked one of the pilots about the raid, he got a big smile and the comment, “You ought to know Father –looking at your face I can see you were there with us.”

Father Lardie recalled that none of his flights were “authorized.” Another of his trips was a daylight raid. “I was making my rounds on the bike and when I got to F/L Gonyo's aircraft he asked, ‘Would you like to come on the trip?’ So I parked my bike in the bush and climbed in. It was something that I was glad I had done because I wanted to find out first-hand what these boys were actually going through –not just once or twice or three nights but night after night after night and it was a constant source of admiration that I had for these men that, as young as they were, that they were able to stand the strain of it. It was something that I really appreciated.”

In his highly acclaimed book, “Reap the Whirlwind,” Spencer Dunmore describes Father Lardie's flight with S/L Jerry Edwards' crew on a raid to Kiel, “Approaching the target, Edwards turned to his passenger and said, ‘You're going to enjoy this Father,’ as he flew into the dazzle of flares and tracers. After bombing, Edwards banked away. A fighter appeared. The rear gunner immediately called for a corkscrew (a violent evasive manoeuvre), whereupon the padre, who had been standing between the skipper and the flight engineer, found himself airborne inside the aircraft. He walloped his head on the canopy roof. A moment later, as the aircraft climbed, he was flat on the floor. Disquieting though the manoeuvre may have been, it enabled the Lancaster to escape in the darkness. Of the sorties, Father Lardie said, ‘I wasn't looking for thrills but for a better understanding of what it meant to fly on operations -and afterwards I had an entirely different outlook. I felt much closer to the airmen.’”

Father Lardie's trip to Kiel was his last. The following evening he was in the pub with S/L Edwards' crew. Lardie recalled that the crew was laughing

about his experiences during the flight and that it was, to them, “a great joke.

“While they were talking about it who walks in but the squadron commander and he took in all that they were saying about this. I was sitting reading a newspaper, very innocently, and suddenly this big hand came down and pushed the newspaper away from in front of me and he stuck his face right up close to mine and he said, ‘Padre, you’re screened (your operational tour is complete). You understand what I’m saying?’ and I said, ‘Yes sir.’ So that was it. That settled it and of course there was no more. He could have made trouble for me I guess but he wasn’t the type.”

In summarizing his year working with the aircrew at Middleton-St. George, Father Lardie recalled, “I always had the feeling that I was welcome in their company -that I was wanted.”



Father Lardie in 1996
photo: Harry Palmer

Father Lardie's "Mentioned in Dispatches" award was effective on June 14, 1945 and although no citation has been found, the following excerpt from a letter to the Director of Chaplain Services (RC) in Ottawa explains something of his career.

"As this chaplain has now returned home on request from the Director of Chaplain Services (RC), it is desired to express satisfaction with his one year's work overseas. Father Lardie is very sincere and zealous. Although inclined to be a bit reserved and silent, it is felt that this priest has wielded a strong influence of good over those confided to his care. It will be remarked that he is the only Chaplain who received a 'Mention in Dispatches' in the Canadian Bomber Group."



Lancaster FM-19 reflected in Canada's Bomber Command Memorial
photo: Brent Armstrong

KEN BROWN

-Dambuster Pilot

Ken Brown liked the Bomber Command Museum of Canada. He and his wife Beryl visited the museum on a number of occasions prior to his death in 2002. He was the classic gentleman –modest and unassuming, and it was always a pleasure to see him in the museum.

One of 29 Canadians to participate in the legendary raid that breached two of the dams that powered the wartime industry of Germany's Ruhr Valley, Ken, like all of the pilots that joined No. 617 Squadron, was one of the very best of Bomber Command. They had all been hand-picked by the squadron's commander, Guy Gibson, and trained to fly at extremely low-levels at night. Ken was awarded the Conspicuous Gallantry Medal for his actions during the Dams Raid.

Born in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, Ken enlisted in 1941 and began his operational flying in a Whitley bomber on anti-submarine patrols over the North Atlantic. He flew Manchesters and Lancasters with No. 44 Squadron prior to being selected to join No. 617. Following the war, he continued his career in the RCAF, flying Vampire jets, being part of an aerobatic team, and flying Lancasters over the Arctic.

In 1993, we were delighted when Ken agreed to be the guest speaker at the museum's Fiftieth Anniversary Commemoration of the Dambusters Raid. Ken's speech was nothing less than spellbinding - intertwining humour with his recollections of incredibly exciting and terrifying action and very personal tragedies. It gives insight into the training for the attack on the dams of the Ruhr, the raid itself, and the character of the Dams Raid's legendary leader, W/C Guy Gibson VC.



Ken Brown

May I commence by first of all saying, Mr. President, members of the Nanton Lancaster Society, Ladies and Gentlemen, we turn back the pages of history and sometimes they cause a great deal of furor in your stomach.

But getting to the time I joined No. 617 Squadron. I was flying with No. 44 Squadron. My c/o was also a VC winner and we were briefed to go to Berlin. After the briefing he said, "Brown, report to my office immediately after the briefing." Which I did and he said, "You are transferred to a new squadron."

I wasn't too happy about that. I said, "Sir, I'd rather stay here and finish my tour with Forty-four." He explained in his very curt manner that, "This was impossible. It was a name transfer and he could do nothing about it."

So we went to Berlin and on our return we got packed up and off we went to No. 617. But before we went, the Wing Commander wished me well and said, "Do you realize Brown, you're going to be the backbone of this new squadron?"

Well, we arrived over at Scampton and we started to look around as to who was there. There were an awful lot of DFC's, not so many DFM's. We realized that perhaps we weren't really all that we were set up to be. My wireless operator sauntered up to me and said, "Skip, if we're the backbone of this squadron, we must be damn close to the ass end." I began to wonder how I'd got there.

When I was going through Manchester training and Lancaster training there was a fellow by the name of "Mick" Martin who was to become perhaps one of the RAF's greatest. He was my instructor at that time. So was a fellow that we knew as "Terry" Taerum (Taerum was to become Guy Gibson's navigator on the Dams Raid). Everyone in the outfit knew Terry. He was teaching GEE at the time. GEE was a navigation aid. It was new at the time, so Terry was sort of our expert.

I was speaking of Martin. He took me up on a flight affiliation. This is where you take-off and you have a fighter aircraft attack you and he shows you how to evade a fighter attack. Well he played around with the aircraft and



Ken Brown speaking at the fiftieth anniversary commemoration of Dambusters Raid

showed me a few things. And then he said, "Okay young fellow, let's see what you can do." So in mid-air we changed seats and I said, "Anything you can do Buster, I can do too," to which he said or mumbled something suggesting that he didn't think my mother was married when I was born.

We got onto the squadron. I'd never met Wing Commander Gibson before. So this was a new experience. We were all sitting out on the lawn in front of the briefing room when someone said, "Briefing's ready, come on in." So we marched into the briefing room which was right down on the flight line. I wasn't last in, but I did close the door. When I did so, he (Gibson) said, "Brown, report to my office after briefing." Sounded familiar.

However, I couldn't believe it when I reported to his office. The adjutant met me, marched me in, and he (Gibson) had me on charge for being late for a briefing. I thought he was kidding, but he wasn't. So he then read out the charge for being late for an operational briefing, and he asked me whether I'd take a court marshal or his punishment. I said, "I'll take your punishment, Sir."

So he said, "Fine. You'll wash all the windows on the outside of the briefing room and the inside of the briefing room -all after duty hours." As we were flying about eighteen hours a day, that was really something. I wasn't going to let this stump me. So I did it. And I did it night after night. It was one of those things.

Wing Commander Gibson had a very high standard for everyone and you had to meet it, and meet it on his terms. He was really a strong and staunch disciplinarian. He had been brought up in a boys' school as a head prefect. And I still think he handled things in that way. At least I thought that way after then ninety-ninth window.

At this time we started our low-flying and you've heard various stories about how we started at sixty feet. It really wasn't so. We started our low-flying cross-countrys over England at about two hundred feet. That lasted about three days. Then we were down to one hundred and fifty feet. I did a cross-country one day and I came across a new aerodrome that was being built with an awful lot of people around it. There I was headed straight for the hangar and I thought, "Well, I'd better pull-up. There's no point in trying to go through it." So I pulled up and over the hangar.

The next day at briefing, and by the way, let me explain that the Royal



F/L Mick Martin DFC



W/C Guy Gibson VC

Observer Corps kept track of us all the time so Guy got our altitudes no matter where we were and had a report on them the next morning. So at briefing he said, "Brown, what were you doing going over the hangar?" I said, "I thought it was a good idea." And he said, "Two hundred feet! Hardly, you'll do that one again."

It wasn't a bad cross-country anyhow so I did it the next day. When I came to the hangar -same thing, all these men were working on top of the hangar and this side of it and so forth. So I put it (the aircraft) down on grass level and then came up over the top of the hanger and there were people sliding off it and running in all directions. So next day at briefing, he (Gibson) looked in my direction and said, "Brown, I said low, but not that low."

We ran into problems. I want to really try to bring out the character of Guy Gibson more than anything. So bear with me a bit. The next time I had a problem with him, we were doing low-level night runs on the aerodrome. And what they did was put a great sheet across the runway at one end and so many yards down another sheet. You had to start at the beginning of the runway at fifteen hundred feet and dive, cross the first sheet at seventy feet, cross the second sheet at seventy feet and at the end of the runway be at fifteen hundred feet. It was quite tricky.

However this particular night David Shannon and I were doing the exercise and he did his. David happens to be an Australian. So we changed seats, he got over the other side and I did mine. And the rain started in dear old England, coming down hell bent for leather. So by the time I'd finished, it was really a soak out. So as we were taxiing in I said, "Dave, keep your head out that window, and I'll keep my head out this window so we can see."

So we were taxiing. We couldn't see out the front -the rain was that heavy. David got his face wet, so he closed his window. I didn't know this -head out the window like an idiot, getting wet.

Low and behold we had a marshal there and he was telling us to turn and we turned. And the port outer...I mean the starboard outer on that side clipped what they call a totem pole, which was a pole with lights on it. Well, I knew Gibson wouldn't take that very well. So next morning at briefing he said, "Brown, I'll see you in my office." I knew damn well he wasn't going to compliment me on my window washing.

However, we started out using the Derwent Dam among other targets. And believe me we didn't have a clue as to what was going to be the target. Nobody even mentioned dams -we thought the Tirpitz (battleship) or some other thing. We went up to the Derwent Dam and there was moonlight, but unfortunately there were a few clouds around. And in the Derwent there's



F/L David Shannon DFC

a row of hills down the east side and a slight cut-off at the end. And you've got to cut around this to come at the dam.

Guy Gibson decided he would make the first run and his bomb aimer happened to be an Australian. So he runs in on this dam and just as he was going in a cloud came across the moon. So it was damn dark. He came down on the water, without lights, then rushing towards this thing. We were equipped with VHF radio which was the fighter boys radio and there was a toggle switch at the side. Transmit was (motions with hand) this way; receive this way (motions hand the opposite direction). Guy left it open (on transmit). Low and behold he dashed in towards this and the bomb aimer says, "This is bloody dangerous!" I think everybody in every aircraft was hollering those same thoughts or remarks.

Then along comes the Dams Raid. Really it is unbelievable now. The pilot, the navigator and the bomb aimer -we briefed on the 14th (two days before the actual raid). But we couldn't tell our crew what the target was. So on the 15th they found out what the target was. We were still shaking. We weren't terribly impressed for the simple reason that at the dress rehearsal, when they dropped the bomb itself, two of the aircraft had their tails damaged to such an extent that they were lucky to get back. However, such was the case. We were going on the Dams Raid.

A friend of mine always remembers, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, stand before the wall." I think in everyone's life that has to come up. Once you find out that this is something you hadn't really expected -How well can you handle it? I think everyone had to handle it his own way.

That night, we were perched out on the grass. It was a beautiful night -clear sky, no cloud, waiting for the buses to take us out to the aircraft. John Burpee, a Canadian, Pilot Officer Burpee came over to me and thrust out his hand and said, "Goodbye, Ken."

I said, "Goodbye, John." I didn't expect he'd come back. You see some people feel that way.

Then we got on board the bus. There were three crews to one bus. The bus stopped to let the first crew off. Then the second crew got off and my tail gunner, when the second crew got off and the bus moved on, was very quiet. Then it stopped for us, so we moved over towards the aircraft. And my gunner stood there, where he'd got off the bus. I said, "Come on Mac. Let's go."

He said, "Skip, you know those guys aren't coming back, don't you?" I said, "Yeah, I know." So he said, "Well, damn it!"



**Guy Gibson's Lancaster with the
"bouncing bomb" in place**

So we got aboard the aircraft. You see in most pictures today, they show the Dambusters taking off from runways. That wasn't so. We took off from grass.

The bomb that I had on the aircraft was marked eleven thousand-nine hundred and sixty pounds on the side of it. I only found out this year why that was so. Because when the bomb was made with a casing and wooden cover; the whole thing weighed that much. But once it was removed then the real weight came off.

We went out to our aircraft. The usual thing -we wet all the areas around the dispersal, some more than others. And then we tried to take off. Well it was a beautiful night, but no wind. We needed that wind because we were on the short runway and the hedge on the short runway was a thousand feet tall. At least it looked that was when you were taking off.

We got the aircraft into the air and then discovered that we had to use climbing power, 2650 (RPM) at 9 (boost) to keep the whole thing in the air. The next exercise was to get down to sixty feet and try out the guns and the lights. The two lights that were focused down on the water, to form a figure eight. We also turned on the motor which rotated the bomb. Now you've heard it said many times that we flew at exactly sixty feet, absolutely, at sixty feet. When that bomb rotated, believe me it was like driving a truck or anything else over the rails of a railway, unbalanced as it was. Then we came onto the coast, the Dutch coast.

Immediately we were in the area of Glize-Reijen which was a fighter drome. We all knew that the Luftwaffe night-fighters were there at the time. Pilot Officer Burpee was about a mile and a half off the north coast and they opened up on him and he blew up on the airport. So I knew we had one less.

We went on towards Hamm and I just couldn't help it -there was a train moving along a gentle slope. I said, "Okay gunners. Here's where you can get your exercise now and your target practice." So we took on the train as we flew right alongside it.

We were having trouble, as was everyone else, with high-tension wires. They were our greatest danger at any time. If the wires in the moonlight were to flutter up here (motions above his head), we knew we'd have to go under them. If they were to flutter down there (motions below his head) we knew we'd go over them. It was that quick. We lost two aircraft to those wires. They merely slapped into them. Deadly stuff.

As we came along to Hamm they were really waiting for us. The other two waves had passed that way. So they just poured it (flak) down. As a matter of fact, they were firing down at us. They were on a little bit of a lip as



P/O Lewis J. Burpee

we went through the valley. Otley was on my starboard side at about one o'clock and they hit him. He immediately blew up. His tanks went first and then his store (his bomb). I have a piece of that aircraft that was presented to me on my recent trip to England. It's no larger than your fist. When that happened the whole valley was just one orange ball.

I didn't have too much of an alternative. I don't think there was any bravery connected with it. There was a road off to port. Everything was trees and this road. I could just see because of the fire from his aircraft. So I dove and went down the road and they were shooting off the tops of the trees as we went along. Then much to my consternation that damn road led right into a castle and I'll never forget that castle door. We had to dip and the left wing went through two turrets as we went through the castle.

We arrived at the Mohne Dam. It had been breached by that time. The gunners were still fairly active. We thought we'd leave them alone and we went over to the Sorpe Dam.

The Sorpe was of a different construction altogether. It was an earthen dam, where you have a solid core and earth on either side -very difficult to breach. Our tactics were to run parallel with the dam and drop our bomb in the middle so that it would explode, wash out the front of it, crack the wall and the water would do the rest. But we needed more than one.

The only problem was the whole damn valley was full of fog. When we arrived there, they told us that there would be a church up on top of the village. We found that all right –but just the spire of the church. So I tried to position myself from the spire. I didn't do too well. I got behind the dam on the first run. Then I found myself at ground level, behind the dam. I had to climb up roughly eighteen hundred feet. It didn't do my nerves any good at all. Because I was on top of the trees, I had to do a flat turn. I couldn't move the wing down to get around. I had to stand on the rudder to get around and then we were down in the valley again.

Well we did quite a number of runs on the dam before we were able to clear enough of the fog away which the propellers constantly going through did. And I must say, according to the historians today, it was a near perfect drop. And I didn't even write them about it. However, we were pleased with it and as far as the explosion was concerned, the waterspout went up to about a thousand feet and so did we. I think we ended up at about eight hundred.

There was one thing that sort of bugged me. When we went to the Mohne Dam, one of our aircraft (flown by Flight Lieutenant John Hopgood)



The Sorpe Dam after the raid. Note the damage on the crest and associated discoloration on the slope

had been shot down and I felt we owed the fellow a visit. So I went back. All the other aircraft had left. As soon as we came over the Mohne they started throwing 20mm anti-aircraft fire at us and I think there were a few that were 37mm. But I figured that we owed that fellow a visit. So we came real low, below the towers, straight on at them. And I heard this fellow's story about three weeks ago in Germany, and he said -No, I won't try his German.

Anyhow, we opened up at about five hundred yards and carried in over the tower and the rear gunner depressed his guns and we raked the thing as we went through. Well, there was no firing coming from that tower when we left. We figured we'd done him in, however the fellow got the Iron Cross. So we weren't that successful.

The worst was really yet to come. It was then daylight or just breaking. We had to go across and up the Zeider Zee. There was no horizon -the mud from the Zeider Zee and the sky were all one. So I started across, strictly on my altimeter with my head below the cockpit top at fifty feet and I hung onto it. I'd been told by a famous Wing Commander in the RAF, "Never, ever pull up. If you're low, never pull up." So I hoped he was right because all hell broke loose within a matter of fifteen minutes.

