

LIVING

...on borrowed time



**The Memoirs of WWII Veteran
E. J. Chenier CD
Flight Lieutenant (Retired)
Bomber Command**

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The Autobiographical Memoirs of WWII Veteran E. J. (Ed) Chenier CD

(December 7, 1923 – October 26, 2014)

Flight Lieutenant (Retired)

RAF Bomber Command
425 Alouette Squadron



Edited by A. J. Douglas (Nephew)

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*Progress
far from consisting in change
depends on retentiveness*

*When change is absolute
there remains no being to improve
and no direction is set
for possible improvement*

*And when experience is not retained
as among savages, infancy is perpetual*

*Those who cannot remember the past
are condemned to repeat it*

George Santayana (1905)

Philosopher

December 16, 1863 – September 26, 1952

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Dedication

This narrative is dedicated to my lover, best friend forever, and wife, 'Deed', who stood beside me without protest nor complaint of neglect, instead urging me to press on with my typing, to complete this task. To my daughter Gail, and sons Glen and Mark, for their unwavering support.

To Kathleen Gingras, the inspiration for this undertaking.

And to my flight crew, who I've been fortunate enough to keep in touch with over these many years, since the end of the darkness of WWII. They truly are of the Greatest Generation and I am proud and honoured to have served with them.

E. J. Chenier CD (Dec 07, 1923 - Oct 26, 2014)

Acknowledgement

While visiting Montreal in 2002, I met for the first time Kathleen Gingras, daughter of the 'bomb aimer'¹ I had crewed up and flown with on numerous operations during WW2. Her dad had recently passed away.

Ms. Gingras and her mother, my former navigator, former engineer and their wives, Deed and myself, our son Mark and his wife Irene, met for lunch at the Auberge Willow Inn in Hudson, Quebec.

During the meal, Kathleen mentioned that her dad had never spoken about his wartime experiences, offering her appreciation for any stories of him I would be willing to recount.

Arriving home from our trip, I scoured my memory for long since forgotten details of our activities in England, where we were stationed, to be readied for the war and coming battles we would fight. Ms Gingras is the person I will be addressing at times, as I tell this story.

After sending Ms. Gingras several anecdotal emails, I considered that in all the years since my return, I also had not made mention of my wartime experiences to my own children. This ascertainment had me include them and their children in this telling. Additionally, prompted by my oldest son Glen, to document and include my post war life and peacetime career, I did so. This decision allowed my kids to not only recollect their early lives as members of an Air Force family, but as a bonus, to contribute from those memories, to this story.

Editor's Note

Over a decade ago my uncle Ed asked me to look at what he had written about his time in the military, and to polish it a little. I was honoured at his request and am so proud to be a part of this project. His is just one of countless stories, of men and women like him. Innocent young souls, courageous enough to blindly walk into the horror of war. Willing to fight and die, to maintain and preserve the freedoms we enjoy today. Their bravery humbles me. It should humble everyone living since.

Photos and newspaper articles courtesy The Chenier Family historical archives and public domain records unless otherwise noted.

Special thanks to Wikipedia for footnoted reference material.

¹ **Bomb Aimer** - Seated when operating the front gun turret, but positioned in a laying position when directing the pilot on to the aiming point prior to releasing the bomb load

Chapter 1

Home is where you are

It was 1939, and the war on Germany had just been declared. I was a high school student, barely a teenager. One day during class, my teacher Brother Albert Laurin, commented that, realistically, we could be involved in this war at some point in the near future. Thinking silently to ourselves that children do not fight wars, we laughed nervously. Seriously believing that the war would be over before we would come of age, and be enlisted to fight.

How naive we were.

In early December of 1942, just days before my 19th birthday, two friends and I visited a local Winnipeg recruiting office, and signed up to join the Royal (Canadian) Air Force. We were sworn in and given a short leave of absence, as the recruiter told us, 'to get our affairs in order' before training and eventual deployment overseas. Affairs? What affairs? We were kids! What affairs could we possibly have, but to kiss our moms goodbye?

On May 9, 1943 we reported to the Manning Depot in Brandon Manitoba, a small farming community, two hundred kilometers west of Winnipeg. This was the furthest distance I had ever been from my family, and the comforts of home life. That was the day I believe, even at that tender age, that I shed the mantle of youth on a passage to manhood.

We were billeted in a large old building once used to stable horses that now served as an armory. With hundreds of bunk beds lined up at one end, and lavatories at the other. Privacy was nonexistent. First on the 'to do' list was a haircut. Believe me, that barber was no stylist, by any standards. Same style for one and all, a couple of chops and you're done!

A quite large book on a quite small table stationed inside the entrance of the barbershop recorded our names, regimental numbers, and hometowns. Our keeper for the time was an NCO by the name of Sgt Erinburg (or something relatively close to that).

Our clothing was limited to regulation attire, and we were given only two pairs of heavy wool socks. Our sergeant told us that we should put them on alternate feet each day, to, as he so eloquently put it 'spread the toe jam'. In this briefing we were officially informed that 'booze' was not permitted on the premises, and if anyone had any they should turn it in immediately. Deed had given me a small bottle of rye whisky as a parting gift. As ordered to do so, after the briefing I turned it in. The sergeant wryly smiled as I handed it over. I am not sure whose belly it finally ended up in, but a few days later he did reimburse me for it. Again, so naive!

Boot camp in Brandon lasted about six weeks. A lot of marching and drill to build up our strength, and the stamina we would need to fight, and to survive. Of course everyone wanted to be a pilot. However, those chosen would have to pass a tough interview, by an even tougher officer, to procure aircrew designation, as it turned out, not an easy thing to achieve.

Ad Bourgeois, my friend, was first to audition. Exiting the room, after what seemed an eternity, he lamented how hard he tried to get pilot assignment, without success. Going on to state that he had to fight like hell arguing his case, just to get wireless air gunner (W.A.G.)². Though forewarned, I faced the same challenge during my interview, fought I am sure as hard as Ad, and with the same conclusion, a W.A.G. designation.

² W.A.G. - Operates the radio equipment in the aircraft and a gun or turret as necessary during an air operation.

The interviewing officer was pure R.A.F. and during both Ad's evaluation and mine, judged and stated to us that we would fail the W.A.G. course, and go through training to be straight air gunners. One friend, Chris Whelan got pilot, cementing our determination and resolve to prove that interviewer wrong, and at some point in the future become the highly skilled pilots we knew we could be.

