

# Class of 65 Newsletter

## Bulletin d'Information—Classe de 65

Issue/Numéro 92



Jan/jan 2016

*Disclaimer: This Newsletter is produced for members of the RMC Class of 1965 and is based primarily on inputs from members of the Class of 65. It is not an official publication of the Royal Military College nor does it purport to represent the views or opinions of all members of the Class. Unfortunately, the Editorial staff lacks the linguistic skills to produce a bilingual version. Items are published in the official language in which they are received.*

### Editor's Corner/Coin du rédacteur

I had very little input for this issue, so I'm afraid most of it is going to be a "me and mine" edition. **Gerry Mueller** has provided some interesting observations stemming from the exchange between **Hugh Spence** and **Nancy Stevens** that was recorded in Issue 91. There has also been continuing debate about the pillbox and I will be proposing a couple of things to perhaps nip it in the bud before it becomes another cause célèbre like the famous (infamous) **Bob Walker** "Theory of Alphabetic".

### RMC Class of 65 and the University of Waterloo Connection by 6559 Gerry Mueller

Regarding the interchange between Hugh Spence and Nancy Stevens, about her late husband, 6573 Charlie Stevens, what intrigued me was that Charlie was the 3<sup>rd</sup> one I know of from RMC '65 that graduated from University of Waterloo. The other two are me, and my roommate in the Frigate, 6531 Aldo Donnarumma. Charlie graduated from Civil engineering in 1971, Aldo from Chemical in 1970. I have some contact with Aldo, but he decided that he didn't want his contact info shared, and I have to honour that. He did promise, health permitting, to come to Waterloo for the 50<sup>th</sup> reunion of his class in 2020, and I hope to see him then. (If the pattern persists, and I can still remember anything, I can make RMC on the last weekend of September, and Waterloo on the first weekend of October.)

But, it makes me wonder how many others, particularly engineers, might have ended up in Waterloo. In the 1960's, it would have been a natural progression, given the relatively new coop program, and the ability to earn enough on work terms to pay for tuition and a bit of living expenses. With at least two still living, we could form a sub-class, and hold an RMC '65 @ Waterloo reunion.

My Waterloo ChE '66 50<sup>th</sup> reunion is fast approaching, and for my sins I have been co-opted to be the organizer and whip to get them out. Not an onerous task, as there were only 20 of us in 4<sup>th</sup> year, 19 graduated, and at last count, only 16 were alive.

Another interesting note, this based on information from Jim Boyd, is that no chemical engineer in RMC '65 living in the Frigate survived to graduation. Must have been the spiders!



# Issue/Numéro 92

## Jan/jan 2016

Page 2

### The Pillbox Debate by 6364 Mike Braham

The debate over the pillbox has continued to rage with the **Houghton/Spence** cabal leading the nay sayers and the **Dextras** faction pleading calm and reason. In an effort to bring this divisive issue to rest, may I suggest that someone from either side produce a dispassionate paper on the history of the pillbox in the British (Canadian) Army and its origins as the headdress of choice for RMC. It is certainly a bizarre enough piece of clothing to have an interesting history.

The other part of this issue seems to be on the proper way to wear it. My own personal experience recalls that I had a great deal of difficulty keeping it on my head—perhaps more a function of the head than the hat! To resolve this problem, I propose that the Class of 65, in its continuing role as chief benefactor of the RMC Foundation, bankroll the production of an Official Manual on the Wearing of the Pillbox.

### **A Child's Poetry** by 6364 Mike Braham

Janet and I are blessed with three beautiful grandchildren aged 10-7. I was blown away the other day when Addison, our ten-year old grand-daughter showed me the poetry she had written for English Class. Not only is the poetic form excellent, but the content is very perceptive and the vocabulary remarkable for one so young. In regards the latter, I should point out to the nit-pickers that just yesterday the “birds bellowing” in my back yard drowned out the “cows chirping” in the field behind us. “Delightment” has also become a permanent state of mind in the Braham household!

#### Look

“Chirp!” Look, look over there  
Beautiful Birds bellow their tunes  
In the bright green summer trees  
“Shuffle”. Look, look behind your back!  
Caterpillars crawl, creating cocoons  
Just look around, take a while  
And soon you’ll discover  
Things you’ve never seen before!  
The sun will smile,  
The moon will wave.  
So just take a minute,  
Just take a second,  
To look, to listen, to see.

#### Frost

The frost of winter,  
It makes the whole ground glitter.  
Snow falls from the clouds.

The ice shimmers in the sun.  
The trees are covered in frost.

#### Peace vs. War

Peace  
delightment, wonderful  
embracing, loving, laughing  
lighting up the world, striking us down  
attacking, killing, battling  
despair, death  
War



# Issue/Numéro 92

## Jan/jan 2016

Page 3

### The Unknown Ace by 6364 Mike Braham

Several months ago, the Canadian Aviation Historical Society asked if I would provide them with a presentation on my father's RAF/RCAF career. This led to a follow-up presentation, brokered by **Charlie Emond** and **Gord Diamond** to the RCAF Advisory Committee; and, most recently, to a suggestion by **Jim Carruthers** that I do the same to the monthly Ottawa Class luncheon on 25 January at the HMCS Bytown Naval Officers Mess where 17 classmates gathered.

