



**JOURNAL OF THE 458 SQUADRON COUNCIL**  
**Year 76 No. 280 August 2025**



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**Bill Wake – United Kingdom**



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**TAS, NT, ACT and New Zealand** – Looking for volunteers.

**\* Mail all communications for Squadron Secretary to Stephen Bruce (address above), and for the Squadron (and NSW Flight) Treasurer to Beryl Dodds (address above) \*\* Have you notified Editor Roland Orchard if you prefer to receive your newsletter by email? Are there others in your family, or circle of friends, who would like to receive a copy by e-mail? Please advise the Editor – see postal address above or email Roland at [editor@458raafsquadron.org](mailto:editor@458raafsquadron.org)**

***Contributions and reports for the next Newsletter #281  
are due to The Editor by 30st November, 2025.***

## **Vale - John “Bert” O’Leary. Co-President. Victoria Flight**



It is with great sadness that I report the passing of our Co-President John “Bert” O’Leary. Bert who turned 100 in January of this year passed away on the 16 July, 2025 at RSL Vasey Aged Care, Frankston, Victoria.

Bert had spoken of the time with 458 when he and his crew were despatched to the western approaches of the Gibraltar Strait to escort a surrendering U-Boat (German Submarine). Bert’s Wellington was fully armed on this operation. When Bert and his crew eventually landed, they all raced to see the U-Boat docking. All guns were pointed at the U-Boat and crew until the Captain formally surrendered. There was an air of relief that it all went off without incident. Bert stated that after inspecting the U-Boat, he concluded that it was a very small and dirty vessel.

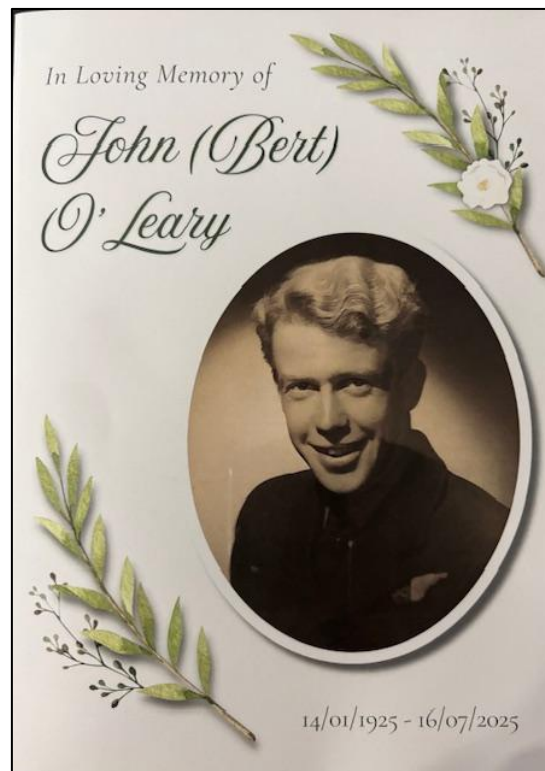
For those old enough to remember the Australian TV series Homicide starring actor Leonard Teale, Leonard was a pilot with 458 Squadron. Bert recalled Len starring in a stage performance of ‘French Without Tears’ which thoroughly entertained the

troops. Apart from the odd play, Bert said it was very boring on The Rock, as Gibraltar is known. Many of the service personnel visited a village in Spain, La Linea, very close to Gibraltar's border. Spain allowed Allied troops bearing Visas to enter their borders. Many a sordid tale came from visiting this Spanish town and Bert assured us that he was not a La Linea attendee.

Shortly after VE Day, 458 Squadron was stood down from operations. On the 9th June, Bert took part in the final parade where 458 Squadron was formally disbanded. Bert made his way back to Australia via the UK and disembarked at Sydney on the 28th November, 1945 and was demobilised from the RAAF on the 6th February, 1946, in Melbourne.

Bert married Moira shortly after the war and together had three sons, Paul, Mark and Philip. Moira passed away in 2019. Bert is survived by 3 sons, and many grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Jeremy, Chris and Roland Orchard represented 458 Squadron Association at Bert's funeral at Springvale Cemetery, Victoria, on 1<sup>st</sup> August. The 458 Squadron Banner was also displayed at the ceremony.

Our sincere condolences to the O'Leary family on behalf of the 458 Squadron Association. Rest in Peace Bert.



# **FLIGHT REPORTS**



## **United Kingdom Flight Report by Keith Wilkinson**

It's always special when someone comes out of the blue to help bring to life the people who served with 458 Squadron. Nothing does that better than when a personal photographic collection comes to light. And best of all when those photos show people informally and having fun with their mates.

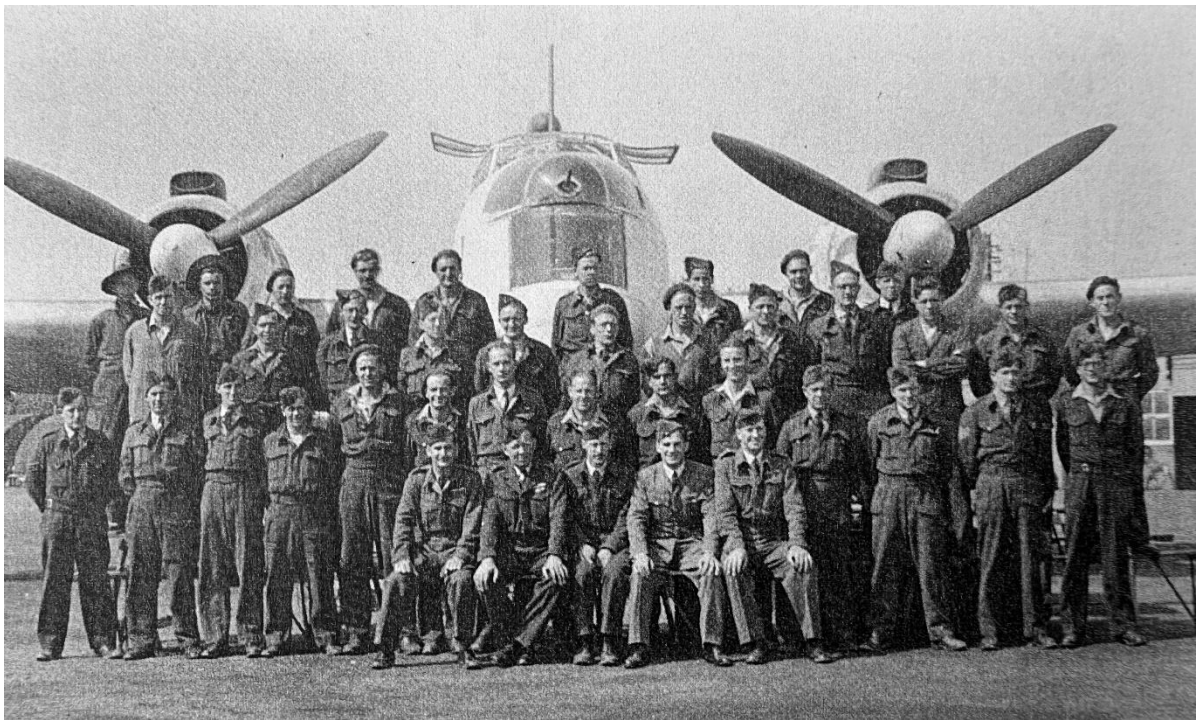
So, we're very grateful to Nigel Cook for getting in touch with us to share some pictures from his dad's precious wartime photo albums. Nigel would be delighted to hear from anyone who might recognise their own relatives on his photos. It could help him with research into his dad's wartime exploits, including his time with 458 Squadron.

Nigel's father was Sgt George Leslie Cook who died in his forties in 1971. He was known to friends and family as "Les" Cook. It's quite possible that his name will appear on other people's group photos. Les had quite a specialist role in the squadron, having been trained by the RAF as a "compass adjuster". He lived in Barnoldswick in the north of England. In civilian life he became a bank manager.

A portrait of Les in uniform shows him with a drum. (page 5) Nigel wonders if this drum - from the insignia on the side - has a link to 458 Squadron. Can anyone help with that query? He only remembers his dad playing the accordion and guitar. Another of his photos shows a band in Gibraltar in 1945. (page 6 top)







LES COOK GROUP PHOTO





TOP-LES COOK WITH MATES AND  
SCRUFFY THE DOG  
BELOW-  
LES COOK OF 458 FUN TIMES





Above- LES COOK WITH TED DIXON,  
GORDON CADMAN AND JACK DARWIN



Left- LES COOK  
OF 458 WITH  
TWO MATES





LES COOK AND PALS AFTER A DIP IN 1946

We hope to show more of Les's pictures in future newsletters. In the meantime, Nigel is hoping to dig out some sketches his dad did while in the RAF. These too could add a fascinating insight into life in 458 Squadron.

## BILL AND CHARLES....

I have chatted recently with our squadron Co-Presidents Bill Wake and Charles Humbles. Pleased to report both are doing fine and both are in good spirits. Bill is now the same age as Charles, having celebrated his 103rd birthday with relatives in May. Congratulations Bill!

"Give my regards to everybody!" said Charles. "I am soldiering on slowly. I'm knocking on a bit now, you know."



### Victoria Flight Report by Roland Orchard



Vale John Herbert (Bert) O'Leary.

Condolences to the O'Leary family on behalf of The 458 Squadron Association.

Rest in Peace Bert.

## ANZAC Day 2025

*The following is from Chris Wurr who spent ANZAC Day in Geraldton, Western Australia, with his family.*

We have finally returned to some sort of normality after our Western Australia north-west coast trip.

Our Grandson Hutchison, his Mum Karen, Heather and myself attended the Anzac Day service at Birdwood House,



the RSL's Geraldton headquarters. Hutchi's Dad had to stay back with the two Labradors at the caravan park!

It was a very sunny, low 30s° day.

The service was very well attended and the address was quite touching. Karen has given permission for you to use these photos of Hutchison.

Because Hutchi is travelling around Australia for all of this year, he was unable to take his 458 Squadron Association polo shirt to wear on the day.

And similarly, since Heather and I flew over to Perth to follow



them part of the way in a hire care, suitcase space restrictions precluded my taking my jacket.

However, I *did* sneak my polo shirt in!

My brother in Ballarat wore Dad's medals this year and Hutchi proudly wore the miniatures of them.

Hoo roo, Chris.



## Melbourne CBD

On a near humid 23C degree day (with rain in the forecast during the afternoon), sixteen of us marched to the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne. Earlier some of us attended the 5.30 am Dawn Service. One of the many highlights on this day was thinking about the very significant anniversaries this year: 110 years since the Gallipoli landings in World War 1 and 80 years since the end of World War 2. Within the hour after completing our march, Victoria Flight President,



Roland Orchard opened the meeting and called for a minute's silence in remembrance of recently passed Veterans, widows & members of 458 Squadron. He then recited the ode. Lest we Forget. The meeting was called to discuss the coming year's focus and activities and to conduct the 2025 AGM. The meeting place was the Terrace cafe by the lake in the Melbourne Botanical Gardens (about 10 minutes walk from our meeting point in 2024, it being just across Birdwood Ave from The Shrine). In attendance were John Boydell, Neil Flentje, Edwina Bell, Roland Orchard, Chris Orchard, Jeremy Orchard, friend John Marino and son Thomas. Apologies were received from Chris Wurr & family, Howard & Sally Bertram, Jane Foster, Rob Forgan. Those who marched were: Matthew Wullemmin and sister Jade, John Boydell, Mark O'Leary, grandkids Hamish, Darcy, Patrick, son John O'Leary, daughter Monique O'Leary, Neil Flentje, Edwina Bell, Roland Orchard, Chris Orchard, Jeremy Orchard, John Marino and son Thomas. This year we had 5 Air Force Cadets displaying the picture of the Wellington and carrying our Banner; Four from 402 Squadron in Watsonia and one from 416 Squadron in Moonee Ponds. Following beside us (with the onlookers) as we marched and meeting us at the end of the march were family members of the O'Leary clan.









## **New South Wales Flight Report by Stephen Bruce**

The year certainly has flown by. Our Sydney Anzac Day march was a rousing success being very well attended by over 20 descendants with an additional 8 attendees at our favourite after march venue, The Castlereagh Boutique Hotel.

As usual there was a great sense of the bond we all share with 458'ers especially the generosity of attendees donating funds for our squadron banner refurbishment. The banner will be present at Malta in this special year commemorating the 80th Anniversary of war's end in Europe.

We now have 46 confirmed attendees destined to unite in Valetta from the 11th October through 17th October.

The itinerary has been delicately assembled by Adam Bruce providing a well-balanced program of formal visits to ceremonial and airbase sites along with a wonderful array of touristic and social activities culminating in our formal dinner on Friday 17th October at a wonderful private restaurant.

If anyone has any further queries or is in need of any clarifications with travel arrangements and or mobility issues please contact Rob Wilkinson. Best Regards, Stephen Bruce.

### **458 SQUADRON REUNION JOURNEY LEADERS**

#### **Rob Wilkinson**

458 Member NSW

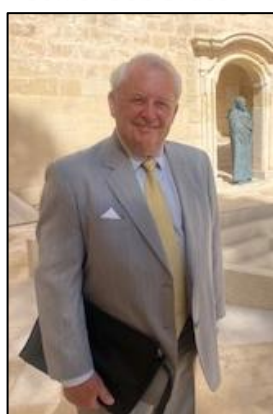
Son of Bill Wilkinson



#### **Stephen Bruce**

458 Member NSW

Son of Bob Bruce



#### **Adam Bruce**

458 Member NSW

Grandson of Bob Bruce



**On the night of October 20, 1941, a Vickers Wellington of 458 Squadron broke its wings at Mont-sur-Marchienne.**

1. A Wellington crashes into the place called *Pont-à-Nôle* in Mont-sur-Marchienne



*The wreckage of the Vickers Wellington after the crash at Pont-à-Nôle. Michel DUBUS Collection*



*A Vickers Wellington Bomber (IV) of 460 Squadron. Source: Australian War Memorial P00298011 RAAF (Royal Australian Air Force). Donor J. RICHMOND*



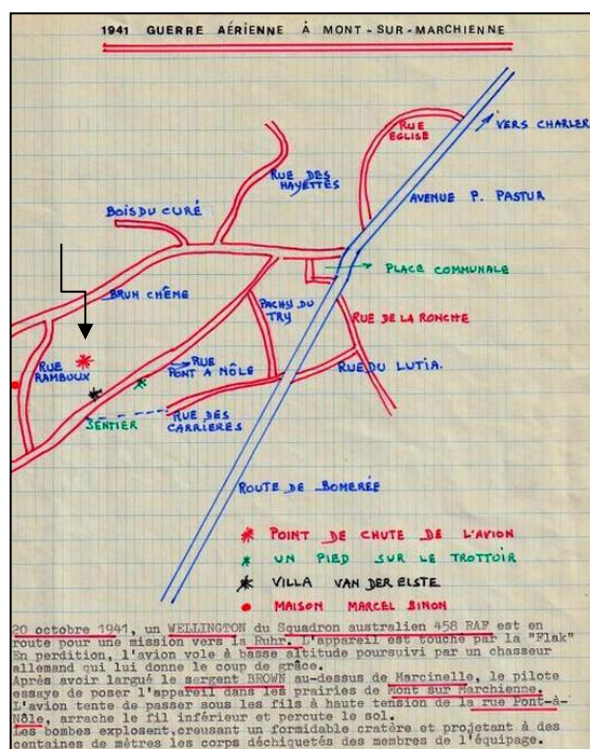
Although the crash of the Wellington of 458 Squadron has already been mentioned in the past <sup>1</sup>, consulting the Australian archives allows us to retrace with greater detail and precision the drama which took place in the skies over Charleroi during the night of October 20, 1941.