With reference to the interviewing officer in Brandon, I was talking to my friend Addie Bourgeois (who's now in Vancouver) yesterday. He told me that the officer's name was F/O (Flight Officer) Armstrong. As Addie and I will prove later on in the war, it turns out that he was a real a**hole.

From Brandon, our initial training completed, Ad and I were posted to a Vancouver technical school, to take a course in Morse code.



Chapter 2

Vancouver...brothers in training

Ad and I were very fortunate finding 'digs' in the private home of Mr. & Mrs. Nellist, a very lovely middle-aged couple with two teen-age daughters. Margaret was 18 and Ethel 16. Our boarding fees were reasonable, though I do not recall the exact amount. The Nellists took in, for a price, all sorts who needed a soft bed and warm meals, both short and long term.

Stan Petrow, who went to school in Norwood. Another airman, Glen Opie, from Fort William (now Thunder Bay) was the spitting image of King Hussein of Jordan. He could easily have been his double. Including as well, two civilians, who were slightly older. One of these 'civvies' would pull out his cigarette holder after dinner, and meticulously insert a cigarette, then light and smoke it. Posing in a 'sophisticated' manner, as though a film star appearing in a Hollywood Movie of that era. The comedic nature of this evening ceremony, and my eventual response to it, allows me, even after all these years, to clearly memorialize the following.

A prankster by nature, I hunted down and purchased a cigarette holder that extended in three sections. Fully drawn out it reached a length of close to a foot. At the next dinner, having finished eating, with table cleared and coffee served, our housemate, as though on cue, pulled out his cigarette holder, executed his routine, and lit his cigarette, I then pulled out my cigarette holder, flawlessly performing a routine I had practiced several times. Stretching the holder to its full length, I inserted with equal care my cigarette and joined him in an after dinner smoke. The table immediately broke up in raucous laughter. It was meant in good fun, but he may have been offended at being jokingly mocked, as that cigarette holder was never seen again.

Our hosts had a canary that was allowed free reign of the house. Tame and very friendly 'Dickie' would often roost on my shoulder. One day at the dinner table, 'Dickie' landed and perched making himself at home. I turned to him and staring into those little eyes stated emphatically, "Dickie, I don't mind you eating my food, but if you s**t on it, that's going too far."

Life with the Nellist family was good and we all became close friends. I think the older of their two daughters, Margaret, had a crush on Addie. After dinner the two of them would often wrestle on the living room floor. Mrs. Nellist went along with our shenanigans, to a certain degree. Addie and I shared a bed. Mrs. Nellist once put holly under the sheets near the foot end, to make a point I am sure, that only so much 'tomfoolery' would be permitted. That night we felt those prickly needles with our toes, so had to get up to clean the bed. Point taken.

Our training was five days a week. Sundays we attended the early mass. But Saturday mornings were for sleeping in. Well before we were ready to rise, Margaret and Ethel would come to our open door and barely enter, hounding us to get up. We would pull the sheet up toward us so that our bare legs were exposed to the thigh, as a tease. They would giggle like amused young children, and then run out of the room and down the stairs, hoping I think that we would chase them. Forewarned by the holly incident we would not.

The day that we were scheduled to leave Vancouver, Ethel, a dental assistant, was getting ready to go to work. She came upstairs to say goodbye and bid us a final farewell. She stood outside the door of our room, playfully taunting us to come out to kiss her goodbye. Addie and I were still in bed. We knew that Ethel, being extremely shy, would think that neither of us would take her up on it.

Not one to fear a challenge, I jumped out of bed dressed in only my jockey shorts. As I exited into the hallway she started down the stairs laughing. And then out the door and down the lane, toward the streetcar that would take her to work.

Nearing the stop with the streetcar approaching, Ethel turned to see me close behind. "Eddy", she shrieked in a high-pitched voice, taking those last few steps, hopping upon her ride to work. Standing on the boarding platform she turned and waved. Wiping my eyes as though I were crying I yelled: "Goodbye Ethel, I'm going to miss you." The people on the streetcar were laughing. Poor Ethel, she was so embarrassed. I must have been a sight. I never saw her again. It was an innocent playful occurrence between young adults. Nothing of a serious nature did nor would have ever come of it, during our time with the Nellists and their lovely daughters.

Four of my brothers were in the army, stationed in the Vancouver area. One day we were all going to meet at Leo and his girl Florence's place for a get together. I'd had my photo taken all decked out in my uniform, the previous week. A beautiful girl I had met who worked at the photo studio was standing at the bus stop a few feet from me. Recognizing each other from that short encounter, we got to talking. She mentioned that she was on her way to their cottage and asked if I would like to go with her. I explained that I was going to meet my brothers and declined. I am sure she was just being friendly to a uniform and not the man wearing it. Or was I too innocent to recognize and succumb to temptation when it presented itself?

All I knew and all I cared about was that Deed was home, worried and waiting for my safe return. She was my girl. She would always be my girl. 70 years later, she still is my girl.

We left Vancouver to traverse the mountain passes of the Rockies, for our arrival in Calgary Alberta, 1000 kilometers east.

Ad and I spent about ten weeks (treated like sons by the Nellists), enrolled at the Vancouver Technical Collegiate, learning Morse code, and other subjects associated with radio transmitters and receivers. It was a basic course and a precursor to the more detailed and demanding training we would undergo at the wireless school in Calgary.

Though they never met in person, perhaps through me feeling a kinship, most grateful for the care and comfort given, Deed began corresponding with Mrs. Nellist shortly after we arrived in Calgary. She continued doing so for many years after the war.



Chapter 3

Calgary – It starts to get real

Arriving at No.2 Wireless School in Calgary, Addie and I were assigned to quarters in the same wing of a standard H-HUTS, common at most Canadian Military stations. These were two story buildings with four wings on each floor, consisting of about 15 double bunk beds in each wing.

Washrooms, located in the centre of the building, housed ten toilets, a dozen washbasins, and eight shower faucets along one wall. The confusion in the morning when everyone was trying to shower or find a free sink had us develop a choreographed little dance, moving from toilet to sink to shower in whatever order each of us chose to do our 'business'! A vastly different regimen from the Nellist's, with just the few of us living there. Now it seemed like there were hundreds of us fighting for the right to get clean. And the noise! Looking around each morning, at the many jostling for position, anticipating what laid ahead for us in the coming weeks and months, on our way to war, it got very real, very fast.