These presentations have been cathartic to me as they have provided an opportunity to become better acquainted with a parent I revered but didn't know very well, for reasons that probably became apparent to those attending the presentations. The following is an abbreviated version of the presentation.

**Group Captain J.R.D. (Bob) Braham, DSO\*\*, DFC\*\*, AFC, Belgian Croix de Guerre, Belgian Order, of Leopold, CD.**

MY FATHER, JOHN RANDALL DANIEL (BOB) BRAHAM, WITH THREE DSOs, THREE DFCs, THE AFC, PLUS THE BELGIAN ORDER OF LEOPOLD AND CROIX DE GUERRE WAS THE MOST DECORATED BRITISH COMMONWEALTH FIGHTER PILOT OF WORLD WAR II.



HE DESTROYED 29 ENEMY AIRCRAFT, PROBABLY ONE OTHER, AND DAMAGED 6 MORE. HE WAS THE TOP SCORING ALLIED ACE FLYING TWIN ENGINED AIRCRAFT AND WAS RANKED FIFTH AMONG ALL COMMONWEALTH FIGHTER ACES IN THE WAR.

HE WAS BORN ON 6 APRIL 1920 IN HOLCOMBE, SOMERSET. HIS FATHER, ERNEST GOODALL BRAHAM, WAS A METHODIST MINISTER WHO HAD SERVED AS A PILOT IN THE ROYAL FLYING CORPS (RFC) IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR.

AT SCHOOL HE WAS AN INDIFFERENT STUDENT AND LEFT SCHOOL AT AGE 16 AND BRIEFLY WORKED AS A CLERK WITH THE MANCHESTER POLICE BEFORE ENROLLING IN THE ROYAL AIR FORCE. AFTER PRELIMINARY FLYING TRAINING HE EARNED HIS WINGS WITH LITTLE EVIDENCE OF THE FLYING SKILL THAT WOULD BECOME EVIDENT LATER AND JOINED HIS FIRST OPERATIONAL SQUADRON, 29 SQUADRON, FLYING THE BRISTOL BLENHEIM IN THE NIGHT FIGHTER ROLE.

HE GAINED HIS FIRST AERIAL VICTORY ON 24 AUGUST 1940 WHEN HE SHOT DOWN A HEINKEL 111 (HE 111).

**Heinkel 111**





# Issue/Numéro 92

## Jan/jan 2016

Page 4

### Unknown Ace (cont)

AT ABOUT THIS TIME HE WAS INJURED IN THE FIRST OF THREE AUTOMOBILE ACCIDENTS IN WHICH HE WAS INVOLVED, BUT WAS SOON BACK FLYING. THE SQUADRON HAD BEEN RE-EQUIPPED WITH THE BRISTOL BEAUFIGHTER, A RUGGED, VERSATILE AND HEAVILY ARMED AIRCRAFT. AT THIS TIME HE WAS AWARDED THE DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS.



**Bristol Beaufighter**

ON 13 MARCH 1941 HE DESTROYED A DORNIER 17 AT A RANGE OF ABOUT 60 YARDS AND NARROWLY AVOIDED COLLIDING WITH THE DEBRIS. THIS CLOSE-RANGE ENGAGEMENT BECAME A HALLMARK OF MANY OF HIS AERIAL VICTORIES.



**Dornier 17**

ON 15 APRIL 1941 HE MARRIED MY MOTHER, JOAN HYDE FROM LEICESTER, AFTER A BRIEF 6 WEEK COURTSHIP. THE CEREMONY WAS HELD IN DUXFORD, CAMBRIDGE AND WAS OFFICIATED BY HIS FATHER.

ONE MONTH LATER HE ACHIEVED ANOTHER SUCCESS. HE POSITIONED HIMSELF TO ATTACK TWO HE 111S, DOWNING ONE OF THEM AT CLOSE-RANGE WITH SHORT BURSTS OF CANNON FIRE. THE HEINKEL CRASHED IN NEIGHBOURING RICHMOND, LONDON.

HE BECAME AN ACE ON 12 SEPTEMBER BY SHOOTING DOWN A HE 111 FOR HIS FIFTH VICTORY. ON 3 OCTOBER HE WAS VECTORED ON TO A POSSIBLE ENEMY AIRCRAFT BY GROUND CONTROL – AS HE CAME INTO RANGE HE WAS FIRED UPON AND NARROWLY AVOIDED FIRING BACK – THE ENEMY WAS AN RAF WELLINGTON BOMBER! A DO 17 WAS CLAIMED ON 19 OCTOBER FOLLOWED BY ANOTHER HE 111 FIVE DAYS LATER. ON 25 NOVEMBER 1941 HE WAS AWARDED A BAR TO HIS DFC.