Several photographs of the plane wreckage and human remains were taken. Out of respect for the young crew members, we have chosen not to publish the latter. Despite the presence of German soldiers at the scene, local residents laid flowers to pay tribute to the crew <sup>2</sup>.

Some people recovered fragments of the Wellington, including the young Marcel DUBUS <sup>3</sup>.

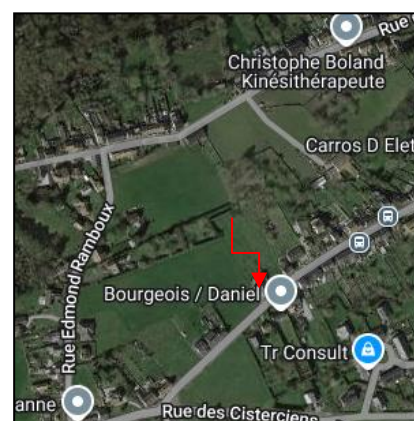


Fragment of the 21 cm bomber carefully preserved by Marcel. Michel DUBUS Collection.



The young Marcel DUBUS from Mont-sur-Marchienne, aged 18 at the time, drew up a map to show exactly where the plane went down between the Rue du Brun Chêne, the Rue Edmond Ramboux and the Rue Pont-à-Nôle. Michel DUBUS

On 20 October 1941, ten *Wellington* bombers of No. 458 Squadron RAAF Squadron take off from the British airbase at **Holme-on-Spalding Moor** in Yorkshire. Although fine, the sky is cloudy and visibility moderate. They target the docks of Antwerp, Rotterdam and Emden. Among the bombers engaged on Antwerp is *Wellington* Z1218 whose crew consists of the following members: Sergeants Percival BROWN (RAF) rear gunner, Andrew CONDIE (RAFVR) radio operator, Philip CRITTENDEN (RAAF) second pilot, Peter HAMILTON (RAFVR) pilot,



The place today.  
<https://www.realo.be/fr/rue-pont-a-nole-23-6032-mont-sur-marchienne/469033> site consulted on 03/11/2024

<sup>1</sup>ROBA (JL.), CHARLIER (R.), DE DECKER (C.), LEOTARD (J.), *The air war in the Charleroi region 1940-1945*, ed. De Krijger, Erpe-Mere, Belgium, 2003, pp. 140-143.

SEVRIN (A.), BONDROIT (F.), *Mont-sur-Marchienne: Memory in Images*, ed. Tempus Publishing, Gloucester, United Kingdom, 2002, T. 1, p. 104 and in a Bulletin of the History Circle of Mont-sur-Marchienne, no date Archives of Mr. Guillaume Anthoine.

<sup>2</sup>These details were kindly communicated to us by Michel, son of Marcel DUBUS.

<sup>3</sup>At the time, Marcel was responsible for delivering telegrams to the Kommandantur (Commandantur) located in the library of the University of Labor in Charleroi. In 1942, he was unfortunately requisitioned for the STO (Compulsory Work Service) in Germany.

Thomas JACKSON (RAFVR) front gunner and Pilot Officer David FAWKES (RAFVR) observer <sup>4</sup>.

THE "robust twin-engine Wellington" bomber, which entered service in 1938, was better suited to night raids due to its vulnerability in daylight <sup>5</sup>. From 1942 onwards, the aircraft was used to spot enemy submarines and ships.

In the *OPERATIONS RECORD BOOK*, although the take-off time for Wellington Z1218 is indeed indicated, i.e. 18:39, the flight details state " *No communication received after takeoff* » <sup>6</sup>. Bomber Z1218 failed to return to its air base on the night of 20-21 October 1941. This was the first loss of the squadron in operation, which was part of the 1st Group of **Bomber Command**. A post-war investigation and research concluded that the aircraft went down " *presumably as a result of enemy action* " <sup>7</sup> at Mont-sur-Marchienne.

Thanks to research in the archive files in London by Mr. James Fitzmaurice, grandson of Sergeant Percival George Brown, the only survivor of the crew, we can trace with greater precision what happened that evening. However, one question remains: what was the plane doing 90 km as the crew flies south of its target, the port of Antwerp?

Questioned for the purposes of the investigation after the war, Roger ANTHOINE, a witness from the Haies district of Mont-sur Marchienne, stated that the bomber, partially on fire, circled and flew at low altitude. He heard " *the engines cut out and start again as if they were running out of fuel* " and he thinks that the aircraft must have hit high-voltage wires on Rue Pont-à-Nôle <sup>8</sup>. When it crashed to

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<sup>4</sup> RAF (Royal Air Force), RAFVR (Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve), RAAF (Royal Australian Air Force). HERINGTON (J.) (406545), *Air War Against Germany and Italy 1939-1943*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, Australia, 1954, p. 187. The RAFVR began as a reserve of officers intended to train pilots.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.avionlegendaires.net>. Site consulted on 06/11/2024.

<sup>6</sup> OPERATIONS RECORD BOOK, p. 30 <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au> NAA A9186 Unit history of number 458 squadron – July 1941 to June 1945, vol.1941, p.165. Site consulted on 06/11/2024.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. German Air Intelligence Report October 20, 1941« *Feindliche durch Flak - 1. 2 mot. Flugzeug Muster noch nicht gemeldet, bei Charleroi* ». "1. Aircraft model 2 engines not yet declared near Charleroi ". N.B. Above this entry also appears a Vichers Wellington near Antwerp, the target for the night of October 20, 1941. Personal archives of Mr. FITZMAURICE.

<sup>8</sup> Story by Roger ANTHOINE cited in ROBA (JL.), CHARLIER (R.), DE DECKER (C.), LEOTARD (J.), op pp. 140-141.

**French:** « *...les moteurs couper et reprendre comme s'ils manquaient d'essence* ».

Marcel DUBUS, a witness, also noted in his hand drawing plan: "...L'avion tente de passer sous les fils à haute tension de la rue Pont-à-Nôle, arrache le fil inférieur et percute le sol. Les bombes explosent, creusant un formidable cratère et projetant à des centaines de mètres les corps déchiquetés des membres de l'équipage".

**English:** "The plane attempted to pass under the high-voltage wires on Rue Pont-à-Nôle, tore off the lower wire, and hit the ground. The bombs exploded, creating a huge crater and throwing the mutilated bodies of the crew members hundreds of meters away ". Michel DUBUS Collection.

the ground at around 10:30 p.m., the aircraft exploded in a field at the back of this same street <sup>9</sup>. Moreover, " *Nearby, all the houses were damaged by the explosion. A fur-lined boot was hanging from a roof. Elsewhere, a "blown open" parachute hung from a ledge .* " <sup>10</sup>According to another witness, Marcel Dubus, a Messerschmitt chased the aircraft and thus inflicted " *the "coup de grace "* <sup>11</sup>.

Since June 1940, the night fighter bases of Luftwaffe units had been located at Saint Trond and Laon-Athies, in the Aisne. To fill the gap between these two enemy air defense systems, the Florennes Air base was built in 1942 <sup>12</sup>.

According to Sergeant Percival Brown, the radio operator, Andrew Condie, was hit by anti-aircraft guns (FLAK) before the order to jump was given. Sergeant P. Brown was able to escape from the rear turret of the aircraft. He was the first and only person to parachute. Picked up in Marcinelle by resistance fighters, he was housed by Mr. Vincart on Rue Ry Oursel . Alas, a " *well-known local " collaborator "* <sup>13</sup>, named Sack , informed the Germans who arrested him on October 21 in Florian Montagne Street <sup>14</sup>. Said Sack hastened to follow the official communiqué of the German occupier according to which " *Whoever informs a German service of the place and time of the fall or landing of a German or enemy aircraft, and this with sufficient precision and speed (...) will receive a large cash reward "* <sup>15</sup>. The Journal de Charleroi of October 22 mentions two Belgians sentenced to death the day before by the " *Field Court of the*



**Sergeant P.G. BROWN.**  
**James FITZMAURICE Collection**

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<sup>9</sup> Mr. James FITZMAURICE received a metal part of the aircraft engraved with the time, 10:30 p.m., the location, Mont-sur-Marchienne, and the date, October 20, 1941. In a letter written to the Red Cross in his prisoner of war camp, Sergeant P. BROWN stated that he saw an explosion and that the entire crew presumably perished. However, he does not know where his companions are buried. Mr. FITZMAURICE's archives.

<sup>10</sup> Roger ANTHOINE cited in ROBA (JL.), CHARLIER (R.), DE DECKER (C.), LEOTARD (J.), op pp. 142-143. **French** « *A proximité, toutes les maisons sont endommagées par la déflagration. Une botte fourrée est accrochée à un toit. Ailleurs, un parachute « soufflé ouvert » pend à une corniche »*

<sup>11</sup> This information is typed under Marcel Dubus's hand-drawn map. Archives of Michel Dubus. We do not have German archives to verify this statement.

**French** "coup de grâce".

<sup>12</sup> <http://archives.aisne.fr> Site consulted on 11/30/2024.

<sup>13</sup> "(...) *a well-known local collaborator* ". Story recounted in an archive document 12b MREU – report p. 2 received from Mr. James FITZMAURICE.

<sup>14</sup> Information provided by his grandfather's letter to the Red Cross. Archives of Mr. James FITZMAURICE.

<sup>15</sup> Journal de Charleroi, Tuesday, October 21, 1941, p. 1. Charleroi Archives. « *Celui qui fera connaître à un service allemand l'endroit et l'heure de la chute ou de l'atterrissage d'un avion allemand ou ennemi, et ce avec une précision et une rapidité suffisantes (...) recevra une importante récompense en espèces »*

*General - Commander of the air territory of Belgium and the North of France for having (...) provided asylum (...) [ and] helped an English aviator <sup>16</sup>in his escape.*

After his arrest on 21 October, Sergeant Percival BROWN was first taken to Brussels for interrogation and then sent to " *Dulag Luft* " , an interrogation and transit camp for air force prisoners of war <sup>17</sup>located in Frankfurt am Main, Germany. Held in various camps for Allied airmen prisoners, Stalags VIII B and Luft III in Silesia (in present-day Poland) as well as Luft VI in East Prussia (present-day Lithuania) <sup>18</sup>, he was part, at the end of the war, of the forced march from Stalag 357 from Fallingbomel (Lower Saxony) to Lübeck on the Baltic Sea in northern Germany. Finally liberated on 4 May 1945 by Soviet troops, he was quickly repatriated as **Bomber Command** had mounted a vast operation to bring all prisoners of war back to England <sup>19</sup>. After years of separation, he was reunited with his wife, Nellie BERRY. Two children joined the family after the war. He died in March 1978 <sup>20</sup>.

## **2. The men of the Z1218 crew at the Charleroi cemetery**

Following the dramatic crash to the ground, the " *Five coffins will leave with military honours on the afternoon of Tuesday, October 21. They will be buried on the 23rd in the Charleroi cemetery* " <sup>21</sup>where, since the end of the First World War, British and Commonwealth soldiers, the vast majority of whom died of Spanish flu, had already been buried. Difficult to identify because of the explosion of the aircraft, the bodies of the five victims were buried by the Germans as " *Unknown* ».

After the Second World War, investigations were carried out to determine the exact burial location of the five crew members, as the indications left by the Germans did not seem to correspond with the data available to investigators. Therefore, on July 29, 1947, Captain AB FISH and Flight/Lieutenant D. COOK decided to exhume the coffins in an attempt to identify the bodies and give them a decent burial. Pilot "wings", bands corresponding to the rank of sergeant and a bright " *Australia* " on the shoulder helped establish the identity of PG CRITTENDEN <sup>22</sup>, while an officer/pilot stripe and an observer's badge helped identify DK FAWKES. Unfortunately, the other three coffins did not provide any clues for naming <sup>23</sup>. Although their graves are shared, individual headstones have been engraved with each of their names. In the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's military square of the cemetery, the five headstones are lined up next to each other.

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<sup>16</sup>Charleroi Journal, Wednesday, October 22, 1941, p. 1. Charleroi Archives. "*Tribunal de campagne du Général – Commandant du territoire aérien de la Belgique et du Nord de la France pour avoir (...) prêté asile (...) [et] aidé dans sa fuite un aviateur anglais*".

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.b24.net> 1. Site consulted on 07/11/2024.

<sup>18</sup>Letter from the International Committee of the Red Cross addressed to Mr. James FITZMAURICE on 10/18/2019.

<sup>19</sup> <https://magazineaviation.ca> Site consulted on 04/12/2024.

<sup>20</sup> Sergeant Percival Brown was born in London in 1920. He began his Air Gunner training on 25 March 1940. See Service record and <https://www.458raafsqadron.org> 2020-266-september.pdf , p.15.

<sup>21</sup>Comments by Roger ANTHOINE quoted in ROBA (JL.), CHARLIER (R.), DE DECKER (C.), LEOTARD (J.), op pp. 142.

« *Cinq cercueils s'en iront avec les honneurs militaires dans l'après-midi du mardi 21 octobre. Ils seront inhumés le 23 au cimetière de Charleroi* »

<sup>22</sup>Exhumation report Crittenden received from Mr. James FITZMAURICE.

