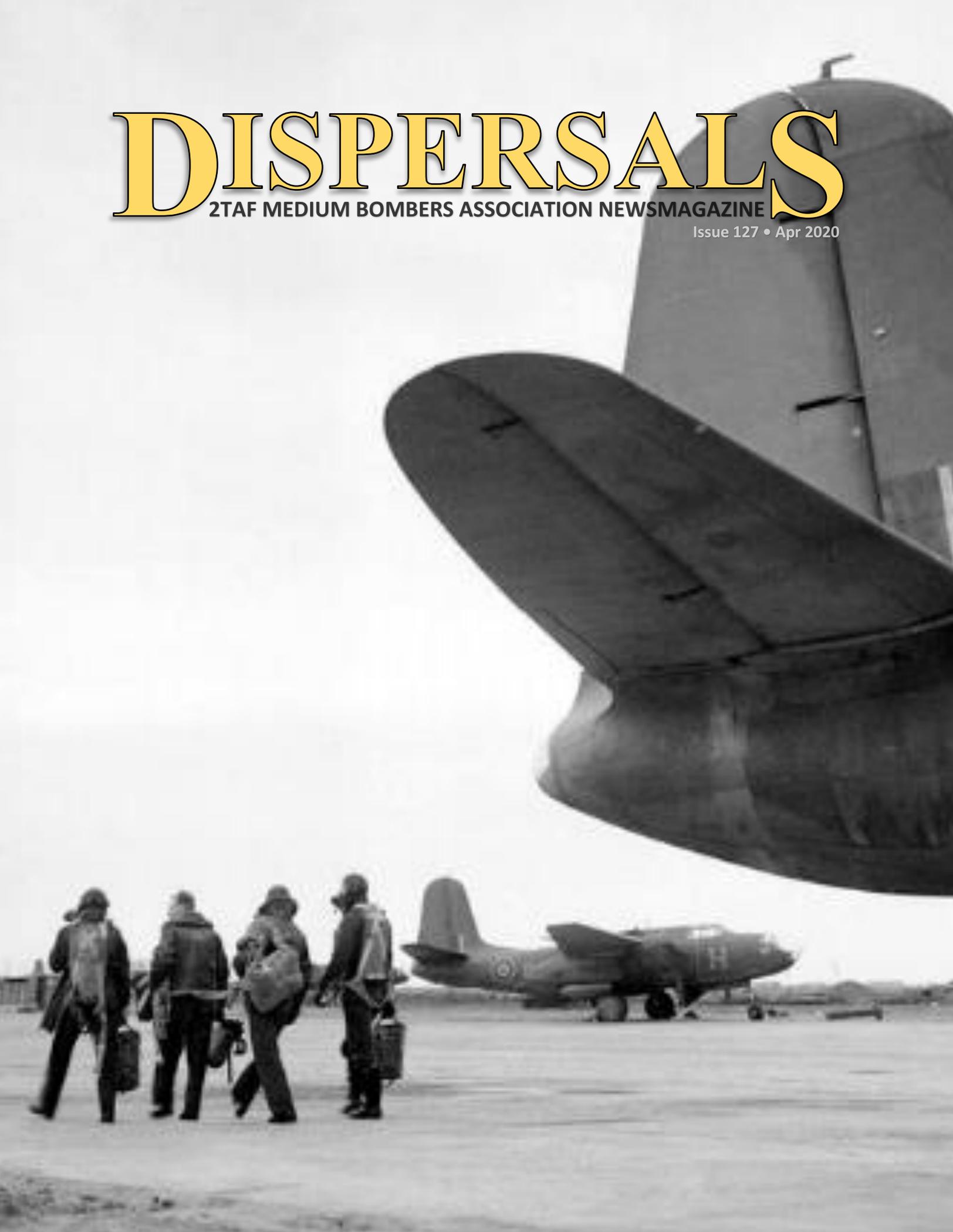


DISPERSALS

2TAF MEDIUM BOMBERS ASSOCIATION NEWSMAGAZINE

Issue 127 • Apr 2020





2nd TACTICAL AIR FORCE MEDIUM BOMBERS ASSOCIATION

Incorporating
88, 98, 107, 180, 226, 305, 320, & 342 Squadrons
137 & 139 Wings, 2 Group RAF