HAVING BEEN ON CONSTANT OPERATIONS WITH LITTLE LEAVE IN 1941, HE WAS RESTED AND POSTED TO NO 51 OTU (OPERATIONAL TRAINING UNIT) AT RAF CRANFIELD IN BEDFORDSHIRE ON 28 JANUARY 1942.

TUCKED IN HERE, HE HAD TIME TO ATTEND THE BIRTH OF HIS FIRST SON – ME – ON 10 FEBRUARY 1942. HE TOOK TWO DAYS LEAVE TO CELEBRATE THE NEW ARRIVAL BEFORE RETURNING TO OPERATIONS.



### Unknown Ace (cont)

DURING HIS TIME AT CRANFIELD HE FREQUENTLY VISITED 29 SQUADRON AND ON THE NIGHT OF 6 JUNE 1942, FLYING A BORROWED BEAUFIGHTER, DESTROYED A DORNIER 217. RETURNING FROM THIS ACTION DURING BAD WEATHER, HE OVERSHOT THE RUNWAY ON LANDING AND DAMAGED THE AIRCRAFT. HE WAS NOT INJURED.



**Dornier 217**

ON 24 JULY 1942 HE WAS POSTED BACK TO 29 SQUADRON IN THE RANK OF ACTING SQUADRON LEADER AND AS A FLIGHT COMMANDER. HE DESTROYED ANOTHER DO 217, ON 9 AUGUST AND THEN, AFTER DAMAGING A JU 88 ON THE 24th HE DESTROYED ANOTHER FOUR DAYS LATER USING THE NEW MARK VII AIRCRAFT INTERCEPTION (AI) RADAR.

ON 29 AUGUST HE ATTACKED AND DESTROYED A JU 88 FLYING AT 150 FT ABOVE THE ENGLISH CHANNEL. SKILFULLY "HUGGING THE WAVES" THE GERMAN PILOT MADE VIOLENT EVASIVE MANOEUVRES AND BEFORE CRASHING INTO THE SEA FIRED A BURST THAT CAUSED THE PORT ENGINE OF DAD'S BEAUFIGHTER TO CATCH FIRE, FORCING HIM TO CRASH LAND NEAR BEACHY HEAD. HE WAS NOT INJURED ALTHOUGH A BULLET WAS FOUND TO HAVE PASSED THROUGH HIS SEAT, MISSING HIM BY INCHES. HE WAS AWARDED THE DISTINGUISHED SERVICE ORDER (DSO) ON 9 OCTOBER 1942 WITH HIS TALLY STANDING AT 10 ENEMY AIRCRAFT DESTROYED.



**Junkers 88**

HE WAS PROMOTED AND GIVEN COMMAND OF 141 SQUADRON AT RAF STATION FORD IN SUSSEX ON 23 DECEMBER 1942 AS A 22-YEAR-OLD WING COMMANDER, THE YOUNGEST IN RAF HISTORY AND A RECORD THAT I BELIEVE STILL STANDS.

141 SQUADRON'S BEAUFIGHTERS MOVED TO PREDANNACK, CORNWALL IN FEBRUARY 1943 TO CARRY OUT NIGHT PATROLS OVER BRITTANY AND FRANCE AND DAYLIGHT PATROLS OVER THE BAY OF BISCAY. ON 20 MARCH HE CLAIMED A LOCOMOTIVE DESTROYED AND IN APRIL HE ATTACKED A GERMAN E-BOAT (A FAST TORPEDO BOAT), FIRING 500 ROUNDS OF 20MM CANNON AT THE TARGET CAUSING A LARGE FIRE. ON SUBSEQUENT OPERATIONS HE DAMAGED THREE MORE E-BOATS AND STRAFED AND DAMAGED A SURFACED U-BOAT. DURING THESE MISSIONS HE WAS ATTACKED BY ENEMY FIGHTER AIRCRAFT AND HIT BY FLAK ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS.



**E-Boat**





# Issue/Numéro 92

## Jan/jan 2016

Page 6

### Unknown Ace (continued)

ON 2 JUNE 1943, HIS SECOND SON, ROBERT WAS BORN ALTHOUGH HE WAS NOT HOME FOR THE OCCASION – HE WAS IN SCOTLAND CONDUCTING SERRATE (A NEW RADAR) TRIALS. IT WAS NOT UNTIL 20 JUNE THAT HE WAS ABLE TO GET HOME FOR SOME LEAVE TO SEE HIS NEW SON FOR THE FIRST TIME.

HE HAD IMMEDIATE SUCCESS WITH SERRATE, DESTROYING A MESSERSCHMITT BF 110 OVER THE NETHERLANDS ON 14 JUNE AND ANOTHER NINE DAYS LATER. A CLAIM WAS ALSO MADE FOR A DAMAGED JU 88 AFTER HIS GUNS JAMMED. IN THIS LATTER ENGAGEMENT IN WHICH HE HAD BEEN ATTACKED BY TWO ENEMY AIRCRAFT, HIS BEAUFIGHTER WAS STRUCK BY ENEMY FIRE AND ONE ENGINE SET ON FIRE. HE MANAGED TO DOUSE THE FIRE, ELUDE THE ENEMY AIRCRAFT AND RETURN HOME ON ONE ENGINE.



