

**the**

# OBSERVAIR

**Ottawa Chapter Newsletter  
Canadian Aviation Historical Society**



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**February 2016**

## CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

107 years ago this month, J.A.D. McCurdy took to the air in the *Silver Dart*, accomplishing the first powered flight in Canada. This achievement was made possible by the work done by Alexander Graham Bell and the Aerial Experiment Association (which comprised of Bell, McCurdy, Frederick W. "Casey" Baldwin, Glenn Curtiss, and Thomas Selfridge).

While searching for films for our film night, I stumbled across an animated short film from the National Film Board of Canada called *The Balgonie Birdman* [https://www.nfb.ca/film/balgonie\\_birdman](https://www.nfb.ca/film/balgonie_birdman) that quite humorously told the story of another early Canadian aviator. His name was William Wallace Gibson, and he not only built the first successful Canadian aircraft engine, but he also built and flew two aircraft of his own design. The first aircraft was called the *Gibson Twin-plane*, which flew on September 8, 1910 near Victoria, British Columbia. The second was called the *Gibson Multi-plane*, which flew on August 12, 1911 near Calgary, Alberta. Both aircraft would be wrecked in crashes, and Gibson would return to his pre-aviation career; mining. Gibson's story is just one of many stories in Canada's rich aviation heritage.

Last month, in the January issue of *the Observair*, we included a photo from Jan Jasinski; in this issue we welcome more new photo contributors to our YOWza photopage. John Buffam, Will Clermont and Ben Senior join Jasinski as avid plane spotters and talented photographers who are capturing much of the exciting activity at the Macdonald-Cartier International Airport (MCIA). To see more of their excellent work, please check out their websites:

John Buffam: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/ottsensfan/>  
Will Clermont: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/willc33/>  
Ben Senior: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/photosbybensenior/>  
Jan Jasinski: <http://www.photojan.ca/Aviation/>

One final note, it is that time of year to begin lining up speakers for next season. If any of our members would like to present their stories or research, or have any topic suggestions, please let myself or Don MacNeil know, and we will see what can be done.

*Kyle Huth*  
Chairman

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*The Observair* is the newsletter of the Ottawa Chapter, Canadian Aviation Historical Society, and is available with membership. Membership fees are payable in September. Any material for *The Observair* Newsletter should be directed to the Editor, Kyle Huth. All matters relating to membership should be directed to the Secretary/Treasurer: Mat Joost

Kyle Huth	Chairman/Editor
Mathias Joost	Secretary/Treasurer
Colin Hine	Newsletter Editor
Don MacNeil	Program convenor
Hugh Halliday	Official Greeter
George Skinner	Museum Liaison
Erin Gregory	Research Group
Bill Clark	Refreshments

## PAST MEETING – Canadian Aviation Documentary Film Night

On Thursday, 28 January 2016, 39 members and their guests were in attendance to see the Canadian Aviation Documentary Film night; however, due to a burnt out bulb in the Museum's projector, we could not watch the films I had selected. Hopefully, we'll be able to watch some of the films in the future. Thankfully, Nick Wolochatiuk came to the rescue, and was able to treat us to some of his aviation-themed TriviAir. (Look for some of his trivia in upcoming issues of *the Observair*). Nick got everyone warmed up with easy questions like, "name an airliner we'd flown in" and "name a tail dragger we'd flown in," followed-up by trickier questions like "name a straight-wing aircraft capable of supersonic level flight" and "name every Grumman 'cat'." His questions prompted some great stories from the audience, including one about an airliner demonstration flight at an airshow that was quite memorable! A big thanks goes out to Nick.

Kyle Huth



### RAMBLING THROUGH RECORDS – TSE-TSE

Excavating an archaeological site (*my basement*), I recently retrieved the text of an article which I sent to *Aeroplane Monthly* in 1982 about *Tse-Tse*. It was neither published, nor acknowledged. The full text is too long for this newsletter, but portions with Canadian content will fit and may interest our members.

*Tse-Tse* was a 57-mm gun firing a six-pound shell and developed in 1942 by the Molins Machine Gun Company as an anti-tank weapon. Increasing armour on German tanks rendered it obsolete, but the Royal Navy took over stocks for torpedo boats. Then, in March 1943, the Ministry of Aircraft Production approached de Havilland, inquiring whether it could be adapted to the Mosquito. The result was the Mosquito XVIII - basically a Mark VI, retaining its four .303-inch machine guns, but with the six-pounder gun replacing the four 20-mm cannon. The intended use was as an anti-submarine and anti-shipping aircraft.

Early development work was by No. 618 Squadron, but operational deployment ended up with No. 248 Squadron. *Tse-Tse* debuted on 4 November 1943. Mosquitos piloted by Squadron Leader Charles Rose and Flying Officer Alwyn Bonnett - a member of the RCAF from Vancouver - attacked a German trawler in the Bay of Biscay. The vessel put up a stout flak defence. Rose was hit and dived into sea.

The balance was restored on 7 November. Bonnett was patrolling the Bay of Biscay when he sighted a U-Boat one-half mile away. He dived from 1,500 to 200 feet and fired eight 57-mm rounds before the cannon jammed. Although his aircraft was damaged in one of its oil tanks, he damaged U-133 enough to force it back to port.