<sup>23</sup>Exhumation report received from Mr. James FITZMAURICE



*"When You Go Home, Tell Them Of Us And Say, For Their Tomorrow, We Gave Our Today"*

*John Maxwell Edmonds (1875 -1958)*



Photo Gérard  
VANDERWEYDEN



**D.K. FAWKES**

M. James FITZMAURICE Collection

David Kimber **FAWKES**, 102969, **Pilot Officer**

- Born: 10/11/1916 in New Malden (Surrey). From Harefield, Middlesex. Bachelor's degree in economics.  
Enlisted: 17/05/1940 at Uxbridge, West London.
- Service: Royal Air Force Reserve Volunteer. Canada: 15/12/1940.
- 12 Operational Training Unit RAF Benson: 12/07/1941 for the training of aircrew on light bombers.
- 458 Squadron: observer.

Source: Royal Air Force Service record received from M. James FITZMAURICE



Photo Gérard  
VANDERWEYDEN



Photo from Facebook group [RAAF Deaths Photographic Archive of Headstones and Memorials WW2 by Spidqe](#)

Peter James Maxwell **HAMILTON**, 912385, **Sergeant**

- Born: 27/01/1919 in Goulbourn, New South Wales, Australia. From Sandringham, Victoria, Australia.
- Enlisted: 26/01/1940 at Uxbridge.
- Service: Royal Air Force reserve volunteer. Canada: 10/11/1940.
- 21 Operational Training Unit RAF Moreton-in-Marsh: 05/03/1941 for night bombing training on Vickers Wellington.
- Pilot: 02/02/1941.
- 103 Squadron: 28/06/1941.
- 458 Squadron: 27/09/1941 (Captain pilot).

Source: Royal Air Force Service record received from M. James FITZMAURICE



Photo Gérard  
VANDERWEYDEN

Thomas **JACKSON**, 995859, **Sergeant**.

- Born: 25/11/1914 in Middlesbrough, Yorkshire.
- Enlistment: 03/05/1940 at Padgate Camp n° 3 RAF Depot, England and 04/05/1940 reserve.
- Service: 10/10/1940 at No. 10 Signals Recruiting Centre in Blackpool for training as both a ground telegrapher and a flying radio operator/ gunner.
- 18/01/1941 4 Wireless 2 Signal School.
- 11 Operational Training Unit RAF Bassingbourn: to train aircrew for night bombing.
- 458 Squadron: 26/09/1941 Radio Operator/Gunner.

Source: Royal Air Force Service record received from M. James FITZMAURICE

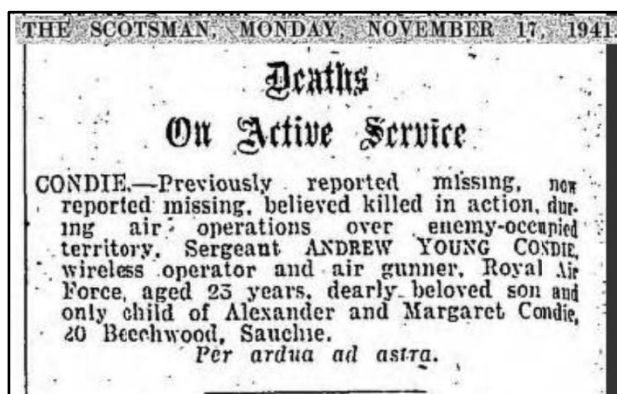


Photo Gérard  
VANDERWEYDEN

Andrew Young **CONDIE**, 968155, **Sergeant**

- Born: 27/12/1917 at Alloa in Scotland, from Sauchie.
- Enlisted: 15/09/1939 at Padgate Camp n° 3 RAF Depot, England.
- Service: 17/01/1941, 3 Wireless 2 Signal School and 05/06/1941 2 Signal School.
- 11 Operational Training Unit RAF Bassingbourn: to train aircrew for night bombing.
- 458 squadron: 24/09/1941 radio operator/ gunner.

Source: Royal Air Force Service record received from M. James FITZMAURICE



James FITZMAURICE Collection



Photo Gérard  
VANDERWEYDEN



P.G. CRITTENDEN

M. James FITZMAURICE Collection

### 1<sup>st</sup> RAAF killed in action

Philip George **CRITTENDEN**, 400410, **Sergeant**

- Born: 02/04/1921 in East Malvern, Victoria, Australia. From Melbourne, Victoria, Australia
- Enlisted: 20/08/1940 for the duration of the war + 12 months at RAAF Recruiting Centre No. 1 in Melbourne (Vic) in reserve. A journalist, he attended Kyneton High School under the direction of the University of Melbourne from 1935 to 1936. He then went on to study at Bradshaw and Everett Business College for a year, before joining the Temperance and General Mutual Life Assurance Society for two years.
- On 21/08/1940, he joined the No. 2 Initial Training School at Bradfield Park (NSW) and then, on 17/10/1940, entered the Elementary Flying Training School at Narromine (NSW).
- On 12/12/1940, Philip joined No. 2 Embarkation Depot RAAF at Bradfield Park where personnel waited before embarking for overseas postings or the British Empire Air Training Scheme. On 28/12/1940, he embarked at Sydney for Canada where he arrived on 23/01/1941. On 25/01, he was admitted to No. 4 Service Flight Training School in Saskatoon under the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan.
- On 23/05/1941 he was posted to No 1 M Depot in Halifax, Canada, then on 29/06/1941 to No 3 Personnel Reception Centre RAF Bournemouth in Great Britain, where the crews trained in Canada arrived.
- 21 Operational Training Unit at RAF Moreton-in-Marsh: 03/07/1941 for night bombing training on Vickers Wellington.
- 458 squadron: 14/09/1941 2nd RAAF pilot attached to RAF.

Source: National Australian Archives, 1939-1948, A9301, item ID5538726.

### 3. Great Britain and the Commonwealth in the Air War.

Twenty-five years after the Sarajevo assassination attempt, Germany's attack on Poland on September 1, 1939, triggered the Second World War. Poland's allies, England and France, declared war on Germany on September 3. Thus, Neville Chamberlain's hope for pacifism vanished.

From 1936 onwards, Germany's rearmament was a concern for Great Britain, which consequently decided to create *Bomber Command* intended for strategic bombing with squadrons made up of light and heavy bombers <sup>24</sup>.

Since 1937, British aviation has progressed more than in army and navy<sup>25</sup>. To meet the need for crews in the Royal Air Force <sup>26</sup>, in December 1939, Great Britain agreed with Canada, Australia and New Zealand on a British *Commonwealth Air Training Scheme* with the aim of providing trained crews ready to fight in Europe as well as in North Africa. The scheme provides training similar to that of the *Royal Air Force* for future aviators of the British dominions.

Canada, scalded by the losses of the First World War on the Western Front, was not in favor of conscription, nevertheless, thanks to this training program, it contributed to the war effort. It was now up to the personnel of the Royal Canadian Air Force to train enthusiastic young recruits from Australia, New Zealand, and Great Britain. These young people had previously undergone training in their countries at *Initial Training Schools*. and *Elementary Flying Training School* <sup>27</sup>They continue their service in a *Service Flying Training School* in Canada (see photo on the next page) and a few in Southern Rhodesia. There were also schools for air observation (*Air Observer School*), air navigation (*Air Navigation School*), bombers and gunners as well as for radiotelegraphy (*Wireless School*).

In 1940, they were directed, based on their results, towards training as pilots, observers for mathematics or radio experts, etc. <sup>28</sup>Generally, these young people had completed at least four years of secondary school. Their main fear was elimination during training. When they arrived on British soil, they had obtained their sergeant's stripes <sup>29</sup>.

At the start of the war, Australians living on English soil joined the RAF ( *Royal Air Force*) Force ) rather than return home for lengthy training, some went to England after joining the RAAF ( *Royal Australian Air Force* ) <sup>30</sup>and about 27,500 Australians joined the *Commonwealth Air Training Plan to become pilots, navigators/observers, gunners etc. Of these, 11,500 were assigned to RAAF squadrons while 16,000 joined RAF squadrons* . Approximately two years elapsed between enlistment and arrival in the theatre

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<sup>24</sup> <https://www.iwm.org.uk> . Site consulted on 04/02/2025.

<sup>25</sup> MARX (R.), *History of the United Kingdom* , ed. Armand Colin, Paris, 1967, pp. 346-349.

<sup>26</sup> <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au> . Site consulted on 02/05/2025.

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.canada.ca/fr/ministere-national-defense/feuille-derable/arc/2021/03/le-plan-d-entrainement-aerien-du-commonwealth-brit> Site consulted on 01/12/2025.

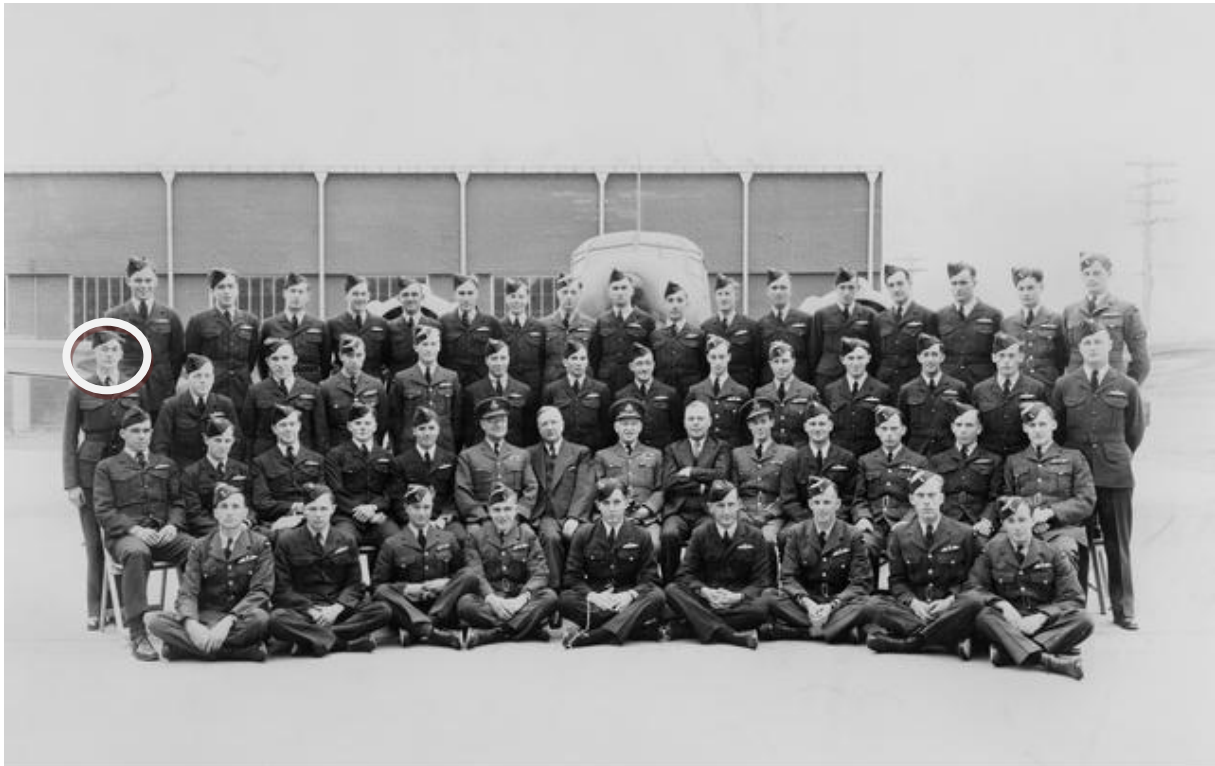
<sup>28</sup> [The PEACB training program: Juno Beach Centre](#) . Site consulted on 01/13/2025.

<sup>29</sup> <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au> . Site accessed on 05/02/2025.

<sup>30</sup> <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au> . Site accessed on 03/02/2025.



of operations <sup>31</sup>. The first Australian recruits, trained under the *Plan* , arrived in Great Britain towards the end of 1940.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

P04303.010

No. 5 Flight at No. 4 Service Flying Training School, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada. Philip George CRITTENDEN is 1st left, standing 3rd. Source: Australian War Memorial P04303010.

The *Operational Training Unit* (OTU) was the final stage of training before joining an operational squadron for crews of different nationalities selected for *Bomber Command* <sup>32</sup>. Unfortunately, during this final stage, bad weather, the inexperience of these young recruits or mechanical problems lead to many losses <sup>33</sup>.

Australians were called upon to join both RAAF *and* RAF squadrons . In 1941, the first two Australian squadrons, 455 and 458, were created within *Bomber Command*, one in June and the other in September, while two others, 460 and 467, were formed in 1942. <sup>34</sup> The 458 Squadron, formed in July 1941 in New South Wales. Part of the *Air Training Plan for intervention in the European theatre*

<sup>31</sup>GRANT (L.), *Australians in Bomber Command* , in Wartime magazine, Australian War Memorial , issue 93, p. 11.

<sup>32</sup> One in four crews came from the British Dominions. Who's Who In An RAF Bomber Crew | Imperial War Museums (iwm.org.uk) . Site consulted on 11/02/2025.

<sup>33</sup>GRANT (L.), *idem*, p.12.

<sup>34</sup>Of the 17 Australian Air Force (RAAF) squadrons that served in Europe during the Second World War, 8 served for *Bomber Command*, namely numbers 455, 458, 460, 462, 463, 464, 466 and 467. See <https://www.dva.gov.au> site consulted on 11/02/2025.

of operations, was then established in England at the "bleak and isolated" <sup>35</sup> air base of Holme-on-Spalding Moor in August of that year.



1942 - No 458 Squadron Officers' Mess at Holme-on-Spalding-Moor. Source: Australian War Memorial SUK10147.

*Bomber Command*'s objective in 1941 was to bomb at night without the guarantee of accurately hitting intended targets <sup>36</sup> such as fuel reserves or strategic transport facilities such as ports and railways. Finally, "between July and November 1941, (...) crews were suffering extraordinary losses for little gain." These night flights and the pace of operations put the crews under severe strain and generate stress. The heavy losses suffered are quickly made up to maintain the squadrons' full capacity. <sup>37</sup>

On the evening of October 20, 1941, ten aircraft from 458 Squadron, including that of the leader, Wing Commander Norman George MULHOLLAND, an Australian serving in the RAF, took off into the skies over England to carry out their first mission. The ports of Antwerp, Rotterdam, and Emden were the designated targets for that night <sup>38</sup>.

Victim of German flak, possibly also a night fighter according to some sources<sup>39</sup>, the Vickers Wellington Z1218 was declared "missing in action". The second pilot, Philip George Crittenden, thus became the first Australian RAAF pilot to die in action on the European front with *Bomber Command*. In 1942, No. 458 Squadron was sent to the Middle East to carry out maritime missions in the Mediterranean. The squadron was disbanded in June 1945 on British territory <sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> « (...) bleakest and most miserable spot I have ever struck, this place Holme. On top of a moor, miles away from anywhere (...) Flight Lieutenant William Baird, RAAF. Cité dans Alexander (P.) *We Find and Destroy: history of No. 458 Squadron*, The 458 Squadron Council, Australia, 1959. Cf. <https://trove.nla.gov.au>, <https://clik.dva.gov.au> et <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au>. Sites consultés le 11/02/2025.