**Me 110**

ON 15 JUNE 1943 HE WAS AWARDED A SECOND BAR TO HIS DFC.

IN JULY, DAD TOOK A BREAK FROM OPERATIONS AND AT THE INVITATION OF THE ROYAL NAVY, SPENT THREE DAYS AT SEA IN THE DESTROYER HMS WHITSHED ON CONVOY ESCORT DUTY UP THE EAST COAST OF ENGLAND – NOT A VERY RESTFUL OR PARTICULARLY SAFE BREAK I SUSPECT!

DAD'S MOST SUCCESSFUL INTRUDER OPERATION TOOK PLACE ON THE NIGHT OF THE 17 AUGUST 1943, WHEN THE SQUADRON OPERATED IN SUPPORT OF A LARGE RAF BOMBER COMMAND RAID.

HE SHOT DOWN WARRANT OFFICER GEORG KRAFT, AN ACE WITH 15 AIR VICTORIES. KRAFT CRASHED INTO THE NORTH SEA AND WAS LATER BURIED IN DENMARK. ANOTHER ME 110 HAD WITNESSED THE ACTION AND ATTEMPTED TO ENGAGE MY FATHER BUT WAS OUTMANOEUVRED AND ALSO DISPATCHED. ITS PILOT, WARRANT OFFICER HEINZ VINKE, WITH 54 VICTORIES, WAS THE ONLY MEMBER OF HIS CREW TO SURVIVE. APPARENTLY DAD, IN REVENGE FOR AN INCIDENT IN WHICH TWO BRITISH AIRMEN IN PARACHUTES HAD BEEN STRAFED BY A GERMAN FIGHTER AIRCRAFT, CONSIDERED SHOOTING AT VINKE IN HIS PARACHUTE BUT WAS DISSUADED BY HIS RADIO OPERATOR.



**Heinz Vinke**

DISSATISFIED WITH THE LACK OF ACTION IN SEPTEMBER, HE FLEW A NUMBER OF MISSIONS AGAINST GROUND TARGETS DESPITE ORDERS THAT PROHIBITED SUCCESSFUL RAF NIGHT FIGHTER PILOTS FROM ENGAGING IN SUCH ACTIVITIES THAT MIGHT EXPOSE THEM TO EXCESSIVE RISK.



# Issue/Numéro 92

## Jan/jan 2016

Page 7

### Unknown Ace (continued)

ON ONE PARTICULAR MISSION HE DECIDED TO HUNT ENEMY RAIL TRANSPORT AFTER FAILING TO FIND ENEMY AIRCRAFT. ON THE DIEPPE TO PARIS LINE HE INTERCEPTED A LOCOMOTIVE WHICH EXPLODED AFTER BEING HIT. HE ATTACKED A SECOND BUT STRUCK SOME TREES WHICH DAMAGED THE UNDERSIDE OF THE FUSELAGE OF HIS BEAUFIGHTER. HE MANAGED TO MAINTAIN CONTROL AND FLEW HOME, LANDING SAFELY DESPITE THE DAMAGE. APPARENTLY IT WAS NOT UNUSUAL FOR HIM TO RETURN WITH STRANGE DAMAGES CAUSED BY LOW ALTITUDE COLLISIONS. AFTER ONE SORTIE AGAINST SHIPPING THE ARMOURERS WERE DRENCHED IN SALT WATER AND SEAWEED WHEN THEY OPENED THE PANEL HOUSING THE CANNONS.

HE WAS AWARDED THE FIRST BAR TO HIS DSO ON 24 SEPTEMBER 1943. FOUR NIGHTS LATER, ON THE 28/29 SEPTEMBER WHILST CARRYING OUT AN INTRUDER OPERATION BETWEEN CELLE AND HANOVER HE ENCOUNTERED WHAT HE IDENTIFIED TO BE A DO 217 WHICH ENGAGED HIM IN A DOGFIGHT. HE DOWNED THE ENEMY AIRCRAFT WHICH HIT THE GROUND AND EXPLODED. HE THEN GAINED ANOTHER CONTACT BUT COULD NOT CATCH IT BEFORE WITNESSING A CRASH NEARBY. THE VICTIM OF THE CRASH WAS GERMAN ACE HANS-DIETER FRANK (55 VICTORIES), FLYING A HEINKEL HE 219, WHO COLLIDED WITH ANOTHER GERMAN FIGHTER WHILE TRYING TO EVADE MY FATHER.