MBA Canada Executive

Chairman/Editor

David Poissant

1980 Imperial Way, #402, Burlington, ON L7L 0E7
Telephone: 416-575-0184
E-mail: david.poissant@sympatico.ca



Secretary/Treasurer

Susan MacKenzie

#2 - 14 Doon Drive, London, ON N5X 3P1
Telephone: 519-312-8300
E-mail: mackensu@gmail.com



Western Representative

Lynda Lougheed

PO Box 54 Spruce View, AB T0M 1V0
Telephone: 403-728-2333
E-mail: lougheedlynda61@gmail.com



Eastern Representative

Darrell Bing

75 Baroness Close, Hammond Plains, NS B4B 0B4
Telephone: 902-463-7419
E-mail: dbing@peakgroup.com



MBA United Kingdom Executive

Secretary/Archivist

Russell Legross

15 Holland Park Dr, Hedworth Estate, Jarrow, Tyne & Wear NE32 4LL
Telephone: 0191 4569840
E-mail: rlegross@gmail.com

Treasurer

Frank Perriam

3a Farm Way, Worcester Park, Surrey KT4 8RU
Telephone: 07587 366371
E-mail: fperriam@live.com

Registrar

John D. McDonald

35 Mansted Gardens, Romford, Essex RM6 4ED
Telephone: 07778405022

Newsletter Editor

Contact **Secretary** (Russell Legross)

MBA Executive - Australia

Secretary

Tricia Williams

PO Box 304, Brighton 3186, Australia
Telephone: +61 422 581 028
E-mail: elegantsol@yahoo.com.au

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***On our cover:** The last crew to return from the last operational mission undertaken by No. 88 Squadron RAF prior to its disbandment, walk away from their Douglas Boston Mark IV, BZ405 'RH-E', at B50/Vitry-en-Artois, France. The crew are, (left to right); F/O J L Weston from Buenos Aires, F/O H Poole from Ilford, Essex, F/O B W Lawrence from Enfield, Middlesex, and F/S D Hack from Clevedon, Somerset. 11 Bostons of the Squadron bombed enemy gun positions in the Emmerich area of Germany for this final mission. (IWM CL 3182)*



CHAIRMAN'S NOTES • Issue 127

April 2020

We got this!

The world has been forced into varying stages of isolation and quarantine by the nasty Corona Virus about which we are learning more each day.

We can be proud of the pulling together of our populations and industries; our parents and grandparents would also be proud of what we've accomplished in such a short time:

- Observing the importance of physical distancing
- Hyper awareness of hygiene practices
- Self-isolation to minimize/slow virus spread
- Manufacturers retooling for disease control apparatus
- Day-by-day updates on status and virus control methods

Imagine the difference the communications and hygiene we now enjoy would have made to our Grandparents/Great grandparents during the 1918-1920 Spanish flu pandemic that affected 500 million worldwide with 50 million fatalities. Much was learned about pandemics.

The following generation, that of our Parents/Grandparents, saw the mobilization of entire populations into the fight against fascism; wholesale conversions of major manufacturers to war-related industries. Those at home relocated for new jobs in factories, observed strict rationing of food, clothing, and gasoline, they donated railings, pots and pans for recycling into planes, tanks and small arms. And for their protection, children were evacuated away from their families in major British cities and boarded in smaller towns and villages remote from the bombing, some as far away as Canada.

They did it; the world survived. And we follow superb example. We got this.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'DANE'.

SURVIVAL MIRACLE FROM 11,500 FEET

Target: Venlo Bridge

David Poissant

German forces were running for the exits of Northwest Europe in the fall of 1944, moving their troops, equipment and supplies back toward the German border.