In Brandon, Ad and I made friends with Fred Buchamer, a fellow from the north end of Winnipeg. I was from the French enclave of St. Boniface, located just a few steps south of the city centre. Back then one rarely ventured outside of their community to another, even if it were a mere mile or two distant. The 'North End' (not its official designation as was St. Boniface), seemed a lifetime away for us, and we had not yet made the trip there. Home neighbourhoods notwithstanding, Fred (also billeted in our wing) was a welcome familiar face amongst a sea of strangers, and the three of us chummed around a lot.

A daily routine soon evolved. We rose early to be on parade by 07:30 hrs for roll call, then moved on to either our classes or to drill on the parade square. Breakfast was served from 06:30 hrs to 07:30 hrs. I seldom made it. Morning wake up was a contest to see who would stay in bed the longest. I usually won! Last up, I'd have to rush to get washed and shaved (if necessary). I often showered at night, leaving time in the morning to sleep a little longer, and be dressed in time for roll call. That proven strategy eliminated the morning washroom dance, as there were few if any who had not gravitated to the mess hall. The odd time I was late on parade, but someone would answer to my name when called and I would sneak into the ranks unnoticed.

We were brothers in arms. And that's what brothers do. From the very first time called upon to support each other, we did so. Whether the parade ground or the battlefield, that sense of loyalty to each other, and kindred spirit, could and would keep us alive throughout.

October 25, 1943. We were delivered to the airport in Shepard Alberta, for a 2½-hour familiarization flight on a Norseman aircraft, six students at a time. A couple of us got airsick. I guess maybe it was psychological. This was my first time flying. Having landed, my body was so stiff; they literally had to carry me off the aircraft. Fortunately, no one took much notice.

My recollection of our curriculum is a little cloudy. Suffice to say that we spent a lot of time learning to send and receive Morse code on a telegraph key. A weekly test evaluated our progress. I do recall that Fred, Addie and I went about twelve weeks without making a mistake. At the time we were up to about fifteen words per minute. I believe Addie and I made one or two mistakes on the next test. Fred went the longest without error.

I forget how many words per minute we needed to graduate, but the three of us did qualify with twenty-five words per minute.

Other courses included: airmanship, navigation, radio technology (learning how to operate transmitters and receivers, similar to amateur radio operators) and without fail, drill (marching) on the parade square.

Addie and I were determined to pass this course and prove us worthy. We studied religiously. Fred, however, was one of those guys who didn't have to study; everything seemed to come easy to him.

Many times Addie and I would be hunched over the books in the library. Fred would suddenly appear in the doorway, fist lightly clenched, thumb to his lips and head tilted back motioning at us to join him in the canteen for a beer. The odd time we would, but more often than not declined the invitation, telling him that we had to study.

We played a lot of floor hockey in the Rec Hall. And believe me, it was a rough game. I recall one time, I happened to pass my hand along the front of my leg. Though I had not felt anything, I had a lump there about the size of a large egg. It wasn't painful and gradually receded, but to this day I have a small lump on my leg, a reminder of those early days of war.

Addie and I decided that on leave, we would take the train home for Christmas 1943. Having a 7-day pass we decided to leave a day early. Our flight leader, Reg Duffy, a New Zealander, said he would cover for us. Another friend, Les Chedore, took a razorblade and scratched the date off our pass and retyped in an earlier one.

When the Military Police checked our passes on the train, they didn't notice the change. Phew! We got away with it. What almost tripped us up was that I had asked Deed (my fiancée at the time), to send me \$50.00, and it arrived after I had left the base. Luckily, Reg Duffy intercepted the telegram and held it until our return. Reg was a great guy. Most of the students on the course were in their late teens or early twenties. Reg was maybe a dozen years older. I think he viewed us as his little brothers (little brothers in arms), who needed the guidance and protection that a big brother offers. Saving them from consequences when they screw up, as little brothers often do!

The ground school portion of our learning had us literally on the ground, simulating flying exercises in the link trainers, to familiarize ourselves with the wireless equipment.

The flying portion of our training incorporated Fleet Fort, Harvard and Yale aircraft. The last two are quite similar, except that the Harvard had a retractable landing gear, whereas the Yale had a fixed landing gear.

We completed various types of exercises and accumulated 21 hours and 25 minutes flying time upon graduation from wireless school. You recall my mention of how sick I was for my first flight in the Norserman. Well, sure enough I would get airsick every time I went flying. My fellow students wanted me to go see the medical officer about it, but I figured if I did I would surely be washed out of the course. Washing out was not an option, so I persevered.

There were 112 Canadians, 12 Australians, 62 New Zealanders and 2 Englishmen in our course. Fred Buchamer, Addie Bourgeois and myself were in the top ten amongst the Canadians. Not bad for a couple of guys who had been labeled as failures, destined to return to Brandon for reclassification. Up Yours F/O Armstrong!

We were planning our graduation party to celebrate, before moving on to the next phase of our rigorous training. I had met a young girl who was in the C.W.A.C (Canadian Women's Army Corps) at a Red Cross dance. I asked if she would accompany me. She asked if I had a girl friend and I told her that I did. She told me that she had a boyfriend who was overseas and wanted to be true to him. And I of course would always be true to Deed.

Her name was Jessie Crossman, a very nice young woman, and as a friend she agreed to go to the dance with me. Passing through Winnipeg, Jessie phoned Deed to let her know that she had gone to my grad, so that I would not look alone and lost, and it was all very innocent. Ironically, during a later call home, Deed said she would have come, had I asked her. Addie's fiancée, Marge Davis, came for Addie's grad. I sure regretted not asking Deed to attend. But I didn't think she could afford it. I never let money come between us again.

The next phase of training saw our homecoming, at No. 7 Bombing and Gunnery School in Paulson, Manitoba, 300 kilometers northwest of Winnipeg. I sure was seeing a lot of the country. I just wish that it were not for the purpose of training for war.



Chapter 4

With the Grace of God

In retrospect, I must mention that the flying portion of our course in Calgary pertained to the wireless part of our aircrew designation, '**wireless**' air gunner. The training aircraft were two-seaters, equipped with a radio transmitter and receiver, with the pilot in the front seat, and the student sitting behind.

The wireless aspect of being a W.A.G. consisted of getting bearings from ground beacons in the area, and fixes of our position, to pass on to the pilot. Or when flying in the Anson Light Bomber on navigation exercises, passing this information to the navigator. In Paulson, we would train in the gunnery phase of our aircrew designation, wireless '**air gunner**'.