**Hans-Dieter Frank**



THE NEXT NIGHT DAD CLAIMED HIS 19<sup>TH</sup> VICTORY, AN ME 110. THIS TIME HIS VICTIM WAS IDENTIFIED AS GERMAN ACE AUGUST GEIGER OF NIGHT FIGHTER WING 1 (53 VICTORIES). GEIGER PARACHUTED OUT OF HIS FIGHTER BUT DROWNED IN THE SEA. GEIGER, FRANK AND VINKE HAD BEEN AMONG THE MOST SUCCESSFUL NIGHT FIGHTER ACES OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR AND THEIR LOSS WAS A SIGNIFICANT DEFEAT FOR THE LUFTWAFFE.

**August Geiger**

AGAINST HIS WISHES DAD WAS RESTED FROM OPERATIONS AND POSTED FROM NO 141 SQUADRON ON 1 OCTOBER 1943 TO ATTEND A STAFF OFFICER COURSE AT CAMBERLEY.

FOLLOWING THE STAFF COURSE, ON 11 FEBRUARY 1944 HE WAS POSTED AS WING COMMANDER NIGHT OPERATIONS AT HEADQUARTERS NO. 2 GROUP. DESPITE HOLDING A STAFF POSITION HE WAS ABLE TO 'FREE-LANCE' INTRUDER OPERATIONS USING MOSQUITOS LOANED FROM ONE OF THE VARIOUS SQUADRONS IN THE GROUP.

(To see an excellent video of a re-built De Havilland Mosquito, one of the most versatile aircraft of World War II, download <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xvp2AeM68iM#t=54> )



# Issue/Numéro 92

Jan/jan 2016

Page 8

## Unknown Ace (continued)

FOR DAD, HUNTING IN DAYLIGHT WAS A STRANGE EXPERIENCE. ON 5 MARCH 1944 HE FLEW ON A 900-MILE TRIP AROUND NORTHERN FRANCE TO THE AERODROME AT CHÂTEAUDUN WHERE HE SPOTTED A HEINKEL HE 177 THAT HE DISPATCHED FOR HIS 21<sup>ST</sup> AIR VICTORY.

### HE 177

IN THE NEXT TWO MONTHS, IN SIMILAR LONG RANGE FORAYS OVER NORTHERN EUROPE, HE CLAIMED SIX MORE ENEMY AIRCRAFT.



IN MID-APRIL 1944 HE PICKED UP MOSQUITO FITTED OUT AS A FIGHTER BOMBER AND JOINED 107 SQUADRON IN A BOMBING RAID AGAINST PARIS EVEN THOUGH HE HAD NO FORMAL BOMBER PILOT TRAINING. THERE IS NO RECORD AVAILABLE TO INDICATE HIS SKILL IN THIS PARTICULAR ROLE, ALTHOUGH HE DROPPED 4 BOMBS AND EXPERIENCED HEAVY FLAK DURING THE RAID ON TRAIN YARDS! HIS NOTATION IN HIS LOG BOOK READ – “*QUITE GOOD FUN*”.



NINE DAYS LATER NEAR POITIERS, WHILE ENGAGED IN A GROUND ATTACK MISSION HE SPOTTED A FOCKE-WULF 190 FLYING AT LOW-LEVEL. HE FIRED AT 600 YARDS AS THE ENEMY ACCELERATED TO ESCAPE. HIS FIRE SLOWED THE FW 190; AND, CATCHING UP WITH IT, THE FW 190 WAS HIT AGAIN AND CRASHED FOR HIS 27TH VICTORY.

### FW 190

ON 7 MAY 1944 HE BORROWED A MOSQUITO FROM 21 SQUADRON AND OVER ROSKILDE, DENMARK, CAUGHT A JU 88 AFTER A 10-MINUTE CHASE AND SHOT IT DOWN FOR HIS 28TH VICTORY.

FIVE DAYS LATER OPERATING OVER AALBORG HE SPOTTED A FW 190. GIVING CHASE HE FOUND HIMSELF UNDER ATTACK BY AN ME 109. HIS MOSQUITO WAS HIT IN THE PORT WING AND A FUEL LINE WAS RUPTURED. THE 109 THEN DISAPPEARED. IGNORING THE DAMAGE TO HIS AIRCRAFT, DAD CLOSED ON THE FW 190. AT ZERO FEET HIS MOSQUITO BOUNCED OFF A MOUND BUT HE MANAGED TO HIT THE ENEMY AIRCRAFT WHICH BURST INTO FLAMES, STALLED AND CRASHED NEAR AALBORG. AGAIN, THE RANGE WAS SO CLOSE—AROUND 100 YARDS—THAT THE CRIPPLED FOCKE-WULF NEARLY COLLIDED WITH DAD'S AIRCRAFT. THE LOSS OF FUEL COUPLED WITH THE DAMAGED PROPELLERS FOLLOWING HIS CONTACT WITH THE GROUND, MEANT THAT THE CHANCES OF REACHING ENGLAND WERE SLIM. HE CLIMBED TO HIGH ALTITUDE 70 MILES FROM THE COAST AND BROADCAST AN EMERGENCY MESSAGE. HE THEN DITCHED THE MOSQUITO IN THE NORTH SEA AND THE TWO TOOK TO THEIR DINGY FROM WHICH THEY WERE SUBSEQUENTLY RESCUED BY A BRITISH AIR-SEA RESCUE VESSEL.