<sup>36</sup> "(...) British bombers at the time lacked navigational aids (...)", GRANT (L.), id, Wartime magazine issue 93, p.12.

<sup>37</sup> GRANT (L.), id, Wartime magazine issue 93, pp.14-16.

<sup>38</sup> OPERATIONS RECORD BOOK, p. 30 <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au> NAA A9186 Unit history of number 458 squadron – July 1941 to June 1945, vol.1941, p.165. Site consulted on 12/02/2025. <https://vwma.org.au> and <https://raafdocumentary.com>. Sites consulted on 12/02/2025.

<sup>39</sup> We believe it may be a mix-up with another aircraft, the Vickers Wellington R1791, which was shot down by a night fighter at 2.46am on 31 May 1942. The aircraft crashed at Montigny-le-Tilleul near Mont-sur-Marchienne. Of the 5 crew members, 3 died and were buried in the Charleroi-Nord cemetery. The 2 survivors were captured and taken prisoner. <https://www.baaa-acro.com>. Site consulted on 14 March 2025.

<sup>40</sup> <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au>. Site consulted on 12/02/2025.



#### 4. Conclusion

During the five years of the war, 9,606 RAAF personnel, including 4,045 pilots and 2,875 radio gunners, graduated under the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan <sup>41</sup>. Australian fatalities in Bomber Command in Europe totalled 3,486 <sup>42</sup>. Two percent of all Australian pilots who flew in Bomber Command accounted for 23% of those killed in action <sup>43</sup>. During the period from August 1941 to January 1942 at Holme -on-Spalding Moor, 24 fatalities were recorded in No. 458 Squadron

<sup>44</sup>.



*The field in March 2025 at Mont-sur-Marchienne. Photo Claire Dujardin.*

**©Claire DUJARDIN**  
**Licence en Philosophie et Lettres (Histoire) (Master)**  
**Université Libre de Bruxelles - 1973**

**Editor-** Thank you Claire for your informative article about the first 458 Squadron Wellington Z1218 to be lost on operations with Bomber Command on the 20<sup>th</sup> October, 1941. Your passion toward Aussies who served in the First & Second World War in Europe is both heartfelt and inspiring. You have inspired me, five members of my family and James Fitzmaurice (relative of lone survivor Sgt. Brown), all representatives of 458 Squadron Association, to pay our respects at the grave sites of the crew of Z1218 at Charleroi Communal Cemetery, Belgium.

After the 458 Squadron Reunion to be held in Malta between 13<sup>th</sup> -17<sup>th</sup> October, we will be attending a memorial ceremony in the presence of local dignitaries, Belgian and Australian Armed Forces personnel and representatives from the Australian Embassy on the 20<sup>th</sup> October, 2025, 84 years to the day of the crash. On behalf of 458 Squadron Association, thank you Claire for organising this important ceremony.

<sup>41</sup><https://www.canada.ca>. Site consulted on 02/15/2025.

<sup>42</sup><https://clik.dva.gov.au>. Site consulted on 02/15/2025.

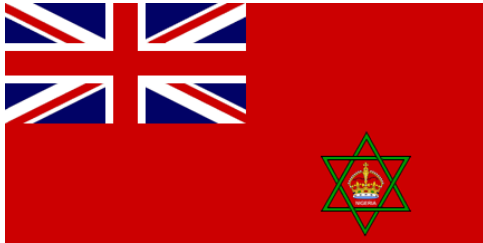
<sup>43</sup><https://les-aviones-de-legende.e-monsite.com>. Site consulted on 02/15/2025.

<sup>44</sup><https://www.458raafsquadron.org>. Site consulted on 02/17/2025.



## **FLIGHT REPORTS CONTINUED.**

### **Canada Flight Report by Adam & Cate Wagstaffe**



*The flag of Colonial Nigeria between 1914 and 1960 was a British Blue Ensign with a green six-pointed star, known as the Seal of Solomon, surrounding a Tudor Crown. (<https://www.fotw.info/flags/nq-qb.html>)*

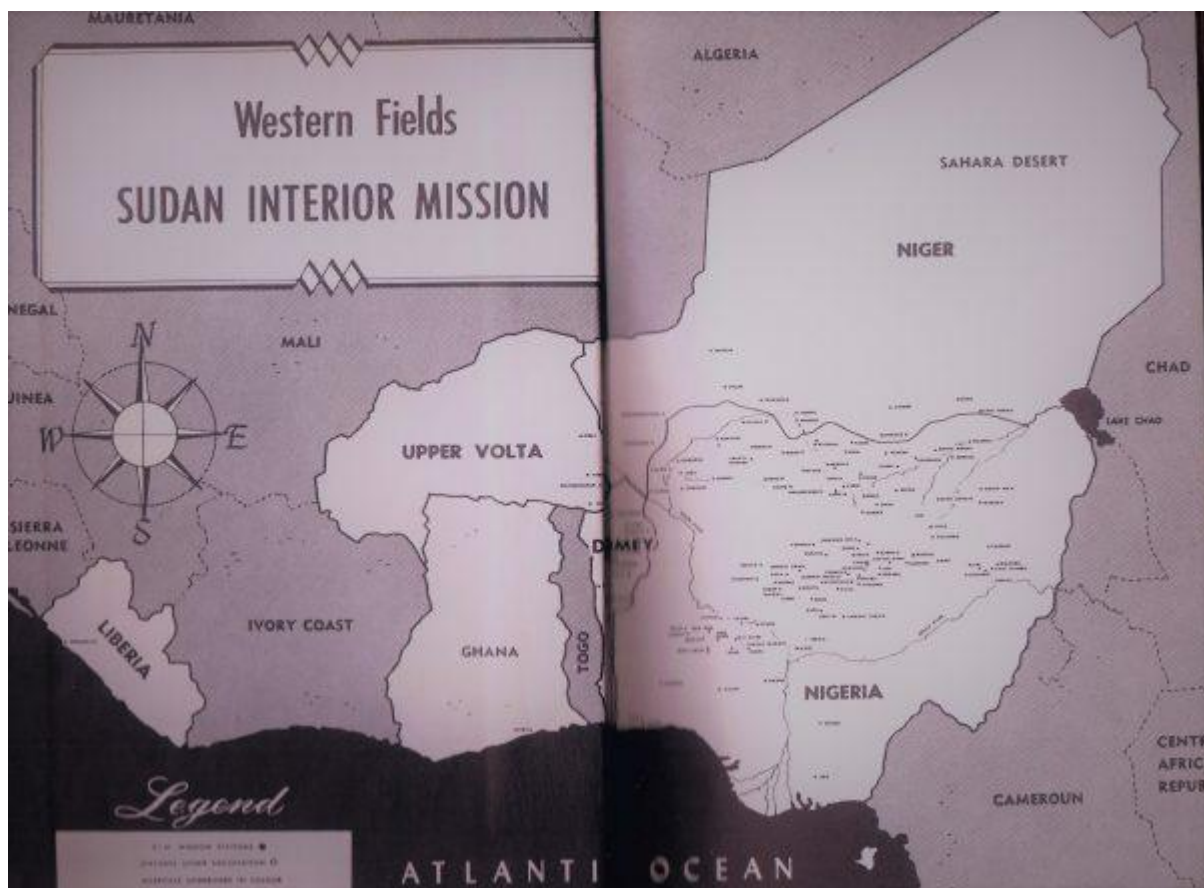
**Harold Ernest Stanley's** story is an interesting one—especially for a Canadian member of 458 Squadron. He wasn't born Canadian.

He was born in Izom, Northern Nigeria, on April 10, 1920, in what was then British West Africa. Most records list Minna as his birthplace, simply because the small village of Izom didn't appear on most maps. His parents, Frank Xavier Stanley and Eva May Young, were missionaries with the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM)—a Christian organisation committed to sharing the gospel in regions with the least access.

*Harold Earnest Stanley R91441*







*“The Sudan” as it was known in the early part of the 19th century, included all of the African continent that lay between the Sahara Desert and the equator. From A Flame of Fire, J. H. Hunter (<https://christinecowley.com/episode-2-burden-of-the-sudan/>)*

The founding members of SIM—Walter Gowans, Thomas Kent, and Rowland Bingham—established their mission work in 1893. By the early 1920s, SIM had expanded into the Middle Niger and Hausa-Fulani regions of Nigeria. Minna, in particular, became a regional centre for SIM activity, with mission compounds, bookshops, medical clinics, and education outreach.

At the time of Harold’s birth, both Frank and Eva had contracted malaria. Remarkably, Harold showed no symptoms. SIM workers at the time faced a 40% mortality rate from tropical diseases. Life was difficult. Families rarely included elderly or school-age children in the field; many missionary families sent their children back to Canada to boarding schools for health and education.



*Village courtyard, Minna, Nigeria, ca.1920-1940 (africacommons.net)*

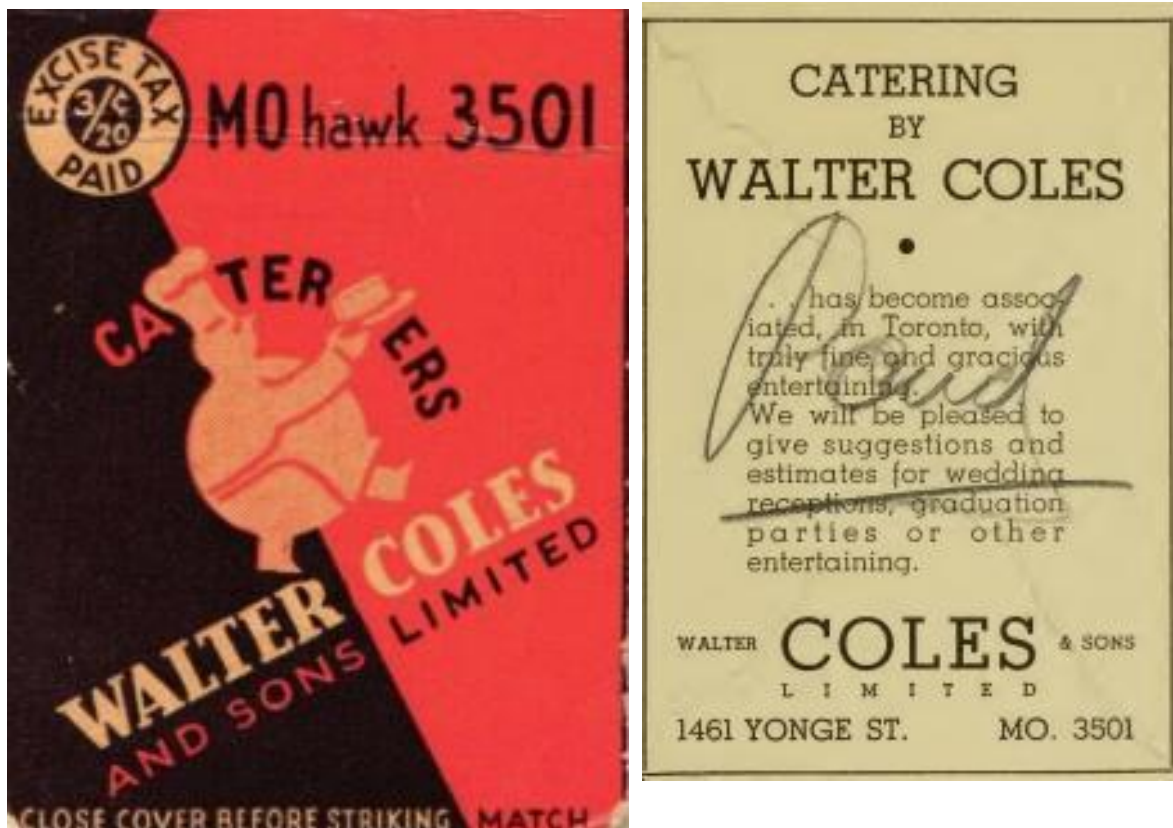
Harold had seven siblings, though three died young: one brother of tropical dysentery at age one, and a sister and brother who died at birth. At the time the family finally resettled in Canada, four siblings remained:

- Eva (1918–2000)
- Ronald (1926–2000)
- Ester (1925–1999)
- Shirley (1928–2018)

The family travelled often between Sutton, Ontario (just outside of York and Toronto) and West Africa, usually stopping over in Liverpool to stay with friends or family, then on to the Canary Islands and eventually into Africa. It was a gruelling route—weeks by ship, often in poor health. Once home for good, Harold attended Sutton Public School from 1934 to 1937. That same year, his mother Eva died of pneumonia. He was 17. We can only assume Harold left school during this time to help his family and would later returned to finish his education through Continuation School. Harold worked in small, family-owned bakeries in Toronto as a Baker's Helper. He had earlier apprenticed for three years under S.C. Cook in Sutton and used Mr. Cook as a reference on his enlistment records.



He eventually secured employment with Walter Coles & Son Ltd., a well-established catering restaurant in Toronto. He worked there for over five years and was still employed there when he joined up.



*Walter Coles and Sons Limited circa 1936.*

Harold was asked in his RCAF application if his employer promised to rehire him after the war. He replied “no”. When asked if the employer had refused to promise re-employment, he again replied “no”. Then, asked if he wanted to return to his former employment, Harold answered: “no!”.

Turns out, he preferred circuits to cinnamon rolls.

In Section 26 of his enlistment application, when asked if he had made any personal arrangements for re-establishment after discharge, Harold wrote that he hoped to become a Radio Technician.



Advertisement for RCC. ([https://jproc.ca/radiostor/rcc\\_radio\\_op\\_history\\_1928\\_1964.pdf](https://jproc.ca/radiostor/rcc_radio_op_history_1928_1964.pdf))

Harold was six months into a correspondence course at Radio College of Canada in 1941. The college had opened in 1928 in Toronto and offered practical training in radio technology, Morse code, and wireless operation. Over 40,000 students would pass through RCC programs before the 1960s—either in person or by mail.

Harold had taken out a loan to pay for the tuition and was repaying it in \$8 monthly instalments from his military wages. He owed the College \$40 when he joined the RCAF. (That equates to \$150 a month today and a debt of \$752.73.)

Harold first volunteered to join the RCAF on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1941 at a place called Chowdra Square in Toronto.