One of the main roads used for the retreat ran through the City of Venlo on the banks of the River Maas in the southeastern Netherlands, adjacent to the border with Germany. The road crossed the river on twin bridge spans west of the town and, being crucial to the German retreat, was protected from air attack by a huge concentration of 88mm flak batteries.

In mid-November 1944 Allied High Command assigned the B-25 Mitchells and A-20 Bostons of 137 and 139 Wings RAF the job of destroying the twin bridges. The two Wings attacked the bridges on seven occasions damaging the approaches and shifting the bridge spans, but not destroying them. The Germans quickly repaired the damage each time and continued moving troops and equipment.



No. 13 OTU Mitchell conversion course. Fred Guest is 3rd from right, back row. George V. Smith collection

P/O Fred Guest, an RCAF Pilot with 180 Squadron, 139 Wing RAF flew in four of those raids. He related that on each raid the flak got heavier as the Germans moved in even more 88mm flak batteries. The raid on 19 Nov 44 saw six Squadrons readied to once again attack this fiercely well-defended target:

- 88 Squadron: 12 Bostons
- 98 Squadron: 12 Mitchells
- 180 Squadron: 15 Mitchells
- 226 Squadron: 6 Mitchells
- 320 Squadron: 15 Mitchells
- 342 Squadron: 12 Bostons

All aircrew had been briefed for the target and assigned the order in which each formation was to arrive over the target. “It was always preferable”, Fred said, “to be one of the first formations at the target as it took the German gunners time to determine the intended target, the course and altitude of the attacking formations and they became more accurate as each formation arrived. By the time of the last formation’s arrival the gunners had become much more accurate and,” as Fred suggests, “probably quite angry!”

W/O Joseph Francois Xavier Alfred Côté RCAF was a Wireless Operator/Air Gunner (WAG) in one of those 226 Squadron, 137 Wing Mitchells and was about to experience one of the most unique escapes of WWII.

Alfred had enlisted in the RCAF in January, 1940 in his home town of Ottawa, graduated from No. 3 Bombing & Gunnery School at MacDonald, Manitoba in November '42 and shipped overseas in March '43. He was posted to 21 Squadron RAF at Sculthorpe, Norfolk on 25 May 43, joining an existing crew flying Lockheed Venturas:

- F/L A.M. Alderton (Pilot)
- F/O B. Chalet (Navigator/Bomb Aimer)
- F/O J. Reader (Air Gunner)

Their first op together, in Ventura Mk I serial AE790, on 27 Jul 43, was a raid on the coke ovens at Zeebrugge; they would fly a total of six ops ending 31 Aug 43, when 21 squadron started a conversion to de Havilland Mosquitoes (21 Sqn was previously slated for conversion to Mitchells, but that was changed after just two Mitchells were delivered). As there was no requirement for WAGs or Air Gunners in Mosquitoes, Alfred was posted to an Operational Training Unit as an instructor until October of 1944 when 226 Squadron came looking for Air Gunners.



*W/O J.F.X. Alfred Côté.
Ottawa Citizen Photo 15 Mar 45*

Alfred, now a Warrant Officer, flew his first 226 operation, an attack on Venlo Bridge, 3 Nov 44 with crewmates:

- F/L Rimmel (Pilot)
- F/L Higgin (Observer)
- F/O Applegarth (WAG)
- W/O Fraser (AG)

He must have been serving as a Squadron Gunner, filling in for ill and otherwise missing regular crew gunners, as he flew three more ops, all with different crews and all against Venlo Bridge, until this one, 19 Nov 44.

Before the arrival of the RAF Mitchells and Bostons that day, the 4th Battery of No. 3 Super Heavy Regiment, Royal Artillery had been shelling Venlo Bridge from a range of just over 15 miles. Flying Officer Richard Rohmer, piloting a 430 Squadron RCAF P-51 Mustang, was spotting for the artillery shoot with F/L E.F.J. Clark providing cover. From the Artillery Regiment Record:

“19 November 1944: 4 Battery with its 8” came into action in Loon [Holland] and laid out an arc of fire covering Venlo to the east with the object of doing a shoot to destroy the bridge across the Maas. The following data regarding this rather interesting shoot had been worked out the day before: Angle between line of fire and line of bridge was 21°; range to the bridge was 27,000 yards. The dimensions of the bridge taken from air photographs were length 175 yards and breadth 15.5. From the above it was calculated that we could expect 19% hits. The shoots started and up to 15.25hrs we fired 36 rounds when we were ordered to stop as medium bombers were on their way to bomb the bridge.”