Searchlights, even though it was light, caught us from the starboard side and straight on. There was a lot of light flak immediately in front of us. The cannon shells started to go through the canopy, the side of the aircraft was pretty well blown out, and there was only one thing I could do. That was go lower, so I put her down ten feet. We came across and actually their gun positions were on the sea wall. So they were firing slightly down at us and I guess they couldn't believe we were lower than what they could fire. So in this turmoil with the front gunner blazing away at them, I just got a glance for a moment. I could see the gunners either falling off because they were hit from



**The 16 RCAF aircrew who returned from the Dams Raid
(Ken Brown standing fourth from left)**

Of the 133 airmen that set out on the raid, 29 were RCAF. 13 were killed during the raid and one became a Prisoner of War. Four of the Canadians who survived the Raid were killed in action later in the war. Note that F/L Joe McCarthy was an American who flew with the Royal Canadian Air Force

our guns or rather they were jumping off to save their skins.

I pulled up over top of them and we all gave a great sigh of relief. I think I've never had a bowel movement that ever gave me greater relief. We figured we had it made at this stage of the game. I called each of the crewmembers and I was really surprised to find that no one had been hit. There was a great deal of damage. My wireless operator said, "Hey Skip. Come on back and crawl in and out of the holes." I did go back. I wondered how badly and what damage had been done to our landing gear etc. But by that time we were in broad daylight of course. I'm sure that the Germans figured that we were a Kamikaze crew or something stupid to do what we did.

We came back to base and we were quite elated that we'd all made it through. I called my squadron call sign and in my enthusiasm I said, "This is F for Freddie." And a little WAAF voice came back, "Hello F for Fox." That too had changed while we'd been away.

We didn't really know of the losses however until we'd landed. Even then we were kind of naïve because when I went into my dispersal point where ten aircraft should be -there was one. And we thought, "Wonder where the other fellows landed." Out of the nineteen, one (flown by P/O Rice) had hit the water on the Dutch Coast. As a matter of fact the tail gunner was under the water when the aircraft pulled out. He made it back. Another aircraft (flown by Flight Lieutenant Munro) was hit by flak and his intercom went. So consequently, of the nineteen you're now looking at seventeen that went beyond the Dutch Coast.

We couldn't quite believe that there were so many missing. When we got out of the aircraft, the ground crews of all the aircraft were standing around long faced, tears running down their cheeks. We were the only ones that were sort of elated in saying "Well, we made it back." But it was a sad thing to know how the ground crew felt, some of them mentioned here tonight.

How the ground crew worked on our aircraft and believe me they did. My aircraft was so badly damaged it had to go back to the factory. But the next aircraft I had was very badly shot-up. My ground crew worked on it. When I came in at six o'clock in the morning they worked all day, all night, all the next day and next night. I took it out the following morning. So I have a great deal of respect for the ground crew personnel. They did a tremendous job and it's unfortunate at times we don't really recognize what they did. They were really a godsend to us all.

Well, the big day came. My stock in trade with Guy Gibson improved tremendously after the Dams Raid. I was commissioned and I was assigned a married quarter which was really an officer's married quarters. We had one room and every room was filled with another officer. In this particular place, I was on the ground floor and every night or evening when I came back there was a huge rabbit that was bounding around out in the field at the back. I figured that the rabbit would look better on my plate than in that field. So I borrowed a shotgun from the armory and a few shells and stashed them in my closet.

I came home one night and sure enough there was that rabbit. So I took off with the shotgun across the field. The old rabbit was well ahead of me avoiding my flak. He crossed the highway on the other side and went into a field. So I followed him in and he went down a hole by a big tree. I thought, "That's fine, I'll just wait him out."

So with my shotgun at my side here I was waiting for this damn rabbit. And what happens? Down the road came a constable with a training officer. And he stops and he hollers, "I say, do you know you're trespassing?"

And I said, "Go on, I'm waiting for a rabbit," which didn't go over very well. So immediately the two dismounted and came over, and he said, "Do you know you're on private property?" And I said, "Well, the rabbit was over on our property and he ran over to this side and I'm claiming him."

"I demand to see your identification," he said. And at that I realized that I'd taken my ID out (of my pocket) and put shotgun shells in. So I said, "I'm sorry, I can't disclose my identification." That was as quick as I could think of, being on a secret squadron.

And he said, "In that case, you'll have to come down to the station." So I said, "Well I'm sorry, I'll have to decline your invitation." And he said, "I demand to know why." And I said, "Because I've got a double barreled loaded shotgun in my hand and you've got nothing." Boy did their faces change.

However, two days later we took a trip. We had to do a mission into Italy. We did a bombing trip to Italy and then cut across to North Africa and landed. So I was away for about seven days. When I came back the Adj. (Adjutant) said to me, "You know, there were a couple of constables out here with a warrant. They were looking for a tall blonde Canadian and as you were the only one who fitted the description we gave them your name."

"How kind of you," I said.

Low and behold, he said, "I think the c/o might like to see you too."

Now this is the point in the whole story. Guy Gibson took the warrant and went before the court. I don't know what he said but he never mentioned that to me. That was his way of letting you know you were accepted. It took a long time.

Guy Gibson came to Canada and visited his navigator's (Terry Taerum's) family. He visited my family. He went and visited a number of flying schools and told them what a good friend he had in Ken Brown. He didn't tell them about the three charges he had me on. However, my mother was very pleased with his visit and to see him.

And it's something today. Beryl and I have just been over to the UK. I introduced the survivors of the Dams Raid to the Queen Mother. Beryl introduced the wives of the Dambusters to the Queen Mother. And we were exposed to a great deal of the English hoopla about the great Dambusters. They do a great deal on it.

We went to the Derwent Dam which we practiced on. There were over one hundred thousand people there. I'd never seen a crowd like that. But

they (the English) sell their air force that way. They sell their museums that way and they do a good job of it. I'm not criticizing them at all. It's something that perhaps we can learn something about in supporting our air force and supporting our museums in Canada.

Because as Canadians we were not as directly affected as the British, and consequently many have no idea at all of what their uncles, their brothers, etcetera did during the war. It was a tremendous contribution.

I'd just like to quote a couple:

"Did you know that twenty-five percent of all aircrew in the UK were Canadians?"

"Did you know that per capita, I repeat per capita, Canada had more aircrew in operational outfits, than what England had?"

"Do you know that sixty-two percent of all casualties in the Canadian armed forces, were aircrew?"

There's an awful lot we can be thankful for. Of the airmen killed in Bomber Command, nine thousand-nine hundred and nineteen, were Canadian.

Today, I've even been asked, "Well, did Canada really get involved in the war?"

We don't want to perpetuate the thought that war is something glorious and wonderful. But we do want to put the thought across.

I've been through Germany. I've been through England, just recently and I was so damn glad to get back to Canada. It's the most wonderful country in the world.

The Nanton Lancaster Association provides that link between those who are not here to speak on their own behalf. To let the younger generation realize that a tremendous contribution was made because the young fellows were so concerned that we might lose our way of life here in Canada. That was their main concern. That this Canada of ours might suffer. And at times, especially with our political situation today, I think we can all give that a little bit of serious thought.

I was proud to stand among, as they called themselves, "Guys." I never heard that in the RAF. As I am sure they would be proud to have the Nanton group expound their desires and their wishes for this country. I take off my hat to the people in Nanton and for the perpetuations that they have achieved here in their Society.

I thank you.



Ken and Beryl Brown at the museum in 1993

NORM ETHERIDGE

-Lancaster Restoration Engineer

During the fall of 1986, four members of the newly formed Nanton Lancaster Society travelled to the Canadian Warplane Heritage Museum in Hamilton, Ontario to find out just what was involved in restoring a Lancaster. Their aircraft, FM-213, was being restored to fly and would become the Mynarski Memorial Lancaster in memory of Andrew Mynarski, a Canadian Victoria Cross recipient who had been killed while flying in a Lancaster during World War II.

Despite the fact that we were only planning to restore our aircraft to static display status, we were welcomed by the project's chief engineer, Norm Etheridge, and the others involved in the restoration including aircraft maintenance engineer, Tim Mols. Norm, Tim, and others at CWH patiently showed us all aspects of the restoration project and answered all the questions related to Lancasters and operating an aviation museum that we neophytes could come up with. Later, through trading some Lancaster parts with their museum, we were pleased to be able to play a very minor role in their wonderful restoration effort.

Over the years, Norm and Tim have become good friends of our museum. Norm has visited on a number of occasions, in particular as a guest speaker during our "Salute to the Lancaster" event in 1997. He also played a significant role in the creation of Canada's Bomber Command Memorial and was present for its dedication in 2005. Both Norm and Tim have donated documentation, tools, and other material as well as advice that has been helpful to our restoration and our museum's development.

Norm was born in Croydon, England in 1927, within walking distance of the Croydon Airfield. During World War II he watched armadas of German bombers attack London by day and by night, and



Norm Etheridge
photo: Graham Paine

witnessed much of the Battle of Britain. Norm saw Stuka dive-bombers attack the Croydon Airfield and narrowly escaped a machine gun attack by a Heinkel bomber on the street where he lived.

In 1943, at the age of fifteen, Norm joined the Royal Navy as a Naval Aircraft Artificer apprentice. He 1957, he immigrated to Canada to continue his aviation career.

Of the restoration of the Mynarski Memorial Lancaster, Norm wrote, "Avro Lancaster FM-213 flew on 11 September, 1988 for the first time in 24 years. A remarkable achievement, accomplished due to the efforts of a small group of volunteers of diverse backgrounds who took a pile of pieces on the hangar floor and transformed them into a wonderful flying machine.

"I was the Project Engineer whose responsibility it was to utilize the small amount of resources that I had at my disposal to make an impossible dream into reality.

"In many ways I likened myself to an orchestra conductor, baton in hand. The different sections of my orchestra were the AME's -Tim Mols, Wes Raginski, and others, the volunteers of the restoration group, the Lancaster Support Club, my friends in the aviation industry, and various companies throughout the world who just wanted to be part of this adventure.

"When I started to wave my baton in 1983, the sounds produced were rather discordant but as the years progressed and my experience grew, I learned to bring in the various sections at the appropriate times and the sounds produced became much more soothing to the ears and mind. Eventually on that inaugural flight, the sounds of the Lancaster flying with four Merlin engines in perfect synchronization brought to the spectators the music that had been our goal. How sweet it was!

"Tim Mols was one of the original students hired under the terms of the government grant in 1983 and he had stayed on through thick and thin to the end of the project. He was deserving of the chance to fly that day in recognition of his personal contribution to a task that had seemed impossible."

The following are some of Tim's recollections -"An Apprentice's View"- of this project that, under the guidance of Norm Etheridge, brought a Lancaster Bomber back into Canadian skies for millions to enjoy.

As I sit back and think of my years at the Canadian Warplane Heritage museum working on the Lancaster, I wonder about how lucky I was then and how fortunate it was that the Lancaster was restored. There were many companies who seemed to become available to the project at just the right time. And, of course, key people as well such as Wes Raginski, Jim Gibson, Karl Coolen, myself, and Norm Etheridge.

Wes and I had just graduated as aircraft maintenance engineers from Centennial College and were apprentices looking for a job in what was then a jobless market. Together, we travelled around Ontario looking for a chance to get a start in the aviation business.



Norm Etheridge (left) with renown aviation artist Robert Taylor
courtesy Norm Etheridge

It was early in March 1983, and we were going to the Hamilton Airport to try our luck. After visiting (with no luck) every aviation company at the airport, we saw the Canadian Warplane Heritage hangar. We asked at the gift shop if we could look inside (without paying admission) and somehow we got to go into the museum. Wow!

We walked around and found the offices. We thought we might as well try our luck again. I walked in, hat in hand, and met the manager who said, "We just got a grant and the man heading up our project is here." Wow, more luck!"

I was introduced to the Englishman who politely said, "Hello. You two are the apprentices? Do you know anything about airplanes?"

"Yes," I replied, to which Norm said, "You're lying aren't you?"

In a rare moment of humility I said, "You're probably right, Sir." I remember him turning away from Wes and I and then turning back and saying, "Do you know anything about Lancasters?"

We both looked at each other and I said, "No. What's a Lancaster?" I don't know why but I suppose Norm saw something in us because Wes and I were hired.

At that time, Canadian Warplane Heritage Museum consisted of one old wooden hangar, a set of offices, and a gift shop. In the hangar was a collection of various World War II era aircraft -some flyable, some not, and a large collection of boxes.



**Norm Etheridge and the original apprentices in 1983
(l-r) Carolyn Sawyer, Wes Raginski, Norm Etheridge, Tim
Mols, Mike Rossadavita, Billy Rothdeutch
photo: Karl Coolen**

The day we started Norm asked each of us to tell him what we were good at. Here we were, five apprentices, a very skilled leader, and an old airplane in a very cold, dark hangar with a skating rink for a floor. I asked Norm if this was a serious project and if he thought it would ever fly again. His answer was noncommittal but had a positive tone to it. That was good enough for Wes and I.

In the early days of the restoration we tried to organize the parts of the Lancaster in our area of the hangar. It became clear that Norm had an idea as to how to do this type of work. He led and we followed.

“Stormin Norman,” as we used to call him, gave us directions as to what and how to do things. He used to say, “You can do things anyway you want, just as long as it is done my way.” It turned out his way was always the best way. With Norm’s growing confidence in us, came more confidence in ourselves. The crew of apprentices worked together and Norm led the way.

The money dried up in the summer of 1985. Norm accepted a full-time job as chief inspector for Field Aviation in Toronto and I followed him there. He had them hire me, I think, so that he could keep an eye on me.

In August 1985, more money was found for the Lancaster and Norm asked me if I would go back to the Lancaster project. My new job paid five times as much and I only lived a mile away from Toronto’s Pearson Airport so my response was, “No way Norm. Good luck though, and call Wes!” But as quickly as my job with Field Aviation had come up, it disappeared. I told Norm I would go back to CWH as long as I could have a raise. It was a go and we reassembled under Norm’s direction again.

The full-time crew was now Wes Raginski and myself. Norm would come in on Saturdays to discuss the progress that had been made and what



**Norm Etheridge (left) inspecting Ron Wylie's
work on the outer wing
courtesy Norm Etheridge**

we were to do during the following week. Norm always led the project. To the Lancaster crew, his word and his direction was it. I became his right (or left) hand man and Wes the other. This allowed us to progress in many different directions of restoration.

There were many times when Norm's aviation smarts came into play during the restoration. The wing spar bolts presented a real challenge. These bolts hold the outer wings. They were stuck in the holes in the spars on each wing and had to be removed. The forward bolts were especially difficult and many ideas had been exhausted including hydraulic rams, heating/cooling, big hammers, and group prayers -all with no results. We had worked for many days and not moved the bolts one millimetre. The bolts, I might add, were about one and one half inches in diameter and eight inches long. In aviation we call them "Jesus bolts" because when they fail that is who you see next.

The final solution was to buy some very expensive diamond drill bits and start drilling from each end and meet in the middle. Then we would get the next size thicker and open the hole a little more. Eventually the entire bolt would be drilled out. We started and promptly began breaking the bits which cost about fifty dollars each. Norm taught us patience and persistence and never hinted that we might not be good enough to get those bolts out.

Well we did get them all out even though it took two months. One of those bolts took six weeks. Please understand that damage to any of the holes or the structure around the holes would have left FM-213 a permanent hangar queen, never to fly. It was crucial we did it right the first time. But it was that way on all of the projects that made up the restoration. Norm's motto was, "We have time to do it right but no time to re-do anything done wrong." As anyone knows in this type of work, it took years to get things done and each problem required a different approach and solution.

Norm, Wes, and I were paid to work on the Lancaster because it was



Lancaster FM-213 airborne for the first time on September 11, 1988

photo: Ross Pratt

necessary to have AME's continuously working on the airplane. The real heroes, other than Norm and Wes, were the volunteers. There was a core group who worked endless hours, doing grunt work. They deserve a lot of the credit for the restoration. Between 1983 and September 1988, many came and went but all made a difference to the project. Some of the special individuals were Jim Gibson, Karl Coolen, Fred Lowe, Greg Hannah, Gil Hunt, Chuck Sloat, and of course, Norm's wife Mary.

If you take any restoration or project, give it vision, proper management, dedicated people, and resources, it will succeed eventually. As with anything, sooner or later it will happen. FM-213 took the latter approach but it was destined to fly again.

During late 1987, the pressure was on to complete the Lancaster. Relationships between the full-timers and the volunteer crew reached overload and each time we felt at our wits' end, Norm pulled us back, helped us with our problems, and then sent us back to work again. Our differences were minor compared to the overall project -seeing the Lancaster fly again.

As a crew led by Norm, we started with piles of junk, restored, repaired, rewired, plumbed, and riveted. Our shared vision involved a diverse, broadly-based group of individuals and corporate supporters who came together, committed to seeing a Canadian Lancaster in the air.

During a high-speed taxi test on September 10, 1988, the Mynarski Memorial Lancaster left the runway for a few seconds. The pilots, Norm, and I held our breaths for those few seconds. The following day we went down the runway again and this time FM-213 took off and flew. Later that month the world was invited to watch as history was made with the official first flight.



The crew following the first flight
(l-r) W/C Tony Banfield RAF (pilot), Tim Mols, Norm Etheridge, and co-pilot Bob Hill
courtesy Norm Etheridge

Canada had a flying Lancaster! I left Canadian Warplane Heritage after the inaugural flight to seek other employment. Norm stayed to oversee the flying of FM-213.

Norm Etheridge was, and still is, the only man I ever met who could solve problems without ever being defeated. My experience, problem-solving processes, and successes are a direct result of the knowledge and confidence Norm left me with. The Lancaster restoration could not have been successful without his guidance. Everyone else was important but he was the reason we succeeded. I personally spent about 14,000 hours on the project.

Many people came and went but we all learned something about aircraft restoration and ourselves. Norm taught us all the skills required to fix old airplanes but more importantly the patience and self-confidence to know that, with the right attitude, any any problem can be conquered.

As our lives came together during the years we restored this magnificent aircraft, Norm always gave us respect and imparted his aviation knowledge to us without hesitation. Norm was voted the best Aircraft Maintenance Engineer in Canada and I was very lucky to work under his direction.

Thanks Norm.