Biscay patrols were usually flown by mixed formations of Mark VI and XVIII aircraft. There were few targets that justified using the big gun. However, on 25 March 1944, U-976 was sunk by six-pounder fire while ordinary Mark VI aircraft suppressed German flak. Two days later, U-980 was damaged and forced back to port.

On 7 June, two *Tse-Tse* aircraft pounced on U-212. Flying Officer Bonnett fired one round before his gun jammed; he made dummy attacks to draw flak while his RAF comrade fired 21 rounds, scored six hits, and sent the U-boat retreating back to port.

This was the last victory for *Tse-Tse* over a submarine, but there were still a few attacks on shipping to come. On 10 June, a mixed force pulverized a German launch off Ushant. Unhappily, Alwyn Bonnett, flying HX903, was shot down and killed with his RAF navigator, Flying Officer A.M. McNichol.

Four of No. 248's Mosquitos attacked German minesweepers in the Bay of Biscay on 24 June; two were *Tse-Tse* machines, one piloted by Flying Officer William Cosman (RCAF) of Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, who was just beginning his second tour. On this occasion, he fired five heavy rounds but scored no hits. He was in action again on the 29th as 18 Mosquitos (two *Tse-Tse* but most armed with bombs) swarmed a heavily escorted tanker off Ile de Groix. The Special



Duty aircraft scored seven hits, but the vessel survived for a few days more. Not all strikes involved the big-gun Mossies, but on 9 August, Cosman registered five hits on a minesweeper which was set on fire. In the last week of August, Nos. 235 and 248 squadrons sent out 25 and 26 aircraft at a time to punish whatever enemy shipping was left in the Bay of Biscay.

The successful conclusion of the French campaign left Coastal Command with no further targets in the area. No. 248 flew its last Biscay sortie on 7 September; it then moved to Banff, Scotland, resuming operation of the 14th. It was now flying with several squadrons (Beaufighter as well as Mosquito) in a relentless campaign around Norway and Denmark.

*Tse-Tse* was increasingly being overshadowed by rocket projectiles. Assessing its effectiveness was complicated by the larger formations and varied weaponry in which it was employed. Moreover, the Mark XVIII Mossies were at a disadvantage *vis-a-vis* orthodox aircraft. Even if the six-pounder had the same wallop as a rocket salvo, the fact was that a Mark VI, having fired its rockets, still had four 20-mm guns and four .303-in machine guns to either strafe targets or engage enemy aircraft. The *Tse-Tse* aircraft had only the machine guns. In Scandinavian waters, encounters with the Luftwaffe were more common than had been the case around the Bay of Biscay.

*Tse-Tse* actions involved a diverse range of targets and results. On 30 October, Cosman (soon to be awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross) was piloting one of two such aircraft (accompanied by two Mark VI machines of No.235) that encountered a Junkers 88 near Sogne Fiord. The Canadian missed - the No.235 aircraft set it on fire - Cosman missed again. The other Mark XVIII got dead astern and blew the bomber to pieces. On 29 November a mixed force spotted a U-Boat off the southern tip of Norway but scored no hits. The RCAF was represented by Flying Officer Kenneth Wing of Battleford, Saskatchewan. Both Wing and Cosman were piloting Mark XVIII aircraft on 5 December when Nos. 143, 235 and 248 Squadrons descended *en masse* on shipping in a fiord, damaging three vessels while running a gauntlet of guns that lined the shore.

On 7 December 1944, No. 248 despatched six Mark VI and four Mark XVIII aircraft for a shipping strike. Other squadrons sent fifteen more Mosquitos; the Dallachy Wing put up forty Beaufighters, while No. 315 Squadron provided twelve Mustangs. Such a large force guaranteed Luftwaffe attention. Near Gossen, they were intercepted by about twenty Fw.190s. The ensuing battle lasted five minutes; the *Tse-Tse* Mosquitos piloted by Wing (PZ346-Z) and Cosman (NT225-O) were shot down. Both men are commemorated on the Runnymede Memorial.

*Tse-Tse* was last used in the Norwegian theatre on 15 January 1945. They were transferred to No. 254 Squadron. From 3 April onwards, based at North Coates, Lincolnshire, they were engaged in hunting small (280 ton) Type XXIII U-boats and midget submarines based in northern Holland. Attacks were few and inconclusive; following VE Day, the Mark XVIII Mossies were swiftly discarded; the last was scrapped in August 1947.

Hugh Halliday

## SABLE ISLAND REVISITED – PART 3

On 19 February 1945, Liberator VI 3715-F of No. 11(BR) Squadron departed Dartmouth, N.S. on an anti-submarine sweep and failed to return.

After extensive searches by RCAF units in Nova Scotia no trace of the seven crew members were ever found and they are listed as missing to this day. Two sleeping bags washed ashore on Sable Island, also the nose wheel, a gas tank, and two empty dinghies were found floating in the sea.

The conclusions of the RCAF accident investigation branch were: aircraft crashed or ditched in the sea somewhere in the vicinity of Sable Island due to reasons which are unknown.