Again, in retrospect, I must tell you of an incident in Calgary, which comically added to my transition from boy to man. There was a bad case of lice (crabs) at No.3 Wireless School. I recall reading graffiti on the toilet wall, warning that 'Calgary Crabs' could jump thirty feet.

Innocent as I was, I had no idea what crabs were. My mother was fastidious and kept a very clean house. In any case, both Addie Bourgeois and me became infested with these bitey little buggers. They got in everywhere that had hair. Chest and legs and underarms were bad enough, with a constant itch that no amount of scratching could stop. But down there (where the sun don't shine) was the worst!

Air Force procedure was to report to the medical officer and have medical staff shave the hair off ones entire body. Now, there was no way that Addie and I would do that. The druggist at a local pharmacy told us that if we took a hot shower and then plastered the affected areas with some blue ointment sold there, we should be able to rid ourselves of this scourge. So we did, and were happily successful. After that we always had extra hot showers and covered the toilet seat with paper before sitting down. You live! You learn! You grow!

No.7 Bombing and Gunnery School at Paulson Manitoba trained Air Gunners, Wireless Air Gunners and Bomb Aimers in their assigned trade. I read a story about Paulson in the Air Force magazine recently, which prompted me to write them about my experiences there.

One particular and defining episode is responsible for the title of my story. What I had written to the magazine, without embellishment, appears below.

When I read John Smith's story in the last issue of AIR FORCE magazine, about his search for 7 B&G at Paulson, it brought back memories of my experience at that flying station. Upon graduation from the WAG course at 3 Wireless School in Calgary, a bunch of us were posted to Paulson for our gunnery training.

We did our gunnery practice, firing from the mid upper turret of a Bolingbroke Bomber, at a drogue³ towed by a Lysander aircraft. Three airmen would get in the belly of the a/c and take turns at firing off our assigned rounds.

Because I used to get air sick, I was always the first to fire off my rounds, whereupon I'd get back down in the belly and usually puke my guts out.

³ **Drogue** - a device, typically conical or funnel-shaped with open ends, towed behind a boat, aircraft, or other moving object to reduce speed or improve stability.

I was in my last week of training at Paulson when on the 16th April 1944 I was scheduled to go on a gunnery exercise. All the students were milling around the operations area, awaiting our assignment.

Because I used to get airsick a lot during my training, I used to go to the bathroom and make myself vomit before every flight. While I was in the washroom, the Sargent in charge of assignments called out three names for the next flight. When he called out my name and received no answer he said, "Where's Chenier"? "He's gone to the can"! So the Sergeant said, "OK next man" and three airmen went to the waiting aircraft.

One of them was a very good friend of mine, Don Black.

I came out of the washroom in time to see the aircraft taxiing out to the runway. Somebody called out to me "Hey Chenier you were supposed to be on that flight".

Finally, the Bollie lined up for take off at the end of the runway and started rolling down the runway gathering speed and finally got airborne and started climbing. I don't believe it got any more than fifty feet in the air when an engine conked out and the bomber plowed into the ground and exploded in flames.

One gunner (a New Zealander) managed to get out but was badly burned. My friend Don Black and the other gunner as well as the pilot were all killed. Had I not gone to the bathroom to make myself throw up, I would have been on that aircraft and the odds are that I would have been killed that day, in which case all my children and grandchildren wouldn't be here. Believe me when every day I say THANK YOU to the GOOD LORD for looking after me.

This singular event deems me to be **"Living On Borrowed Time"**.

The Commanding Officer asked me to escort Don's body back to his family in Vancouver. This was an assignment that I did not relish, and one very difficult for me to carry out. I was only 20 years old at the time. It was my first taste of the death war brings.

By the time I got back to Paulson, my course had its graduation parade. Consequently, I was marched into the CO's office, and by him, presented with my WAG aircrew badge (Wing) and my Sergeant stripes. It was customary for some of the graduating students to be promoted to Pilot Officer. However, for some unknown reason the list of promotions did not arrive in time, and the whole flight was held back awaiting the forthcoming announcement.

Addie was supposed to be getting married in Winnipeg on the 24th of April. Due to the delay of promotions, the wedding was pushed back until the 26th.

The Commanding Officer allowed us to leave, even though no announcement of promotions had been made. While we were packing our kit bags in our barracks getting ready to leave Paulson, the Sergeant in charge of our flight passed by my bed, and his hat happened to fall off his head. He turned around and commanded: "Chenier, pick up my hat!" To which I answered, "You're a sergeant (pause) I'm a sergeant (pause) you pick up your hat!"

He just laughed and picked up his own hat. The rest of the guys in the room had a good laugh as well. From this day forward we were equals as well as brothers. We had earned that!

Marge Davis and Addie Bourgeois were happily married at the St. Boniface Basilica on 26 April 1944. I was most proud and honoured to be Addie's best man.

During the wedding reception at the Bourgeois home, Addie got a telegram advising him that he had received his commission to Pilot Officer. Right away Addie says to me: "You better go home and see if there's a telegram there for you".

I rushed home and sure enough the telegram was there. I believe there were only a dozen commissions handed out on our course, and Addie, Fred Buchamer and myself each received one. Not bad for guys who had been prematurely labeled failures! Addie and I went and got our officer's uniforms, and feeling quite proud as Pilot Officers we paid a visit to Brother Laurin, our Grade 10 teacher at Provencher School. He was the one who years earlier, predicted our future service in the armed forces, as combatants in the now raging war overseas. When he saw us at the classroom door, he gave his students a project to work on and then came out to greet us. He took us across the street to the Brothers' house, up to his room, took a bottle of whisky out of a small bedside cabinet and offered us a drink.

Seeing Brother Laurin years later after the war, he said to me, "You know, you and Addie didn't apply yourselves when you were in school. But you sure applied yourselves when you were in the Air Force. I was so proud of you boys when you came to see me that day at school, in your brand new Pilot Officer's uniform".

My embarkation leave came to an end, and Addie, Fred and I parted ways. Fred was posted to Ancienne Lorette in Quebec for a navigation course. Addie was posted to Ferry Command. I was posted overseas.





Ed (newly commissioned) & Deed circa 1944

Chapter 5

Across the Pond and Off to War

Some may wonder why Deed & I didn't get married at the same time as Marge & Addie. My answer has always been that Deed never asked me. Seriously though, I didn't ask Deed to marry me at the time because I was going to war, and didn't believe I would be coming back. Knowing that a lot of young men were getting killed in Europe, I thought my chances of surviving as a wireless air gunner were pretty slim. And I didn't think it would be fair to Deed, making her a young widow should I not survive. Her lighthearted answer to that serious conclusion was, "Well, I would have got a widow's pension." We laugh about it now, but sincerely, I regret not having married her then.