*The building housed The Granite Ice club prior to the war, now 519 Church Street “the 519” is now “The centre of Toronto’s 2SLGBTQ+ experience.”*

Harold’s enthusiasm to volunteer meant that whether his application was rejected, delayed or deferred he reapplied just 29 days later. In his later application he requested “Flying Duties” specifically Air Gunner, Wireless Operator.





Source:  
Manitoba  
Historical  
Society: Train  
Yards & Depot,  
Brandon  
Manitoba.

Three days  
later Harold  
now R.91441  
was accepted  
and  
immediately  
posted west

to the #2 Manning Depot, Brandon Manitoba. His trade was listed as “Standard General Duties, Airman Cadet 2 (AC2)”. After a two- or three-day 2000km rail journey and several stops and changes, Harold arrived at Brandon’s #2 Manning Depot on February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1941.

Source: Winnipeg Digital Library: R.C.A.F. No. 2 Manning Depot, Brandon, Manitoba

Normally recruits would expect to spend 6-8 weeks in basic training getting



their uniforms, learning to march, salute and follow orders etc., but such were

the needs of the war and especially the newly active British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (BCATP) that Harold was posted just nine days later on February 9<sup>th</sup> 1941 to No. 2 Bomber and Gunnery School in Mossbank, Saskatchewan, arriving a day later.



Source: No. 2 Bomber & Gunnery School in Mossbank, Saskatchewan:  
([www.hillmanweb.com](http://www.hillmanweb.com))

This must have been a bitter pill for Harold; for here he was being sent to a training facility dedicated to the very aircrew specialty he had volunteered for, but being sent as a general duties ground cadet. Not to train, but to work for the trainees and the establishment.

What also must have been very hard for Harold, was that fact that he was going to, what appeared to be, the middle of nowhere in the middle of Saskatchewan, in the middle of Canada, in the middle of WINTER! The next five months for a lad born and raised in the heat of Nigeria, West Africa, were going to seem like a something from a "Gulag" novel.

In an article in "Fortune" magazine April 1942 noted by someone stationed at Mossbank, it stated. *"Out at Mossbank, in Saskatchewan, a station so drearily remote from human society that it serves as a place of banishment for the unruly"*. Everyone looked at his neighbor and asked "What did you do to be sent here?"



While Harold was not ready for Mossbank, Mossbank was also not ready for Harold or any of the hundreds of staff, trainees and civilians posted there in late 1940 and early 1941.

No. 2 Bombing & Gunnery School in Mossbank Saskatchewan opened on October 28<sup>th</sup>, 1940 and remained open for 1509 days until December 15<sup>th</sup>, 1944 when the RCAF closed the school. It was at the BCATP Bombing & Gunnery Schools where bomb aimers, air gunners, air observers and wireless air gunners received training in bombing and gunnery techniques.

One of 20 BCATP Schools opened in Saskatchewan, No. 2 BGS was a large school with five aircraft hangars and various other buildings including H-Hut barracks, other living quarters, a parade square, administrative buildings, motor transport buildings and service buildings for the aircraft. The primary aircraft used for training were the Westland Lysander, Bristol Bolingbroke, Avro Anson and Fairey Battle. ([www.hillmanweb.com](http://www.hillmanweb.com))



*Source: Imperial War Museum: No. 400 Squadron. RCAF rushing to climb into the cockpits of their Lysanders during training.*

Although Mossbank officially opened at the end of October 1940, three months later when Harold arrived the meaning of the word “open” was open to much debate as some of the following station diary entries would suggest:

*“10 October 1940. The water supply for the station continues to be hauled in tanks. The consequences of normal consumption of this water are most distressing as it contains minerals which act as an acute purgative. (ed: that would be laxative!)*

*21 October 1940. All the Airmen and Civilians with the exception of the NCO’s continue to be messed at the cookhouse of the contractor constructing the station.*



*24 October 1940. All ranks to be aware of deep trenches which traverse the station area at various points, which are not illuminated and as considerable distances have to be travelled after dark to the temporary messing quarters.*

*01 November 1940. The 4<sup>th</sup> day of #1 Air Gunners course. Lectures mostly impromptu Armament and practical hints. No equipment available. Air Observers course impeded due to lack of equipment.*

*03 November 1940. Trainees on AG's course prepared for Wind speed and direction exercises despite difficulty of lectures without equipment. A.T.S finds it impossible to begin training flights. Only one Bomb-sight on the Station.*

*06 November 1940. Weather turning much colder. Certain of the Barracks have not yet had heaters installed. Air Gunners course spent pm on sports as no lecture material available and no equipment for lectures. Air Observers Course proceeding under difficulties. One additional Bomb-sight arrives, no Compass.*

*08 November 1940. Weather turns considerably colder with snow flurries. More open deep trenches. Air Gunners Course at standstill.*

*11. November 1940. No apparent progress being made in laying of sewer and water main construction. Water pipes from temporary tanks to kitchens and ablution rooms constantly freezing."*

Two months later

*"12 February 1941. Fifty General duties arrived from Manning pool, Brandon, Manitoba. This will permit a beginning in the replacement of civilians by Service Personnel. (Harold arrives at Mossbank)*

*22 February 1941. The water situation again has reached a crucial stage. The weather is cold with heavy gale blowing, the various heating units are working to capacity."*

At the end of February 1941, the Station strength was close to 1000 (including officers, Airmen, and civilians). For Harold this must have seemed bleak, but as was often the way the future direction and hope for movement to aircrew training did appear. For example:

*"21 February 1941. Thirty Aircrew Standard (Harold's designation), serving here as Service Police Guard today posted to No. 2 Initial Training School, Regina*

*Saskatchewan, being replaced by thirst Aircrew Standard who arrived from No.2 Manning Depot, Brandon."*

So, there was away out and up. Harold stuck with the "General Duties" endured a week in the base hospital in May 1941. Got to endure more blizzards, mud; see graduation classes, forced landings and crashes of the base Fairy Battles: prepare drones and firing targets: watch and help the station develop into one of the premier Air observers and Air Gunner training sites of Th BCATP.

On May 01<sup>st</sup> 1941 Harold was promoted to AC1.



*A commemorative Cairn dedicated to those who trained at No. 2 Bombing and Gunnery School in Mossbank Saskatchewan during World War II.*



#415.026 #2 B&G Mossbank Sask.

On May 16<sup>th</sup> 1941 Harold attended a General Medical and Surgical examination at Mossbank. His height of 5'5" was noted and that he had no surgical abnormalities other than "flat feet" His eyesight noted as 20/20 and declared "Fit A1B A3B"

It was noted that he answered "No" to alcohol and "No" to smoking. The inspecting physician noted: *"Small stature but well developed, excellent eye test, general impression is that he cerebrates very slowly but would likely retain anything, once it was understood"*.



We don't know if this medical examination was part of the normal process, perhaps missed in his very short stay at No. 2 MD in Brandon, perhaps a result of his hospital stay while in Mossbank or in preparation for posting to aircrew training, but it seemed to be the trigger.

Harold was on his way. Barely six weeks later Harold was posted to No. 3 Wireless School (WS) in Winnipeg, Manitoba. In recognition he was demoted back to AC2 (we presume the starting point for all aircrew)

The day after Harold left Mossbank the station was quarantined for "Mumps", but he made it out and on July 05<sup>th</sup> 1941 he reported to No. 3 WS.

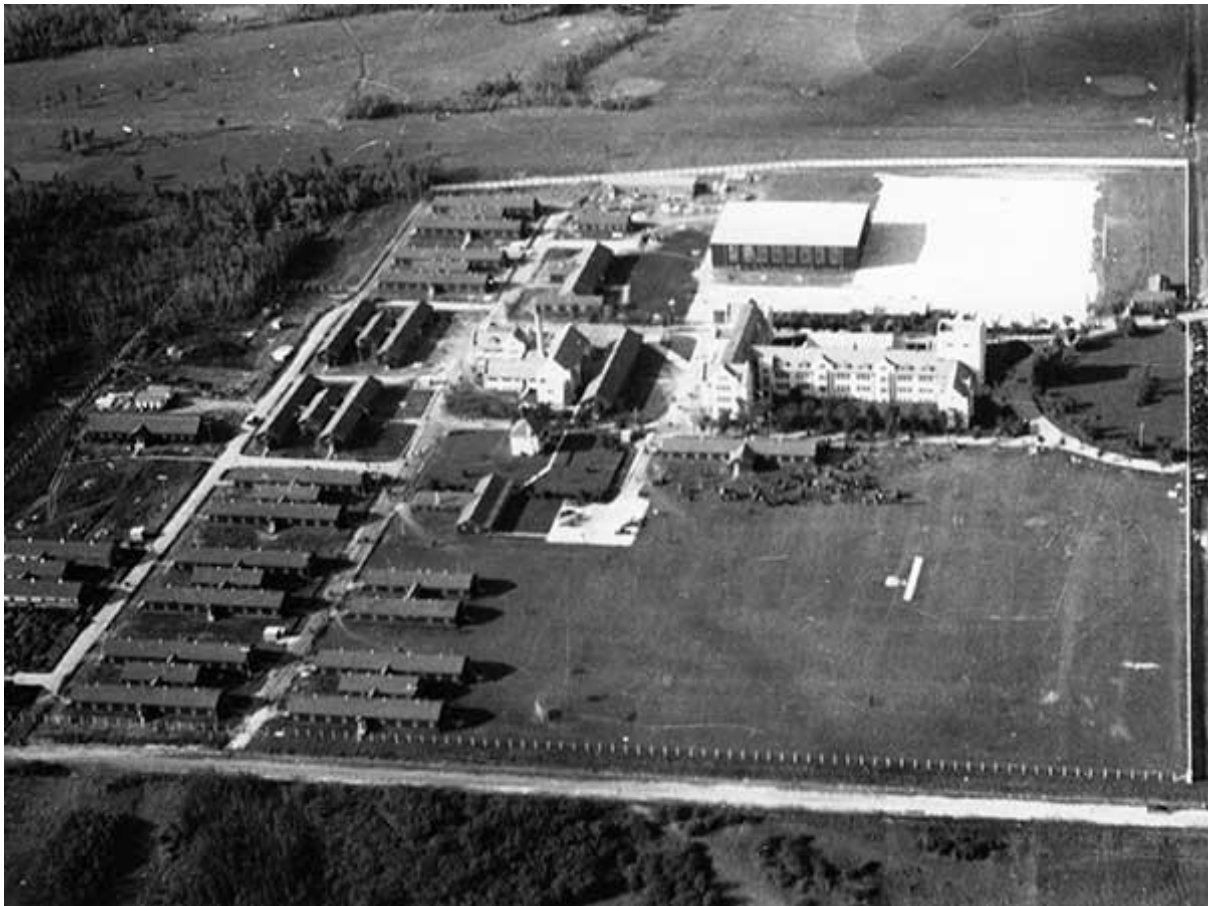


The Station Diary notes:

*"July 05 1941. One hundred and forty-one new trainees from Australia and New Zealand comprising the Twenty-First Entry arrived on the Station. The balance of the Twenty-first entry being made up of Canadians."*

That would be Harold with the "Canadians"; prescient, perhaps, that he would do his initial aircrew training with Australians!

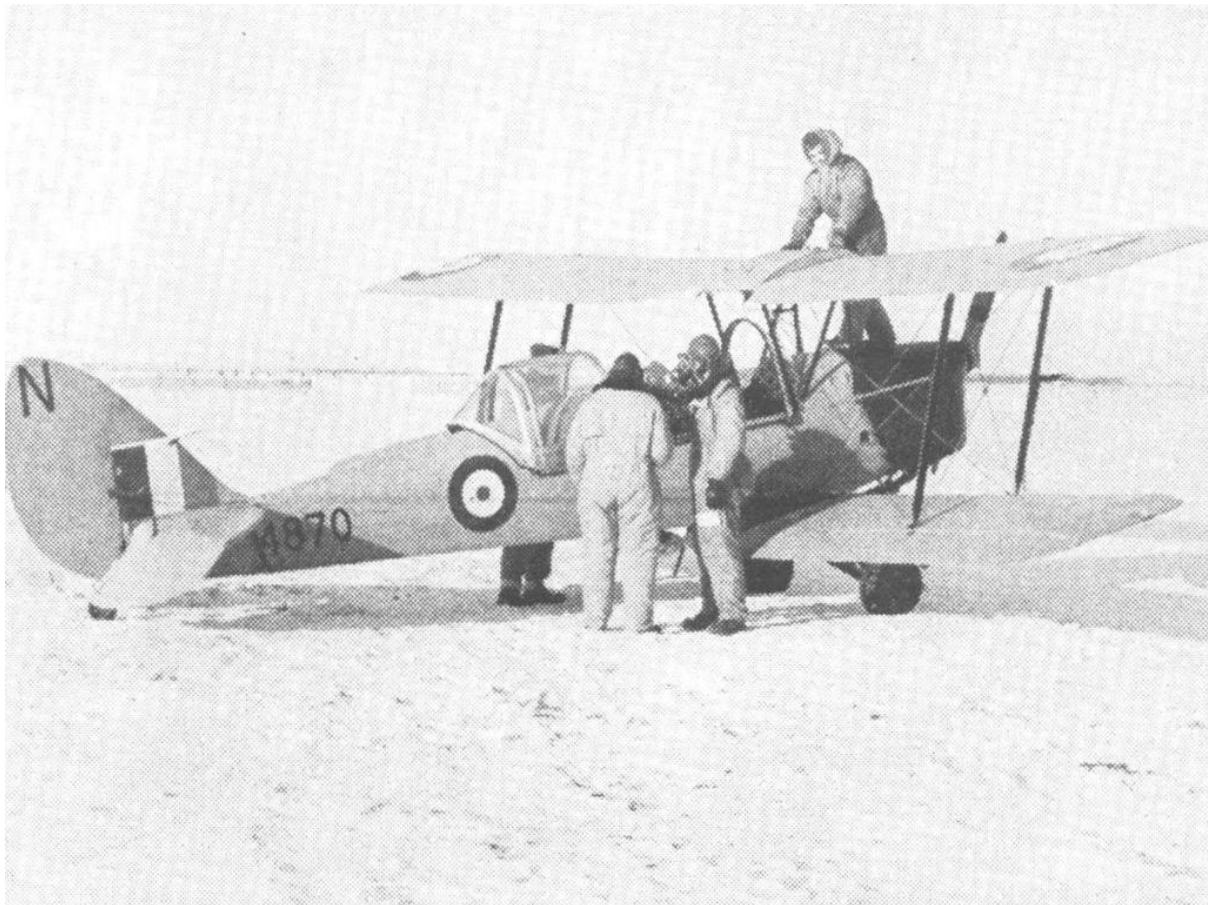
The No. 3 Wireless School opened on February 17<sup>th</sup>, 1941. It provided a 24-week course for Wireless Operator Air Gunners (WAG), teaching the theory and practice of wireless and visual communication. Students were required to learn morse code to a proficiency of 18 words per minute.