The crew members of Liberator 3715 were:

J20673 F/L G.F.R. Apps, Pilot, Cannington, ON.  
J9122 F/L D. Hogan, 2<sup>nd</sup> Pilot, Rockingham, NS.  
J20873 F/L E.C. Ireland, Navigator, Edmonton, AB.  
J22857 F/O D. Murphy, WOAG, Sydney, NS.  
R140182 WOI H.L. Teasdale, WOAG, Edmonton, AB.  
R182753 F/Sgt W.R. Grant, WOAG, Saskatoon, SK.  
R65487 F/Sgt D.A. MacLellan, FE, Antigonish, NS.

The following paragraphs relate the searches for the missing men and the aircraft which began on 20 February and ended on 22 February 1945.

### **20 February 1945**

No. 11(BR) Squadron dispatched five Liberators on searches as follows:

Lib 3709-E, Pilot F/O K.P. Mulvihill and crew

Lib 3714-A, Pilot S/L P. Wilkinson and crew

Lib 3717-I, Pilot F/L J.M. Couse and crew

Lib 3720-Q, Pilot F/L L.H. Anderson and crew

Lib 3725-H, Pilot F/L P.W. Porter and crew

1800-0315 hours Liberator 3725 sighted a beached dinghy and a gas tank, took photos. Canso 9844-F of No. 161(BR) Squadron Yarmouth, NS, piloted by F/L R.J. Dutson and crew flown on search. RCAF boat M447 *Nictak* of Eastern Air Command Marine Squadron departed Dartmouth for Sable Island.

The air sea rescue flight of No. 121 Composite Squadron Dartmouth carried out a 6.15 hour search for the missing Liberator in Hudson BW707-V fitted with an airborne lifeboat and Hudson BW460-M4. Both aircraft returned reporting nil sightings.

Two Venturas of No. 145(BR) Squadron Dartmouth took part in the search. Ventura V 2161-O piloted by F/L D.E. Filer and crew and Ventura V 2207-Q piloted by F/O K.L. Nelson and crew. They sighted a nose wheel, an empty dinghy, sonobuoys and other debris floating in the sea.

All available aircraft of No. 167 Communications Squadron Dartmouth were sent out to search. These aircraft were: Norseman 2476-M, Digby 745-R, Hudson BW625, and Grumman Goose 382.

Canso 9819-F of No. 116(BR) Squadron Sydney, NS, took part in the search.

Two crews of No. 161(BR) Squadron detachment located at Sydney proceeded to the search-area located east of Halifax using two Canso aircraft borrowed from No. 116(BR) Squadron at Sydney as follows: Canso 9798-K flown by F/L W.M. Peters and crew of No. 161(BR) Squadron detachment. This crew assisted a marine craft which had located floating wreckage from the missing Liberator at 1800 hours GMT in position 4402N: 6012W.

Canso 9825-B flown by F/L L. Beattie and crew of No. 161(BR) Squadron detachment searched, but had nil sightings.

### **21 February 1945**

Liberator 3709-G of No. 11(BR) Squadron Dartmouth piloted by F/O H.S. Reinke and crew flown on search from 2355 to 1040 hours and was diverted to Sydney for landing and later returned to Dartmouth. Nil sighting.

Canso 11026-G of No. 116(BR) Squadron Sydney flown on search, but nil sighting reported.

On 21 February the search for missing Liberator 3715 was discontinued late in the afternoon by Eastern Air Command HQ. Two sleeping bags were found washed up on the beach at Sable Island. Also sighted in the sea were: one nose wheel; a bomb bay gas tank and two empty dinghies from the Liberator.

### **22 February 1945**

Although the search was officially ended the Squadrons at Sydney, NS, continued to search for one additional day utilizing two Canso aircraft as follows: Canso 9829-D of No. 116(BR) Squadron and Canso 9828-S of No. 161(BR) Squadron detachment piloted by F/O D.K. Game and crew. The results for both aircraft were no sightings.

*R.H. "Bob" Smith*



## Images of recent sightings at Ottawa's Macdonald-Cartier International Airport (MCIA) (YOW)



Atlas Air Cargo 747s have been visiting MCIA on a more-or-less regular basis (approximately every two weeks) since late last fall. The flights are believed to be delivering new currency from Ottawa's Canadian Bank Note Co. to South American countries. Boeing 747-477UF, N496MC (c/n 29257) was captured after dark on November 10<sup>th</sup> 2015. © John Buffam



The recently revived Eastern Airlines paid its first visit to MCIA on January 5<sup>th</sup> 2016 when this chartered Boeing 737-7L9, N278EA (c/n 28006) brought the NHL's Florida Panthers to play the Ottawa Senators. © Will Clermont



An Air Transat Boeing 737-8Q8, C-GTQG (c/n 30701) returns to MCIA on January 17<sup>th</sup> for an overnight turnaround before heading south again at 0600 next morning. © Will Clermont



This unusually configured Boeing 757-225, N757HW (c/n 22194) made an overnight stop on January 14<sup>th</sup> whilst *en route* to the UK. The aircraft is operated by Honeywell as a flying engine test bed. Test engines are carried on a pylon on the right side of the forward fuselage. © Ben Senior



Seen on February 5<sup>th</sup>, this Short SC.7 Skyvan 3, N161WW (c/n SH-1890) is owned by Win Win Aviation and leased to the Canadian Forces for use by the Skyhawks parachute team. © Rod Digney

## **SYDNEY BAKER – PART IV**

### **The Early Post-War Years**

In early 1947, I returned to flying club work as engineer-in-charge of the flying club at Weston. We purchased two airplanes from war surplus; a Taylorcraft Auster LD334, re-registered G-AHUM, and a Miles Magister, G-AHUK. Following these, we also obtained a DH Hornet Moth, G-AFDT and an Auster Autocrat, G-AJIT.