As an airman in the air force, and my four brothers, privates in the army, we all sent our parents \$20 per month out of our wages. The financial challenges of war on a family cannot be understood until you live through one. We felt obligated to help our parents. This money sent allowed them to properly care for everyone left at home. I don't recall exactly how much our salary was, but \$60 a month seems to ring a bell. When I received my commission my salary was doubled, so I doubled my monthly contribution.

We deployed out of Halifax Nova Scotia on the Empress of Scotland, one of the large troop ships used to transport military personnel overseas, taking about six days to reach England. Being a large ship, we were unescorted for the journey. On the ship were P/O Jim Read and P/O Les Chedore. We all had graduated the same course, and received our commissions at the same time, and became good friends.

The accommodations on the 'Empress' left a lot to be desired. As this was wartime there were no frills, believe me. Some officers were lucky with four to a cabin, but not so for yours truly. I shared a large area in the hold with about five hundred other junior officers and enlisted men. Washroom facilities consisted of a few toilets and washbasins. I don't recall having shower facilities. We slept in hammock style bunks stacked up in piles of five, one on top the other with about eighteen inches between each bunk. The immediate and urgent need was to deliver as many personnel as quickly as possible to England to fight the war. Comfort be damned, they crammed us in like cattle. Trust me, after a week below deck while crossing the Atlantic, getting off the ship in England was a welcome blessing.

Les, Jim and I were sent to No. 6 (O) AFU (Air Force Unit) in Moreton Valence, Gloucestershire, to take part in cross-country navigational exercises. I completed over 36 hours of flying time. 19 hours and 15 minutes of daylight and 17 hours and 15 minutes of nighttime.

No. 6 (O) AFU was an experimental station for the first jet fighter in the Royal Air Force, the Gloster Meteor. Security was very stringent. Military police were on guard 24 hours a day around the hangar that housed this aircraft. The first time we saw this new fighter taxiing out to the end of the runway, we were speechless. We had never seen an aircraft without propellers, and were quite impressed with its speed, as it flew by at low level. Only the test pilots and maintenance crew were allowed near it. Additionally, it was never left outside for more than a minute or two, going directly back into its heavily guarded hangar after each flight.

From Moreton Valence, we were posted to No. 22 OTU (Operational Training Unit) at Stratford on Avon in Warwickshire.

Chapter 6

Crewing Up and Preparing to Fight

I will begin this chapter by saying.... Hi Kathleen! Continuing for your benefit (Kathleen), with a short back-story of how your dad and me and the rest of the crew met. Followed by the condensed version of our next training program.

A bunch of aircrew types of different trades, were posted to No. 22 Operational Training Unit (O.T.U.) at Stratford on Avon in Warwickshire, England. We were directed to assemble in a large hangar in order to form an operational crew. I saw your dad and Leo Menard talking to each other, and merely walked up and introduced myself. I asked if they had contacted a WAG yet. They hadn't, so we agreed to team up. Louis Paquette, a pilot, joined the conversation, as did two air gunners, Luc Laroche and Marcel Gauthier. After a few minutes of chitchat (all of us I am sure sizing each other up), we unanimously agreed to become a flight crew.

It is not an easy thing to do. Literally put your life in the hands of strangers that you met a minute prior, after only a very brief conversation. But we did, each of us as individuals, trusting the others as a whole. When continued life or certain death were the only two options presented, with minimal control of choice and outcome, to end any given day.

There it is, a simple story of how like-minded men unknown to each other, came together in a common bond, and unspoken pledge of loyalty. In my mind we never once let another down, and I dare say, we became the best damn crew in Bomber Command.

We completed our OTU training on Wellington Bombers (a two engine aircraft). Numerous cross-country flights had me assist the navigator, by getting him fixes of our position by wireless. As well as bearings to certain radio beacons marked on his maps. The navigator would navigate us to a bombing range, where your dad, as bomb aimer, would take over and guide the pilot to the target upon which he would drop the bombs. For air gunner training, Spitfire or Hurricane fighters simulated attacks on us. The gunner sights were connected to cameras recording how accurate our aim was, and how well we defended ourselves.

The air attack defense procedure was as follows: When a gunner sighted an enemy aircraft they would let him get within a certain range. The pilot was then directed to corkscrew either starboard (right), or port (left), depending on which side the fighter was coming in from. This evasive action, turning away from the fighter, forced the enemy pilot to turn as well, making it difficult for him to train his guns on our aircraft.

If you recall, at that luncheon, I mentioned to you that it was on one of our first training flights, with an instructor pilot F/L Merrifield, that your dad was caught smoking (a big no-no in the Wellington) in the back of the aircraft. Being a dangerous safety breach, one that could cost a crew their lives, your dad was made to sweep the ops area with a small hand broom, as punishment. The serious nature of that event recognized, there was no repeat, by any of us.

We were at O.T.U. from early September to mid November 1944. We continued training at 1664 Heavy Conversion Unit (H.C.U) at Dishforth in Yorkshire, crewing up with your uncle Bruce Webster (an engineer). Our crew all being of French descent, we nicknamed your uncle Bruce, 'Webstaire'. The French connotation comically solidified our crew (with simulated common ethnicity), into an even stronger cohesive brotherhood. At H.C.U. we trained on the Halifax, a four-engine bomber requiring an engineer. Training at H.C.U. was similar to O.T.U. in so far as; we were familiarized with the differences of the Halifax from other bombers.

Chapter 7

Squadron Operations – Into the Blue and Black

Dear Kathleen: I hope you are not weary with the mundane nature of the above, but I know you'd be interested in learning of what your dad did during the war.

We still had two weeks left to complete our training at H.C.U.. However, on 6 March 1945 we were awakened in the wee hours and told to pack our gear. We were being assigned to 425 Squadron (the Alouette Squadron). Apparently they had had a rough mission the previous night (that story in greater detail appears later in chapter 11), and lost quite a few aircraft. The underlying inference to losing one aircraft is that many men were lost as well. And so, losing a great number of aircraft, meant that a great number of men were lost, resulting in a great shortage of crews. Funny but sad how the word 'great' can be used to describe tragic events, and the wholesale loss of life.