*Source: Gordon Goldsborough ([www.mhs.mb.ca](http://www.mhs.mb.ca))*

The main building was designed and built for “The Manitoba School for the Deaf” in 1921 and reverted to that function in 1966 after being a post war teacher training facility. There was no airport attached to the facility, so Harold and fellow students did the practical flying at Stevenson field only a few miles away.





*Ground crews make a last-minute check on fuel as a potential WAG prepares to climb into the cockpit of a Menasco Moth for an hour or two of air operating, at Stevenson airport. Source: Wireless and Air Gunners magazine (WAG) No 3WS. (Publications.rcaf.info)*

(The Menasco Moth was a Tiger Moth in all aspects except the engine. Fears over delivery of spares and replacement Gipsy engines from the UK caused the Canadians to purchase US made Menasco engines on some “Moths” The Menasco was not as powerful as the Gipsy engine so was deemed less useful in pilot training and was used exclusively for Wireless training. The Menasco could also drive a bigger generator, again more useful for Wireless training)

In fact, because of the under powering of the engine and extra weight carried by the radio equipment, it was recommended that “All wireless training exercises in this type of aircraft be conducted at altitudes above 1000 feet owing to the high stalling speed of this aircraft due to the extra loading of the radio equipment.”

A pilot was killed, and WAG seriously injured three days after Harold started the course in such an accident.



The day after that, a Menasco Moth collided with a steam roller at Stevenson Airport. In fact, there were four accidents with the Menasco Moths within a week of Harold's arrival. He would of course be starting with the theory and the lab work before progressing to the practical in aircraft lessons.

In addition to the 22 Menasco Moths on strength the WS also had 6 Noorduyyn Norseman Aircraft



*Source: BCATP Museum. Norseman 2471 picture taken at Stevenson Airport with No3 Wireless School. Harold may well have trained in this aircraft. It is now with the Brandon BCATP Museum.*

For Harold his time with course No. 21 did not include any recorded accidents, and indeed a month after his arrival at Wireless School August 07<sup>th</sup>, 1941 Harold was promoted to Leading Airmen Cadet (LAC).

- On July 10<sup>th</sup>, 1941, Right Honorable Mackenzie King, Prime Minister of Canada visited the Station. He visited the labs and the lecture rooms.

While Harold had left behind a mumps epidemic in Mossbank Saskatchewan, it did not leave him, and his new station suffered a similar outbreak within a week of his arrival and the Officers house was quarantined.

- July 24 1941. Due to the exceedingly hot weather the Commanding Officer has authorized shorts to be worn by all personnel within the confines of the School only.
- August 23 1941. The weather has been extremely cool and has been very uncomfortable to the Australian Trainees, it has therefore been decided that summer dress will be optional from this date.
- October 10 1941. Final examinations for the 21st entry commenced and will continue for 2 days. (Harold's course)
- October 27 1941. First snowfall of the year, for shadowing the arrival of winter weather. As we have a few Australian and New Zealand trainees, the snowfall was quite a novelty for them, and snowball fighting etc., was the rule of the day with the result that several windows and panes of glass were broken.
- October 28 1941. Due to the severity of the present outbreak of mumps it is again necessary to institute a working quarantine. It is hoped that the present outbreak will be controlled and will not necessitate a general quarantine such as we had in June. (This was the day that Harold was admitted to Hospital for two weeks)
- November 18 1941. Preparations are going forward for the graduation of the 21st Entry, which will be held on Friday, November 21st. It would appear at this date that there will be a number of failures in the 21st Squadron. (Harold's class)
- November 2 1941. Graduation Day for the 21st Squadron. Graduation parade held at 1645 hours on the North Sports ground and due to the severity of the weather the parade did not take more than one-half hour. The Graduation Dance was held in the evening in the Drill Hall and though on the whole the entertainment is improving there is still room for great improvement in the monthly dances. The P.A. system installed during the last month did not prove satisfactory and it would appear that it will be necessary to spend a considerable sum of money to convert the Drill Hall into a suitable place for entertainment. A good number of

visitors were present on the station and the Graduation Dance might be considered a huge success. It is hoped that by December, further improvements will have been made. (Harold's graduation ceremony. Rather a shambles it would seem)

- November 22 1941. Results of examinations for the 21st Entry are now available and it would appear that out of a total of 208 airmen in the 21st Entry, 134 passed, 74 being either failures or class transfers for further instruction. This is the greatest number of airmen to have failed to graduate in any entry to date. Lack of Morse training would appear to be the chief cause of failures. Sixteen men of Class 21 have been recommended for Cease Training, effective 24.11.41, and the balance are to be given extra instruction in Entry No. 23 E.

Harold was in course 21 at No. 3 Wireless School from July 7<sup>th</sup> 1941 until November 23<sup>rd</sup> 1941.

His results are shown below. We can see that Harold did time in a flying classroom (that would be the Norseman) and in a two-seater as sole operator (the Menasco Moth) he did not do a lot of time in aircraft and his rating of below average should not have been registered. -- We do know that Harold was admitted to the King George Hospital on October 28<sup>th</sup> 1941 and was isolated there for two weeks. (Likely with the mumps) and this would have been during the critical practical flying time of his course. Rather than having him re do the course and based on his excellent theoretical, radio equipment, Morse, and procedure results (81.7% including 192 out of 200 in Morse) Harold was registered as passing the course and eligible to wear the Wireless Operators badge on November 21<sup>st</sup> 1941.







AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

ART24160

(No3 Wireless School Winnipeg. Warner R Malcolm [www.awm.gov.au](http://www.awm.gov.au))

With badge sewn on his uniform, the graduation parade and dance still fresh in his mind, Harold boarded a train for the 1200 km journey west. To Lethbridge, Alberta and the No. 8 Bombing and Gunnery school (B&G) for a four-week course in gunnery theory and practice. He was still with course #21.

Lethbridge's Kenyon Airport first opened in 1939, originally built along with many other small airports to function as a link, an emergency landing and refueling stop in a transcontinental system servicing the newly formed Trans Canada Airlines

With the establishment of the BCATP, Lethbridge was designated the airport for the No. 5 Elementary Flying School using Tiger Moths in July of 1940. However, extreme wind in the area (known as the "Wicked Winds of the West") was so bad and frequent that the No. 5 EFTS was forced, with its light aircraft, to move to High River, Alberta in June of 1941.



At that point the No. 8 B&G, with its much heavier Fairy Battle Aircraft, moved into Lethbridge.



*Source: Glenbow Archives, PA-3458-7 [www.vintagewings.ca](http://www.vintagewings.ca)*

The Fairy Battles of the BCATP were meant and built for the front-line service. Poor performance and heavy losses during engagements with the Luftwaffe in France and Belgium 1940 caused them to be withdrawn from service. Hundreds were shipped to Canada as gunnery training platforms and as target tugs. The camouflage paint was supplemented with large yellow panels and black and yellow stripes.





*No. 8 B&G School Lethbridge. Source RCAF [www.vintagewings.ca](http://www.vintagewings.ca)*



Harold was taught operation of all types of machine guns, air cannon, ammunition, multi-gun turrets and aircraft recognition. On the ground he used a 25-yard range. In the air, in the back of the Fairy Battle, usually with one or two other students, he took it in turns firing at a 20 foot by 3-foot fabric sleeve, or drogue, towed by another Fairy Battle. Each student had different coloured ammunition. On completion of the firing the drogue was dropped to the ground, the number of hits by each student counted and the results phoned into the airfield ready for Harold's return.

The range was a 100 square mile area leased from the "Blood Indian Reserve" Canada's largest by area. Today the Kainai First Nation considers this to be an illegal seizure of their lands from the Blood Tribe.

In Canada this illegal "leasing" of bombing ranges seems to have been systemic. The Defence department lists 25 reserves potentially laden with discarded explosives.

Harold spent just over 12 hours firing from or monitoring in, the Fairy Battles in November and December of 1941.

His course results are listed below. What is striking is the incredibly low percentage of hits on the towed targets. Harold passed the course eight in a

PART I—Concluded  
WIRELESS TRAINING

6. ~~Comments~~ **Numerical Assessment:—** 372. **Comments as to suitability for Commissioned rank:—** **Maximum Assessment:—** 500.....

No. 3 *W. J. Lunn* 70  
Officer Commanding  
Wireless School

Date 21/11/41

To be passed to No. 8..... B. G. S.

PART II  
ARMAMENT TRAINING

1. No. 8..... B. G. S. Course No. 21.....

2. Dates of Courses:— From 24/11/41 To 22/12/41

AIR TRAINING  
GUNNERY

3. Flying Time:—

Aircraft	Day	Night	Passenger	Total	
				Hrs.	Mins.
Fairly Battle	8:40	Nil	3:40	12	20

4. Air Gunnery Results—

	Average percentage hits to rounds fired
(a) Beam Test.....	1.5%
(b) Beam Relative Speed Test.....	2.8%
(c) Under Tail Test.....	4.1%

5. Total Rounds Fired—

Ground.....	298%
Air to Ground.....	193%
Air to Air.....	2000%

6. Assessment—

	Marks Obtained
(a) Written Examination..... (100 Marks)	74
(b) Practical and Oral Examination..... (100 Marks)	78
(c) Ability as Firer..... (250 Marks)	154
(d) Qualities as an N.C.O..... (150 Marks)	150
<b>Totals..... (600 Marks)</b>	<b>306</b>

7. Position in Class 8..... No. in Class 36..... Pass or Fail Pass.....

8. Date authorized to wear Air Gunner's Badge 22/12/41.....

9. ~~Comments~~ **Numerical assessment as to suitability for Commissioned Rank. (Maximum 250)** 160/250.....

10. Remarks... Exceptionally keen and quick to understand, learn and solve difficulties, apt to jump at conclusions.

*W. J. Lunn*  
Chief Instructor

No. 8..... B. G. S.  
Date 22-12-41

class of 36, so it must be assumed that even less than 1% hits on a steady target would be sufficient to qualify as a gunner in 1941/42!



As noted in the remakes Harold was “*exceptionally keen and quick to understand, learn and solve difficulties.....*” The overall assessment for Harold noted he was 7<sup>th</sup> out of the 36 in class and above average.

PART II—Concluded  
AIR TRAINING

11. Final Assessment (to be completed at B. G. S.)

Course	Maximum Marks	Marks Obtained
Wireless School.....	1000	817.....
Bombing and Gunnery School.....	<del>1000</del> 450	306.....
TOTALS.....	<del>1000</del> 1450	1123.....

12. Percentage 77.44 Pass or Fail..... Pass..... Position in Class 7.....  
No. in Class..... 36.....

13. Recommended for Commissioned Rank..... N.A...... Assessment Above Average.....  
(yes or no) (ex., above average)

14. Remarks... Smart appearance, good military bearing but is however quiet...  
and shy, good wireless operator and average gunner.  
.....

.....  
Officer Commanding  
No. 8..... B. G. S.  
Date 22-12-41.....

*“Smart appearance, good military bearing, but is however quiet and shy. Good wireless operator and average gunner”*

On his successful completion of the Gunnery course Harold was awarded his WAG “wing” badge. And three days later promoted to Sergeant.



*Source: NASM*

Harold had now been with the RCAF for ten months and his next assignment was to No. 31 Operational Training Unit (OTU) in Debert, Nova Scotia. Another train journey, this time 4600 kms to the east coast of Canada.

Debert was an ideal location, providing a wide range of challenging terrain and features. Operational training started in August of 1941. The task was to conduct training over long distances, in marginal flying conditions. To train men who had rarely flown out of sight of land, under realistic conditions. For pilots and Wireless Operator/Air Gunners (Harold) it was a twelve-week course. In the final stages the crews, consisting of one pilot, one observer and two wireless operator/air gunners were joined together as a crew.

But first Harold was granted 24 days “Embarkation Leave”, so it is likely that he stopped off in Toronto on the way east to stay and visit with relatives in Sutton and family friends in Toronto. The journey would have taken Harold 5-6 days and the travel time would have to be included in his leave time.

At Debert they used Lockheed Hudson aircraft to practice night flying long distance, over water patrols, anti U-Boat patrols, photography, and radio work. Usually with a four- or five-person crew.

This flying and operational training was not without risks. Five Hudson's were lost with crew in late 1941 and a further five in early 1942.



*Source: National Airforce Museum of Canada*

Harold completed his course and in preparation for posting to the UK, more training and then operations, he next travelled to RAF Ferry command in Dorval, near Montreal, Quebec. There he then flew to RCAF Station Gander in Newfoundland for the trans-Atlantic flight.





Busy tarmac at Dorval in May 1942, with ubiquitous Hudsons and Venturas, as well as Liberators, Mitchells and a B-17 Flying Fortress awaiting their turns to be flown to operational squadrons overseas.

*The transportation of aircraft across the Atlantic was pioneering work. Before Ferry Command, only about a hundred aircraft had attempted a North Atlantic crossing in good weather, and only about half had made it. Over the course of the war, more than 9000 aircraft were individually ferried across the ocean.*

Harold was one of these. After ten days with Ferry Command and a promoted designation promotion to Wireless Operator/Air Gunner "Grade 2" he and a crew ferried an aircraft to the UK on the night of April 24/25<sup>th</sup>, 1942.

In early 1942 meteorology lacked the precision it later acquired and, consequently, the weather forecast was considered reliable for no more than half of the flight plan. Still for the time it was remarkably detailed. Many of the weather briefings throughout the war were provided by Patrick McTaggart Cowan, a Canadian Rhodes Scholar, affectionately (or perhaps not) known as "McFog".

Three days after arriving in the UK (likely after yet another train journey from probably Liverpool, where returning aircrew would immediately board ships

bound for Canada) Harold was posted to No. 3 Personnel Reception Centre (PRC) in Bournemouth on the south coast of England to await his next posting on his journey towards 458<sup>th</sup> RAAF.

The Metropole Hotel was assigned exclusively to the RCAF billeted in hotels. There was no staff or service:

*“Just damp, chilly, barren rooms with beds, communal toilets and crumbling plaster. The breakfast was powdered eggs marooned on a slice of parched toast with a small piece of grease drenched spam. Later on brussell sprouts, which seemed to be a British national institution, were introduced”. Source: Hubert Brooks MC.*

The Metropole hotel was bombed a year after Harold was in Bournemouth.