Around this time the American disposal unit was selling off some Fairchild Argus aircraft; four-seater, high wing monoplanes fitted with single Warner-Scarab seven cylinder radial engines. These planes were based at Silloth, southern Scotland. I visited Silloth to inspect the planes and found them to be in excellent condition. Although in a military utility configuration, I considered them to be perfectly suitable for advanced training, passenger work and joy-riding. We purchased ten of these planes and had them flown to Weston-Super-Mare where they were serviced and repainted. We had them re-upholstered by Rumpolds of London, specialists in the aircraft upholstery business.

Following inspections and test flights, the Ministry of Civil Aviation approved the American type certificate and issued certificates of airworthiness. The only registrations I have recorded or can recall are: G-AJPB, G-AJOY, G-AJOX, G-AJPD, G-AJPA and G-AJSA. These aircraft proved to be very popular and they were reliable and proved easy to maintain. Although we maintained a fairly busy schedule, flying clubs did not take-off as they were expected to. I believe the war aftermath and the general shortage of cash were the main reasons for this.

Early in 1947, we purchased two Walrus II aircraft from Number 15 Maintenance Unit at Wroughton in Wiltshire. The planes were flown to Weston-Super-Mare; one by Llewellyn Lisle our chief engineer and test pilot, the other by Bill Cuthbert. I knew Bill from when he worked at Jersey Airways in Eastleigh. After landing in Weston, Mr. Lisle reported that his aircraft had flown very left wing low and upon inspection it was found that a large quantity of water has seeped into the top left wing during its storage at Wroughton. Apparently, a Mr. Owen Roberts, who was I believe a director of Straight Corporation in earlier days had intended operating these aircraft for charter work in the Caribbean, but this venture never materialized.

One of the aircraft was serviced and submitted to the Air Registration Board (ARB - a group that had taken over responsibility for civilian aviation in Britain) for a certificate of airworthiness. Registration letters G-AIEJ were given to this plane but before a C of A could be issued a 48-hour flotation test needed to be carried out. It was decided to do the test at the Saunders-Roe air base at Cowes, Isle-of-Wight.

The flight to Cowes was on October 23<sup>rd</sup> 1947 with Mr. Louis as pilot and Colin Turner our inspector as engineer. Cowes being my home town, I went along for the ride. Flying time to Cowes was one hour, thirty minutes. We landed at the mouth of the River Medina where it flows into the Solent. It was not long before we realized that the aircraft was rapidly taking on water. Fortunately, it was high tide and Mr. Louis was able to taxi to the Saunders-Roe slipway on the eastside of the river. He was then able to lower the landing gear and taxi up the slipway and then onto dry land. It was then discovered that all the sea-cocks had inadvertently been opened. From the outside the sea-cock operate contrary to normal i.e. they "unscrew" (counter clockwise) to close. After the sea-cocks were drained and closed correctly flotation tests were completed successfully and we flew back to Weston on October 27<sup>th</sup>.

Now equipped with a current C of A, G-AIEJ undertook a few commercial contracts, one of which was to film the City of London while flying up the Thames. For this, the camera operator was positioned in the mooring hatch, in the nose of the aircraft. I believe another contract to film sailing events on the south west coast of England during the 1948 Olympics was undertaken and there was a third contract for some photographic work in Glasgow, Scotland. Unfortunately this aircraft was later wrecked in a severe storm and ironically a similar fate ended the life of the other Walrus II. This second plane was turned completely upside down during a terrific wind storm while it was parked outside the hangar at Weston-Super-Mare.

Later in 1948, I was transferred to Exeter Airport Limited, a subsidiary of Airways Union which had taken over from Straight Corporation following reorganization to eliminate all references to Whitney Straight who was by now Deputy Chairman of British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC).

Exeter Airport Limited operated RAF Number 10 Reserve Flying Training School. Wing Commander W.R. (Parky) Parkhouse was managing director, Mr. W.T. Dann the chief engineer, and I took up the role of deputy chief engineer. We were operating DH Tiger Moths followed by Chipmunks and an Avro Anson Mk. 21 for navigation and radio operator training.

Wing Commander Parkhouse was well known in this part of the country. He had operated an airfield and flying school at Haldon and had given flying instruction to Whitney Straight who gained his pilot's license at the age of 17. At that time he was living at his mother's home, Dartington Hall, Totnes.