### Unknown Ace (concluded)

DURING THE D-DAY LANDINGS HE TOOK PART IN LOW LEVEL GROUND ATTACK MISSIONS. ON ONE OCCASION HE ALMOST SHOT DOWN HIS 30<sup>TH</sup> AIRCRAFT BUT FORTUNATELY, AT THE LAST MINUTE, REALISED THAT IT WAS BRITISH!

ON 13 JUNE 1944 HE RECEIVED THE SECOND BAR TO HIS DSO.

ON 25 JUNE 1944 FLYING A MOSQUITO HEADED TO THE DANISH COAST HE SPOTTED, AND WAS LIKELY SEEN, BY GERMAN COASTAL SHIPS. AS HE NEARED LAND HE NOTICED A SLIGHT WHINE IN THE AIRCRAFT'S RADIO RECEIVERS INDICATING THE MOSQUITO WAS BEING TRACKED BY RADAR. THE CLOUDS WERE THINNING OUT AND VISIBILITY WAS IMPROVING. DAD DECIDED IT WAS NOW FOLLY TO CONTINUE AND DECIDED TO HEAD FOR HOME. EN ROUTE, HE SPOTTED A BUILDING WITH A BIG SWASTIKA FLAG FLYING FROM A POLE. A CAR WAS PARKED OUTSIDE THE ENTRANCE. BELIEVING IT MIGHT CONTAIN SOMEONE OF IMPORTANCE, HE DIVED TO ATTACK, STRAFING THE BUILDING AND DESTROYING THE CAR.

BUT HE HAD LOITERED TOO LONG. HE SPOTTED TWO FW 190S APPROACHING FAST FROM THE EAST. THERE WAS NO CLOUD COVER AND THE MOSQUITO COULD NOT OUTFLY THE FASTER AND MORE AGILE SINGLE-ENGINE FIGHTERS FOR LONG SO HE DECIDED TO TURN AND FIGHT WHILE HE STILL COULD. IN A HEAD-ON ATTACK THE FIRST FW 190 PILOT MISSED BUT THE SECOND STRUCK THE PORT WING AND ENGINE WITH CANNON FIRE CAUSING A LARGE FIRE. THE INSTRUMENT PANEL AND COCKPIT WINDOW WAS SHOT THROUGH MISSING DAD BY INCHES. HE DIVED TO THE SEA, LEVELLING OUT BELOW 100 FEET WHERE HE TRIED TO USE THE FIRE EXTINGUISHER TO PUT OUT THE FIRE. HOWEVER, THE MOSQUITO WAS HIT AGAIN AND HE CRASH-LANDED HIS AIRCRAFT ONTO A BEACH AT 150 MILES PER HOUR.

DAD AND HIS RADIO OPERATOR, UNHURT BUT SHAKEN, SCRAMBLED FREE OF THE MOSQUITO AND HID BEHIND A SAND DUNE. THE FW 190 PILOT FLEW OVER AT 20 FEET AND FOR A MOMENT THEY BELIEVED HE WAS GOING TO FIRE ON THEM BUT TO THEIR RELIEF HE WAVED AND FLEW BY. THEY CONTEMPLATED ESCAPE BUT THEY HAD CRASH-LANDED NEAR TO A RADAR STATION AND ENEMY SOLDIERS WERE AT THE CRASH SITE VERY QUICKLY AND THEY WERE CAPTURED AND ESCORTED TO A CELL ON A NEARBY AIRFIELD NEAR ESJBERG.

THEY WERE THEN TAKEN BY TRAIN TO THE *LUFTWAFFE* INTERROGATION CENTRE AT OBERURSEL. AT ONE POINT, A GROUP OF DRUNKEN GERMAN SOLDIERS THREATENED THEM WITH BAYONETS AND TRIED FORCING THEIR WAY INTO THE CARRIAGE OF THE OVER-CROWDED TRAIN. DAD FEARED FOR HIS LIFE BUT THE SITUATION WAS RESTORED WHEN A YOUNG SS OFFICER INTERVENED AND PUT A STOP TO IT.