No. 3 Super Heavy Regiment, 4th Battery, Royal Artillery www.royalartilleryunitsnetherlands1944-1945.com

180 Squadron's Fred Guest continues: “On 19 Nov 44, our crew's 39th operation, there had been several formations ahead of us; we came in behind a formation of six Mitchells of 226 Squadron and the sky was full of flak all 'round it; we were about 20 seconds behind them on their bombing run; I was marveling at all the flak surrounding them and more than a little apprehensive (terrified) about flying into that same area in another few seconds. I saw an aircraft in the preceding formation take a direct hit and the starboard (right) wing came flying off; the aircraft went into a violent spin and I lost sight of it in a second or two. Now it was us on the bombing run and surrounded by flak bursts. When we completed our bombing run and set course for our base at Melsbroek, we were a pretty happy crew to have survived all that flak with only a few holes, as we discovered later.”

The aircraft that Fred saw get hit was 226 Sqn Mitchell II 'MQ-P' RAF serial FW146 (USAAF serial 42-87472) B-25D. That model had no tail guns, but had a Perspex observation dome at the end of the fuselage. In an RAF Mitchell crew, the Wireless Operator/Air Gunner (WAG) would lay prone with his head in the dome to spot any enemy aircraft approaching and, on bombing runs, to call out flak burst locations to aid the pilot via the intercom in evasive manoeuvres. The WAG would also man the ventral (lower) turret¹ as required. The Air Gunner (AG) was positioned on a bicycle-type seat on the pedestal of the upper turret with his head and shoulders between armored plates; there was little room to turn his head, so he had to traverse the turret in order to watch the skies around him.

That turret position in 'MQ-P' saved the life of WAG W/O Alfred Côté. There was no AG, but three WAGs, on this crew captained by S/L G. Campbell. Squadron Leaders often had extra crew in the form of new squadron members along for familiarization flights.

The flak hit that broke away the wing and threw the Mitchell into a spin also caused the tail section of the fuselage with gun turrets and empennage (vertical and horizontal stabilizers, rudders and elevators) to break away, also into a spin. With Alfred trapped inside at his position on the upper turret pedestal, the spinning continued for several thousand feet before calming into a flutter, rather like an autumn leaf. Remarkably, it fluttered the last few thousand feet before coming to rest in a Dutch orchard.

All of Alfred's crewmates were killed. They are buried in the Jonkerbos War Cemetery at Gelderland, Netherlands:

S/L G. Campbell DFC (Pilot) RAFVR

F/O D.G. Farquar DFC (Nav/B) RAFVR (of Great Neck, NY, USA)

F/O J.L. Halliday (Special Observer) [GEE?] RAFVR (of Notting Hill, London, England)

P/O W. Hodson (WAG) RAFVR

P/O W.E. Osmonde (WAG) RAAF (of Goulburn, NSW, Australia)



Mitchell II upper turret; W/O Alfred Côté was in position seated here when his Mitchell was hit by the flak burst. D. Poissant collection

¹ The retractable ventral turret on early B-25s was operated by a gunner inside the fuselage and aimed through a periscopic site. Almost impossible to track an attacking fighter, it often induced vertigo to the point of nausea. They were often removed in the field, saving 600 lbs. Ventral turrets were deleted from production after the B-25G version, when tail guns became standard.



Above: An RAF B-25C/D Mitchell in flight. The rear section of Alfred's Mitchell broke off about eight feet ahead of the upper turret, at a mating joint with the main centre wing section; the small bump on the bottom of the fuselage is the retracted dorsal turret. Note the Perspex observation dome at extreme rear of the fuselage. IWM photo.