In 1949, Exeter Airport Limited received a contract to operate Number 3 Civilian Anti-Aircraft Cooperation Unit (CAACU) at Exeter Airport. They were to use Beaufighters, Spitfire Mk 16 and Oxford aircraft, followed later by Mosquitoes and Vampire jets. This unit required little of my time; I was mostly kept busy with the Reserve Flying School where we were undertaking a major overhaul of the Tiger Moths. This became due after six hundred hours of flying time, if I remember correctly.

The chief flying instructor was Squadron Leader W. (Whispy) Turner. His flying displays with a Tiger Moth were really something to behold. He could actually fly a Tiger Moth sideways. Another display that was carried out, usually on air show days, was conducted by three instructors flying Tiger Moths. The three planes would line up in V formation in front of the hangar; the outer wing struts of the centre aircraft were tied to the outer wing strut of the aircraft on each side by fifty feet of one inch wide red ribbon. The planes would then taxi to the take-off position (note these planes had no wheel brakes only a heavy tail skid). Then they would take off complete several circuits of the airfield, land and taxi back to the hangar with the ribbons still attached.

I found the work at Exeter very interesting and relaxing. Mr. Parkhouse and Mr. Dann were wonderful people to work with. There was no pressure to complete a project by a certain time. The work routine became very enjoyable.

A complete overhaul of a Tiger Moth is particularly interesting, especially the reassembly process after all units have been overhauled. The process begins by levelling the fuselage longitudinally and horizontally on trestles. At this stage the landing gear is also installed, making the fuselage unit mobile. Correct rigging of the centre section by adjusting the struts and bracing wires is critically important as the rigging of the main-planes depends on the centre section being properly rigged. The centre section also supports the nineteen gallon fuel tank.

Boxing of the wings involves standing the top and bottom main-planes on their leading edges and installing the inter-plane struts, jury struts, incident flying and landing bracing wires. The boxed units are then lifted into place and the attachment bolts are installed.

The fuselage is checked once again to ensure it is level in both axes. Rigging can then be started using an inclinometer or rigging boards with a high quality spirit level. My personal preference is to use the inclinometer as this enables one to accurately read off the degrees and minutes. The inclinometer I use is an old military unit (Clinometer Field Mark III, manufactured by C.S.I. Co. Ltd. Cambridge, No. 6913 ↑ 1915).<sup>1</sup>

Rigging can be extremely tedious and time consuming, but it is always rewarding when a pilot returns from a test flight and tells one that it flies "hands off." Changing of either the incidence or the dihedral inevitably changes the other and likely the stagger as well. Stagger is the distance the top main-plane is forward of the bottom; measurement is taken at the outer inter-plane strut. The correct measurement for the Tiger Moth is 7.25 inches. We always try to get within 15 minutes of the desired angle for incidence and dihedral before an aircraft is test flown.



Sydney Baker's Clinometer Field Mark III No. 6913, Circa 1915 Mfr. CSI Co. Ltd. Cambridge. (C Hine photo)

<sup>1</sup> In 2012, Sydney Baker donated his clinometer to the Canada Aviation and Space Museum where it will be used by museum aircraft restoration staff. It is pleasing to see this device put to practical use rather than simply being displayed as a static artefact.

Flying controls (ailerons, elevators and rudder) are adjusted for correct movement and the cables for correct tension. The engine is now installed and connection is made. The aircraft is then subjected to a final inspection as well as dual inspection of flying and engine controls. The plane is test flown and adjustments are made in accordance with the pilots report.

Night flying exercises were carried out on one night of each week; this was always interesting. A flare path would be laid out using gooseneck flares in the form of a T or an L, depending on the number of aircraft to be flown that night. A battery operated glide-slope was used; the aircraft navigation and instrument lights were also battery operated.

Colin Hine

## AUTO AND AVIATION MEET PROVIDES FINE ENTERTAINMENT FOR LARGE CROWD

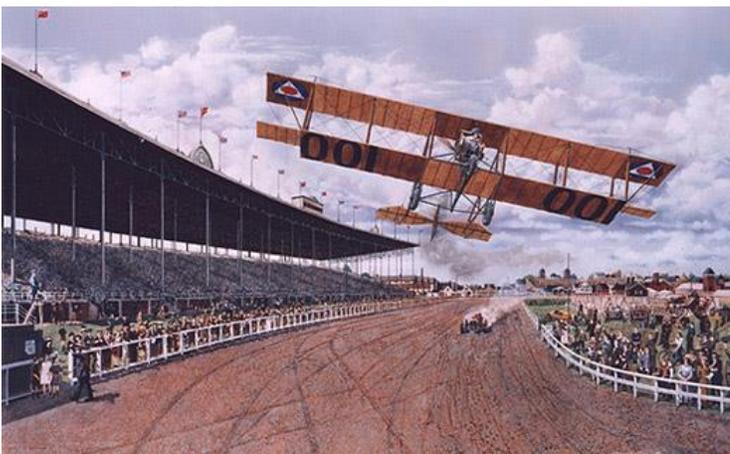
The newly-refurbished Lansdowne Park continues to attract its share of grumbling: not enough happening in off-peak hours; the need for more varied stores; why isn't there an automotive museum?; not enough separation of pedestrians and vehicles ....and so on. Maybe what's needed is the sort of event that took place away back in July 1918.

