

A Letter from a BCATP Graduate

(Transcribed by Robert (Bob) Winson CAHS No. 4226)

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Dear Mr. Winson:

Thank you for your letter of 12th January. I very much appreciate your kindness in sending me a copy of the "Fading History" book with special thanks for having the same signed by the author. The Chapters relating to the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan and to Malton are of course of special interest to me. I had not previously appreciated the magnitude of Canada's contribution to WWII. I was certainly surprised to read about the extent of aircraft production in Canada. The only other aircraft I saw at Malton, as well as the Douglas and Lockheed airliners, was a single Hampden.

After completing elementary flying training at Malton, I was posted to No. 5 Service Flying Training School at Brantford, Ontario (Ansons and Harvards). I was awarded my Pilot Wings in June 1942 as part of Class 49 Number 12. There was a rather strange coincidence whilst I was at Malton. The RAF pilot trainees were invited to spend Christmas 1941 with Toronto families. I was collected by Mr. Henry Williamson Simpson of Balliol Street No. 12. I never established if we were distant relatives. Mr. Simpson had connections with the area where I had lived as a boy, and his brother was a member of the staff of a grocery store in a nearby town. Three members of the family were my guests at the Pilots Wings Presentation Ceremony at Brantford. I spent almost eighteen months in Canada and throughout that time I was treated as a member of their family.

There wasn't anything spectacular about the years I spent in the RAF. After qualifying I was posted to No. 6 Bombing and Gunnery School at Mountain View, Ontario to fly Battles and Ansons for the trainee Bomb Aimers. Battles may be in the background in the photograph on Page 18 of the book. I am sure that my first trainee Bomb Aimers passengers would have been most concerned had they been aware that the pilot of the Battle had been awarded his wings the previous month after training on twin engine Ansons, and that for familiarisation had taken off and landed a Battle on only two occasions. In September 1942 I was entitled to fourteen days leave, and I had a wonderful holiday and experience travelling by train to Vancouver and back again.

In January 1943 I was posted to the Air Navigation School at Charlottetown P.E.I. At that time I had not heard of Anne of Green Gables otherwise I would have spent time exploring the area.

I returned to the U.K. in the summer of 1943. After further training I commenced operational flying as co-pilot on Wellingtons with No. 172 Squadron based at Chivenor (North Devon) and from there to detachment to Gibraltar and the Azores – long night patrols searching for surfaced U-Boats as they sailed in and out of their bases on the French coast, or were trying to find the convoys in the Atlantic. Two of the crew members were Canadian. No. 172 Squadron, when at Chivenor, shared the base with No. 407 RCAF Squadron.

After a period of Office duties I commenced an Operational Training Unit course flying the quite heavily armed Beaufighters (four cannons, six machine guns and eight rockets). The war ended just before I completed the course.

My apologies if you are finding this rather boring, but you did ask what happened after I departed Malton!! I was born in Ennerdale (In the Lake District) in 1921. After the war I was in business in the Liverpool area. I returned to live in Ennerdale in 1987, shortly after I retired. Many thanks again for finding the time to reply to my letter, and of course, for the book.

Yours, Sincerely,

Signed Fred Williamson