By 09:00 we were doing circuits and landings to familiarize ourselves with the airdrome⁴. After a few cross-country training flights, the powers that be figured our skipper was ready for his 1st operation over enemy territory. The rest of us remained at the base and were more than a bit concerned, with both fingers and toes crossed, that the Skip would return safe and sound. Thankfully he did, and when asked how it was said, "A piece of cake." Knowing now that nothing in war is a *piece of cake*; I can only guess that he didn't want to scare us.

On 11 March 1944 we took part in our 1st operation as a crew, over Germany.

Prior to take off that morning, the RC Padre attended the dispersal and gave us communion, sharing as well a few words of encouragement. This became S.O.P.⁵ before every trip. Being a man of faith, taking communion afforded me a sense of calm, and I felt at peace, though none of us knew what we would face that day, or for that matter, any day.

What's that old adage about faith and war? There are no atheists in foxholes!

Our target was Essen. It was a daylight trip and we took off at 11:40. We made our way across the North Sea and set course for our target. Nearing our goal, the skipper came on the intercom informing the crew that we were approaching the target and instructed us as follows: "Gunners; keep your eyes open for enemy fighters and also for predicted flak⁶. Wireless op, keep your eyes peeled on that *fishpond and alert the gunners if anything suspicious is heading our way. Bomb aimer; let me know when ready to take over for your bombing run. Good luck everyone and let's hope we get back to base in one piece."

Because it was relatively new technology and significantly important for our safe return, I think the term 'fishpond' deserves more than a footnote at the end of a page.

**Fishpond was the code name given to an extension to the British H2S airborne radar system fitted to Royal Air Force (RAF) Avro Lancaster and Handley Page Halifax heavy bombers during World War II. It was designed to give early warning of German night fighters approaching in the hemisphere below the carrying aircraft out to a range of 30 miles (48.2 km).*
- Courtesy wikia.org

⁴ **Airdrome** - An airport or airfield, especially a military air base and landing field for airplanes

⁵ **S.O.P** - Military acronym meaning Standard Operating Procedure

⁶ **Predicted flak** - a series of bursts that appear to be headed your direction that indicate the likely location of the next burst

We encountered some flak⁷ but not as heavy as anticipated. The bomb aimer took control of the aircraft for his bomb run. As soon as the bomb aimer exclaimed “bombs away” the navigator gave the skipper a course to steer and we got out of the target area. The engineer then went to the bomb bay area and checked for hang-ups⁸. There were none.

I didn't let up from watching my fishpond even as we got away from the target area. There was always the chance of being attacked by enemy fighters, who would prey on returning bombers who might lower their guard, on their way home, after the excitement in the target area.

My first mission was over and we had safely returned to base. A 6 hour and 10 minute trip; it was like a dream to me.

After an operation, it was procedure to assemble in an area for crew debriefing. The crews compared notes while waiting to be debriefed by an intelligence officer. The most experienced crews would give their impression as to the effectiveness of the enemy flak and assess whether it was light, moderate or heavy. This being our first op, my impression was that the flak was moderate. However, the consensus of the experienced crews was that it was light. Geez, if that was light flak, I sure wasn't looking forward to seeing heavy flak.

So far I have not burdened you with much of the boring intricacy of our training. And there is a great deal of information in that regard that I have glossed over. I will flesh things out here and there, so that you understand some of the more militaristic terms and phrases.

**Flak consists of jagged metal fragments that result from midair explosions of projectiles from a German 88mm cannon, fired upward from the ground in the direction of approaching aircraft. These projectiles were set to explode, at the predetermined altitudes that approaching aircraft were expected to fly. These metal fragments would tear through the fuselage (body) of an aircraft wounding and killing the aircrew and possibly causing the aircraft to crash.*

**Predicted flak is when a continuous series of airbursts from enemy ground artillery appears to be headed your way. This indicates where the next burst may be if you continue on your present course. The gunners tell the skipper in which direction to alter course to avoid the next burst hitting the aircraft. Flak also left a characteristic black cloud hanging in the sky after detonating at the set altitude.*

**Hang-ups were bombs that had not released during an operation, and remained 'hanging' from their framework in the bomb bay. After dropping his bombs, the engineer checks the bomb bay to ensure that no bombs are hanging there. To jettison hang-ups, the pilot puts the aircraft through various rapid maneuvers, attempting to shake them loose.*

Nobody likes to land with hang-ups!

On 12 March we bombed Dortmund (light flak). On the 13th we bombed Wuppertal (light flak). On the 14th we bombed *Zweibrucken (light flak). On the 15th we bombed Castrop Rauxel (flak was so heavy that it looked like you could walk on it). We were sure glad to get out of there and take up a heading for base. Five missions. Five days. Seemed like minutes.

⁷ **Flak** - jagged metal fragments from projectiles fired from the ground that exploded at set altitudes

⁸ **Hang-ups** - bombs that may not have released and remain within the bomb bay area of the aircraft

*Ironically Kathleen, our son Mark who you met at that luncheon in Montreal, was born in Zweibrücken in 1959.

Through our first three operations, we flew whatever aircraft was available. For our trip to Zweibrücken, we were allotted our own aircraft, "C" Charlie. Now "C" Charlie was said to be a jinxed aircraft.

After our 5th mission (Castrop Rauxel) we were given a few days leave. Upon our return we were told that "C" Charlie had been shot down. We were assigned to another aircraft.

I must comment here, about the effectiveness of security during WW2, or rather the lack of it. On the days when we weren't scheduled to fly, we would go to the Robin Hood Pub or Betty's Bar in Yorks. Often times staying into the evening and occasionally after midnight. We'd have a few beers and visit with the barmaids. On many occasions, they would ask if we were scheduled to fly that evening, then tell us what our target would be if we were.

When we reported in for our pre flight briefing, we were told what our target for that mission would be, say, Dortmund. Well we knew that already, because the barmaid at the Robin Hood or Betty's Bar had told us. No one could be certain who spilled the beans, but with that low level of security it is amazing that we won the war!

I remember seeing posters, with a slightly cryptic message purporting the need for secrecy regarding sensitive operational information that proclaimed, ***Loose Lips Sink Ships!***

Thinking back, could loose lips have been any way responsible for the jinx of our 'ship', "C" Charlie, having been shot down multiple times?