Reported the *Ottawa Journal* [8 July 1918], "The Great War Veterans' Association put the seal of greatness on its entertainment activities by the tremendous success of their automobile and aviation meet at Lansdowne Park on Saturday. Over 5,500 people were thrilled and entertained, including a large number of wounded Canadian soldiers who were there as the guests of Miss [Ruth] Law, and everyone voted the show one of the best ever put on in Ottawa. It was a great success financially, and the proceeds will be devoted entirely towards the Great War Veterans' home."



Ruth Law posing in her Curtiss Pusher - CAVM 15494

"Miss Ruth Law, the world's most famous aviatrix, was a whole show in herself, performing the hardest feats with the greatest of ease, and astounded the spectators with her daring. Some of her feats included looping the loop, spiral diving, and riding with the machine upside down. She did not appear to be bothered much by the wind, which was blowing fairly strong."



Ruth Law at the 1918 C.N.E. by Jim Bruce

"At the commencement of her part of the entertainment, Miss Law had her machine moved to the east end of the field, gave the engine a brief test, and then climbed in for her flight, which was got under way in quick time. She rose from the centre of the field, and flew in full view of the grandstand at all times. After being up about fifteen minutes, Miss Law dove down until the machine was almost even with the roof of the grandstand, and at the head of the stretch picked up Gaston Chevrolet [yes, *that* Chevrolet!], in his Sunbeam car, for their two-and-a-half mile race. The \$10,000 Curtiss biplane covered the two-and-a-half miles in 3.25, and Chevrolet, who was about one-quarter of a lap behind, made the distance in 3.33. At the conclusion of the race, Miss Law made a perfect landing in the centre of the field and was given a grand ovation by the spectators, just as she was when introduced to the crowd before commencing her flight."

Peter Robertson

## AN AIRMAN'S STORY

John "Jack" Mitchell Gilmour passed away in November 2015 at 101 years of age, while living with his daughter and her family in a Montreal suburb. Right until the end, though a bit hard of hearing, he maintained the firm bearing of an RCAF airman with a clear, powerful voice.

The following is his story, one which he wanted to remain private until after his death. During my 2013 interview with Jack, his daughter confessed that she was hearing some details of his war experiences for the first time, any of which could have become the plot of a novel or film.

Jack Gilmour was a young man of 26 when he joined the Royal Canadian Air Force in Montreal in 1940. He explained that he waited until the fall to enlist to ensure that his hay fever was over, as he wanted to be certain that he would pass the medical for air crew. Like most young men who joined the RCAF, his dream was to become a pilot. "Everyone wanted to be a pilot, but they had enough of those." After some basic training in Halifax and a stint guarding a munitions depot in the Maritimes, Jack went for further training as a bomb aimer, gunner, and wireless operator in Montreal. He then continued training at No. 6 Bombing & Gunnery School at Mountain View, near Trenton, Ontario.



In January 1942, he arrived in Lossiemouth, Scotland to continue bomb aiming training at a Wellington bomber Operational Training Unit (O.T.U.). He was eventually posted to 115 Squadron at Mildenhall, Suffolk. On September 28, 1942, his crew was sent on a mission to attack marshalling yards near Lingen, Germany. The pilot was Squadron Leader Robert Parsons, who had already come through one tour of 30 missions unscathed. Jack considered himself lucky to be with such an experienced flyer. The crew had already flown nine successful missions with him and their confidence was high. "We figured we had it made," he recalled.

That mission on September 28<sup>th</sup> was unusual in that it was a daylight mission. Intelligence ("some smart guy") reported that there had been no German aircraft patrol activity over the Zuider Zee (in Holland) for a few days and so the briefing officer told the crews they should be "all right." According to Jack, however, aircrew generally had a cynical attitude towards such briefings. He related that on one occasion, a weather-briefing officer had been reduced to tears because of the loud boos emanating from the disbelieving airmen after they had received a series of incorrect weather reports. On that fateful day in September, the briefing officer advised Jack's crew, "Fly right down as low as you can, go over the Dutch border into Germany, bomb it, and then come back. You shouldn't have any trouble." According to Jack, "He was a bloody liar!"