After the bomber formations left the Venlo target area, the Royal Artillery resumed action:

"They [the bombers] failed to hit it, and at 16.00hrs we fired another 10 rounds at the same line and range, it turned out later that we hit the bridge and knocked one span down."

W/O Côté was assisted from the remains of the tail section by a Dutch farmer who had watched the wreckage spiral into his orchard. Incredibly, after a fall of 11,500 feet, Alfred's worst injury was a broken leg; combined with other injuries, he required immediate attention so the farmer had to contact German authorities. Alfred was taken by horse-drawn cart and canal barge to a facility where his leg was splinted, but without being set! After three weeks he was removed to a POW camp near Dusseldorf, followed by several more moves until an Australian doctor, also a prisoner of war, was allowed to re-break and properly set the leg and put it in traction to heal properly. When he was well enough to move Côté was returned to the prison camp's general population.

Alfred was liberated by US Army forces in April '45 and flown back to England to be reunited with his wife Winifred (Howell), whom he had married in 1943 in Newcastle, and his daughter Carolyne, born in Sep '44. They moved to Canada and Alfred's hometown Ottawa, arriving in mid-June, 1945 to live with Alfred's mother, Ida Côté. Their son Michael was born in 1954.

*Editor's note: **Dave O'Malley**, President, Aerographics and **Dean Black**, Executive Director RCAF Association, both of whom I turned to for assistance, came up with information on Alfred Côté that I used in this article. Two authors did short articles on Alfred in the past to which I referred: **F/L L.F. Gray** (RAF 'Roundel' Magazine 1967) and **Hugh A. Halliday** (Legion Magazine 2013).*

*I will always be grateful for the memoirs of **Fred Guest** (Pilot • 180 Sqn); I'm still mining them.*

A 1966 short community news listing in the 'Ottawa Citizen' marked Alfred's retirement from the RCAF; and a ship's register listing him and family going to England to visit Winifred's parents are all I found on him post-war. If you have any information on him, please let me know.

HOW A USAAF P-47 PILOT SAVED OUR HEINKEL He 111

Royal Air Force Museum • Kris Hendrix: Researcher, Aircraft Collection

The Heinkel He 111 was a bomber in service with the Luftwaffe, the Nazi German air force before and during the Second World War. At the time of its entry into service in the late 1930s, it was one of the finest combat aircraft in the world. It was the main German bomber during the 1940/1941 Blitz over London, although by that time, its operations were mainly restricted to flying at night. It had become too vulnerable against British day fighters such as the Spitfire. In various roles, it soldiered on until the last days of the war.

The Heinkel He 111 was originally designed as a passenger aircraft and because of this, quite unusual for a bomber, it has windows along the fuselage. However, our 1944 He 111 with serial number 701152 and individual code NT+SL went back to its roots. The seats and straps

which are still inside the aircraft today, show that this is a H-20 variant, optimised for carrying 16 paratroopers beside its 3 crew members. This is somewhat surprising as Germany was on the defensive this late in the war and was unlikely to drop soldiers in support of a ground offensive. It is more likely it would have dropped secret agents behind enemy lines. For this reason, the H-20 could carry two 800 kg (1,764 lb) supply containers.

American forces captured this aircraft in May 1945, in the final days of the war. It was flown to Cherbourg on the French coast for shipment to the USA for evaluation. Due to the lack of space on the allocated vessel, HMS Reaper, this did not occur. A three-man American crew of the 56th USAAF Fighter Group, Major Carter, Major Williamson and Captain Ordway took the decision to fly the abandoned aircraft to their base in Boxted, Essex. The He 111 was painted in the unit's colours: matt purple / black with the nose and tail rudder in red. On one side of the fuselage was a monogram, in red outlined in white, forming the individual identification letter. This consisted of a letter O in which was a letter C and centred in that the letter W - the initials of the three-man American crew: Ordway, Carter and Williamson. When they received their orders to return to the US, they realised they had to leave their 'private' He 111 behind, possibly to be scrapped. They came up with an idea...