Norm Etheridge speaking at the museum's "Salute to the Lancaster" in 1997



The Mynarski Memorial Lancaster approaching Nanton in 1989. The aircraft performed a spectacular low-level flypast as a thank-you for our co-operation in supplying badly needed parts.

DUKE DAWE AND FRIENDS

-Flying FM-159 in the Fifties

Having rolled off the Victory Aircraft Assembly line just as the Second World War was coming to an end in Europe, the museum's Lancaster did not see wartime action. However for five years, from October 1953 until October 1958, Lancaster FM-159 travelled widely as a maritime reconnaissance aircraft with the RCAF, logging a total of 2068 flying hours.



Duke Dawe

The museum has done everything possible to document our Lancaster's activities during these years. Through the acquisition of copies of aircrew logbook entries, we have documented over 350 of its flights. But more importantly, we have come to know a number of the aircrew who flew aboard "Lanc159" during her time based at Greenwood, Nova Scotia and with No. 407 Squadron at Comox, British Columbia. Flight Engineer Duke Dawe has the most time on FM-159, with 62 flights in his logbook totaling 224.5 hours. During visits to the museum, Duke and his friends have told of many memorable trips aboard our Lancaster, some to rather exotic locations.

After hearing these stories, one looks at the aircraft that stands quietly in the museum in a different light. It has enjoyed some glorious

To Bally Kelly for Bull Ring –as told by Duke Dawe

During the summer of 1957, FM-159 was off on a trip across the Atlantic with two other No. 407 Squadron Lancs to participate in the Royal Navy's anti-submarine course in Londonderry, Northern Ireland. The course was made up of Royal Air Force, Royal Navy, U.S. Navy, and RCAF personnel. It was designed to introduce No. 407 Squadron personnel to newly developed anti-submarine techniques. Following the course, FM-159 was to fly over the Irish Sea to "hunt" Royal Navy submarines. This part of the exercise was known as "Bull Ring."

F/L Hetherington and crew left Comox on June 15, 1957. Following stops in Winnipeg and Summerside, Prince Edward Island, FM-159 landed in

Goose Bay, Labrador. During the nine hour flight From Goose Bay to Keflavik, Iceland, the aircraft encountered heavy airframe icing and could not maintain its 11,000 foot altitude. F/L Hetherington requested a lower altitude but the request was refused by "Oceanic Control." But FM-159 had no choice and slowly drifted down through the clouds to just above the sea where they were able to shed the heavy load of ice. The next day a four hour hop found FM-159 in Prestwick, Scotland.

Two days later, F/L Hetherington flew the aircraft to RAF Station Bally Kelly on the northern coast of Northern Ireland. Duke Dawe recalls that Bally Kelly had an, "interesting runway -an old railway track went right across the runway and we had to wait for the train to pass before landing."

The crews spent the next four weeks engaged in a series of lectures and exercises that culminated with operation "Bull Ring" where they worked with "live" submarines, ships, and other aircraft.

Following "Bull Ring," FM-159 flew to RCAF Langar in the Sherwood Forest district of England. This was the supply base for Canada's NATO squadrons that were operating in Europe at the time.



No. 407 Lancasters at RCAF Langar
Lancaster FM-159 was coded "RX-159" during its service
with No. 407 Squadron at Comox

Three days later FM-159 took off for the Azores. The initial part of the flight was through the London Control Zone and this called for numerous frequency changes as they flew along. The Lancaster had only a twelve channel VHF radio. In order to change to a different frequency, the radio operator had to locate and install a fixed crystal. Duke Dawe remembers a problem they had. "The crystals were kept in a nice metal box with the frequencies labeled next to them. All went well on the first crystal change but then the radio operator opened the box upside down and all the crystals fell to the floor. What a mess! Needless to say we flew right through London control at 6000 feet without talking to anyone. They must have had to divert traffic away from us in all different directions."

After spending two days in the Azores with compass problems, the crew completed an eleven hour flight to Summerside, P.E.I. before carrying on to Winnipeg and reaching Comox on July 26th.

FM-159 VISITS BERMUDA –by Bernie "Shorty" Hazelton

In January 1955, during my tour with No. 404 (MR) Squadron at Greenwood, Nova Scotia as a flight engineer, our crew was tasked to do an anti-submarine patrol to the south of Nova Scotia with an overnight stay in Bermuda. The captain was F/L Lawrence and we were assigned FM-159.

After the patrol, our radio-operator contacted Bermuda and was told that because of excessive crosswinds no aircraft had landed all day. They suggested that, fuel permitting, we should return to Greenwood.

We had been airborne for over seven hours. We determined that, yes, we did indeed have enough fuel to return to Greenwood, but with the whole crew looking forward to an overnight in Bermuda, the reply to the message stated that we could make it back to Greenwood but we would be very tight on fuel.

We were then advised that we could land at Bermuda at our own discretion. We had quite a ride on final and the crosswind did make it quite an interesting approach but all turned out well as FM-159 rolled to a stop.

The Officers Club, which was situated in a location that overlooked the runway, offered an ideal viewing area to watch incoming aircraft and as we were the only aircraft in on that day we had a full audience to critique the landing.

Upon entering the club, our crew was met by a United States Air Force major who inquired as to who was flying that Lancaster and was she quite a handful on final? Our captain answered with a nonchalant reply, "No, not too bad." The major's comment was, "She shouldn't have been. You had every damn pilot in here helping you."

The Alert Diversion -by Harry Addison and Norm Sharratt

This is the tale of Lancaster FM-159's unscheduled visit to the northernmost point in Canada, Alert, on the northern tip of Ellesmere Island (latitude: 82.5 degrees north), just 490 miles from the north pole.



**Lancaster FM-159 at Yellowknife
en route to Resolute Bay
photo: Norm Sharratt**

We were doing what was called the west leg from Resolute, about a seven hour patrol, on June 18, 1955. Roughly three hours from Resolute, we received word that they were experiencing a "white-out" due to ice crystal fog and visibility was below limits. We were advised to fly to Thule, Greenland.

About half an hour out of Thule, we were advised that they had an indefinite ceiling with zero visibility in "ordinary fog." Several USAF aircraft had attempted to land but none had succeeded. We then checked the weather at Sonderstrom and Bloue West One. While they had been as high as a 700 foot ceiling, they were now settling into similar conditions as Thule. Now what? When we asked for another alternate, we were advised that although they had not heard from Alert lately, the weather there was forecasted to be improving. But they only came on the radio every four hours

so they didn't know for sure. So trusting in the wiles and magic of the met forecaster, we headed north to Canadian Forces Station Alert.

We knew it was a fair piece up the road (500 miles). Freddy Pineau, our flight engineer, was frantically doing all sorts of engine configurations to increase our flying time as we were getting critically low on fuel. A former aero engine technician, he had adjusted our constant speed units to 1600 rpm on arrival at Resolute Bay, so we flew at 10,000 feet, throttles well back on a slow steady descent for Alert. All things being equal, if we ran out of fuel at least there was a solid, slippery ice surface for a forced landing. Box lunches, usually ignored unless you liked spam and mustard, chicken noodle or tomato soup, and juice were seen to disappear in rapid order.

As we descended, we became visual at 6000 feet. About forty miles out of Alert they came on with their regularly scheduled weather broadcast and we were relieved to hear that Alert was practically clear. Twenty miles out we made contact on the radio and descended to 1000 feet for landing. Fuel gauges were hitting the stops, so we kept all turns to a minimum down to final over the sea ice, landing uphill. Never having landed a Lancaster with so little fuel on board, we must have floated two-thirds of the runway before touching down. Lanc-159 had been airborne for 12 hours and 25 minutes. After a few "Hail Mary's," the pale faces returned to colour and, as we turned off the runway, number four engine died. We shut down number one and taxied into the ramp on the two inners. Isachsen was the only other airstrip available and it was 45 minutes away. Needless to say we were all relieved to be on the ground.

On landing, we were met by the Alert "inmates," seventeen or eighteen in total. Ours was the first Lancaster to land at Alert since July 1950 when W/C D.T. French had crashed while dropping badly needed bulldozer parts from an altitude of 1000 feet. The parachute had caught on the horizontal stabilizer and fouled the controls. The nine people on board were all killed when the Lancaster (KB-965) crashed and exploded as CFS Alert personnel watched.

The Alert cook baked lemon meringue pies and made a huge cauldron of popcorn to celebrate our arrival. Before heading off to bed, the crew loaded 1200 Imperial gallons of fuel from barrels by hand wobble pumps. Aircraft fuel caches in the Arctic are always suspect with additives, water, and rust being concerns. Needless to say, on takeoff the next day we climbed to 10,000 feet in the vicinity of Alert before heading south. Lanc159 chugged along smoothly southward and landed safely at Resolute Bay.

From the Log of Lancaster FM-159 -by Bert Clark

Just after midnight on the morning of February 19, 1956, my crew and I took off from RCAF Comox, British Columbia for a night navigation trip. Our destination was Ocean Station Papa, a meteorological ship stationed 300 miles off the west coast of Vancouver Island. Whenever we went out to the

ship, we dropped off a waterproof bag containing the latest Playboy and newspapers.

After climbing over the mountains, I let down to 1500 feet and set heading. Not only was it dark but we were also in solid cloud. About 200 miles out No. 4



engine suddenly exploded and burned with a great shower of flames and sparks. Co-pilot F/O Erickson feathered the propeller and activated the fire extinguisher which in short order put out the fire. The radio officer informed Operations of what had happened and in order to return to base by the normal route I began our climb to 10,000 feet to get over the mountains into Comox. There was absolutely no problem. We could have done it on two engines. The Lanc is a superb aircraft.

While climbing to altitude, the radio officer received a message from Operations suggesting that we return by descending and travelling around the southern end of the island instead of flying over "the top." I instructed him to inform Ops that all was well and we would maintain course.

At this point, the flight became one of the more memorable in my 22 years as an RCAF pilot. Everything was quite normal. It was a dirty, black, rainy, foggy night and communications were difficult. A second message from Ops directed me to return via the low-level circuit around the island.

So I let down to 1,000 feet and headed south. Moments later we lost all communications, Loran and ADF! As far as navigation went, we were blind. It's a strange feeling to be moving along at 180 knots into a black void not knowing where you are. The navigator gave me a course to clear the island and F/O Erickson kept up a continuous "Mayday." Response came from Neah Bay (US Search & Rescue) who suggested they send out an aircraft with all lights flashing to guide us. They were airborne in 15 minutes and stayed at 1,000 feet as we went to 300 feet. We passed through the Straits of Juan de Fuca without being able to see the lights of Vancouver. Then the ADF came back on and communications suddenly were re-established with Comox. With a ceiling of still only 400 feet, we landed safely.

In retrospect, maybe the incident was not really all that important. Perhaps the real story is the incredible Lancaster. In this case it was FM-159. She performed superbly! After 5:20 hours of flight I parked on the tarmac and cut the engines. We all sat for several minutes and said nothing. I'm sure we were all thanking the old girl for bringing us safely home.

Red Route -by Fred Burton

On April 10, 1956, FM-159 participated in "Red Route," a NORAD penetration exercise designed to test the ground radar and interception readiness and capability of both Canadian and American interceptor squadrons. After leaving Comox, Lanc FM-159 flew northeast into the interior of British Columbia and dropped down into the valleys of the Rockies to avoid detection by radar. The Canadians did catch us and shortly after we were jumped by RCAF CF-100 fighters. We continued on our southerly track and crossed into Washington State with no further interception. We then climbed to about 20,000 feet and began our simulated bomb run over the City of Spokane. We made three passes before a United States Air Force F-86 Sabre jet came up to see who we were! After having successfully wiped Spokane off the map, we landed at Comox following the 8 hour and 40 minute flight and painted another bomb on the side of the aircraft for a successful mission.

Operation New Broom VI –as told by Cy Dunbar

On August 24, 1956, Cy Dunbar and crew took off in FM-159 for a 23 day trip that included a visit to the Azores. After stopping in Winnipeg and Ottawa, a few days were spent in Torbay, just north of St. John's, Newfoundland. Then the crew set out on a seven hour flight to the Azores, a group of Islands 3000 kilometres to the southeast and 1800 kilometres from the coast of Portugal.



FM-159 at Torbay, Newfoundland
(l-r) Al Boulton, Terry Munday, Don Elliott, Roy Jobling,
Cy Dunbar, Jack Mort, Norm Sharratt, Jack Britney,
Bob Mazey, Cpl. Dayman
courtesy Cy Dunbar

New Broom VI was an anti-submarine exercise and involved a series of three long flights in as many days, the lengthiest being just under ten hours. Cy Dunbar recalls that, "During anti-submarine exercises we would be working in concert with military ships and aircraft to try to detect, localize, and carry out simulated attacks on submarines engaged in the same exercises. Military aircraft, ships, and submarines from Great Britain, the U.S.A., and other NATO countries would take part."

After three days of rest at Torbay, FM-159 flew home to Comox,

including a ten hour, non-stop leg from Ottawa to Calgary.

North to Alaska –as told by Fin Sinclair

During the winter of 1957, FM-159 flew to Kodiak Island off the western coast of the Gulf of Alaska. F/L Smith and crew set out on February 27th but after flying north for 3 1/2 hours, deteriorating weather forced them to return to Comox.



Lancaster FM-159 taxiing prior to taking off for Alaska

The following day, the aircraft reached the island after a seven hour flight. Over the next four days, FM-159 flew three, eight hour antisubmarine exercises in cooperation with the U.S. Navy. Fin Sinclair was the flight engineer aboard FM-159. His memories include long flights along the Aleutian chain of islands and, on a clear day, being able to see a smoldering volcano.

Fin recalls that landing at Kodiak was not something to be attempted in questionable weather. "Kodiak has a long runway but faces into a high mountain. The American met men also warned us of a sudden wind squall caused by cold air flowing down the side of the mountain onto the runway. This phenomenon was known locally as a "Willywall."

A Farewell for G/C Weston –as told by Duke Dawe

During FM-159's last year of service with the RCAF, No. 407 Squadron attempted a mass fly-past of all its aircraft. G/C Weston, the c/o of RCAF Comox, had received a posting to Air Force Headquarters. On February 22nd, in order to say farewell to the popular commander, all base personnel and their families gathered on the flight line to witness a mass launch of all twelve Lancasters. This was the first and only time all of the squadron's aircraft were in the air at one time. A former airman recalled, "At that time it was considered quite a feat to have every aircraft in the squadron airworthy –no 'hangar queens' at 407!" The ground crew took great pride in its work and the 85% rate of serviceability that it was able to maintain.

Duke Dawe had the added responsibility of co-pilot as the squadron was short of pilots. He remembers that some navigators performed co-pilot duties as well that day.

Although the "stream take-off" of the twelve Lancasters was exciting, unfortunately the fly-past never did come to pass. Duke recalls that there was a, "very low cloud ceiling of about 300 feet that topped out at about three to four thousand feet. The original plan was to formate after the stream take off but we were in cloud just as the gear was retracted. Upon bursting out of the top of the clouds there were Lancasters going in all directions. We never did



FM-159 is the third of the dozen No. 407 Lancasters lined up for take-off



Duke Dawe back in the cockpit of Lancaster FM-159 in 2005

PETER ENGBRECHT & GORDON GILLANDERS

-Air Gunners

Alone in his transparent shell,
A speck in space,
He sits, poised in his airy kingdom;
At his back the unknown,
Before him the unfolding map
Of his journey.
Guardian of seven lives,
Taut with the concentration of survival,
He swings his turret through vigilant arcs,
Eyes straining for the fighters,
Braced for the violence of surprise.
-Philip A. Nicholson

Clarence Simonsen is the author of "RAF and RCAF Aircraft Nose Art of World War II," the authoritative reference on the subject. He is a researcher and artist as well as a passionate historian. Clarence visited our museum one day and told us of Peter Engbrecht, a Canadian hero whose story he felt had not been adequately told.

Upon hearing Clarence's compelling argument and learning of Peter Engbrecht's and his partner Gordon Gillander's impressive accomplishments, we agreed that the story should be told in our museum. A "Salute to the Air Gunners" was organized for the summer of 2004 and the focus was to be on Peter Engbrecht and Gordon Gillanders as the greatest team of RCAF air gunners during World War II and likely the greatest team of air gunners ever. With a little bit of luck and some detective work by museum member Don Currie in North Vancouver, the families of Peter Engbrecht and Gordon Gillanders were contacted, a display honouring them and all the air gunners was created, and Peter, Gordon and all the Canadian air gunners were recognized. The museum's collection of five World War II gun turrets formed the backdrop as six hundred people, including about one hundred ex-air gunners, filled the hangar for the tribute.

The gun turret of bomber during a night operation was the coldest, loneliest, place in the sky. Whereas other crew-members enjoyed some comfort from the proximity of others in the forward section of the aircraft, the mid-upper gunner spent the trip suspended on a canvas sling seat, his lower body in the draughty fuselage and his head and shoulders in the plexiglass dome. The rear gunner was even more removed from his fellow crewmembers and any heating system. Suspended in space at the extreme end of the fuselage, "Arse-end Charlie" was subject to the most violent movements of the aircraft. Many rear gunners removed a section of the plexiglass to improve their view, so with temperatures at 20,000' reaching -40 degrees, frostbite was a regular occurrence. During the Second World War, 20,000 air gunners were killed while serving with Bomber Command.

F/S Peter Engbrecht and F/S Gordon Gillanders formed what was undoubtedly the most successful gunnery team in the Royal Canadian Air Force during World War II. As members of No. 424 Squadron flying Halifax bombers, they accounted for nine "confirmed" and two "probable" enemy aircraft. Peter Engbrecht manned the mid-upper turret and Gordon Gillanders the rear turret.

Born in Poltavka, Russia in 1923, Peter Engbrecht immigrated to Canada with his family in 1926 and settled in

Whitewater, Manitoba where his father began working as a blacksmith. As a youngster, Peter was known to be a crack shot with a .22 calibre rifle. After completing public school (Grade 8), he began working with his father.