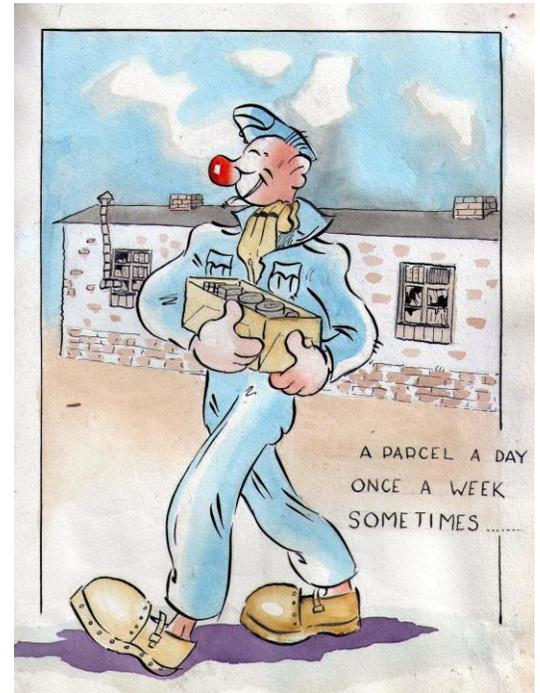
Wellington KO-J made its run without incident, but while returning to England over the Zuider Zee, a Focke-Wulf Fw.190 moved in for the kill, his cannons blazing. As the shells hit, the Wellington was set alight. Flight Sergeant Clough desperately fought the flames, while Jack Gilmour scrambled back from his nose turret and asked S/L Parsons if he should go back to help out. "Stay beside me," he was told, "I might need your help!" Suddenly, because the aircraft was flying so low over the sea, it pancaked onto the water. "It was like hitting a stone wall," recalls Jack. "The bulkhead hatch was blown out from the impact and I must have been ejected through the hole."

When Jack came to, he quickly realized that he was underwater and the Wellington was above him, pushing him down as it sank. "I knew it was time to get out fast," recalled Jack. He swam frantically to the surface and made for the rubber dingy that had automatically inflated on impact. The only other crew member he saw was tail gunner and fellow Canadian Sergeant Stansall, whom he managed to pull aboard. "I wasn't sure he could swim," said Jack. They sadly realized that of the 5-man crew, they were the only survivors. Soon they were picked up by a Dutch fisherman and then, once ashore, were taken into custody and stitched up. Jack and Sergeant Stansall spent a few days in a non-military prison before being transported to Stalag VIII B, later renamed Camp 344, in Poland, where they would spend nearly 3 years as POWs. For several months, Jack and the other POWs were manacled every morning by the guards. This was in retaliation for what had allegedly been done to German prisoners at Dieppe, some of whom had been found dead with their hands tied. Jack mused how a simple nail was all that was needed to unlock their shackles, but they always remembered to relock them before the guards came to remove them for the night. Eventually the Red Cross intervened and the use of manacles was stopped by both sides.

For Jack, one of the hardest parts of living in a POW camp was standing outside in the winter for roll call. No one could return to the barracks until the head count matched the official list. The arrival of Red Cross parcels helped camp life

immeasurably. Each one contained basic staples such as powdered milk, jam, tea, coffee, chocolate, and tinned meat. "Most of the parcels were very substantial compared to the parcels sent from England." Apparently, the Canadian parcels were the best of all and highly sought after. At first they had to be divided among four POWs, but later in the war, they were shared by only two prisoners. Jack was also lucky in that a neighbour from home regularly supplied him with cartons of cigarettes which arrived via the Red Cross. These were used as currency in the camp and many a jar of jam was procured from the guards who relished Canadian cigarettes. "We even got our photos developed outside the camp," remembered Jack. "In camp some of the guards actually weren't so bad."

Jack's camp was basically divided into two sections, one reserved for NCO airmen and another for "enlisted men". These were mostly Canadian soldiers captured at Dieppe. These "lower ranks" were obliged under the Geneva Convention to do manual labour. As an NCO, Jack spent most of his time sitting around and reading. It was excruciatingly boring, so after a year and a half, Jack made a key decision. As he reminisced, "You got fed up and when you get fed up, you'd do anything. I decided I'd go out and work." So, in the spring of 1944, Jack managed to swap identities with a Welsh Guard soldier named Johnny Butcher, who was quite happy to exchange places. "There was no trouble doing the switch," said Jack. "The guards didn't even look at the picture on our I.D.s. They only counted heads!" The only problem in Jack's plan was that he didn't know if he would be sent to work in a salt mine, a coal mine, or a stone quarry. And though he was selected for the quarry, he never regretted it. "We were there all day breaking stones with sledge hammers, but at least it was outside in the fresh air. We also got better food, because we had to work hard." The food he had been getting on the Air Force side of the camp was terrible, consisting mainly of black bread, mint tea, and weak soup that was made mostly from horses. He remembers, "You could find anything in the soup, like bones or teeth, and there were always fights about bread and fights about potatoes. If you didn't get your rations right, it was very easy to have a fight."



Doing manual work at the quarry was a break in the POW routine, but even so, after several months Jack decided that enough was enough. One evening, he and another prisoner squeezed between the iron bars of a window, dropped 15 feet to the ground, and made for the woods. Their fellow inmates helped cover up their escape by talking to the guards. They were free for two weeks and, at one point, even hopped a train. They spent three days in a farmer's hayloft, but decided to move on because they knew that if they were discovered, the Gestapo would shoot the farmer and his family. One morning, after sleeping in a cemetery, they awoke to find themselves surrounded by German soldiers. After being interrogated by the Gestapo and the SS, it was back to Camp 344.

All the time that Jack was pretending to be Johnny Butcher and working at the quarry, his sister in Montreal was panicking because she hadn't had a letter from him for months. About November, he decided to reclaim his true identity and the Welsh Guard returned to the section of the camp with the other army privates.