*Source: Daily Echo. Today the site is occupied by Royal London House, an office building.*

The function of 3PRC was to reorientate airmen as they arrived. Medical checks, a battery of night vision tests, refresher courses, lectures, and postings. In addition, airmen were given “water egress” training in an outdoor pool to open and turn upright a dinghy while fully clothed.

Harold was also issued a new flying kit, including Boots, Helmet, Gauntlets, silk gloves oxygen masks, goggles, and a kit bag.

After just two weeks at No3 PRC, Harold received his next posting to No 7 OTU.

No. 7 (coastal) OTU was reformed at RAF Limavady on April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1942 just one month before Harold arrived. It operated the Vickers Wellington GR VIII.

Coastal Command OTUs were responsible for training crews in various aspects of maritime warfare, including anti-submarine warfare, anti shipping strikes and reconnaissance missions. This was for Harold an enhanced training compared to the time spent at Debert Nova Scotia, but it was now done in a Vickers Wellington a full operational aircraft and crew.



*Above: RAF Limavady with Wellingtons from No 7(c)OTU dispersed around the site. ([www.historyfare.co.uk](http://www.historyfare.co.uk))*



*Below: Flying Wellington Mark VIII*



After three months training at the No. 7(C) OTU, Harold received word that he was going on a three-week training course on Ferrying aircraft at 1446 Ferry Training Flight at RAF Moreton in Marsh. \*1446 was involved in ferrying Wellington bombers to the Middle East.

Harold was with 1446 Flight until August 31<sup>st</sup>, 1942, when he flew as crew in a Wellington to the Overseas Aircraft Dispatch Unit (OADU) and on September 05<sup>th</sup>, 1942 Harold departed in a Wellington for the Middle East.

Harold's first stop and posting in the Middle East was with 38 Squadron RAF, part of 201 Group, based in Shallufa, Egypt. The runways were lighted with electric cables. The airfield had a control tower, a 14-bed infirmary, shops, and an administrative building. On-site were two installed steel hangars, a swimming pool, and a cinema.



*38 Squadron Wellingtons*

38 Sqn was at this time tasked with night torpedo attack on enemy shipping.

During this period, if air crew were not part of a permanent crew (Pilot, Second Pilot, Navigator, WAG (2 or 3), ASI Operator) it could be a difficult time. Basically, filling in for sick or rested or transferred crew members, but often never becoming a permanent member of a crew, with all the benefits of sharing the highs and lows and camaraderie.

For Harold, who was not a member of a permanent crew it was a brief time of waiting. He was only with 38 Squadron RAF for 6 days before being transferred 221 Squadron RAF. On September 14<sup>th</sup>, 1942. The move to 221 Squadron was not a distance move as they were also based at Shallufa, Egypt. Again, flying Wellington Mk VIII with similar missions to 38 Squadron.

Harold was with 221 Squadron for five weeks only but did get to fly two missions.

On October 5<sup>th</sup>, as part of a crew in Wellington HK381 flying over the Mediterranean to "Locate and home a striking force" a seven hour night mission.

13:13 Tue Jul 29 ds-live-prepared-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com 90%

Number	Crew	Task	Date	Time	Details of Sortie or Flight	Reference
HK.405	P/O. White, Sgt. Penner, P/O. Williams, Sgts. Atkinson, Brunt, Oldfield.	Locate enemy a/v N.E. Derna and home force.	1920	0325	O/v sighted and home procedure carried out.	5.10.42.
Lib. 916	P/Lt. Proctor, Sgt. Reynolds, P/Sgt. Collinson, P/O. Anderson (S.E.), Sgts. Binns, Lee, Somerville.	Offensive Recon.	2143	0835	Reconnaissance carried out. Nil enemy sightings.	4.10.42.
HK.383	P/Lt. Hoskins, P/O. Prior, P/O. McLeod, P/O. Howlett, Sgts. Dean, Loudon.	Locate shipping and home force.	2220	0405	A/c returned to base owing to bad weather.	5.10.42.
Z.8906	P/Sgt. Joy, Sgts. Beetham, Davey, Drummond, Laing, Gibson.	Locate enemy shipping and home force.	2227	0535	A/c ran into very bad storm in pos: 323W 2404E. Eventually decided to return to base.	
HK.381	P/Sgt. Sayers, Sgts. Wincott, Devine, Daniels, Stanley, Patterson.	Locate enemy and home striking force.	2230	0515	Land fixes at 65 miles obtained but no other blips.	5.10.42.
HF.913	P/Lt. Garton, Sgts. Miller, Hall, P/O. Corlett, Sgts. Bayman, Bishop, P/Lt. Thurtle.	Search for a/v North of Derna	1920	2331	Received recall signal while in pos: 3304N 2544E. Nothing sighted.	5.10.42.
HK.381	Sgts. Deschamps, Beattie, Locke, Bullock, Bland, Fisher.	Search for a/v North of Derna	1925	2035	Decided to return to base as no sign of a break in the large quantities of thunder cloud could be seen.	5.10.42.
HB.461	P/Sgt. Joy, Sgts. Beetham, Davey, Drummond, Laing, Gibson.	Search for a/v North of Derna	1930	2010	Starboard engine became u/s. Returned to base.	5.10.42.
HB.481	P/O. Gay, Sgt. Chadwick, Williams, Young, McIlfatrick, Woolman.	Search for a/v North of Derna	2030	2210	Received recall signal while in pos: 332W 2920E and returned to base.	5.10.42.
HK.383	P/O. Fraser, P/Sgt. Wood, Sgts. Malpas, Soott, O'Hara, Watson.	Search for a/v North of Derna	2025	2225	Concentration of cloud with high tops bad weather most imminent a/c returned to base after recall signal.	5.10.42.
HK.286	Sgts. Backhouse, Rotherham, P/Sgt. Pamerton, Sgts. Colman, Stapleton, Chuk.	Search for a/v North of Derna	1922	0022	A/c running into bad thunderstorm. Received recall signal & returned base.	6.10.42.
HF.628	P/Sgt. Joy, Sgts. Beetham, Davey, Laing, Gibson.	Locate enemy a/v, illuminate & home striking force.	1810	0338	Unsuccessful search as S.I. jamming badly & flares failing, a/c returned to base.	6.10.42.

Harold flew again with the same crew, three days later October 08<sup>th</sup> 1942. This time a twelve-hour flight “enemy shipping sighted, flares were dropped, S.I. (Surface Search Radar) jamming badly”.



Unfortunately, he was just a temporary replacement for a crew member and on October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1942, he was transferred to the No. 22 Personnel Reception Centre (PRC), to await his next posting. RAF Almaza, located near Cairo was the base for 22PRC.

For Harold, barely enough time to move his kit bag, let alone unpack it, for just three days later he received his next posting, to 69 Squadron RAF in Malta.

No. 69 Squadron was formed on Malta as a reconnaissance squadron and spent three years operating a wide range of aircraft from the island. One of the types it flew on more offensive operations was the Wellington.

Conditions in Malta at the end of 1942 were still very rough. Shortages of even the basics of food and water and specifically aviation fuel continued. The upkeep of the operation records of 69 Squadron came a distant second and, in many cases, for the Wellington flights, the minimum of crew information is recorded. Often only the Pilot's name with a “Crew Unknown” notation.



However, we can establish that Harold flew on eight and possibly ten missions between November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1942 and January 31<sup>st</sup> 1943. Many of these missions were as part of Sgt D.E. Fowler's crew. On one recorded mission on the night of November 12/13, 1942, in Wellington MF509 "Fishington" they "located enemy shipping and fired the torpedo, missed!"

Wellington "X" 18-13/11/42	P/O Sutton 10. H. FALLS SGT K. HAYDEN SGT A. STOUT SGT A. STOUT	Torpedo Attack.	1850 2245	Torpedo Attack on major naval units N. of Sicily. 3150 Stromboli 15' Sbd. engine cut out and came off and on for 30 minutes. Sent signal to base: "returning with engine trouble". S/Ls and heavy flak from Messina. S.E. all the time except in the Messina area. No contacts.
Fishington "S" 12/13/11/42	DC Sgt Fowler and SGT C. FOWLER SGT R. BIRCH SGT L. G. KIDBING SGT G. DEAN SGT H. STANLEY	Attack.	1910 0110	To attack enemy major naval units N. of Sicily. Messina: a little flak, also about 6 S/Ls. S/C Capri, weather cleared N. of Stromboli. 3910 1450E picked up about 10 blips 28 miles ahead. Switched on rooster and off at 2205 hours. Eventually able to see shipping, definitely the 3 S/S and the remaining D/Rs by the aid of flares from "Y". The B/S were laying black smoke screen and the D/Rs a white one. As no flares were forthcoming from Y and deeming it not feasible to attack on own flares, S did not drop torpedo. -(Continued)

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PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE

Reference: **AIR 27/607**

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We can also establish that on at least one occasion he flew with the "Gleason" crew, as a gunner. December 19/20, 1942. It was with Gleason and crew that Harold would meet his death three weeks later as part of 458<sup>th</sup> RAAF.

19/20 Jan 1943 Wellington "O"	P/Sgt. Gleason and crew. No H. KEMPTON SGT K. B. GAN SGT A. FORET SGT C. ROWAN SGT H. STANLEY	Search maritime area.	1810 0330	1 small trawler type 300 tons 3700 maritimo 15 mls. course 070° at 8 knots. Without up moon on 28 about 400 yds. away slightly above no attack. 3 batches of flares (white) last ones amber 5100 maritimo 3 mls saw what appeared to be 2 S/Ws surfaced or 2 small vessels 285 maritimo 30 min. all sighting report patrol completed S/C for base. Weather and vis V. Good.
19/20 Jan. 1943 Godfrington "H"	P/O Sutton and crew. SGT H. HAYDEN SGT R. WESTMAN No H. FALLS SGT A. FOWLER SGT A. STOUT SGT H. STANLEY	Naval co- operation in Gulf of Gadag.	1913	1300 Cape Turgeumes 5 mls. saw flares saw flash as off torpedo hit 2nd flash observed from same area. 1800 Cape Turgeumes 5 mls. saw vessel U/L dropped 2 flares light A/A. sighted L/R and M/N (partially obscured by smoke from D/R). Sighting report sent contact lost. Dropped flares saw nothing land interference on S/E. sent message "continue shadowing" 2000 Cape Turgeumes 5 mls. sent message that contact lost. Dropped flare L/R course 300° sighted report sent. Weather and vis Good.
19/20 Jan. 1943 Fishington "M"	Sgt Norton and crew. SGT H. STANLEY	Strik on sighting from 3000	0045 0630	Shipping contact ahead N. of Djerballa 12 mls. contact 3440 N 1110°. Visual of ship but soon lost flares worked but where on wrong side of ship. sent sighting report and shadowed A/A fired

On February 01<sup>st</sup>, 1943 the Wellington flight of 69 Squadron was transferred to the reforming 458 Squadron RAAF. Harold was now part of the 458<sup>th</sup> family. Based on Malta and of course with many of the previous 69 Squadron personnel and crews.

The first on February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1943 as a rear gunner in the crew captained by Flt Sgt A. Milne. He was the rear gunner on this occasion in Wellington Mk V111. An eight-hour flight in the Maritimo/Palermo area.

WORK CARRIED OUT  
By No. 458 (R.A.A.F.) Squadron.

**SECRET**      PAGE No. 3

FOR THE MONTH OF February, 1945.

DATE	AIRCRAFT TYPE & NUMBER	CREW	DUTY	TIME		DETAILS OF SORTIE OR FLIGHT	REFERENCES
				UP	DOWN		
5/8. Feb.	Wellington. V111. "O".	R.98864. F/Sgt. Milne.A. 3086774. Sgt. Smith. .W. 180596. P/O. Hiasy.F.R. R.98828. Sgt. Cope. R. . R.91888. Sgt. Quinn.R.T. R.91441. Sgt. Stanley.H.	Captain. End Pilot. Navigator. W/Optr. S.I. Optr. Rear Gunner.	1800.	0160.	Patrol Maritimo/Palermo. Stratus Cloud. Visibility Bad. Weather Poor. Sighted 4 destroyers 090 deg. Speed 20 knots. Flares and Flak and 1 fire seen at Palermo, explosion reflected by clouds (possibility and aircraft). A.S.V. Jammed from port base. Returned to base after jamming.	

Harold second and last mission with 458<sup>th</sup> was on February 13<sup>th</sup>, 1943. It was as part of the crew with Captain F/Sgt L. Gleason \* (see 458<sup>th</sup>.org Newsletters December 2024 and April 2025 for further information on other crew members from this mission)

It is recorded on page 94 "We Find and Destroy" (First edition) As we have noted, this was the night that three 458<sup>th</sup> Wellingtons all reported engine trouble and returned to base at Malta. As the wireless operator on this flight, it would have been Harold who made that last call.

DATE	AIRCRAFT TYPE & NUMBER	CREW	DUTY	TIME		DETAILS OF SORTIE OR FLIGHT	REFERENCES
				UP	DOWN		
15th Feb.	Wellington. "O". MX.728.	R.87397. F/Sgt. Gleason.L. 1289628. Sgt. Brown. E.R. J.9516. P/O. Kempton.H. R.91441. Sgt. Stanley. H. R.92302. Sgt. Brown. PEE. R.75235. Sgt. Drew. W.T.	Captain. End Pilot. Navigator. W/Optr. S.I. Optr. Rear Gunner.	2124.	Crash landed. 0100.	Shipping Strike Cape Bon/Maritimo/to Palermo. Apparently reached patrol area. Message received 2540 hrs, returning to base with engine trouble. No other messages received. Crash landed at Luqa, high speed- overshot on landing, either on fire or catching fire immediately afterwards. Crashed into quarry. All members of crew killed with exception of Sgt. Drew (R/c). Sgt Drew sustained cuts and bruises.	

Harold, along with the four other members of the crew are buried in Malta at the Capuccini Naval Cemetery (Prot. Sec (Men's) Plot F Coll grave 104.



A I R M I N I S T R Y

73-77 Oxford St., London W.1,

26th February, 1943.

CAN/R91441/P4/CAS

Dear Mr. Stanley:

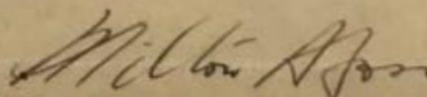
It is with deep regret that I must confirm the information which you have already received from Air Headquarters, West Africa, which stated that your son, Sergeant Harold Ernest Stanley, lost his life as the result of air operations on the 13th February, 1943.

Your son was Wireless Operator Air Gunner of a Wellington aircraft which was carrying out operations against the enemy when it encountered engine trouble and on attempting a landing at base overshot the field and crashed into a quarry at 12.01 a.m., G.M.T., on the above mentioned date.