### Unknown Ace (Continued)

WHILE AT OBERURSEL THE PILOT WHO HAD SHOT HIM DOWN - LEUTNANT ROBERT SPRECKELS OF 1 FIGHTER WING - ARRIVED TO MEET HIM. DAD WAS ONE OF HIS 12 AIR VICTORIES. AFTER A BRIEF MEETING BOTH FIGHTER PILOTS SHOOK HANDS AND PARTED. HE WAS THEN SENT TO STALAG LUFT III, A *LUFTWAFFE* PRISONER OF WAR CAMP NEAR SAGAN CLOSE TO THE POLISH BORDER WHERE THE FAMOUS GREAT ESCAPE HAD TAKEN PLACE IN MARCH OF 1944. HE REMAINED THERE UNTIL 27 JANUARY 1945 WHEN THE ADVANCE OF THE RED ARMY FORCED THEM TO MARCH WESTWARD IN FREEZING CONDITIONS. DAD SUFFERED FROST BITE TO HIS FEET BUT OTHERWISE WAS UNAFFECTED BY THE MARCH. ON FOOT, BY TRAIN AND TRUCK THEY GOT AS FAR AS BREMEN ON 5 FEBRUARY 1945 HOWEVER THE ADVANCE OF THE BRITISH ARMY IN NORTH-WESTERN EUROPE NECESSITATED THEIR EVACUATION TO LÜBECK WHERE THEY WERE LIBERATED BY ELEMENTS OF THE BRITISH ARMY ON 2 MAY 1945 AFTER A JOURNEY OF OVER 500 KILOMETRES.

DAD'S RETURN HOME WAS NOT AN EASY ONE. HIS FAMILY FOUND HIM DIFFICULT TO LIVE WITH. HIS SHORT TEMPER AND AGGRESSIVENESS MANIFESTED ITSELF WHEN JOURNALISTS CAME TO THE FAMILY'S HOME IN LEICESTERSHIRE SEARCHING FOR A WAR-STORY TO PRINT. DAD, WHO DESPISED PUBLICITY, PHYSICALLY EJECTED THEM FROM HIS PROPERTY. THIS DECISION TO SHUT THE MEDIA OUT OF HIS LIFE LIKELY EXPLAINS WHY, EVEN AS ONE OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL ACES, HE WAS VIRTUALLY UNKNOWN IN BRITAIN.

HE STAYED ON IN THE RAF AFTER THE WAR BUT DESPONDENT WITH A DECLINING STANDARD OF LIVING AND LOW-WAGES, IN MARCH 1946, HOWEVER, SIR BASIL EMBRY, A FORMER COMMANDING OFFICER PERSUADED HIM TO RETURN, BUT IN MAY 1952 HE RESIGNED FROM THE RAF FOR THE SECOND AND LAST TIME. HE DECIDED HE COULD NOT AFFORD TO PAY FOR HIS SONS' PRIVATE EDUCATION ON A WING COMMANDER'S SALARY IN BRITAIN. HE JOINED THE ROYAL CANADIAN AIR FORCE WITH THE RANK OF WING COMMANDER (LESS SENIORITY). ON 6 JUNE 1952 THE FAMILY SAILED TO CANADA ABOARD THE EMPRESS OF SCOTLAND. DAD WAS APPOINTED STAFF OFFICER FOR OPERATIONS AND TRAINING AT AIR DEFENCE HEADQUARTERS IN ST HUBERT.

FOLLOWING A TWO YEAR STINT IN ST HUBERT HE WAS POSTED IN COMMAND OF 3AW(F) OTU IN NORTH BAY, ONTARIO. ONE DAY WHILE FLYING WITH A STUDENT PILOT IN A CF-100, A FLAP BROKE LOOSE AS THEY WERE LANDING. DAD IMMEDIATELY TOOK CONTROL AND NARROWLY AVOIDED A POTENTIALLY FATAL ACCIDENT. FOR HIS ACTION IN THIS INCIDENT HE RECEIVED AN OFFICIAL COMMENDATION.

TWO YEARS IN NORTH BAY WERE FOLLOWED BY A SIMILAR PERIOD AT AFHQ IN OTTAWA WHERE HE DISTINGUISHED HIMSELF BY GETTING UNDER THE SKIN OF MOST SENIOR OFFICERS WITH HIS BLUNT CRITICISMS OF CURRENT POLICY.



### Unknown Ace (Continued)

THE FAMILY THEN MOVED TO RCAF STATION BAGOTVILLE WHERE DAD COMMANDED 432 SQUADRON THEN FLYING THE AVRO CANADA CF-100. WHILE THERE HE WAS INVOLVED IN A MID-AIR COLLISION.



WHILE FLYING IN CLOSE FORMATION WITH ANOTHER CF-100 THE TWO AIRCRAFT CAME INTO CONTACT AND, AS A RESULT HE LOST MOST OF A WING. UNABLE TO JETTISON THE CANOPY HE AND HIS NAVIGATOR EJECTED THROUGH THE CANOPY. SINCE THE NAVIGATOR HAD GONE OUT FIRST, DAD WAS SURPRISED WHEN HE PASSED HIM ON THE WAY DOWN. LOOKING UP, HE NOTED WITH DISMAY THAT HIS SEAT WAS CAUGHT UP IN THE PARACHUTE, COLLAPSING ONE OF THE PANELS AND RESULTING IN A VERY FAST DESCENT. HE SUSTAINED BACK INJURIES AND SERIOUS CUTS AS HE CAME DOWN THROUGH THE