Heinkels in formation RAF Museum

The Museum was contacted recently by Azure Carter, granddaughter of Major James Carter. She filled us in as to what really happened. Her grandfather was a successful American fighter ace. He was credited with 8 'kills' flying the Republic Thunderbolt, the largest and most powerful single-engine fighter aircraft of the Second World War. He logged 450 combat hours or 137 missions, although when he was assigned a desk job, he flew on without logging his flights.

After hostilities ended, he and his two colleagues were eager to get back to their base in Boxted, Essex when they noticed an abandoned German Heinkel He 111. They took it upon themselves to fly the German bomber, although none of them had received any instructions how to fly the aircraft. Prior to landing they had to fly rounds of the airfield while they figured out how to lower the landing gear. But somehow, they managed to bring the Heinkel safely on the ground. In the following weeks, they flew the aircraft several times, attracting great interest wherever they went. But when in September 1945, they were ordered to return to the States, they knew they would get in trouble for possessing an aircraft without documentation, as the Heinkel was not officially on the USAAF's books.



Left: USAAF Maj. James R. Carter, 61st Sqn, 56th Fighter Group with P-47D 42-7960. Photo: IWM UPL 30535

Right: Maj. Carter with 'his' He 111 Heinkel photo: RAF Museum

Carter and his friends first thought of cutting it up. But as it was such a fine aircraft they could not bring themselves to do this. In any case, dismembering and disposing of such a large airframe could not be readily undertaken. Carter could not pass it to any other American establishment, so the RAF was considered, particularly an RAF cadet airfield where aerodrome security would not be tight. Feeling that the British might also be loath to accept it without transfer documents an act of stealth was planned.

At dawn on the morning of 12 September, Carter took off from Boxted and landed at RAF North Weald, parked the Heinkel near the watch tower and was immediately picked by Captain Charles Cole, flying a 56th Group's transport aircraft, and returned to Boxted. It must have been quite a sight for the people at RAF North Weald to wake up and see a German bomber parked near the

watch tower! Before the British could start an investigation, Carter and his unit were on their way to the States.



The RAF Museum's Heinkel serial no. 701152 as Maj Carter left it at North Weald 12 Sep 45. RAF Museum

The aircraft was later put on display, first in the German Aircraft Display at RAE Farnborough and later at several RAF stations. In the late 1960s, its interior was used for several shots in the Battle of Britain film. In 1978, it moved to the RAF Museum in London, where it remains today. It is here that Azure saw the Heinkel her grandfather flew in 1945.



Left: Royal Air Force Museum London's He 111. Right: Azure Carter with her Grandfather's 'gift'. RAF Museum photos

Azure went up close to the aircraft, and underneath to have a peek inside and imagined what it must have been like for her grandfather to fly this rare aircraft.



DOES ANYONE KNOW THE NAME WYJAD?

Kim Bradford • Chris Larsen • Brenda Gibson

"Does anyone know if there was a family named Wyjad in Black's or Pennfield area, one with a member in the RCAF?"

That was a post on the 'Black's Harbour' Facebook page on 18 Aug 2019 by Kim Bradford. When Chris Larsen (founder of Pennfield Parish Military Historical Society) read it, his Pennfield Ridge 'spider sense' began tingling. He continues:

"I contacted Kim to learn why she was inquiring. Turns out Kim found a bracelet (see attached) that was amongst her father's WWII memorabilia, once I saw it, especially the Service Number, I knew it was Daniel Wyjad. I then contacted Brenda Gibson [Daughter of Dan Wyjad] who gave me permission to give her contact details to Kim."