Peter was one of over 3000 Mennonites to abandon their pacifist principle and fight for freedom against the Nazis. Although he enlisted in Winnipeg in March 1941, Peter wasn't called up until November when he



(l-r) F/S Peter Engbrecht (mid-upper gunner), F/S Gordon Gillanders (rear gunner), and F/S James Keys (pilot) in front of "Dipsy Doodle"

began his career as a General Duties Aircraftsman Second Class. He was stationed at Brandon, Manitoba and later at Summerside, Prince Edward Island where he married Louise Arsenault before being sent overseas in 1942.

After spending two long, frustrating years fulfilling assignments such as waiting on officers' tables as a "batman" and assisting armourers, Engbrecht re-mustered as an air gunner in 1943. He was said to have been ecstatic to be training as aircrew but found the pace devastatingly slow. One day he grew frustrated with what he referred to as, "the stupid target," and decided to hit the buckle immediately behind the aircraft to which the tow cable was attached. The whole contraption fell into the North Sea, the pilot was scared to death, and Engbrecht was almost court-martialed.

Gordon Gillanders was born in Vancouver in 1924, enlisting in that city in 1942. He trained at No.3 Bombing and Gunnery School at MacDonald, Manitoba and graduated in September 1943.

In May 1944, Engrecht and Gillander's crew was posted to No. 424 Squadron. During the night of May 27/28, they attacked Bourg-Leopold, Belgium on their second operation. Their aircraft, "Dipsy Doodle," was attacked fourteen times by German night-fighters in a running battle from the target back to the English coast. "Just after we left the target area," Engbrecht recalled, "bullets began to whistle over our aircraft and I opened fire in the direction the tracers came from."



F/S Gordon Gillanders receiving his air gunner wing

The combat reports for the operation are as follows, "The enemy fighter made a bow attack and the first warning received was his trace, the pilot immediately going into a corkscrew (evasive manoeuvre) and the mid-upper firing at the trace. The aircraft itself was not sighted, consequently no ranges could be given but the bomb aimer had a glimpse of the fuselage as it went down and is of the opinion that it was an Me110. The fighter appeared to drop off on one wing and went on down in flames, a petrol tank exploding on the way down and another heavy explosion upon impact with the ground which was witnessed by the pilot, engineer, and bomb aimer.

"Continuous attacks followed, mainly by three aircraft operating together, a Ju88 with two Me109's on either quarter. On this first attack, three of the four guns in the mid-upper turret packed up and all guns in the rear turret. The one gun from the mid-upper turret was the only one serviceable for the rest of the sortie with the exception of one gun working from the rear turret

towards the end of the trip and very few rounds were fired from this gun. The attack came after several sightings and because of the corkscrewing the aircraft was below the height of the main stream.

“After further attacks after the above first mentioned attack, an FW190 attacked from the port quarter up and started to break away on the port beam, the mid-upper gunner firing almost continuously and observing the fighter to blow up in his sights. This was observed by the pilot, flight engineer, and rear gunner. The attacks continued until reaching the English coast. Types seen were Ju88 and Me109, nearly all operating in threes. The mid-upper gunner had no time to clear his guns and used only the one to shoot the second machine down. Further hardship was caused by intercom failure from the turret, combat manoeuvres being passed on and given by the rear gunner.”



Junkers Ju-88



Messerschmitt Bf-109E

On June 10/11 1944, F/S Engbrecht shot down two more enemy night-fighters during a raid on the rail facilities at Versailles-Matelots in France. The combat report for this action reads, “At the position given a fighter flare was seen to drop on the starboard beam. The enemy aircraft came from behind the flare and in doing so silhouetted himself against it. The Me110 opened fire at 400 yards, almost immediately on sighting. The mid-upper gunner ordered combat manoeuvre and opened fire right after, keeping up his fire until the engagement was broken off, the rear gunner getting in a short burst at 250 yards. The fighter seemed to lose control at 200 yards range, diving straight down and an explosion was seen on the ground a few seconds later.”

Immediately afterwards an Me109 attacked. The air gunners reported, “In this combat, conditions were the same as in the previous one, identical ranges etc., except that the fighter was seen to go on fire, flame coming from the engine so far as can be ascertained, and then went down into scattered cloud below, the whole cloud lighting up a few seconds later. The fire did not start until the breakaway, starting with a small glow and growing rapidly. Due to being in a corkscrew the illumination in the cloud was seen by all members of crew except the wireless operator and navigator.”

For these actions, F/S Engbrecht was awarded the Conspicuous Gallantry Medal, one of only eight presented to Canadians during the war. The medal was presented by the King at Leeming on August 11 and the citation read, in part, “His exceptional coolness and confidence under fire was a source of inspiration to other crew members. . . His feats have been worthy of great praise.”

On August 7, 1944 while flying another Halifax, “Gallopig Gerty,” F/S

Engbrecht shot down an Me-410 and, together with Gillanders, a Ju-88. To become an “Ace,” an airman had to destroy five enemy aircraft. With 5 1/2 shot down, Engbrecht now held the distinction of being the only RCAF ace who wasn't a fighter pilot.

During a raid on Brunswick six days later, F/S Engbrecht claimed an Me210 and a “probable” Ju-88. The combat reports read as follows, “Enemy aircraft



Peter Engbrecht beside his mid-upper gun turret

was first seen by mid-upper gunner and rear gunner as it attacked and shot down another Halifax on their port quarter down. The fighter then turned and attacked from the port quarter level at 450 yards. Corkscrew port was given by mid-upper gunner. Fighter opened fire at 400 yards and both gunners immediately returned fire. Traces from both turrets converged on the enemy aircraft which burst into flames and was seen to explode by both gunners and the flight engineer. The aircraft was identified as an Me210.

“Rear gunner sighted enemy aircraft at 400 yards port quarter down. He and fighter opened fire at the same time. Trace was seen striking the enemy aircraft which burst into flame and shortly afterwards exploded. The aircraft was identified as an Me109 when it burst into flames and was seen to explode by the flight engineer and both gunners. The pilot also saw the flash and burning parts going down. Following this raid, F/S Gillanders was recommended for the Distinguished Flying Medal. The accompanying citation stated, “Flight Sergeant Gillanders has always shown courage, coolness and determination to fulfil his duty.”

Four days later on August 16/17, Gillanders was credited with an Me110, the combat report reading, “An unidentified aircraft was first sighted at 550 yards starboard quarter down, showing a yellow light in the nose. The fighter immediately opened fire and the rear gunner gave the evasive action corkscrew starboard. The gunner opened fire at 500 yards and continued firing until the fighter closed to 400 yards, at which time the fighter caught fire and broke off on the starboard quarter down. The gunners lost sight of the fire, but about two minutes later an aircraft was seen to explode on the water. The mid-upper gunner saw it burn for a short time and disappear. Rear gunner claims fighter as probably destroyed.” Engbrecht claimed a “probable”



Rear gun turret

Me262, one of the Nazi's new twin-engine jet fighters, during that night as well.

When the war ended, F/S Engbrecht had been officially credited with five and one half kills and two probables. Of the probables he remarked, "As far as I'm concerned, I got 'em." His partner in the rear turret, F/S Gordon Gillanders, was officially credited with three and one half enemy aircraft.

For most of their 33 operations, the crew included F/S James G. Keys (pilot), Charles C. Gunn (wireless operator), F/O Pat Peterson (bomb aimer), F/S Charles Macdonald (flight engineer), and F/O William Riome (navigator).

Most of their operations were flown in Halifax HX-316 that featured the nose art, "Dipsy-Doodle" and Halifax MZ-802, that carried the nose art "Gallop-in-Gerty." Both of these were painted by Matthew Ferguson of Calgary, Alberta.

The media of the day made much of Peter Engbrecht and his successes. The Toronto Star wrote, "The paradoxical Peter Engbrecht is, all at once, a member of a religious sect which forbids participation in wars, of pure Germanic descent, and a member of the RCAF. The 21 year old gunner can claim an unparalleled record in the air force."

Peter Engbrecht left the RCAF in June 1945 with the rank of Pilot Officer. He then farmed for three years in the Turtle Mountain area south of Lake Whitewater, Manitoba. Like many other Mennonites who served, he was not prepared for the hostility he encountered from his own people. So in 1948, he re-enlisted in the RCAF as a radar technician.

He served a total of 28.5 years with the RCAF, mostly with Air Defence Command and NORAD. As a Master Corporal, he was honoured by the Royal Canadian Air Force Association with a fly-past salute on Parliament Hill on September 28, 1972. He was the first person of his rank to ever take the salute. The following evening at the banquet in his honour, the dignitaries included Governor General Roland Michener who at one point stood to attention and said, "Master Corporal Engbrecht, the Royal Canadian Air Force Association saluted you yesterday on Parliament Hill. Your Governor General salutes you now." A "roar of spontaneous applause" was said to have filled the room.

Peter Engbrecht reached the rank of Flight Lieutenant and retired in 1973. At the time of his retirement, he was the longest serving NORAD serviceman. He then settled in Beausejour, Manitoba where he worked with the Beausejour Beaver newspaper. Following the death of his first wife, he married Ramona Sarkozi in 1978 and two years later moved to Altona, Manitoba. He passed away in April 1991. His obituary stated that, "Peter had a warm, extroverted personality coupled with a friendly smile and a good witty sense of humour. His character and charm did much to maintain the morale and spirits of the crews he served with. He was known as competent and skillful and capable of imparting his knowledge and wisdom to others."



**The "Engbrecht & Gillanders" team
in their later years**



Members of the Engbrecht and Gillanders' families unveil a commissioned painting honouring F/S Peter Engbrecht and F/S Gordon Gillanders at the museum's "Salute to the Air Gunners" in 2004



JIM LOVE

-The Pennemunde Raid

Jim Love was a long-time supporter of the museum. He visited frequently from his home in Calgary and we enjoyed and learned from his memories of being a navigator on Lancasters. On several occasions he told us about his most memorable operation, the raid to Pennemunde in 1943 where the Nazi's were developing and testing one of their "Vergeltungswaffen" or "Vengeance" weapons –the V-2 rocket.



Jim Love

James Nelson "Jim" Love was born in Weyburn, Saskatchewan but was living in Regina when he enlisted in the RCAF in 1941. #3 Air Observers School was located in his home-town and he graduated from the school as a navigator on July 31, 1942. After completing his training in England, Jim was posted to No. 207 Squadron RAF.

Jack "Lucky" Pegrum, ("Lucky because he was the sole survivor of a crashed Hampden bomber on Friday the Thirteenth of February, 1942) was the wireless operator on Jim's crew. He recalls that at the time they did their tour the loss rate was very high. The German night-fighters were at their peak and during their frequent flights to the Ruhr, Jim's crew found that every target was well defended.

Jack wrote, "Our first trip was a relatively easy one to the submarine pens at St. Nazaire and we were proud to get that one under our belts. The next one was a 'shocker' to Essen, just about the toughest target one could get at that time. The next night we went to Keil where the German naval gunners really knew their stuff! We made the long haul to Spezia after that. Mont Blanc looked lovely in the moonlight –but I don't think the Italians were too pleased to see us. Two nights later we were off to bomb the Skoda works in Pilzen, Czechoslovakia. They were making tanks in those days. In another 48 hours we were back to Spezia again –the Alps were becoming quite familiar.

"The next month or two proved to be more or less a shuttle

service to the Ruhr, with trips to Genoa and Nuremburg thrown in just to give us a change of scenery. Then it was up to the Baltic for what was one of our most memorable trips –to destroy the V-2 development sites at Pennemunde.

“Then came a Berlin raid and it was during the run-up that Steve (pilot John ‘Steve’ Stephens) asked for a course out of the target. We were startled to hear Jimmy (navigator Jim Love) answer, ‘Go where the — you like. I couldn’t care less.’ I turned round from my set to look at the navigator’s table and saw Jimmy looking as though he had a skin-full down at the Plough (our local pub). His oxygen pipe was dangling from the roof of the aircraft –He was unplugged! Once he was plugged in again he soon returned to normal. We dropped our bombs and hightailed it for home.”

A sortie to Mannheim completed Jim’s crew’s tour of thirty operations on September 23. Jim was subsequently awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, the citation referring to, “many successful operations against the enemy in which he has displayed high skill, fortitude and devotion to duty.”

The V-1 flying bomb could be seen and defended against by fighters and anti-aircraft guns but the V-2 was effectively invisible after it had been launched. The first Londoners knew about a V-2, was when it exploded. The rocket was 46 feet in length and, fully loaded with fuel and warhead, weighed 13 tons. From launch to the speed of sound took only 30 seconds. Its maximum trajectory height was between 50 to 60 miles for long-range targets. The warhead weighed one ton and could do devastating damage.

On September 8, 1944 the first V-2 hurtled down on London without warning and exploded with devastating effect. The campaign reached a climax in February 1945 when 232 hit southern England. In all, 1,115 fell, 517 in the London area. Although 2,754 people were killed and about 6500 were injured, the V-2 program did not change the course of the war as Hitler had hoped –but it might have.

General Eisenhower wrote following the war, “It seems likely that if the Germans had succeeded in perfecting and using these new weapons earlier than he did, our invasion of Europe would have proved exceedingly difficult, perhaps



impossible. I feel sure that if they had succeeded in using these weapons over a six-month period, and particularly if they had made the Portsmouth-Southampton area one of the principal targets, "Overlord" (The D-Day Invasion) may have been written off."

Pennemunde was located on the Baltic coast, due north of Berlin. Here the Nazis had assembled a group of scientists and a workforce that operated under the greatest of secrecy. One of the leading scientists was Wernher Van Braun who would go on to play a leading role in the Apollo program that succeeded in making the first lunar landing in 1969. In 1943, the Polish underground movement had sent back information about the Pennemunde program and facilities. As well, the RAF had aerial photographs of the site.

As part of the planning for the Pennemunde raid, a diversionary raid on Berlin by Mosquito Bombers was to be launched with the hope that German fighters would be drawn to the defence of the capital. It was thought that perhaps the first, second and even the third of the three waves of bombers would be able to drop their loads without interference from fighters. The attack was to be made from an altitude of only 7000 feet and in full moonlight. This was necessary to obtain the accuracy required to identify and destroy the individual buildings in the complex. The low-level, moonlight raid was highly unusual for Bomber Command, making it much more hazardous for the crews –there would be no hiding in the clouds on this night but the risk had to be accepted.

Jim Love's pilot, Jack Stephens, recalled, "The first thing that baffled everyone was, "Pennemunde?" No one had the slightest idea where it was or what it was –we were to find out! There were two other aspects of this raid that were puzzling and rather scary. We were to bomb from 7000 feet rather than our usual 18-20,000 feet and it was a full moon."



(l-r) Jack "Lucky" Pegram (wireless operator), Jack "Steve" Stephens (pilot), and Jim Love (navigator)

The Pennemunde raid was considered to be one of the most important of the war and this was emphasized by a personal message to the crews from Bomber Command chief, Arthur Harris. Jim Love recalled very clearly the warning that the squadrons were given, "If you don't knock out this important target tonight it will be laid on again tomorrow and every night until

the job is done (regardless of losses).” The airmen had not heard anything like this before. Sergeant K.W. Rowe of No. 434 Squadron recalled, “There wasn’t the usual babble and horseplay and I remember coming out onto the airfield, right into the rural surroundings and sunshine and I thought, ‘This can’t be happening to us on such a lovely day.’”

A total of 596 bombers including 62 from the Canadian No. 6 Group took off during the evening of August 17, 1943. The first wave of two hundred aircraft was due to start the attack at 00:15, with the second attacking at 00:30 and the third at 00:45 hrs. Jim Love’s squadron was part of the second wave. The Canadian aircraft were part of the third.

Of the flight to the target, Jack Stephens wrote, “The trip out was uneventful but very scary –flying a bomber at night with a full moon is like walking down your busiest road –naked! Everyone can see you. You are a sitting target for every fighter in the Reich. You want to hide but there’s no place to go.

“Eventually we crossed the north of Denmark and turned south to Pennemunde. Before long the target appeared. The first wave of bombers had already arrived and when we bombed, the target was well alight. Jerry had put up a smoke screen but too late.”

Lancasters of the Pathfinder Force had marked the target and continued to drop target flares as the raid progressed. In this case the markers were dropped some distance from the target and the crews flew a pre-arranged course and distance from the markers before dropping their bombs. This ensured the markers would remain visible and not become obscured by fires and smoke. The deputy Master Bomber for the Pathfinders was Canadian W/C Johnny Fauquier of No. 405 Squadron.

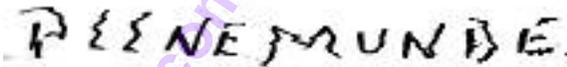
Most of the first wave aircraft were on their way home before the flak opened up and the remaining crews found themselves in the thick of intense gunfire. Many of the bombers flew across the target at altitudes as low as 4000 feet, making themselves ideal targets. Fortunately the diversionary raid to Berlin had been successful and the enemy fighters, upon realizing that Pennemunde was under attack, had to land and refuel. The second wave, that included Jim Love’s aircraft, saw lots of fighters but it was the third wave that included the Canadian squadrons that encountered the majority. When the fighters arrived, the bombers were silhouetted against the bright flames on the ground and bathed in brilliant moonlight.

Jack Stephens recalls, “We bombed and turned on a reverse course for home. It was then it seemed that fighters were everywhere. I saw a Lanc ahead of and below us, clearly visible in the full moon. All four engines were on fire and the fighter was standing off, following it down. Then I saw tracers streaming out from the rear turret but the fighter was obviously out of range. In my mask I was silently screaming, ‘Get out, get out.’ The tracers continued to stream out and then it was too late. He hit the Baltic and it was all over. He is my unknown V.C.

“Twice on the way back fighters maneuvered into position for attack and each time they were spotted in time and conversely the full moon was our salvation. With the fighter below and behind, a turn up-moon brought the fighter into full view while we on the dark side became invisible to him. The Gods were with us that night.”