Your son's funeral was held at 3 p.m. in the afternoon of the 17th February, 1943, at Bighi Cemetery, Malta.

Please accept my deepest sympathy with you in your great loss.

Sincerely,



(Milton A. Foss) Flight Lieutenant,  
R.C.A.F. Casualties Officer,  
for Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief,  
Royal Canadian Air Force, Overseas.

F. G. Stanley, Esq.,  
Izon via Minnagan,  
Nigeria, West Africa.





Funeral – Detail 5 (photo of funeral service in Malta) from framed photo collection donated by Mrs. Shirley McClelland (sister of Sergeant Stanley) to Commonwealth Air Training Plan Museum in Brandon, Manitoba.



Because Harold's mother had died in 1937, and he was not married, no "Mother's Cross" was issued.

Harold was promoted to WO2 on December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1942. His total service with the RCAF was 743 days. He spent 297 days overseas and flew on 11 confirmed missions (perhaps more unrecorded with 69 Squadron). Because of his service in the defence of Malta it is very possible that he would be eligible for the "Malta Cross".

The above pictures are via Veterans.gc.ca as part of a memory box created by Harold's sister, Shirley. Shirley donated it to the Commonwealth Air Training Plan Museum in Brandon, Manitoba.

We will visit and pay our respects to Harold along with the 30 other Canadians of 458<sup>th</sup> RAAF who are buried and/or memorialised in Malta, in October of this year.



## **Queensland Flight Report by Brett Taylor**

As I have no correspondence to report for this newsletter, I will again continue to use excerpts from my father's WWII diary written for his sister in the event he did not make it. I think the diary allowed my father to share his private thoughts as a download and maybe to help him cope.

This newsletter is an edited version of the diary when four Wellington Operational Training Crews transferred in late 1943 from the UK and to North Africa to start torpedo bombing training and join 458.

If nothing else this episode provides an insight into war service life. To help the reader understand my father's Christian name references, I have given an explanation below:-

- Karl (Girrbach), Len (Harrison) and Geoff (Smith) were all pilot officer friends, now all MIA
- Tom, Mac and Roy were members of his crew
- Crusher (Jones), John (Dowling) and Joe were from the other Wellington crews
- Joan and Tubby were friends in the UK

The edited diary is in italics together with some additional explanation in normal type from my father's life story notes.

*Friday 6<sup>th</sup> Aug 1943*

*Swung my compasses today and got our parachutes & Mae Wests and tomorrow we draw our K type dinghies. This preparation for a ferry trip is a binding business with a hell of a lot of chasing things & people.*

*Feel a bit depressed for some unknown reason. I keep on thinking about old Karl, Len, Geoff, old Dunga a prisoner of war. I feel I have a score to even up for each of those boys.*

*It looks as if the glider boys were a tough bunch and they certainly proved their guts. A more horrible job I cannot imagine. I expect I*



*know a lot of the boys who went on that job. I can just imagine it. Sicily or bust.*

*There is a Court of Enquiry about the loss of my Kit Bag and it looks as if I will get some compensation. Good thing. I've claimed 10 pounds.*

#### *11.8.43 Wednesday*

*My first operational trip. Air/Sea Rescue trip looking for some poor devil who went into the Atlantic on Monday night. We were out for six hours and we did a "creeping line ahead search for about 4.5 hours. We did 87 legs of 10 miles in length and 3 miles apart.*

*Fortunately, the weather was perfect with bags of visibility. Didn't see a sign of the poor devil. Hope he is found. Went in, in a Wimpy. Ah, it's a silly business. Feel very tired tonight and have the noise of the engines singing in my ears. The front panels were open most of the time to aid visibility. Tom's navigation was good or bloody lucky, as we came out right on the nose.*

*One more trip another compass swing & we are on our way. Old Tom is as deaf as a post and everything must be explained in words of one syllable. Have to be careful with him. Old Crusher has been having nightmares. A couple of nights ago, he woke us all up. He was yelling his head off "He's got me by the foot, he's got me by the foot". Poor old Crusher, he's a good bloke.*

*I hear that Sgt Webber "bought it" at Tunberry. Flew into the water at night. No future in this low flying at night. All his crew were lost. That's two of our fourteen O.T.U crews gone. Ah, yes, my son, join the Air Force for a nice safe job and what a lovely uniform you can have.*

#### *Monday 16<sup>th</sup> August 1943*

*Still at Talberry and if anything, the whole set-up is a little worse than previously. A bomb, a big bomb is needed under this place to brighten up the place.*

*20.8.43 Friday*

*Blast, here I'm dragging my feet with my old pal my diary. At long last my kite, V for Victor or as the crew say V for Vomit, appears to be more or less ready. I got F/O Smith, one of the auxiliary Air Force crowd to check it, and now, except for old George, it appears O.K. I'm going out for a Nav trip tonight. Actually, it is an anti-sub patrol. Damn near everything has happened to old V, even to the dinghy operating in flight & blowing out.*

*Don Anderson in D for Don has arrived at Ras El Ma (Morocco) and old Markey was recalled to Hurn (Bournemouth). I expect he is there by now. Once again, this shocking job of packing & sorting clothes & gear, but I think I've fixed it up now. I've got an astonishing amount of gear, binoculars (night & day), revolver, torches, a hell of a lot of Nav gear.*

*I'm going to leave this diary in London with my gear. I hope, if anything happens to me that this will be sent on to my sister. This will help Marg to get some idea of things over here. Now that I'm about to leave old England, I feel sort of sad. Dear old England with her small fields, high hedges, winding roads & lanes, rivers, small country pubs. Lots can be done to make our country more broad minded. Again, old John distinguished himself, again with the able assistance of old Crusher, they put their poor long suffering Wimpy in a bloody great hole. The next scene is in the lecture room, with the Group Captain lecturing us on "avoidable accidents".*

*22.8.43 Sunday*

*Tomorrow, we go. All my gear has been checked over and part is to remain in London at the R.A.A.F stores. I have left my camp kit in South Australia House. Old Mac has been dashing about getting clearances etc. Now I must pay my mess account and then we are ready.*

*The day is blustery & generally unpleasant which is a pity as England looks so attractive now, more so perhaps because we are about to leave. I do hope that I'm able to come back again as I like England a lot. No news from Tubby but I expect she imagines I am on the way.*

*Had a letter from Joan wishing me God speed. Good old Joan, a pal if ever I had one. Look out 458 Squadron here we come. {I hope}.*

*Next day we flew 10 hours to Ras El Ma near Fez in Morocco. Next hop was to Castel Benito in Libya, 8 hours, Marble Arch 3.5 hours, Benina 2 hours, Cairo West 4.5 hours and finally to Fayid in Egypt where we had to leave our aircraft.*

*Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> Sept 1943*

*T'is here on the edge of the desert at Almaza that I again try to put something down to remind me, in my declining years, of 1939 – 1943. I left Talbenny on the 23<sup>rd</sup> August and flew “V for Vomit” to Hurn & there we were briefed for our first hop. Some very poor type F/Lt gave us duff gen about our losses in the Bay (of Biscay), but as we got through, all is well. Got down through the Bay taking all the cloud cover we could and old Tom made an excellent land-fall off the Spanish coast.*

*Mac said he heard that the 88's (Junkers) always did left hand circuits at the Cape, while waiting for the poor, poor suckers to fly through the Bay. Got to Ras El Ma without trouble and made a lousy landing. The first people I saw were old Markham, Vic Kemis, both on their way back to UK. They gave me some interesting “gen” about the Sicily “do” - 65% of the gliders were dropped in the sea. The Yanks were largely to blame. Poor old Wilke “bought it” on the second raid & Peter May, my old Kidlington C.O., also “bought it” on a special raid with paratroopers. I understand that he didn't even drop his “bodies”, so the whole lot must have gone.*

*My engines were still playing up at Ras El Ma & that coupled with an attack of “Gippy” stomach for both Dick & I, put us out for six days. Castel Benito was our next stop where the tail wheel packed up. It must have gone on take off as the landing was O.K. Castel Benito was Musso's “show place” and they had a wizard place, swimming pools etc*

*Once again engine trouble, but this time it was finally fixed up and then on to Cairo West. The wireless and our compressor packed up, so we landed at Marble Arch. They couldn't fix our wireless or*



compressor, so we altered our route and went to Benina, which is outside Benghazi. Here our wireless was fixed and we got our brake pressure built up, so we could proceed. An Air Commodore, one Russell, came on as a passenger and he was a good fellow despite the fact that I was a shaken man, when he asked if he could come on. Cairo West and then from there to Fayed, where we finally got rid of "V for Vomit". She gave a hell of a lot of trouble, but she made it. From Fayid they brought us per M.T. to Al Maya on the edge of the desert, but close to Cairo. It is a lousy camp, but I've talked myself into 14 days leave. Most of the day I spend in at Gezira Sports Club and what a club it is. Officers may join at a nominal rate. I pay the daily rate 10 piastres per diem and enjoy the swimming etc. We are in tents here with hardly any bathing or washing facilities, but as we draw 7 pounds 6 shillings per day allowances, I guess we can't complain. I hear that S/L Green, Whit's new C.O. "bought it" in the Bay. Don't know if it is true. No mail, of course, and Lord only knows when it will catch up now. I met Clem Hughes in Cairo H.Q. and also Len Gardner and Bruce Mann. Thought Len had crashed but he looks O.K. Am going back to see him. Must buzz off and see if there is any water. Sick of chasing bloody flies.

*Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> September*

*Joe Bartlett is staying here with me and tonight we are going to telephone the "Wrenery" and see what happens. You never can tell. I'm not in the mood for writing, so will pack it in.*

*Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> Sept 1943*

*Still in Alexandria. Met Nick Ey today and we had lunch together. Haven't seen Nick since E.D. in Adelaide in September, two long years ago.*

*Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> September*

*Old Joe went back to Almaya today after trying for an extension of leave. They turned him down, although I can't imagine why.*

*I saw the Italian Fleet sail into Alexandria, which is something I can tell my grandchildren {I hope}.*

*Joe and I went out to the Alexandria Yacht Club, which is supposed to be the finest in the Med. It is a cracking place built right on the edge of the Harbour. I saw the perfect yacht there. It is owned by Mr. Armstrong, the secretary of the club. It is a 45 foot by 13 foot beam, built of timber collected for 20 years. It is perfect in every way. Gord knows what it is worth.*

*Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> Oct 1943*

*To get at this book I had to dig through my luggage, which just goes to show that I'm still lazy at heart, or maybe it's the heat, I dunno.*

*Shallufa (RAF Station) on the canal. Never imagined I would ever be here, but here I am doing a night torpedo course flying Wellingtons. I find it is a marvellous thing the way one accepts things. Six months ago, the very thought of a torpedo course would have scared me completely rigid, but now I merely accept it.*

*Actually, it is a highly dangerous business, the flying side alone, without enemy opposition. Low down on the water and I mean low, is a very silly business, but there you are. God knows what it will be like with the enemy taking pot shots at you as well. Oh, well, what the hell.*

*While in Alex, I met Keith Napier now a F/Lt. Haven't seen old Keith for nearly three years.*

*Am sharing my very comfortable room with Joe Bartlett and we are blessed with an Italian batman, one Reynaud. He appears to be quite a good bloke and apparently is quite happy. They have a fair amount of freedom and don't work very hard.*

*Old John Dowling is on his way to his Squadron 458, which is a cracker squadron from all reports. We will follow in due course.*

*No mail since leaving England, so am fed up.*

Ed (By this time 458 had already been based in Shallufa for over 12 months and since January 1943 were operating in Malta.)

*Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> Oct*

*Went “dicing” again with Don Anderson, Tom and Roy. Old Don excelled himself by getting 7 hits out of 8 runs without the use of a sight, which is bloody good. I managed to get 4 hits out of 8, thus maintaining my average.*



Wellington crew practicing flying at submarine attack height. Actual attacks were normally at night when submarines were on the surface to recharge their batteries.



*The locals stole 27 parachutes last night and I fancy mine was one of them. Ye Gods, you can't trust 'em as far as you can kick them. I don't like them one little bit.*

*Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> Oct 1943*

*Arrived back from 13<sup>th</sup> General Hospital last night after 11 days in dock for a touch of dysentery. No hope of completing this course now, so I'm being sent on 8 days leave. My crew have already gone, which is very decent of the C.G.I. Bad luck last night as an aircraft went into the sea. S/L Watson and F/Sgt Souster and crew, but this morning a dinghy was found with four people aboard and S/L Watson is supposed to have been seen on the beach. There is hope then that the others also got away with it. They were extremely lucky to get out, because a Wimpy goes down like a brick. Might stay up for 30 secs, if you are lucky. The whole business is made more hazardous by the fact that we fly so close to the water. No chance to do a proper dinghy drill, so you must just take your chance. Add to this the fact that it is at night and the position is really interesting.*

*John is with his squadron and now, in a short time, we too will be members of 458. I hope.*

*Had two air letter cards from old Joan. First mail from England.*

*I'm going to Tel Aviv, which is supposed to be better than any city in Egypt.*

*... to be continued*

No wonder casualties were so high. Bill's brand-new Wellington had problems with engines, brake pressure, wireless, compressor and tail wheel.

I hope this record provides new information for 458 relatives and friends.

I can be contacted on **btaylorc6@gmail.com**

## THE 2025 ERIC J. JEWELL AWARD

Congratulations to the joint winners! They are:

- 2 Wing Band, Queensland, for the purchase of a new drum kit; and,
- A/CSGT Lopez and LCDT Robinson from 723 SQN AAFC in Joondalup, Western Australia



The 2 Wing Band members wonderful musical opus with their winner's certificate.

Photos of 723 SQN recipients will be shown on the 458 website when available.

Entries for 2026 are now open, closing on ANZAC Day next year  
Please refer to <https://www.458raafsquadron.org/eric-j-jewell-award>



Breaking News: after searching over the last 13 years or so, our 3 missing Squadron News #23 & #24 from 1955 and #32 from 1957 have been found!! They were contained in a donated collection to the Australian War Memorial.

This collection <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1036485> (among other items) has the first 218 Newsletters from #1 in 1949 through to #218 in 2004. Thanks to the 458 family (I'm still trying to find out who) for making the donation to the AWM.

This means we now have the complete set from the very first Edition of Squadron News in 1949 all the way to current day, the 280<sup>th</sup> Edition, August 2025. They can be viewed at our webpage: [www.458raafsqadron.org/newsletters-and-publications](http://www.458raafsqadron.org/newsletters-and-publications) 458 SQN News has been in publication for 76 years! We may well have the longest continuous publication of its kind in Australia.