Chris did that and here's the follow-up Kim sent Brenda:

I found a silver bracelet in my Dad's things some years ago. It was completely black with tarnish and for a long time I didn't pay much attention to it as I thought it was plastic & some item Dad won at a fair or something. Eventually I looked closer and saw RCAF. Then the name. I looked it up and realized it was another Air Force member's silver bracelet. It was kept in a wooden jewel box my Grandfather (Victor H Bradford, Black's Harbor) made for my Grandmother (Linnie Bradford). Then the box became Dad's. (Hazen Bradford, also RCAF, stationed in Gander Nfld)

I really didn't know where to go from there as looking up the name Wyjad via Google was basically fruitless. Tonight it occurred to me to post on the Black's Harbor site here on FB - ask if anyone knew anyone by that name.

That's when I started chatting with Mr. Larsen.

I can faintly recall my Dad talking about the bracelet he found in the then derelict Pennfield Airstrips when out picking blueberries. And Mom saying we should get it back to them but not knowing how to. There was no internet then & we had moved to PEI. (I currently live in Charlottetown).



Kim sent the bracelet to Brenda who was 'pleased as punch' to have such an unexpected and welcome memento from her Dad's WWII RCAF service. She had not heard her Dad mention it.

Dan, a native of Montreal, was an RCAF Pilot; he with 226 Squadron RAF flying B-25 Mitchells. He went to his Last Post 21 Jan 1985 in Montreal.

A-20 BOSTON III SERIAL AL775

David Poissant

Neil Hutchinson is a friend of mine in England; a very accomplished aviation photographer with a second expertise in aircraft modelling. His main modelling interest has been de Havilland DH98 Mosquitos and North American Aviation B-25 Mitchells. Numerous examples of each decorate his 'man cave' study at home. His models always reflect RAF aircraft that actually saw service.

He began work on an A-20 Boston based on an 88 Squadron Boston serial AL775. Why? Because he saw a photo of it and it liked the look! I follow Neil's progress on his Facebook page and was very impressed with his attention to detail that made obvious Neil's pride in his work.



Note the weathering and paint-fade realism built into Neil's ultra-detailed models.

Neil asked if I could supply him with the service history of AL775; here's what I found:

Boston III (Douglas Aircraft construction No. 3707) was received at RAF Speke (now John Lennon Airport), where Douglas and Lockheed companies received and reassembled aircraft, on 08 Dec 41. She moved, 09 Jan 42, to 51 Maintenance Unit at RAF Litchfield for inspection and required RAF modifications.

She was Taken on Charge at 88 Squadron at RAF Attlebridge 27 Mar 42. In Sep/Oct she suffered damage and was sent to the Martin Hearn Civilian Repair Organization (CRO) 15 Oct 42. After repair AL775 was sent back to 88 Squadron, now at RAF Oulton, received 07 Nov 42.

She was again damaged and sent this time to Burnwood Repair Depot (Warrington, Lancashire) 28 Feb 43.

From there she was sent to RAF West Raynham, from where the Overseas Air Delivery Unit flew her to Tunisia 22 Mar 43 to become part of 18 Squadron RAF at Souk el Arba Airfield. Two months later she was noted involved in a 'flying accident'. Although there is no record of her repair, it must have been performed, as she continued to serve with 18 Sqn through the time they moved to Italy as part of the Mediterranean Allied Air Force (1st Tactical Air Force), where she was finally Struck Off Charge at Marcianise Airfield on 29 Feb 44.



Attention to detail is superb; note the oil streaking and dirt! All photos by Neil Hutchinson



84-YR-OLD FORMER RCAF PILOT RETURNS TO THE COCKPIT

Don Mitchell • Global News • via RCAF Association

An 84-year-old former Royal Canadian Air Force fighter pilot got to relive his passion on National Seniors Day by stepping into an RCAF plane for the first time in decades.



Gordon giving pre-flight interview with Global News

Back in the 1950s, Canadian pilot Gordon Helm served at an RCAF base in West Germany and, on many days, was behind the controls of a North American Aviation F-86 Sabre fighter jet in Europe, patrolling the border of the former Soviet bloc during the Cold War.

“We used to fly up and down the Iron Curtain,” Helm recalls. “I suppose you might consider it tense. Canada lost 29 pilots during that tour.”