Bob Charman, another navigator who became a Nanton Lancaster Society member, recalled, “All over the sky planes were going down in flaming infernos. I had barely given Frank (Frank Brady, his pilot) a course for home, when Jimmy Fletcher, the tail gunner, broke in with evasive action. A Ju-88 was bearing down on our tail. We went down into a dive, trying to avoid the fighter. Then the aircraft quivered, like in killing poultry you strike the brain with a knife and the feathers release –that is the way the aircraft felt. A horrible smell of gunpowder enveloped the aircraft and the wireless operator lay beside me dying, with his entrails exposed. . .” Bob was one of only two crewmembers of his No. 427 Squadron Halifax to escape and become a Prisoner of War.

In his navigator’s log, Jim recorded, “several aircraft seen shot down” and “dozens of fighters about.” During visits to the museum he often spoke of the vividness of his memories of watching bombers going down in flames around him. His logbook entry shows the name “Pennemunde” written in extremely shaky printing. He later told his family that it was no joke -he was still frightened when he made the logbook entry. In a letter to his mother written the day following the raid Jim wrote, “Had a very ‘shaky-do’ night before last at Pennemunde but managed to scrape through by the ‘skin of our fins.’ We had a rather charmed life I guess.”



Jim’s hand was shaking when he wrote “Pennemunde” in his logbook following the raid.

Jim understood that he was one of the lucky ones. Bomber Command lost forty aircraft that night, 6.7% of the attacking force. But the Canadian squadrons in the third wave lost twelve aircraft, suffering a staggering loss rate of 19.3%. The Luftwaffe estimated that they might have shot down 200 bombers had the diversionary raid to Berlin not been so successful.

The Pennemunde Raid was clearly a tactical success with a high percentage of the bombs being on target. Following the attack, the V-2 program was dispersed to various other locations. Estimates vary as to the delay the raid caused in the development of the V-2 program –the consensus being at least two months and possibly six. As well, the raid resulted in the scale of the program being significantly reduced.



In 1993 Jim Love (left) and Bob Charman signed the museum's Robert Taylor print depicting Lancasters outward bound on the Pennemunde Raid



Jim Love's DFC and logbook are part of the museum's Pennemunde Display. They were presented by Maureen Love on behalf of Jim's family.

HAMISH MAHADDIE

-A Horsethief for the Pathfinders

Hamish Mahaddie first came to the attention of members of the Nanton Lancaster Society as plans were being made to dedicate the museum's aircraft to the memory of Alberta-born Lancaster pilot, Ian Bazalgette VC DFC. We were attempting to locate the family and crewmembers of S/L Bazalgette and it had been suggested that a "Hamish Mahaddie," whose address was given as "RAF Club; London," might be of some assistance. George Turner, Baz's flight engineer, Chuck Godfrey, his wireless operator, and Ian's sister, Ethel Broderick were eventually located and Hamish himself accepted the Society's invitation to join us for the dedication ceremonies and to be one of our guest speakers.



Thomas G. "Hamish" Mahaddie

Upon his arrival at Nanton, Hamish's well deserved reputation as an out-going character and gentleman became apparent as he quickly became friends with all, particularly a number of the ladies who he insisted must have been, "child brides."

During his speech, Hamish recalled how S/L Bazalgette had, "plagued him on a weekly basis with letters and telephone calls, begging to be put back on operations with the Pathfinder Force and which I have always regretted doing because sadly he was killed on the occasion when he won his V.C."

As he reached the end of his speech, Hamish emotionally lamented the deaths of so many thousands of the Pathfinders that he had personally recruited, including that of Ian Bazalgette.

The museum was honoured to have Hamish write the "Foreword" to Ian Bazalgette's biography which the museum published in 1996.

Born in Scotland in 1911, Thomas Gilbert “Hamish” Mahaddie joined the Royal Air Force in 1928 and spent the first three years of his career being trained as a metal rigger. In 1933 he was posted to the RAF base at Hinaidi, near Baghdad. The following year his quest to be accepted for aircrew training was successful and he earned his wings at No. 4 Flying Training School in Egypt flying Avro 504N’s. During his two year posting to No. 55 Squadron, he acquired an Arabian horse that he named “Hamish.” His fellow pilots pointed out that he (Thomas Gilbert) bore a distinct resemblance to the horse and assigned him the nickname “Hamish” as well.

Hamish flew widely in the Middle East and, as was expected, took part in various social functions with the local Arabs. During one of these, he recalled, “I was offered the eye of a sheep that had been cooked on a vast platter. We all sat around cross-legged picking at bits of the sheep and I was offered the eye by the Sheikh, which I understand was a kind of honour. Whilst I took it, I was about to flip it away somewhere when my c/o said, ‘You must eat it, YOU’VE GOT TO EAT IT!’ under his breath. How I put that eye in my mouth and how I swallowed it I will never know, but swallow it I did. The things we do for England!”

Mahaddie returned to England in 1937 and soon began flying Whitley bombers with No. 77 Squadron. In September 1939, he was piloting the Whitley on wartime operations that included reconnaissance flights, leaflet raids over Germany, and attacks on coastal targets. In May 1940, Hamish began flying raids designed to slow down the enemy blitzkrieg of France, completing a total of 23 operations between May 9th and June 29th.

Hamish was then assigned to No. 19 Operational Training Unit in Kinloss, Scotland as an instructor where he continued flying Whitleys and rose to the rank of Squadron Leader over the next two years. He was awarded the Air Force Cross (AFC) –a non-combat award that Hamish referred to as the, “Avoiding Flak Cross.”

Mahaddie’s second tour of operations began in August 1942, flying the huge four-engined Stirling with No. 7 Squadron. During October, he began Pathfinder operations

with the newly formed elite group (No. 8 Group) that marked the targets in advance of the arrival of the main bomber force. A raid on Frankfurt on December 3rd was his fiftieth operation. Then, over the period of only eight weeks and following his promotion to Wing Commander, he



Short Stirling

was awarded a second AFC, the Distinguished Service Order, the Czechoslovakian Military Cross, and the Distinguished Flying Cross. The various citations included phrases such as, “consistently attacked heavily defended targets with coolness and determination often in adverse weather,” “powers of leadership of a very high order,” and, “unflagging enthusiasm has had an inspiring effect on his comrades.”



Hamish and family

Undoubtedly, Hamish’s closest call came on a raid to Cologne on the night of February 1/2, 1943. After releasing his target marking flares, the cloud cover that had been providing some protection broke up and flak damaged the Stirling’s intercom system and put the rear turret out of action. At the same time, a Ju88 night-fighter raked the fuselage with cannon fire from a range estimated to have been eighty yards. The mid-upper gunner, wireless operator, and bomb aimer were all injured, all the compasses and navigational equipment were destroyed with the exception of the astro-compass, and the aileron controls were severed.

Somehow, second pilot Thompson was able to provide navigation bearings back to base while Flight Sergeant Stewart treated the wounds of the three injured crewmembers. “Meanwhile,” according to Bob Pointer, the rear gunner, “The skipper was fighting with the aircraft. Having had the aileron controls badly mangled by the cannon shells, he could only fly the aircraft by varying the power of the engines. Jock, our engineer –clambering in the wing root with a torch –did some very good work reconnecting the aileron controls with pieces of wire which he had conjured up from somewhere and that enabled the skipper to gain partial control of “C” Charlie and set a course for home.”

A count the next morning revealed that, as Hamish described it during his visit to Nanton, he had suffered, “174 cannon shells up his kilt.”

Hamish completed his operational tour with the Pathfinders during March 1943 upon which he was promoted to Group Captain and assigned to No. 8 (Pathfinders) Group Headquarters to become “Group Training Inspector” for PFF commander Don Bennett. This role included recruiting crews for the Pathfinders from operational squadrons whose commanding officers were generally not particularly interested in having their best crews recruited. Hamish became notoriously successful at this, referring to himself as, “Don Bennett’s Horse Thief” and it is for this that he is best remembered.

As “Group Training Inspector,” Hamish regularly visited operational squadrons, giving lectures to four hundred or more aircrew on the changing

tactics and techniques employed by the Pathfinders. But before visiting a station, Hamish would have already identified crews that he felt were candidates for the Pathfinders by studying aiming point photographs that indicated which crews were dropping their bombs accurately on the targets.

During an interview recorded when he was in Nanton, Hamish recalled that his lectures were, "just a pretext. That was to get in and to see the guys who I had identified. Generally I met these people, individually and privately, in the pub that evening. Then, if a pilot and crew wished to apply to be transferred to the Pathfinders, they would have to put in a written application to the squadron commander. What would then happen would be that the squadron commander would look at it and say, 'No fair! He's too good!' and then tear it up and put it in the ashcan. Then the guy would put in another one and the same thing would happen. But the next time I was around, the guy would make quite certain that he bought me a half pint at the local boozier down the street that same day. He'd say, 'Look, what gives? I've put in two applications and the boss just tears them up.' I'd take his name and his crew would then be posted and 48 hours later he'd be down at Warboys to begin Pathfinder training."

Through this, and other techniques, Mahaddie recruited thousands of the most highly regarded Bomber Command aircrew to the Pathfinders, including Ian Bazalgette.

S/L Bazalgette had attended a lecture given by Hamish at which he was introduced to the methods utilized by the Pathfinder Force. Not satisfied with his assignment to No. 19 Operational Training Unit at Lossiemouth, Scotland, Baz was, according to Hamish, "one of many tour-expired bomber pilots that seemed to rot in our OTU's." He recalled that Baz, "plagued me weekly with letters and telephone calls beseeching me to take him back on operations."

A letter from Bazalgette to Mahaddie dated February 3, 1944 begins, "A pathetic appeal from the frozen north –my six month OTU tour expires at the end of this month and I must get to No. 8 Group at once. I feel that if I cannot break away now, I have 'had' my second tour. It is my dearest wish to have another personal affair with Germany. . . This all reads like a line, but believe me I am very sincere."

Hamish's answer was always, "You just stay there (at the OTU at Lossiemouth, Scotland) and I will get you out." "This wasn't just an idle promise," Hamish insisted, "because there was the type of fellow that I wanted to be a squadron commander eventually." Hamish's answer (dated February 8, 1944) to Bazalgette's letter asks him to, "take no action officially until my own horse dealing methods have been completed." It closes with, "Well, cheerio Bazal, and may I wish you in the near future, 'Good Pathfinding.'"

Mahaddie's final assignment during the war was as Officer Commanding RAF Warboys, the airfield that was the home of the Pathfinders' Training Unit.

After continuing to serve in the RAF until 1958, Hamish went on to enjoy a successful career as an aviation consultant, one of his most noteworthy projects being the gathering of the extensive collection of aircraft that were used in the classic film, "The Battle of Britain."

Lt. General Reg Lane, former commanding officer of No. 405, the Canadian Pathfinder Squadron, recalled, "Hamish had a fabulous personality –an extrovert of extroverts. He could charm anyone. I got to know him when he was at No. 8 Group Headquarters and I used to see Hamish frequently. Anyone who's met Hamish Mahaddie will never forget him."



Lt. Col. Terry Chester, commanding officer of No. 407 Squadron (left) and Hamish Mahaddie at the dedication of the Ian Bazalgette Memorial Lancaster in 1990

photo: Larry Wright



Hamish enjoyed his visit to Nanton

JACK ALLAN

-Nanton's Golden Hawk

John (Jack) Fallow Allan was born in Nanton in 1917. After attending school in Nanton, he joined the RCAF as an aero-engine mechanic, six months before war was declared in September 1939.

The following year he became a pilot and served in North Africa flying Hurricanes and Spitfires with No. 33 Squadron RAF from March 1942 until May 1943. During this time he engaged in dog-fights, shooting down two enemy aircraft and claiming another two as "probables." He also provided cover for shipping and attacked enemy army vehicles. Jack flew thirteen operations during the pivotal Battle of El Alamein. Later he served as a test pilot in Egypt, prior to being posted back to Canada in January 1944.

Following the war, Jack flew the F-86 Sabre and in 1952 became the C/O of No. 414 Fighter Squadron. From 1953 to 1956 he was Chief Flying Officer with No. 4 Wing in Germany, returning to Canada as the Commanding Officer of No. 1 (Fighter) Operational Training Unit.

W/C Allan helped form the Golden Hawks, a renown RCAF Aerobatics Team. It first flew in 1959 as part of the celebration of the 50th Anniversary of Flight in Canada.

From 1960 to 1962, W/C Allan was the Commanding Officer of the Golden Hawks. Although he had been a Sabre squadron C/O, he had no experience in aerobatics. However, he was in charge of the team and travelled with them, flying a T-33 that was painted in Golden Hawks' markings. The golden T-33 was a real crowd pleaser, so Jack often made low passes on arrival and departure as the team visited the many air shows and other functions where they performed.

Jack completed his air force career as Commanding Officer of the radar base at Beaverbank, Nova Scotia. He retired to Kelowna, British Columbia in 1964 and passed away in 1973.



Jack Allan



Jack Allan -Spitfire Pilot



Jack Allan in the Desert

 A photograph of a logbook page with handwritten entries. The entries are organized in columns and rows, with some names and dates visible. The handwriting is in cursive and somewhat faded.

Battle of El Alamein logbook entries -Late October and early November, 1942



P/O Allan crash-landed this Hurricane.



W/C Allan (nearest) preparing to leave for Germany with No. 414 Squadron RCAF.



W/C Allan (centre) and the 1960 Golden Hawks Team being welcomed to Montreal.



Flypast over Nanton as photographed by Jack's father over the family's house.



Jack Allan's T-33 in Golden Hawks Markings

JOE McCARTHY

-The RCAF's American Dambuster

Joe McCarthy proudly wore a CANADA/USA patch on his shoulder indicating that he was an American citizen serving in the Royal Canadian Air Force. He was the only American to fly on this legendary raid. Joe continued to serve with No. 617 Squadron until July, 1944 and then went on to other important duties with the Royal Air Force. Following his return to Canada in 1946, Joe served in a variety of roles with the post-war RCAF.

Canadians made a major contribution to the Dams Raid as they did with all aspects of Bomber Command. Of the 133 airmen who set out on the raid, thirty were Canadian and six were from Alberta. Fourteen were killed during the raid and one became a Prisoner of War. Exactly 50% of the Canadians who took off did not return. Four of the Canadians who survived the Raid were killed in action later in the war.

We have come to know several of the Canadian Dambusters at the Bomber Command Museum of Canada and the stories of three of them, Ken Brown, Harlo Taerum, and John Fraser are included in this book. As well, Fred Sutherland attended our sixtieth anniversary commemoration and the families of many others have been in contact and have visited our museum.

Joe McCarthy jr. has visited the museum on a number of occasions and it is through him that we have come to gain a complete appreciation of "Big Joe's" remarkable career in the RCAF.



Joe McCarthy

Joe McCarthy was born on Long Island, New York in 1919 and grew up in New York City. Fascinated by aircraft and flying, he worked as a lifeguard at Coney Island and other beaches in the New York area as well as at other odd jobs to pay for flying lessons. On three occasions he attempted to join the Army Air Corps. Each time he was told that he would hear back from them but he never did. The Air Corps knew that it had to expand but the US military was simply unprepared for any large-scale expansion.

During May 1941, twenty months after the beginning of the war and with the United States still neutral, Joe's good friend Don Curtin suggested that they head up to Canada and join the Royal Canadian Air Force. "Within two days," McCarthy recalled, "we were boarding a bus and heading for Ottawa. We spent the night at the Ottawa YMCA and the following morning proceeded to the air force recruiting office." There they were told that they'd have to come back at a later date. Joe and Don's response was, "Take us today as we don't have the money to return again." The warrant officer in charge took a second look at the lads from the States. He wouldn't likely see a healthier, stronger pair of prospects for a while and the next day they were at Manning Depot in Toronto.

Joe trained at No. 12 EFTS at Goderich, Ontario flying Fleet Finch aircraft. He was then assigned to No. 5 SFTS at Brantford, Ontario where he trained on Avro Ansons. One day during his training his map flew out a window and Joe became utterly lost. With fuel running low he had to land in a farmer's field to ask directions. Despite this incident, he received his wings and a commission on 17 December, 1941. Most of the sixty or so graduates became pilots with Bomber Command and most of them would not return from Europe.

After spending Christmas with his family, McCarthy travelled to Halifax and embarked on the dangerous trip across the Atlantic to England. His ship was separated from their convoy during bad weather and proceeded on alone for eleven days before docking in Liverpool. When McCarthy and his fellow aircrew arrived at Bournemouth they were surprised that they had



Joe McCarthy (right) with his good friend Don Curtin two days after Don had been awarded the DFC in the fall of 1942. Sadly, F/L Donald Joe Curtin DFC and Bar was lost on a raid to Nuremberg on 25 February, 1943.

arrived before the rest of the convoy.

After gaining additional experience on Oxfords at No. 12 Advanced Flying Unit, P/O McCarthy completed his training at No. 14 Operational Training Unit. During his "training" at the O.T.U. he flew his first operation, a raid to Dusseldorf in a Hampden bomber.

On 11 September, 1942 he was assigned to No. 97 Squadron RAF at Woodhall Spa in Lincolnshire and began flying regular operations against the enemy. He was highly regarded on the squadron and awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, the citation reading, "On many occasions this officer has attacked targets in Germany. As captain of aircraft he has participated in sorties to the heavily defended objectives in the Ruhr and took part in the successful raid on Essen on a night in March 1943. He has also attacked Berlin three times and Italian targets on five occasions. Throughout his whole career, his conduct has set an example of high courage and efficiency to other members of the squadron".

While with No. 97 Squadron, Joe had met W/C Gibson who was stationed at a nearby airfield. Don Curtin happened to be flying with Gibson's squadron and he likely introduced Joe to Gibson. As Joe was completing his tour he received a telephone call from Gibson who told him, "I'm forming a new squadron. I can't tell you much about it except that we may be doing only one trip. I'd like you and your crew to join us."

Joe was excited about the opportunity but his crew were a bit cool. They had just beaten the odds and completed a tour of operations. However they all decided to follow their captain to the new squadron. On 31 March, 1943, the McCarthy crew made their first flight with No. 617, the squadron that would become known as The Dambusters.