DENSE TREES. DESPITE BEING UNABLE TO WALK, HE HAD NOTICED A NEARBY LAKE DURING HIS DESCENT AND MANAGED TO CRAWL TO IT, DRAGGING HIS DINGHY BEHIND HIM. HE HAD NOT BEEN IN THE WATER FOR MORE THAN HALF AN HOUR WHEN TWO HUNTERS MIRACULOUSLY CAME UPON HIM AND MANAGED TO ARRANGE FOR A SEARCH AND RESCUE EXTRACTION. HE SPENT SOME TIME IN HOSPITAL RECOVERING FROM HIS INJURIES. MEANTIME, HIS NAVIGATOR HAD MADE A PERFECT DESCENT, LANDED SAFELY AND, AFTER SPENDING THE NIGHT IN THE BUSH, WAS RESCUED AND RETURNED HOME NONE THE WORSE FOR HIS EXPERIENCE.

IN THE SUMMER OF 1960, THE FAMILY MOVED AGAIN, THIS TIME TO SHAPE HEAD-QUARTERS OUTSIDE PARIS. WHILE HERE, DAD FLEW AS OFTEN AS HE COULD. IN A RETROSPECTIVE OF HIS WARTIME EXPERIENCE HE WOULD PATROL THE SKIES OVER BELGIUM, WEST GERMANY AND LUXEMBOURG .



IN 1961 HE ACCEPTED AN INVITATION FROM ROBERT SPRECKELS, HIS VICTOR IN THE 25 JUNE 1944 AIR BATTLE, TO VISIT HIM IN GERMANY. SPRECKELS HAD ATTEMPTED TO LOCATE DAD FOR SOME YEARS. DAD LATER WROTE , *"ROBERT SPRECKELS BECAME, IN SPITE OF WORLD TENSION AND HATREDS, ONE WHO IS COUNTED AMONG MY COMPANY OF FRIENDS."*

AFTER RETURNING TO CANADA IN 1964, DAD ATTENDED THE NATIONAL DEFENCE COLLEGE AND TOOK UP ANOTHER POSITION AT AFHQ. HOWEVER, WITH THE UNIFICATION OF THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES IN 1968 HE RESIGNED FROM THE RCAF AND SETTLED IN NOVA SCOTIA .

HE JOINED THE HISTORIC SITES DEPARTMENT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT AND BECAME AN AREA SUPERINTENDENT, WHICH INCLUDED SUPERVISION OF THE CITADEL IN HALIFAX WHERE HE SERVED FOR FIVE YEARS.



### Unknown Ace (Concluded)

IN DECEMBER 1973 HE EXPERIENCED A SUDDEN ONSET OF HEADACHES AND COMPLAINED OF NAUSEA. HE WAS ADMITTED TO HOSPITAL BUT HIS HEALTH DECLINED RAPIDLY AND JOHN 'BOB' BRAHAM DIED FROM A BRAIN TUMOUR ON 7 FEBRUARY 1974 AT THE AGE OF 53.

THIS EXTRAORDINARY AIRMAN FLEW 67 TYPES OF AIRCRAFT IN HIS CAREER RANGING FROM THE TIGER MOTH BIPLANE WITH A TOP SPEED OF 180 MPH TO THE ENGLISH ELECTRIC LIGHTNING WITH A MAX SPEED OF MACH 2.1 (1,390 MPH). HE LOGGED 5371 FLYING HOURS IN HIS RAF AND RCAF CAREERS.

THIS PHOTOGRAPH IS OF HIS MEDAL SET, NOW ON DISPLAY IN THE RAF MUSEUM AT HENDON. I HAVE HIS MINIATURES AT HOME.



HAVING DEVOTED THESE WORDS TO MY FATHER I THINK I SHOULD CLOSE WITH MENTION OF MY MOTHER WHO HAS RECEIVED RATHER SHORT SHRIFT IN THIS PRESENTATION, BY SAYING THAT I BELIEVE THAT SHE, AND ALL MILITARY SPOUSES INCLUDING MY WIFE, DESERVE A MEDAL FOR THEIR SACRIFICES AND SERVICE TO THE CAREERS OF THEIR MILITARY SPOUSES. IN THE SPECIFIC CASE OF MY MOTHER, I DON'T THINK IT WILL HAVE BEEN TOO HARD TO RECOGNISE THE BURDEN THAT SHE STOICALLY BORE RAISING THREE CHILDREN IN WARTIME AND POST-WAR BRITAIN AND A TRANSITION TO CANADIAN LIFE, AS SHE FOLLOWED MY FATHER'S RATHER TEMPESTUOUS CAREER. THIS PHOTO WAS TAKEN ONE YEAR BEFORE SHE PASSED AWAY AT THE AGE OF 90 IN 2011.





# Issue/Numéro 92

## Jan/jan 2016

Page 13

### Closing Notes

I am sure that by now you will all have received more information about the Braham family than you really needed, but the only cure is to send me some less parochial stuff of your own. The bank is empty so lets hear from you , particularly those who have remained relatively silent over the past eight years or so of this blurb—nothing is too inconsequential!

Until Next Time.