Our 6th operational target was to bomb the marshalling yards at a place called Witten, Germany. For this trip we were assigned to a brand new "C" Charlie. This was the third in a line of "C" Charlies allotted to the squadron, the first two shot down. If this was a jinxed aircraft (and I must admit we were all a little bit apprehensive) we leaned heavily on an old proverb.

'Three times lucky - Three times a charm.' We could only hope and pray that it was.

This was our first all night operation. On our 4th op to Zweibrücken, we got back to base in the dark, but had been over our target when it was still daylight.

Other crews teased us and made comments like: "Boy you guys are taking a chance flying in "C" Charlie. I wouldn't fly in that aircraft if you paid me all the dough in the world" Or facetiously say: "I'd go LMF⁹ before flying in that thing".

After the war, L.M.F., referred to as "Battle Fatigue" or most recently "Post Traumatic Stress Disorder" is recognized and accepted more liberally today. Military personnel back then were reluctant to admit to this state of mind, as it was considered a sign of cowardice to do so.

No one who volunteered to fight that war was a coward. None of us! For the love of all things we were just kids! We didn't want to die on a battlefield in some foreign country. Or be blown out of the sky and fall to earth in pieces or more terrifyingly being still alive! Who would?

⁹ **LMF** Lack of Moral Fibre – Colloquial acronym for a depressed state brought on by the stress of continuous flying operations

Target TOKEN

AIMING POINT

TARGET

CASTROP-RAUXEL.

DATE

15.3.45.

CREW

P/O PAQUETTE, I. R.
F/O MENARD, J. L.
F/O CHENIER, A. J.
F/O MALLETTE, L. J.
SGT. GAUTHIER, M. D.
SGT. LAROCHE, L. V.
P/O WEBSTER, B.

C. W. MacLure
AIR VICE MARSHAL
AIR OFFICER COMMANDING
No 6 (RCAF) GROUP



Left to Right: F/O Ed Chenier.. F/O Lou Mallette.. F/S Marcel Gauthier..
F/S Luc Laroche.. F/O Leo Menard.. F/L Louis Paquette.. F/O Bruce Webster

We got airborne at 00:05 hours on 19 March 1945 and set course on the first leg of our trip. Our course was set to avoid known anti aircraft positions along the route. So rather than a direct course, it was a zigzag type of route.

The routine when approaching the target was much similar to our previous operations. Except that when the skipper came on the intercom, as we were getting close, his emphasis was as follows; "Gunners; be extra vigilant on the predicted flak and keep an extra sharp eye for enemy fighters. Wireless operator, keep an extra sharp eye on that fishpond and alert the gunners the second you spot anything that looks like a bogey¹⁰. This is our first trip in this supposedly jinxed a/c. Let's show them that it's lucky for us, and we aim to carry it on our inventory 'till the end of the war. Good luck and pray that we get back to base safely."

As we approached the target area we noticed that there was very heavy flak activity. We had to dodge a lot of it to avoid being shot down. Also, it was dangerous if your aircraft was coned by the searchlights and very difficult to shake them off and continue your bomb run.

We saw other bombers being hit by flak and going down in flames. That just made us more vigilant. I kept my eyes on that fishpond all through our bomb run, and after we had left the target area. I thought we were relatively safe.

¹⁰ **Bogey** - Military war time slang to denote an enemy, enemy aircraft or other piece of military equipment

I noticed a blip on my fishpond that was headed for us. I turned on my intercom and blurted out, "Gunners, we have a bogie at 7 o'clock high, coming in fast." I kept watch on the radar return and just as I was about to give the command to take evasive action, the tail gunner screamed, "Corkscrew port go". The skipper put the aircraft in a steep port diving turn, and proceeded to take evasive action. I could hear the rat tat tat of our .303 machine guns. And I prayed hard to both the Good Lord and Virgin Mary. I don't know how many Our Fathers and Hail Mary's left my lips. But I do know that as the skipper had suggested, I was praying we would be blessed with our safe return to base.

Something comical happened while we were being attacked. The bomb aimer, in the excitement of being attacked from the rear by the enemy fighter, started firing his *VGO at the empty air in front of the aircraft. Hell if I'd had a machine gun in front of me I probably would have done the same thing. It wasn't funny at the time. But when we landed we all had a good laugh about it. This was the first time that we had actually been under close attack. For that short time I was scared enough to crap my pants. I think we all were!

** VGO - The Vickers K machine gun, known as the Vickers Gas Operated (Vickers G.O.) in British service, was a rapid-firing machine gun developed and manufactured for use in aircraft by Vickers-Armstrongs. The high rate of fire was needed for the small period of time when the gunner would be able to fire at an attacking aircraft.* Courtesy Wikipedia

The enemy pilot came at us in a JU-88 fighter-bomber. He missed the first time around, but came back for a second attempt to shoot us down. We evaded him again successfully and our gunners may have got a hit. In any case he didn't return for a third try and we were relieved to set course for base. Because we had unserviceable low brake pressure, we had to divert to Carnaby on the east coast of Yorkshire, England, a base that had an extra long runway. We made a safe landing at Carnaby. Naturally, when we deplaned, all of us anxiously inspected the Halifax for bullet holes. We did not find one bullet hole, which indicated that we had carried out our evasive action in a very professional manner. This trip was 7 hours and 25 minutes. With our brake pressure problem corrected we flew back to base in 25 minutes.

Our 7th mission on 21 March was to the marshalling yards at a place called Rheine, Germany. We flew what was called a 'Gaggle' formation where each a/c was on it's own, flying at a given altitude.

For this operation we had fighter escort protection of Spitfires and Hurricanes. Ironically, we did not see any enemy fighters. Our fighter escort may have scared them off. There was a moderate amount of flak in the target area. Nothing exciting happened. We dodged the predicted flak and got home safely again. We hoped our luck would hold.

Nothing exciting? Too funny! This whole experience was nothing but darkly exciting!

An accurate description of war could be; long periods of mind numbing boredom interrupted occasionally by a few seconds of sheer terror!

Operation number 8 was on 22 March, to the marshalling yards at Dorsten, Germany. Again this was a Gaggle formation with fighter escort protection. Again, there were no enemy fighters seen and there was only light flak.

Number 9 on 24 March to Gladbeck Germany was a First Canadian Army co-op operation in support of ground troops. We took off at 09:29 hours and set course to altitude, again in Gaggle formation, but with no fighter escort.

We encountered moderate flak and did not see any enemy fighters. My logbook says, "good results were observed". The trip took 5 hours and 50 minutes. My tattered logbook was, and still is, a precious treasure trove.