After several weeks of intensive and dangerous low-level training, Joe very nearly was unable to participate in the raid itself. When he and his crew entered their aircraft "Q for Queenie" they found that the Lancaster could not be flown because of leaks in an engine's coolant system.

Joe and his crew then rushed over to "T for Tom", the spare Lancaster, only to find it virtually unserviceable too since the card giving the compass deviations vital for accurately flying the carefully charted route to the dams was not in the cockpit. The chances of navigating through the enemy anti-aircraft sites to their target were zero without it.

Again Joe left the cockpit, this time headed in a rage for the hangar where he was met by Flight Sergeant "Chiefy" Powell, the squadron's senior NCO. Fortunately, he was able to locate the missing compass deviations card.

Finally Joe was airborne, but he had taken off 34 minutes after the rest of his section. He was the commander of the squadron's second wave that was assigned to attack the third of the three priority dams targeted, the Sorpe.

Joe flew as fast as he could and was only about twenty minutes behind schedule when he reached the Sorpe Dam. But his was the only

aircraft of the five plane wave to reach the target. Of the four other aircraft, one was shot down and another was so badly shot up by flak that it had to abort. Another crashed into an electrical pylon supporting power cables and the fourth had to abort because it was flying so low that it bounced off the water and lost its bomb.

The Sorpe, because of its earthen construction, had no vertical wall to stop a bouncing bomb. It had to be attacked by flying along the crest of the 2297' dam wall and not at right angles to it as was done at the Mohne and Eder Dams. This necessitated coming over the top of a hill and closely following a steep slope down to the dam, using flaps to keep speed under control, dropping the mine, and then climbing out quickly as the hill rose on the other end of the dam. It was not until the tenth run over the dam that bomb-aimer Sgt. George "Johnny" Johnson was satisfied and released the bomb from a height of about thirty feet. The explosion sent a huge tower of water into the sky but when Joe flew over again he could see that the wall had survived although the parapet had been damaged.

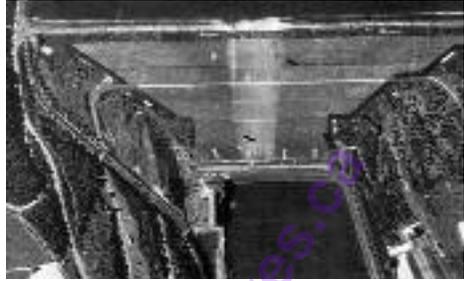
Although the Sorpe Dam wasn't breached as were the Mohne and Eder, the crest of the dam had crumbled for fifty yards and eventually the Germans were forced to draw off some of the capacity of the Sorpe Reservoir. Canadian pilot Ken Brown flew the only other aircraft that attacked the Sorpe.

F/L McCarthy was awarded the Distinguished Service Order for his efforts on the Dams Raid.

The Dams Raid was the first of many special operations that No. 617 Squadron would carry out during the war. Joe continued to fly with the squadron, serving under two of W/C Gibson's successors, including Leonard Cheshire, who had a high regard for his abilities, promoting him to squadron leader and making him a flight commander.

Joe was involved with the use of a new SABS bomb-sight that gave great accuracy from high altitudes. He flew a number of operations on selected, small targets in France that could be hit without causing damage to nearby residential areas.

No. 617 also flew operations as "Pathfinders", dropping target indicators at low level for the main force which would follow. On one occasion, McCarthy's reference point was a small building. Somehow his TI went right inside the building and he had to come around again to place another marker! In April 1944, S/L McCarthy was awarded a "Bar" to his DFC with the citation,



The Sorpe Dam after the raid. Note the damage along the crest. A slight leakage of water occurred through the expansion joints of the drainage system and this can be seen as well.



Harlo 'Terry' Taerum (left), Guy Gibson (centre-front) and Joe McCarthy (right) and other Dambusters at the Investiture where Joe was awarded the Distinguished Service Order.

"Since being awarded the Distinguished Service Order this officer has completed numerous sorties as captain of aircraft in which he has taken part in difficult and hazardous operations at low level. Squadron Leader McCarthy has displayed exemplary skill and courage which, combined with his unflinching devotion to duty, have contributed much to the success achieved".

Joe began his third tour with a raid to Toulouse on 5 April, 1944. On the night prior to the D-Day invasion, he flew with the squadron as they followed racetrack shaped circuits at 800 feet off Calais with three-minute turns, dropping special types of aluminum foil. This duped the German coastal radar into thinking that a large surface fleet was approaching Pas de Calais while the real force was approaching Normandy far to the west.

Joe was also involved in the dropping of the first 12,000 pound "Tallboy" bomb on the Saumar railway tunnel. The weapon was released from 10,500 feet and struck within 100 yards of the target, causing the tunnel to collapse. Joe dropped other Tallboys on submarine pens and a V-1 factory where he spent fifty minutes over the target. His 67th and last operation took place on 4 July, 1944 when he placed a Tallboy on a target near Criel, France.

Following a brief period with No. 6 Group Headquarters and another as the commanding officer of a fighter affiliation unit where he flew Hurricanes and Spitfires, S/L McCarthy was posted to the Royal Aircraft Establishment at Farnborough in November, 1944.



The Dornier Do335 was a tandem twin-engine fighter-bomber that did not enter service. It was said that while the performance provided an exhilarating ride for the pilot, the configuration prompted some doubts.



The Focke Wulf 200 Condor was a long-range reconnaissance bomber and transport aircraft that was utilized by the Nazis for anti-shipping operations.

Following the end of the war, McCarthy continued at Farnborough where he served with the "Foreign Aircraft Flight". This group had the task of locating a wide range of Luftwaffe aircraft types, ferrying them to England, and evaluating them. Some 75 ex-Luftwaffe aircraft were flown to Farnborough and approximately 50 others were delivered by sea. Joe flew numerous types including the FW-200 Condor long range anti-shipping aircraft, the big Arado 232 transport, the FW-190 fighter, the He-219 Owl, Germany's most advanced night-fighter, and the Do-335, Germany's most advanced piston-powered aircraft of the war. It had two DB-603 engines each with 2100 horsepower. One was mounted in the nose and the second in the tail. Joe also flew his first jet, the British Meteor EE-360. When his duties at Farnborough came to a close at the end of 1945, S/L McCarthy had flown fifty different types of aircraft.

Joe McCarthy remained in the RCAF and took out Canadian citizenship upon his return to Canada in 1946. He enjoyed a varied and successful post-war career that included commanding the Test and Development Establishment at Rockcliffe, Ontario during which he test-flew the Pterodactyl flying-wing glider being developed by the National Research Council. He went on to serve as Wing Commander Flying with No. 4 Flying Training School at Penhold, Alberta, commanding No. 407 Maritime Reconnaissance Squadron at Comox, British Columbia, and acting as the air operations officer for the United Nations for fourteen months in the Belgian Congo in 1962. In 1966 he became Base Operations Officer at Greenwood at the height of the Argus anti-submarine activity. His last trip in the RCAF was aboard an Argus on April 9, 1968.

Following his retirement from the RCAF, Joe moved to Virginia Beach, Virginia, where he worked in



Joe McCarthy in his office at Comox

real estate for a few years. During retirement he lectured at the USAF Air War College at Maxwell Air Force Base.

During the war, Joe McCarthy is said to have been a favourite of his fellow pilots. He was 6' 3" and weighed 225 pounds, becoming known on the RAF squadrons as "the big blond American." According to Harry Humphries, No. 617 Squadron adjutant, "He was a massive hunk of man physically, but really a gentle giant."

Outwardly, he had a personality that matched his physique. His colourful American expletives, freely lavished on all who crossed his path, were in marked contrast to the more austere profanity of the British pilots. But as the end of the war approached, he had adapted somewhat to the British way, being seen with a pipe, a walking stick and a dog on a leash. "If I'm going to be an officer and a gentleman," he said, "I'm going to have a crack at looking the part."

McCarthy hated bureaucracy and anything from ground staff that he interpreted as a lack of appreciation of the risks that the aircrew took almost every night. Prior to a second attempt by No. 617 Squadron to breach the Dortmund-Ems canal, he over-heard a WAAF officer remarking, "My God, I hope they get there tonight. The trouble the AOC's gone to over this." McCarthy silenced her with a snarled, "The hell with you and all the AOC's."



Joe at the theatre in Comox

Panda Bears and Nose Art

Joe's No. 617 Squadron aircraft carried three different nose art images with a common theme. Clarence Simonsen, nose art historian, author, and artist, knows of no other set of three images related to an individual pilot.

Each features a panda but the reason for this is not certain. Despite his large physical stature, Joe was described as a "gentle giant," so perhaps the images on the aircraft represent Joe himself.

However it is also known that Joe's Canadian flight engineer, Bill Radcliffe, carried a small Panda Bear tucked into his boot during every flight. His daughter understood that it was the mascot for the whole crew and wonders if the panda was carried because of the nose art or whether the panda actually gave rise to the nose art.

Either way, the images clearly show Joe McCarthy's connection to three countries. Within the four images can be found Canadian maple-leaves, the Stars and Stripes, the Union Jack, Winston Churchill's trademark cigar, and Franklin D. Roosevelt's trademark cigarette holder.



Nose art replicas by Clarence Simonsen



Dorothy Radcliffe, Joe McCarthy jr.
and Bill's panda bear

MINNIE SIMCOE

-No. 431 Squadron's Mascot

Minnie Simcoe was a hand-crafted doll who became the mascot of No. 431 Squadron RCAF. She was taken into battle by a number of different crews and always brought them home safely. No. 431 was nicknamed "The Iroquois Squadron" and had the motto, "Warriors of the Air." Nose art on their aircraft often featured the head of an Iroquois Indian. In some cases tomahawks were painted on the aircraft after each successful operation. The squadron is now No. 431 Air Demonstration Squadron -the renown Snowbirds.

During the last eighteen months of the war, the squadron was adopted by the City of Simcoe, Ontario and its citizens showed their support for the airmen's efforts by ensuring that they received comforts that were in short supply. A steady stream of cigarettes, chocolate, candy, gum, toothbrushes, toothpaste, and knitted garments were forwarded as a volunteer effort by Simconians. As a tribute to this support, the airmen painted the town's name on many of their Halifax and Lancaster Bombers.

The Simcoe Chapter of the Imperial Order of Daughters of the Empire took the relationship to an even higher level by sending the squadron a doll modelled after Princess Pocahontas. The identity of the IODE member who made the doll is not known. It seems that she was received with much enthusiasm by the aircrew on the squadron and became known as "Minnie-Simcoe." They took turns



Minnie Simcoe



"Simcoe Warrior" -a No. 431 Squadron Halifax

taking her with them on operations, likely to bring luck and hopefully ensure their safe return.

Minnie's operational record was recorded in the squadron's ORB (Operational Record Book) that listed the crews and other details of each days flying. The book records that Minnie first flew into battle on 2 November, 1944, a raid to



W/C "Marty" Mitchell with Minnie Simcoe

Dusseldorf. Details, generally including the name of the pilot and the particular aircraft she flew with, were noted for eighteen operations although it is believed that she likely flew some that were not formally recorded. During much of the war, Bomber Command aircrew were unlikely to survive eighteen operations and only a fraction survived their tour of thirty operations.

On 14/15 January, Minnie Simcoe flew with the squadron's commanding officer, Wing Commander Eric Martin "Marty" Mitchell, following which she was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.

On 31 January, 1945, Minnie Simcoe was screened from further operations (grounded) and presented to Wing Commander Mitchell who had received a posting to become the Station Commander at RAF Dalton.

Clarence Simonsen, a member of the museum, first heard about Minnie in the late 1980's through his research into the nose art that was painted on No. 431 Squadron aircraft. He expected to be able to locate images of the doll painted on some of the squadron's aircraft but could never find any. However he continued to be fascinated by the story of the doll, her relationship to the City of Simcoe, and the doll's connection with the airmen. Clarence knew that this history is important. In January 2008, he decided to try to do something to ensure that it would not be lost.

Through the museum, Clarence had come to know Marg Liessens of London, Ontario who has a special relationship with the Bomber Command Museum of Canada. The museum was created to honour the Canadians who served with Bomber Command and at its entrance, Canada's Bomber Command Memorial Wall lists the names of 10,659 airmen who were lost. One of these was Marg's father, Albert Dorey, who was killed in action while serving with No. 431 Squadron. Clarence assumed, correctly, that Marg would be interested and also knew that London was not that far from Simcoe. Perhaps she could do some research in Simcoe.

Marg took the idea from there and contacted her friend Christine Brutin in Simcoe, whom she had met during a visit to Vimy Ridge. Christine

then contacted Leighton Peach, a columnist with the Simcoe Reformer. Leighton published the request and although the creator of the original doll has yet to be found, Myrle Smith stepped forward and volunteered to make a Minnie Simcoe replica for the museum.

Myrle recalled, ". . . as a nine year old going to school one day and the teacher had written on the chalk board in big letters, 'We Are At War.' It was very sad." During the weeks she was making the doll Myrle never told a soul she was making it -not even her family. "When I read your article," she told Leighton Peach, "I thought it would be really cool to make it. The doll represents Simcoe and I'm a real Simcoe person." Myrle completed the new Minnie Simcoe on March 28, 2008. She was to be placed on display at our museum.



**Minnie Simcoe with Myrle Smith
and Marg Liessens**

Prior to this though, arrangements were made with today's No. 431 Squadron (The Snowbirds) to have the Minnie replica go flying with Major Rob Mitchell, the Snowbird Lead (no relation to Marty Mitchell but an intriguing coincidence) at the Rocky Mountain House Air Show. Following her flight, Marg Liessens presented the Minnie replica to the museum.

Following Canada-wide publicity generated by the Minnie Simcoe replica's flight with the Snowbirds, the original Minnie was located in a trunk in the home of W/C Mitchell's daughter, Kathy Mitchell.

The museum spoke with Ms. Mitchell and with W/C Mitchell's son, Peter Mitchell, a retired airline pilot who lives in Calgary. We learned more of their father's long and distinguished career with the Royal Canadian Air Force and that he has a very special link with our museum.

"Marty" Mitchell (C175) graduated as an electrical engineer in 1934 prior to becoming the 175th officer to join the RCAF in June, 1935. He received his wings in May, 1936. Mitchell spent most of the following six years training flight instructors at Camp Borden. During these years he flew ninety-nine different Fleet Fawns and Fleet Finches, accumulating a total of two thousand logbook entries for the Fleet types.

On 5 December, 1939 he made his first of sixteen flights in Fleet Fawn #264, an aircraft currently on display in our museum.

Posted overseas during May, 1943, Marty



Marty Mitchell

trained for operational flying with Bomber Command at No. 20 AFU, Nos. 22 and 23 OTU's, and No. 1659 Conversion Unit. He flew operations aboard Halifaxes and Lancasters with No. 427 and No. 434 Squadrons prior to becoming the C/O of No. 431 Squadron at Croft where he flew with Minnie Simcoe and completed his tour of operational flying.

Following post-war service with the RCAF, Marty Mitchell retired as a Group Captain in 1963, having flown a total of forty different aircraft types.

His DFC citation referred to W/C Mitchell as having, "completed numerous operations against the enemy in the course of which he has invariably displayed the utmost courage and devotion to duty." Other air force documents read, "During this officer's service career he has proven himself to be a fearless and courageous leader, and at all times has shown outstanding ability in all his work," "Since his commencement of operations, this officer has displayed determination, fortitude and exceptional tactical ability. Such targets as Hanau, Merseberg, Zeitz, [and] Ludwigshaven have been attacked with outstanding skill and precision, setting an inspiring example to all his squadron. Under his keen and capable guidance his unit has been welded into a strong and determined bomber force," and, "For his superb captaincy and airmanship, his undoubted courage and devotion to duty and his magnificent leadership of his squadron I recommend the immediate award of the Distinguished Flying Cross."

The culmination of this remarkable story occurred during the summer of 2009 when, with the cooperation of the Mitchell family, the real, wartime Minnie Simcoe doll went flying with Major Chris Bard and The Snowbirds at the Lethbridge Air Show and was placed on display at the museum.



Peter Mitchell with the Museum's Fawn #264



Peter Mitchell with Minnie Simcoe in the cockpit of the museum's Lancaster



Minnie Simcoe about to go flying with Major Chris Bard. It was her first flight with No. 431 Squadron in sixty-four years.

Ron Jenkins

-Ronnie's Lancaster is Still Flying

During the 1950's everyone in the City of Calgary and nearby towns knew of the Jenkins Groceteria Chain that dominated the business at that time. Ronnie Jenkins managed the family business but during the war he had been a Lancaster Bomber pilot. His story came to the museum's attention when Clarence Simonsen painted a full-size replica of "Lady Orchid," the nose art that Ronnie's Lancaster KB-895 had carried.

As preparations were made to display the nose art replica the remarkable story of Ronnie's aircraft came to light, including the fact that a major component of it was still flying.

Canadian Warplane Heritage's Andrew Mynarski Memorial Lancaster (FM-213) honours the story of Lancaster KB-726 and its crew on the fateful night of 12/13 June 1944. However, few know that this aircraft flies with the centre section from Ronnie Jenkins' "Lady Orchid."

This story of the relationship between Ron Jenkins, Lady Orchid, and Andrew Mynarski Memorial Lancaster was written by Clarence Simonsen.



Ron Jenkins

Henry Marshall Jenkins grew up on a farm in the heart of Prince Edward Island's potato country. As a teen he grew bored with the picking and sacking of the endless rows of spuds. For pure adventure, Henry came up with an idea of placing a note in each sack of potatoes, asking the recipient to write back to him, telling of the place they lived. When a letter arrived from a western town named Calgary, Henry was hooked and saved his money to purchase a one-way train ticket west. In June 1909, Henry stepped from the train and just two months later formed a partnership with store owner John Irwin. They opened "Jenkins and Crowfoot Groceries" at the corner of 9th Avenue 12th Street S.E., near the entrance to the Calgary Zoo.