In January 1945, the Russians were getting closer, so the decision was made by the authorities to move the POWs further west. After they left, the camp was taken over by POWs who were going to be repatriated to England due to illness or injuries. For the next two to three months Jack and the other POWs were forced to march over 400 miles, spending nights in barns or in the open. They suffered from dysentery and terrible food, as well as cold weather, but eventually they were relocated in a camp in Germany. One morning, they awoke to find that their guards had vanished. Soon after, the Americans arrived, part of General Patton's 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. "We got out of there in a hurry," he said. They were soon airlifted back to the U.K. in Dakota transports to recover from their long and horrendous ordeal.

In the rush to evacuate Camp 344, Jack had to leave behind his War Diary filled with memories and mementos of his three years there. However, it was found by one of the new inmates, a Cpl. George McAlpine. He carried it all over Europe, to Vienna, Bucharest, and Odessa, until he was repatriated to England. He then mailed it to Jack with a note. Jack still has this well-worn book that had been supplied by the Canadian YMCA to all POWs. Its contents, especially the cartoons drawn by a New Zealander, Bill "Toad" Hughes, provide sometimes sad, sometimes humorous insights into the daily life of a German POW camp.

Soon after his liberation, Jack Mitchell Gilmour was promoted to Warrant Officer and, just before de-mobilization, he was commissioned a Pilot Officer. He returned to Montreal where he married, raised a family, worked until he was 75, and

played golf well into his 80s. The only RCAF reunion he took part in was at the Queen's Hotel in 1947. "A lot of them got too drunk," remembers Jack, "and they started breaking the furniture. It was a dead loss." He never attended another one. In 1995, Saltspring Island resident John McMahon published the story of his own experiences at Stalag VIII B in the powerful book, *Almost a Lifetime*. His book mentions several mutual acquaintances of Jack, and contains other cartoons by the New Zealander, Bill "Toad" Hughes. McMahon and Gilmour's stories are mirrors of each other.

In January 2016, just two months after his death, Jack's grand-daughter gave birth to a baby boy. They named him Jack.

Don Houston



## Pubs & Mags

**Canada's History (Dec/Jan 2016)** - 10pp on Canadians during the Battle of Britain

**Airliner World (Jan 2016)** - 7pp by Robert S. Grant on flying DHC-6 Twin Otters in some of the world's most challenging environments; 5pp on the history and development of Quebec City's Jean Lesage International Airport (YQB); 6pp on the Basler BT-67 turbine DC-3 conversion; many of the illustrations are Canadian-registered aircraft

**Combat Aircraft (Jan 2016)** - 6pp on the possible stay of execution for the RAF's Raytheon Sentinel R.1 surveillance aircraft, based on the Bombardier Global Express

**FlyPast (Jan 2016)** - 8pp on post-war RCAF Lancaster variants; 3pp on the temporary special nose markings of Canadian Warplane Heritage Museum's Lancaster VRA; 2pp colour profile of Conair Douglas Invader CF-BMS

**FlyPast (Feb 2016)** - 5pp on the nose art worn by the Canadian Warplane Heritage Museum's B-25 Mitchell; 6pp on the resurrection of the last Canadair C-54GM North Star by volunteers at the Canada Aviation and Space Museum

## SNOWBIRDS AND CF-18 DEMO TEAM SCHEDULE

The 2016 schedules for the RCAF's Snowbirds <http://www.airforce.forces.gc.ca/en/snowbirds/schedule.page> and the CF-18 <http://www.airforce.forces.gc.ca/en/cf-18-demo-team/schedule.page> demonstration teams have been released, and those shows that will be of interest to CAHS Ottawa members include:

### Snowbirds

June 11-12 - Borden, ON  
June 15 - Quebec City, QC  
June 25-26 - Trenton, ON  
June 30 - Gatineau, QC  
July 1 - Ottawa, ON  
July 30-31 - Oshkosh, WI, USA  
August 20-21 - Bromont, QC  
September 3-5 - Toronto, ON  
September 17-18 - London, ON

### CF-18 demo team

June 8 - North Bay, ON  
June 11-12 - Borden, ON  
June 15 - Quebec City, QC  
June 25-26 - Trenton, ON  
June 30 - Gatineau, QC  
July 1 - Ottawa, ON  
August 20-21 - Bromont, QC  
September 3-5 - Toronto, ON  
September 17-18 - London, ON

As well as the schedule, the RCAF announced the special markings that the CF-18 (yes, technically the CF-188) will be wearing. This year, the markings of CF-18 188761 will be designed to commemorate the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (BCATP).



# **NEXT MEETING OF THE OTTAWA CHAPTER CANADIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY**



## **FROM THE BURMA WOODEN WONDER TO THE SUPERSONIC NATIONAL DREAM**

**Brigadier General (Ret'd) W. "Bill" H. Casely CD**

**LOCATION: Bush Theatre, Canada Aviation and Space Museum, Rockcliffe**

**DATE/TIME: Thursday, 25 February, 2016, 1930 Hours**

**LANDING FEES: \$1.00**

**Meetings include guest speakers, films, slide shows, coffee and donuts**

**Visitors and guests are always welcome**