On Tuesday, 01 Oct 2019, the Huntingdon, Que., native returned to the cockpit, piloting a de Havilland Canada DHC-1 Chipmunk for about 25 minutes over the Hamilton International Airport, thanks to

the charity Wish of a Lifetime and Chartwell Retirement Services.

The Canadian Warplane Heritage Museum provided the backdrop for Helm’s return to the skies, and he was joined by former Air Force pilot Steve Purton.

Gordon is currently a resident of Chartwell Lancaster, a retirement community located 28 kilometres northeast of Cornwall, Ont. Janine Reed, senior director of communications and public relations for Chartwell, says Helm was chosen for the outing after a staff member heard Gordon talking about his exploits in the Chipmunk and nominated him for the wish program for older adults.

“She knew he flew the Chipmunk and had a passion for flying it so she raised it to us, and he was selected because of his passion for the aircraft,” Reed explained.

Helm admitted that despite his love for the Chipmunk, he had actually requested to be flown in a Boeing-Stearman biplane, which was also a military training aircraft. However, though the Museum had an operational PT-27 Stearman, Helm was told it was not serviceable for the flight he had in mind.

The former fighter pilot’s passion for planes started at a young age, specifically during the numerous trips between his birthplace in Quebec and Peterborough, Ont., during which time he would pass by Canadian Forces Base Trenton and see airplanes on the ramps.

“I had an interest in flying, but my mother told me I had to get into engineering first,” he said. To complicate matters, Helm said his family doctor told him he had a heart murmur and that his condition would pretty much ground any chance of a flying career. Undaunted, Helm signed up for the University Reserve Training Plan and passed a physical examination, which cleared him to

join the RCAF Regular Officer Training Plan. Eventually, Helm was shipped to the overseas headquarters for the Air Force in Metz, France.

After seeing much of Western Europe during his posting, Helm decided to get married at the age of 22. He says that back in the day, that was a “no-no” and that the action had his commanding officer considering a discharge.

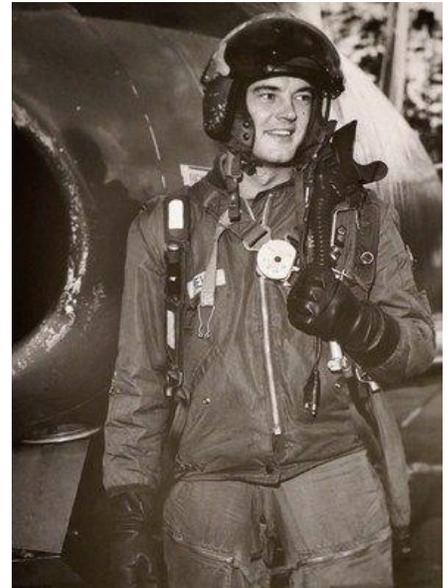
“I explained to him that I had six weeks to go to earn my wings and just one year to get my engineering degree,” said Helm. “He allowed me to continue flying, and I was able to get my wings and graduate from McGill [University].” During that time, Helm had his first child, a daughter, and began looking again at a posting overseas, this time in Germany.

Helm took up his role in Germany at RCAF Station Baden-Soellingen in the '50s, without his new family, and began flying a Sabre jet fighter.

The former pilot would log 4,000 hours in his flight book from that tour of duty, including the operation of simulators after the Sabre jets were retired.

He then returned to Canada to do his ground tour at Lac St-Denis, Que., and flew the Chipmunk before being grounded by “health issues” and working until he was 80 with a number of commercial airline companies.

Helm said he was “pleased” with his 25-minute so-called “exercise” on Tuesday, adding that the best part was when he took over the controls and got to do chandelles, which involve the pilot combining a 180-degree turn with a climb.



Gordon Helm with an F-86 Sabre in France. RCAF photo



Gordon Helm heading out in Canadian Warplane Heritage DHC-1 Chipmunk

When asked whether he would take another flight in a warplane in the future, Helm replied: “Yeah, I’d do it again.”