Henry's only son, Ronald Henry Jenkins, was born on 8 July 1913. He grew up around the grocery store business while attending Earl Grey and Western Canada High School before graduating from Mount Royal College. In 1934, Ronnie joined Jenkins Groceteria as an inventory clerk and traveller. At that time the business consisted of a network of several stores, a bakery, and a wholesale grocery branch. The responsibility for the country stores fell on Ronnie.

At age 29 Ron left the family business to join the Royal Canadian Air Force, reporting to No. 4 Initial Training School at Edmonton on 18 April 1943. F/O Jenkins graduated as a pilot during October 1943 and was posted overseas. Following further training, he was posted to No. 434 Squadron on 21 December 1944. His crew was made up of F/O A.W. Savage, navigator; F/O R.J. Hines, bomb-aimer; F/Sgt N. McLean, wireless operator; Sgt. D.C. Foss, flight engineer; Sgt. T.B. Baird, rear gunner; and F/Sgt K. Moodie, mid-upper gunner and they flew Lancaster PA-225.

Then on 2 April 1945, the crew air-tested a brand new Canadian built Lancaster Mk X. Upon completion of the testing, Wing Commander J.C. Mulvihill informed Jenkins that the new bomber would become his personal aircraft with code WL-O. The crew now decided that "their" bomber needed a name and nose art painting. At first they named her "Wee Lady Orchid," based on the code letters. Later they dropped the "Wee" and she became "Lady Orchid." Pilot Jenkins painted the name in large white letters with a larger red capital L and O. The complete crew then shared in the painting of the Lady Godiva pin-up riding a bomb while holding two western style six shooters because of Jenkins' Calgary connection. She completed her first operation on 8 April 45, attacking the submarine pens at Hamburg, Germany.

F/O Jenkins completed a total of fifteen operations, five in Lady Orchid, before the war ended. Under his pilot position he painted fifteen white bombs and one red bomb for an aborted operation.

On 7 June 45, No. 434 Squadron left Croft, England, for the trans-Atlantic flight home to Canada, and for this return, two red Maple Leafs, were painted on the upper torso of Lady Orchid.

Rudy St. Germain of Timmins, Ontario served as an air gunner with No. 434 Squadron and it was his crew, piloted by Terry Coghlan of Sudbury, Ontario, that flew Lady Orchid home. It appears to have been a perilous trip. The logbook noted the 7 hour and 45 minute leg from St. Maugans, Cornwall to Santa Maria in the Azores as a "tough trip" and referred to "broken hydraulics" and "three engines." They were on three engines again on the 8 hour leg between Azores and Gander and then again on the final leg before landing at Dartmouth, Nova Scotia on 17 June.

During the flight, Rudy wrote the following words which Ron Jenkins considered a "Good Thought," and subsequently copied into his pilot's logbook, "Flying the Atlantic alone - because in spite of others - you feel alone, with the sun over you and nothing between you and the sea but this

man-made machine, a Lancaster, that once seemed so huge but is now dwarfed by the immensity of space; yet is winging its way confidently towards some known place on the other side of the world, the Azores, Newfoundland and finally good old Canada."

Following the end of the war in the Pacific, hundreds of Lancaster bombers were placed into in long-term storage in western Canada and Lady Orchid eventually found herself in Penhold, Alberta where she was turned over to War Assets for disposal. Ron Jenkins had somehow been keeping an eye on his old aircraft and on 12 April 1947, he arranged to purchase KB-895 for \$230. Ron then had some of the equipment from each crew station removed and shipped to each of his old crewmembers as souvenirs.

The bomber was then returned to War Assets who re-sold the Lancaster to a local Penhold farmer who had a scheme to turn it into a machine shop and shed. By 1952 the Lancaster had been raised up onto three cement columns, but the farmer had lost interest in his project.

During the early 1950's, over one hundred Canadian-built Lancasters were modified for post-war service in the RCAF. Shortly after conversion work was completed on Lancaster FM-213, a crew stalled the aircraft over the runway at Greenwood, Nova Scotia, lost control, ground-looped, and then the starboard undercarriage collapsed. When the inspection team checked the aircraft they reported repairs could be made but a replacement centre-section would have to be found. There were no other centre-sections in Canada according to RCAF records but Bud Found, who had been in the business of locating aircraft parts for the air force, recalled the farmer in Penhold and his plans to build a shed. A phone call was made and the farmer was willing to sell Lady Orchid. The largest railway flat-car in Canada was sent from New Brunswick to Penhold in order to carry the centre-section to Downsview, Ontario where KB-895's centre section was inserted into FM-213 during July 1953. FM-213 went on to fly ten years with No. 107 Composite Unit at Torbay,



Lady Orchid back in Canada in 1945.
Fred Bendus in the cockpit.



Lady Orchid on the farm



**The centre-section of Ron Jenkin's Lancaster
on its way to Downsview, Ontario**

Newfoundland, and today flies as KB-726, VR-A, known to all as the Mynarski Memorial Lancaster.

Ron's father had passed away a few months prior to the end of the war. When Ron returned to the family grocery business, he became president and general manager and shortly thereafter purchased control of the company. Under Ron's guidance, the business continued as a family-run entity to become the dominant force in Calgary's retail food business. In 1959 Ron sold the business to Western Grocers which entered a new stage of expansion under Ron's direction. Ron Jenkins was involved in a variety of Calgary-based businesses and played a leading role with community service organizations such as the Calgary Stampede, United Fund, Chamber of Commerce, and the Rotary Club until his death in 1976.



**The Andrew Mynarski Memorial Lancaster
approaching Nanton in 1989**

MAURICE BRIGGS

-F for Freddie -Calgary's VE Day Tragedy

Richard de Boer has had a life-long passion for vintage aircraft and their history. As a member of the Aerospace Museum Association of Calgary, he attended the inaugural meeting of the Nanton Lancaster Society in 1986 and since then has supported and contributed to the development of the Bomber Command Museum of Canada in numerous ways.

"F for Freddie" was a Mosquito Bomber. Its flew more operations than any other World War II bomber and, through a complex set of circumstances, the aircraft and its last pilot, F/Lt Maurice Briggs, have a remarkable connection with the City of Calgary.

An example of engineering ingenuity inspired by the challenges of war, the De Havilland Mosquito's all-wooden design was a major advantage during a time of acute shortages of light metal alloys. Most of the aircraft was made of plywood. The fuselage was a frameless shell made of balsa wood sandwiched between sheets of birch.

The sleek, Merlin-powered design, together with lightness and lack of any defensive armament or armour, allowed the Mosquito to travel at speeds in excess of 400 miles per hour to avoid enemy fighters. During much of the war, the it was the fastest aircraft in the sky on either side. The Mosquito could deliver the same bomb-load to distant targets as the heavily armoured, four-engined B-17 flown by the American Air Force.

The de Havilland Mosquito has been one of Richard's interests for decades, in particular this Mosquito known as "F for Freddie." His research regarding both the aircraft and pilot F/Lt Maurice Briggs has been exhaustive.



Maurice Briggs

“F for FREDDIE”

Calgary's V.E. Day Tragedy

by Richard de Boer

ECHOES OF HISTORY

The VE Day sounds of celebration, revelry and relief were given new life when the stirring base tones of two Merlin engines at full power caught the attention of Calgarians on the afternoon of May 9, 1945. One of their wartime adopted sons was home for a visit with a very special guest of honour; Mosquito LR503, known as 'F for Freddie'. This powerful, beautiful airplane, late of 105 Squadron, was the survivor of 213 operations over occupied Europe: More ops than any other allied bomber during World War II.

In one of the poignant and painful ironies of war, 24 hours later would see the crew dead and the remains of Freddie, a few bits of metal and smoking splinters, scattered across the airport.

Freddie's pilot that day was F/Lt. J. Maurice W. Briggs, DFM, DFC, and DSO. Just two years earlier, Briggs had left Calgary with his newly earned wings from #37 S.F.T.S.

Seated beside Briggs on his return to Calgary was F/O John C. Baker, DFC and Bar. Having successfully navigated them to Calgary, Baker



"F-for-Freddie" with (l-r) John Baker and
Maurice Briggs
[Globe and Mail]



Low and fast across the Calgary Airport on May 9, 1945 - the day after VE-Day
and the day before the crash.

[Glenbow Museum Archive]

could do no more than hang on and try to enjoy the ride as Briggs dove for the streets of downtown Calgary.

Those Calgarians who witnessed Briggs's flying display have never forgotten it. "Spectacular, exciting, frightening" and "amazing" are some of the words Neil Jonathan used to describe the spectacle more than fifty years later. R.C.A.F. staff working on the sixth floor of the Hudson Bay building recall having to look down to see the Mosquito streaking past their windows at over 300 mph.

While discussing the 'beat up' with a reporter later that day, Briggs admitted he didn't know how he missed the flagpole atop the eleven story landmark Palliser Hotel.



Just after landing at Calgary on May 9, 1945. Maurice Briggs, John Baker and Edward Jack pose in front of Mosquito "F-for-Freddie". Members of the public who bought war bonds in support of the 8th Victory Loan Drive were allowed to chalk their names on the aircraft. [Glenbow Museum Archive]



Hundreds of Calgarians came out to welcome Briggs and Baker and to see "F-for-Freddie" after witnessing the spectacular flying display that afternoon - which saw them flying below rooftop level in downtown Calgary. [Glenbow Museum Archive]

THE AIRPLANE

The Mosquito known as "Freddie" didn't start out life as 'Freddie' at all: For most of its life, "Freddie" was known as "Charlie". Before acquiring any name at all, the airplane began life as one of a batch of twenty-two B. Mk. IX Mosquitos built at de Havilland's Hatfield facility in early 1943.

LR503 joined 109 Squadron, Path Finder Force on May 28, 1943 at Wyton, Huntingdonshire where it was known as "Charlie" after being assigned the letter "C" as its individual identifier.

On June 21, 1943, LR503 took off on the first of its 213 combat operations. It was one of twelve Mosquitos assigned to mark targets in the Ruhr city of Krefeld for 693 heavy bombers.

On March 10, 1944, LR503 was transferred to 105 Squadron, stationed at RAF Bourn. 109 Squadron's "HS" code letters were replaced by 105 Squadron's "GB". Initially, LR503 retained its individual identifying letter "C".

In less than a year from its first combat op to Krefeld, LR503 racked up its first hundred ops. F/Lt. H .D. 'Bill' Riley DFC and Bar, a navigator with 105 Squadron, notes in his logbook on the night of June 3, 1944 that LR503, reached its 100th op with a flight to Calais to drop three red target indicators.

That same page in Riley's log book also records LR503's contributions to D-Day operations. At 02:55 on the morning of the 6th of June, Riley along with his pilot F/Lt. Cliff Chadwick took off to drop target indicators at Longues-Sur-Mer, where a battery of artillery covered both the Omaha and Gold beaches.

Riley and Chadwick made a second trip on D-Day with LR503 to St. Lo with three red target indicators. After this trip Riley remarked on the significance of this day in his log book with a note which reads "INVASION HERE 'D' DAY".

Another navigator with 105 Squadron, John Sampson DFC, flew several ops in LR503 in the autumn and winter of 1944-45 and notes that by this time, LR503 carried the individual aircraft code letter "F" with a bar above the letter. The bar designation came about later in the war when squadrons had more than 26 aircraft on strength and letters had to be assigned to more than one aircraft, hence the 27th aircraft became "A" bar.

John Sampson remarked that "At 105 we did not go in for 'Nose Art' or mission credits but an exception was made in the case of LR503 because of its unique history. I remember this being discussed on the squadron as no one appeared to know what a mosquito (insect) looked like. I believe that the assistance of the Station Medical Officer was sought."

From its 100th trip on June 3, 1944 to its 213th and last combat operation on April 10, 1945, to the Wehren marshalling yards at Leipzig, Freddie average just over one trip every three days.

When early in May a Mosquito was needed to fly to Canada to support the 8th Victory Loan Drive, Briggs and Baker were told to take F for

Freddie after its sister ship, "D Dog" failed to make the Atlantic crossing because of mechanical problems.

THE CREW

It had been a long war for Maurice Briggs. He joined the RAF in 1938 when he was just 17. At the start of hostilities on September 1, 1939 Briggs was an Air Gunner/Observer with 77 Squadron. His first taste of war came just days later when Whitleys from 77 Squadron flew on a 'Nickelling raid', dropping leaflets on cities in the Ruhr valley. Briggs completed his tour with distinction in September 1940 and was awarded a DFM.

In April 1942 Briggs was sent to #13 Initial Training Wing (I.T.W.) at Torquay to begin pilot training, where in the Livermead Hotel he met and befriended fellow student F/Lt. A.J. 'Alf' Smitz, DFC.

Briggs and Smitz were next sent to Canada to continue their training, first at #32 EFTS at Bowden, Alberta and then on to #37 SFTS at Calgary.

Beyond learning to fly, the time in Calgary was eventful for Briggs and Smitz. Being an affable and charming character, Briggs made many friends and dated a number of young ladies. Smitz took a more permanent approach, when on a weekend leave he met Anne Littleton in the Banff Springs Hotel. They were married three months later. To thwart her disapproving parents' attempts to prevent the wedding, Briggs helped plan a ruse before standing up as best man at the wedding. Briggs later became godfather to their first child, Peter Smitz who was born in London just before D Day.

On April 2, 1943, eleven days after the wedding, Briggs and Smitz received their wings in the Drill Hall of #37 SFTS.

With mailing addresses, wedding rings and pilot's wings in hand, it was time for Briggs and Smitz to return to England and to the war. Both men spent the balance of the war piloting Mosquitos: Smitz with 141 Squadron and Briggs with 1409 Met Flight where, with his navigator Baker, they flew solo daylight ops, gathering weather data for Bomber Command planners.

After completing 108 trips with 1409 Flight and earning a DFC and a DSO, Briggs flew his last combat op of the war on December 7, 1944. Over the next few months, he and Baker made several trips to Canada to ferry Mosquitos from the de Havilland plant at Downsview, Ontario back to England.



Training days: Maurice Briggs, Alf Smitz (at the wheel) and their colleague Brighouse, on leave from #37 SFTS in January 1943, en route from Calgary to Banff, Alberta, where Smitz met his future wife. That spring, the men returned to England and the war.

[A.J. Smith]

On May 5, 1945, Briggs and Baker finally joined up with F for Freddie when the pair was detailed to take the airplane to Canada in support of a war bond drive after their first assigned aircraft broke down enroute.

THE ACCIDENT

When Freddie and its crew arrived at Downsview on May 6, de Havilland supplied a resourceful engineer in the person of Edward Jack to look after the airplane's mechanical needs as they flew a series of half and one day stops across the country.

And so it was that on the afternoon of May 9, 1945, Calgarians thrilled to the sight of WW II's most accomplished bomber buzzing their city in a celebration to mark the end of the European war. Hundreds thronged to the airport to see this famous airplane and to meet its crew. For some, like Evelyn Powlan who had met him two years prior, it was a chance to reconnect with Maurice Briggs. For others, it was an opportunity to buy a bond and sign their names in chalk on the famous F for Freddie.

The next day Briggs and Baker were scheduled to fly Freddie on a triangular route over flying Penhold, 80 miles to the north, then south to the RCAF bases at Lethbridge and Medicine Hat, before returning to Calgary for the night.

When Briggs and Baker arrived at the airport, they found Edward Jack busy with the top cowlings removed from both of Freddie's engines. Their departure was delayed for an hour and a half by the mechanical problems.

Finally, just before 16:00, Jack declared the airplane fit to fly. As he stood talking to Briggs, he suddenly felt ill. Though he was scheduled to take the right seat for the trip that afternoon, Briggs suggested that he might be better off sitting this one out. Jack agreed and then climbed the stairs to the control tower to watch them take off.



**Edward Jack walking back to the terminal building as
"F-for-Freddie" taxis out for its last flight.**

[Harry McCaully]



May 9, 1945 - the day after VE-Day and the day before the crash. Briggs and Baker perform a victory beat-up of Calgary Airport. It was on an almost identical low pass 24 hours later that their Mosquito, LR503, "F-for-Freddie", hit the poles visible atop the control tower, shearing off the aircraft's port wing.

[Glenbow Museum Archive]

With a brisk wind blowing from the north, Briggs took off headed in that direction. As he had done several times the day before, Briggs turned back toward the terminal building and its rooftop control tower for a low altitude, high speed pass.

As the airplane got within 300 ft of the building, flying straight for them at near 400 mph, Harry McCaully, who was working in the tower, turned to his assistant Charles Hamilton and exclaimed "I'm looking down on him!" As McCaully related in 1993, "The airplane rose quickly; just making it above the tower".

Briggs took Freddie south and circled back for a second pass on the building and the few dozen spectators who had come to see them off. As he completed a figure 8 and headed north for Penhold, Briggs came back on the tower frequency, telling controller Peter Minchuk that he had spotted a car just pulling up and that he was going to do one more pass for the friend he saw getting out of the car.

Diving back to ground level, Briggs again pointed Freddie straight at the terminal building, pulling up to clear the control tower at the last possible moment. This time he cleared the building, but hit the steel anemometer tower and flag pole on top of the control tower.

Harry McCaully exclaimed "My god!" and ran across the room toward the stairs. Edward Jack had already left the tower and was on the stairs. He



Partly obscured by a telegraph pole in the foreground, this picture shows the Mosquito seconds after it hit the control tower, with the port wing folding upwards and breaking away. Owing to its high speed and upward trajectory when it hit the building, the aircraft crashed more than half a mile further on.

[via George Rynning]

later recalled feeling the building 'shudder' and hearing a 'thud'.

The impact with the metal poles sheared the port wing and horizontal stabilizer from the airplane. The upward angle and high speed carried the balance of Freddie and its crew over the 'H' huts of #37 SFTS and into a field almost half a mile from the terminal building. It struck at a shallow angle and exploded into flames, trailing wreckage and igniting the grass for over 300 yards.

The first people on the scene found Briggs and Baker face down, side by side, thrown clear from the wreckage, but ablaze in their gasoline soaked uniforms.

Briggs had just celebrated his 25th birthday the previous Sunday in Downsview.

Mrs. G. L. Williams ran the lunch counter in the terminal building. She found Edward Jack and poured him some coffee and brandy; then she and her husband drove him back to his hotel. Enroute, Jack told the Williams' how he had just missed death by what he called "blind luck".

Then, according to Mrs. Williams, Jack just kept repeating over and over, "They were grand boys".

Although she saw the airplane hit the metal poles, Evelyn Powlan didn't find out that Briggs and Baker were killed until a reporter interviewing

her about the accident confirmed their deaths.

Airport Manager Cyril Huntley telephoned the station commander Group Captain Irwin, then noted in his daily journal simply that "F for Freddie Crashed. 1620 M.D". (Mountain Daylight).

A fireman detailed to help with the cleanup removed a narrow 4 inch long strip of grey painted plywood and a patch of fabric 6 inches square from the crash site. That night he penciled on the fabric: "Wing fabric from 'F for Freddie'. Most famous World War II Mosquito dive bomber. Ripped off wing as it crashed and fell. May 10, 1945".

Two days later the Union Jack draped coffins, adorned simply with the crew's hats and a single rose each, were escorted by an honour guard of 100 airmen from the overfilled church, to the Field of Honour in Burnsland Cemetery where they were laid to rest.

THE ECHOES

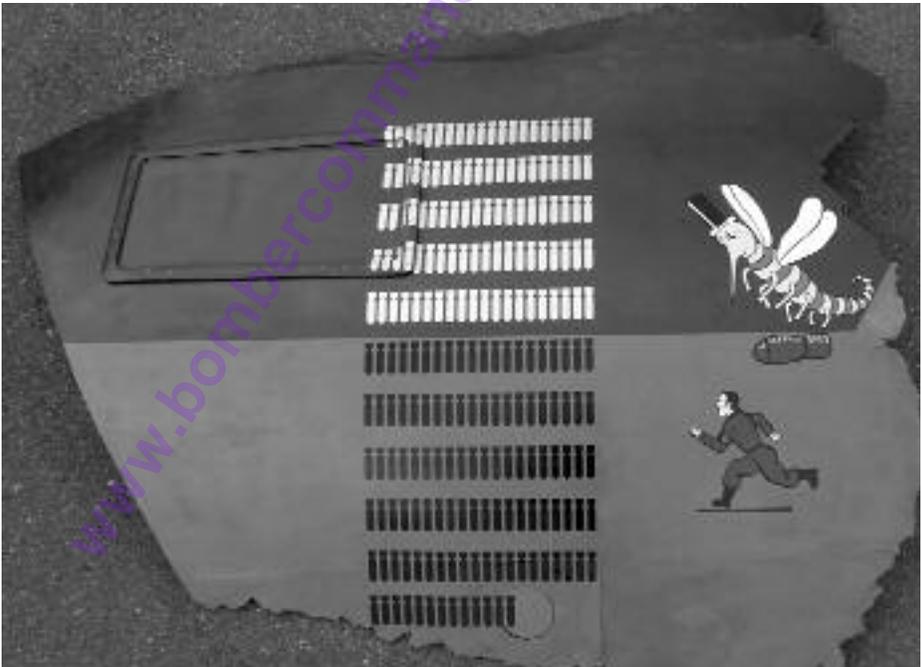
When I telephoned Anne Harder (nee Littleton) at her home in California where she had been living since 1948, we discovered that despite the separation of 35 years, she and I had grown up in the same neighborhood in Calgary and that we had gone to some of the same schools. I told her that the flying school where I earned my pilot's license now occupied the old terminal building and that when I started working for the Aero Space Museum that my office was also in that building. I told her that the museum now occupied the old Drill Hall and that it had a Mosquito in its collection; one of only 30 or so left in the world and that I would dearly love to see it restored as a tribute to Maurice, John and Freddie.

Anne asked if I ever went skiing and if I knew the Banff Springs Hotel. Then she began to tell me about being young, a little reckless and in love. She told me about a world at war and about the coming of peace after VE Day.



De Havilland engineer Edward Jack at the graveside of Briggs and Baker on Remembrance Day, November 11, 1973. Jack had originally been scheduled to go on the fatal flight but felt ill and was told by Maurice Briggs to "sit it out". Jack witnessed the crash minutes later from the control tower. This was his first visit to the graves in Calgary since the funeral 28 years earlier.

[Glenbow Museum Archive]



This "F for Freddie" nose art replica by Clarence Simonsen was painted on aircraft plywood formed into the shape of a Mosquito nose by Shane Chipchase.

JOHNNY FAUQUIER

-A Renown Canadian Bomber Pilot

Whenever one researches or reads about the Canadian contribution to Bomber Command, the name of Johnny Fauquier invariably appears. He appears to have “done it all” by playing significant roles in all aspects of the effort from instructing within the BCATP to becoming the officer commanding the famous “Dambusters” squadron.

After attending school in Ottawa, John Fauquier moved to Montreal where he became a bond salesman but livened up his life with fast cars and motorcycles. He then joined the Montreal Light Aeroplane Club and became a pilot. Taking the decision to fly for a living, he set up Commercial Airways, operating from a lake and supporting mining exploration in northern Quebec.

By the time war broke out, Johnny was a very experienced bush pilot with some three thousand hours in his logbook. He enlisted on November 1 1939, only three weeks after Canada declared war. The RCAF needed flight instructors at this time and Johnny soon found himself at Camp Borden and Trenton taking a flying instructors course. After a year of instructing, he was posted overseas in June, 1941.

Following a short period in England at a glider and paratrooper training centre, he was posted to No. 405 Squadron, Canada’s first bomber squadron and the first Canadian force to carry the attack into Germany. While returning in difficult weather from bombing Berlin on the night of November 7 1941, he was forced to land his Wellington on a non-operational airfield, and as a result was temporarily suspected to be a spy by the Home Guard.

By January, 1942 he had proven himself to the point that he was appointed a flight commander and in February became the commanding officer of the squadron.

No. 405 was re-equipped with Halifaxes during April, 1942 and by August 1942, Fauquier had completed his first tour of 35 operations



Johnny Fauquier

and was awarded the DFC.

Fauquier was then posted to RCAF Overseas Headquarters, promoted to Group Captain and sent to 6 Group Headquarters. On March 1 1943, he was made commanding officer of No. 405 Squadron which, after only a few weeks, was transferred from 6 Group to 8 Group, the Pathfinders. Fauquier acted as Assistant Master Bomber to Group Captain John Searby on the Peenemunde Raid against the German V1 and V2 Development facilities. He spent thirty-five minutes and made seventeen passes over the target as he assessed damage and directed the bombers. On August 23/24, Fauquier was Master Bomber on the opening operation of the Battle of Berlin when he coordinated an attack by 727 aircraft. He continued as C/O of No. 405 Squadron until the end of his second tour in January, 1944 after which he returned to 6 Group Headquarters.

After hearing that Bomber Command was looking for a replacement for Willie Tait as commanding officer of the elite No. 617 Squadron, Fauquier offered to have his rank reduced from Air Commodore (a rank that precluded him from operational flying) to Group Captain in order to accept the position. During December 1944, he was back flying operations as the new No. 617 C/O, a position he held until the end of the war. Under Fauquier's command, No. 617 continued to fly a variety of special and challenging operations and was the only squadron to drop the 22,000 lb "Grand Slam" bombs.

As usual, Fauquier took part in almost every raid, completing his third tour of operations a few weeks before the war ended.

Regarding Johnny Fauquier, Spencer Dunmore, author of a number of fiction and non-fiction books regarding the air war and Canada's role in it, wrote the following in his highly acclaimed book, "Above and Beyond."

He was aggressive and impatient, often brusque, sometimes downright rude, yet he could display considerable charm when it suited him. He flew an airplane superbly. And he got things done. Not for him the lighthearted approach of so many airmen, the breezy downplaying of danger, the casual assumption of risk. John Emilius Fauquier, destined to become Canada's leading bomber pilot, was under no delusions about the dangers of his profession, but he had total confidence in his skill and experience. Born in Ottawa of well-to-do parents, he learned to fly early in the thirties, becoming a successful bush pilot. On the outbreak of war, he volunteered. The Commonwealth Air Training Plan was being planned, and men with Fauquier's experience were in demand. Although impatient to get into combat, Fauquier bowed to the inevitable. He did a good job as an instructor and turned out pilots efficiently, although he could muster little enthusiasm for the job.



No. 405 Squadron RCAF Wellington at dispersal

At last, in June 1941, Fauquier got his wish: a posting overseas. It was a time of mounting casualties among the bomber squadrons. (Bob Dale, who graduated as an observer in December 1940, recalled that of his group of 42 novice navigators who reported to the RAF depot at Uxbridge, near London, only four survived their first tours.) Fauquier joined 405 Squadron at Driffield, Yorkshire, flying his first operation, to Emden, on Germany's northwest coast, in October 1941. Resourceful, totally dedicated to the task of getting the bombs on the target, he seemed to have been born for the job. Like Guy Gibson, he derived intense satisfaction from taking on the formidable odds of ops, and beating them time and again. His unique qualities brought him rapid promotion. In January 1942, he became a flight commander on 405; a month later he became CO, replacing Wing Commander Fenwick-Wilson, of Rock Creek, British Columbia, who had been in command since the previous August. It was a meteoric rise. Soon the name Fauquier was becoming well known in Bomber Command circles.

To his squadron-mates, Fauquier appeared to be a totally fearless individual who flew into danger without hesitation, never concerning himself about the risks - "dapper, cool-faced, steely-eyed as a swordsman," the Star Weekly called him. Fauquier must have squirmed. He himself always maintained that a man without fear was a man without imagination. The trick was to keep fear under control, and this Fauquier did supremely well. The

complete professional, he saw survival in his dangerous profession as a matter of percentages: crew teamwork counted for so much, constant vigilance for so much, intercom discipline for so much, and so on. He knew there was nothing absolute about it: a lucky 88 -mm flak shell could make it all count for nothing. Perhaps that was the spice, the flavour that proved irresistible to a man of his nature.

Like many individuals of powerful character, Fauquier was usually referred to by his surname only. There was only one Fauquier. Some hated him because he seemed unaffected by casualties -"tough break" was all he would say when an aircraft failed to return. Realist that he was, he knew there would be casualties, so what was to be gained by overreacting? When things went wrong, Fauquier's gaze froze, "and it looked as if it could penetrate solid steel," according to Lucien Thomas, an air gunner in 405 Squadron during the Fauquier era. Every op was a maximum effort as far as he was concerned, and no allowances were made. A totally inexperienced crew arrived on the base and the next day went off to Schweinfurt, fifty miles northwest of Nuremberg, on Fauquier's orders. The navigator of the crew, Allan Turton of Ottawa, recalls being shot down because, "typical of sprog crews, we were flying straight and level at 22,000 feet in an avenue of fighter flares." A German night-fighter fired his cannon into the Halifax's belly and, says Turton, "blew the middle out of the aircraft." Five of the crew escaped, two died.

There is not doubt that Fauquier drove his crews hard, invariably dissatisfied with their performance. They could always have done better, in his opinion. Edith Kup, a WAAF intelligence officer at Pocklington, East Yorkshire, one of the squadron's bases, remembers a harried -and inebriated -aircrew officer threatening to shoot Fauquier. He wasn't going to put up with any more of the CO's brow-beating, he declared, producing a service revolver in an unsteady hand. Fortunately for the war effort, he didn't carry out his threat.

There is no doubt that Fauquier was one of the toughest of commanders. He saw his job as getting every available aircraft on the target on every night of operations and had no patience with any incompetence or inefficiency that might compromise that goal. Although well read, he was no sophisticate. Edith Kum remembers him eating the flowers on his table at dinner at the Royal Station Hotel after a few drinks. Many of his airmen found his language salty, his manner crudely abrasive. The ground crews thought the world of him, because he thought the world of them and never took them for granted, always remembering to take them bottles of beer or other treats if they had worked particularly hard. Many considered him Canada's greatest

*** Above and Beyond: The Canadians' War in the Air, 1939-1945 © 1996 by Spencer Dunmore. Trade paperback edition published 2000. Published by McClelland & Stewart. Used with permission from the publisher.**

The citations for Johnny Fauquier's awards are as follows:

Distinguished Flying Cross (29 July, 1942)

Throughout the many sorties in which he has participated this officer has displayed the highest quality of courage and leadership. His ability and grim determination to inflict the maximum damage on the enemy have won the admiration of the squadron he commands. Wing Commander Fauquier took part in the two raids on Essen when a thousand of our aircraft operated each time. He is an exceptional leader.



Distinguished Service Order (31 August, 1943)

This officer is a first-class leader whose skilful and courageous example has proved most inspiring. His sterling qualities were well illustrated during an operation against Peenemunde one night in August 1943, and again a few nights later in an attack against Berlin. Wing Commander Fauquier has displayed boundless energy and great drive and has contributed, in a large measure, to the high standard of operational efficiency of the squadron (No. 405) he commands.

Bar To Distinguished Service Order (19 March, 1944)

This officer has commanded the squadron (No. 405) with notable success during the past nine months. He has frequently taken part in sorties against distant and well defended targets including several attacks on the German capital. He is a forceful and gallant leader whose outstanding ability and unswerving devotion to duty have been reflected in the fine operational work performed by the whole squadron. Group Captain Fauquier has set an example of the highest order.

Second Bar To Distinguished Service Order (1 June, 1945)

Since assuming command of the squadron (No. 617) in December 1944, this officer has taken part in almost all the sorties to which the formation has been committed. Early in February 1945, Group Captain Fauquier led the squadron in an attack on the U-Boat pens at Poortershaven. Photographs obtained showed that the bombing was accurate and concentrated. Since then, this officer has participated in a number of sorties during which the railway viaduct at Bielefeld, a railway bridge over the river Weser and a viaduct over a flooded meadow near to Ardbergen bridge were all rendered unusable by the enemy. By his brilliant leadership, undoubted skill and iron determination, this officer played a good part in the successes obtained. He has rendered much loyal and valuable service.

*bomber pilot. **

Reg Lane DSO DFC and Bar took over the command of No. 405 Squadron from Fauquier. In an interview recorded for the RCAF Memorial Museum at Trenton, Ontario, Lt. General Lane recalled, "I was with Fauquier as a flight commander for about three months. Then he left and I took over the squadron. Now Fauquier was a remarkable person, I think he had ice in his veins -that's the only way to describe him. He was as hard as nails and it didn't make any difference whether he was thinking of the enemy or getting into a fight in a pub in London, he just had no fear. He was a tough commander. He would not stand for any shortcomings in his crews. He had no compassion whatsoever. If you didn't measure up you were chewed out something fierce. Now he couldn't fire people because there was no place to fire them to, but he let it be known that he was not very pleased with your performance. But a fine man, I liked Johnny. I think the remarkable thing about Johnny was that he was a Canadian who went after 617 Squadron. Then he took 617 Squadron on some pretty horrendous raids. The man didn't



Johnny Fauquier with a 22,000 pound "Grand Slam" during his time as C/O of No. 617 Squadron



Lancaster at Dispersal by David Mould RCAF (Air Gunner -No. 49 Sqd.)



PER ARDUA AD ASTRA

ABBREVIATIONS

AC1 -Air Craftsman First Class
AFC –Air Force Cross
AFU –Advanced Flying Unit
AME –Aircraft Maintenance Engineer
AVM –Air Vice Marshall
BCATP –British Commonwealth Air Training Plan
CBE –Commander of the Order of the British Empire
CWH –Canadian Warplane Heritage
C/O –Commanding Officer
DFC –Distinguished Flying Cross
DFC and Bar –DFC followed by a second DFC
DFM –Distinguished Flying Medal
DSO –Distinguished Service Order
EFTS –Elementary Flying Training School
F/L –Flight Lieutenant
F/O –Flying Officer
F/S –Flight Sergeant
G/C –Group Captain
LAC -Leading Aircraftsman
MO –Medical Officer
OTU –Operational Training Unit
PFF –Pathfinder Force
P/O –Pilot Officer
POW –Prisoner of War
SFTS –Service Flying Training School
RCAF –Royal Canadian Air Force
RAF –Royal Air Force
SS –The Nazi’s Secret Service
VC –Victoria Cross
W/C –Wing Commander

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The families of the individuals whose stories have been included, and in many cases the individuals themselves, have been most cooperative in providing interviews, photographs, artifacts, and written material to assist with the development of the museum. This, in turn, has helped establish a wonderful archive of material in the museum's library that was used extensively in the preparation of this book.

Special thanks to those whose writing appears in the book -Lyle James, Margaret Dove, Murray Peden, Richard de Boer, Tamara Stecyk, Clarence Simonsen, Don Currie, Cliff Black, Ron Groeneveld, Spencer Dunmore, Tom Smith, David Spinks, Al Hymers, Tim Mols, Bernie Hazelton, Harry Addison, Norm Sharratt, Bert Clark, and Fred Burton.

Our archives include thousands of photographs taken by museum volunteers such as Bob Evans, Jim Blondeau, Brent Armstrong, Clarence Simonsen, Larry Wright, Kathy and Rob Taerum, and others. Many of these are included. The Glenbow Archives, Red Deer and District Archives, University of British Columbia Archives, and the Canadian Aviation Hall of Fame have provided photos as well.

We appreciate the co-operation of Stephen Snider in permitting us to include his artwork in Lyle James's story and that of Irma Coucill for allowing us to publish her drawing of Jock Palmer. Thanks to John Rutherford for permission to reproduce three of the museum's collection of his paintings.

THE AUTHOR

A geophysicist, teacher, and interpretive guide in the Canadian Rockies, Dave Birrell was a founding director of the Nanton Lancaster Society. One of hundreds of volunteers, he has been primarily involved with the development of the display material in the museum and with the research and organization associated with the museum's special events.

Dave is also the author of "Baz," the biography of Ian Bazalgette VC, "FM159 –The Lucky Lancaster," "Calgary's Mountain Panorama," "Fifty Roadside Panoramas in the Canadian Rockies," and "www.peakfinder.com."



**Dave Birrell (left) at the museum
with Deryck Bazalgette**