That mission completed, we were given 6 days leave. Your dad, Leo and I went to London and stayed at a hotel (I believe it was the Strand). We went dancing at the Crystal Palace I think it was called. On our way back to the hotel the air raid sirens started wailing.

People on the street ran for the shelters. This being our first visit to London, we bravely, or perhaps foolishly, decided to stay outside and watch. We did see what we thought were aircraft flying overhead in the searchlights and wondered why the pilot wasn't trying to evade the lights. We found out next day, reading the newspaper, that these were not manned aircraft but buzz bombs. We were in London the night the Germans first used the *V1 buzz bomb.

**The V-1 was designed under the codename Kirschkern (cherry stone) by Lusser and Gossiau, with a fuselage constructed mainly of welded sheet steel and wings built of plywood. The simple, Argus-built pulsejet engine pulsed 50 times per second, and the characteristic buzzing sound gave rise to the colloquial names "buzz bomb" or "doodlebug" (a common name for a wide variety of flying insects). It was known briefly in Germany (on Hitler's orders) as Maikäfer (May bug) and Krähe (crow). Courtesy Wikipedia*

On this leave I did spend a few days with Maurice, one of my older brothers who was in the army. I managed to talk his adjutant into giving him a full week leave and later on that week smuggled him into our hotel room. As he was my older brother, out of respect, I gave him my bed and I slept on the floor. Your dad and Leo were good about it and didn't object.

There were few distractions from the bitter reality of this war, so the ability to visit with my brothers while on leave between battles was a great blessing.



Ed & Crewmates - Photo date unknown

Chapter 8

Drawing Strength from Family

Beginning that first furlough in London, after arranging that seven-day leave for Maurice (ironically having only a six day leave myself) we went to spend a few days with Ernie and May Stevens (Maurice's wife Agnes's uncle and aunt) and their daughter Chrissie. We had a great time with them. However, this was wartime and they were rationed, and our visit put a heavy strain on their food allowance. Their generosity was unwavering, even when Agnes's brother Steve, who was in the Navy, popped up while he was on shore leave. I don't recall where we all slept, but we managed.

One evening May and Ernie took us to a theatre production, where one scene was a "tableau" featuring the lady performers 'frozen' in place while posing topless. Of course we were surprised, and I guess a little embarrassed. We were not used to seeing this type of presentation. Ernie and May explained after, that this was considered art, and permissible, providing the actors (like nude statues on exhibit at a museum), did not move.

A planned outing, I think that Ernie and May wanted to see what the reaction of three virile young men would be, to this kind of risqué display. We watched the show, that being our entertainment for the evening. And Ernie and May watched us, that being their entertainment for the evening. A show within a show for the Stevens's, as I think they had seen "tableaus" more than once prior. And observing 'tough' military types blush, at seeing 'naked ladies', served to them a fresh source of amusement, during these very difficult and dangerous times.

During that visit, for a lark, we one day decided to swap gear, and take pictures of everyone in each other's uniform. I was in the Navy, Maurice in the Air Force, and Steve in the Army for a picture. And then I was in the Army while Steve was in the Air Force and Maurice in the Navy. Then we took a picture together in our own uniforms.

A personal note to Margy (Maurice and Agnes's daughter) who I hope reads this once it is finished; Look through your Dad's photo album(s), you may find a few of these pictures.

Our return to London after visiting May and Ernie, found Maurice and myself sharing that hotel room with my two crewmen, Kathleen's dad (Louis Mallette) and Leo Menard.

We visited Buckingham Palace, but didn't have 'High Tea' with the King and Queen, as I believe that they were otherwise occupied! We visited Westminster Abbey and Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum. As well as some of the other sights, including Hampton Court, a beautiful castle a dozen miles from central London. So all in all, we had a good time together.

Reflecting (with both joy and sadness) on this occasion, I wondered if this was going to be the last time I would ever see my brother. I was going back on operations, and Maurice would eventually be going to the Netherlands. Fortunately, we were two of the lucky ones who survived. I don't care how big, how tough or how mean someone is or thinks they are. War changes you. One day you wave to a buddy as you leave on an op. When you return you hear that he did not make it back from his. Over and over. Day after day. At some point there are so many of them that their faces and names become a blur. And sadly become interchangeable.

Every November 11th, (Remembrance Day) I think of my friends (especially Don Black), who didn't come back, and more than a few tears well up in my eyes. 'Lest We Forget' is a brand on my brain and I never shall. London was the last time I saw Maurice until after the war.

Returning to the squadron after our leave was over, we found out that "C" Charlie had been shot down again! So they again gave us another one! It had become apparent that though the aircraft may have been jinxed, it fortunately was not for our crew. I'm not sure whether "C" Charlie was ever shot down again on any subsequent leave. But, Kathleen, if you ask your uncle Bruce, he may remember better than I am able to. He's younger!

On our return to base we did a few training trips, to relearn what we had forgotten, while on leave. Then on 8 April 1945 our 10th operation set the target as the harbor installations in Hamburg, Germany. We had no fighter escort, but had no need, with no enemy a/c sighted. Flak was moderate. My logbook says we diverted to the village of Silverstone and returned to base the next day. Our 11th operation, on 10 April 1945 was to the marshalling yards in Leipzig, Germany, our longest trip. The 8 hours and 5 minutes seemed like an eternity. It was also in a Gaggle formation with no fighter escort and light to moderate flak. We were fully exhausted when we got back to base. And we sure enjoyed our bacon and eggs and chips in that dingy mess hall, after completing our intelligence debriefing.

Our crew's mission number 12 was actually our skipper's 13th trip, having done his first as you may recall, way back when, with a different crew. Ironically the skipper's 13th operation was on the 13th (Friday) of April 1945. Our target? The U-Boat installations in Kiel, Germany. There were a few fighters there, but they thankfully ignored us and attacked other bombers. The flak again was light to moderate. Successfully completing that mission, we diverted to Pershore in Worcestershire, England. The trip lasted 6 hours and 25 minutes. The next day we flew back to base in 1 hour and 5 minutes.

Our crew's operation number 13 was on 18 April 1945. Our target the Dune U-Boat pens on the island of Helligoland, a small archipelago off the west coast of Germany. This also was a daylight Gaggle formation with no fighter escort. We experienced light flak but no enemy fighters. The trip lasted 4 hours and 55 minutes.

One of the many things I learned for a certainty during my Air Force career was that military life was completely unpredictable, and even more so during time of war. On our way to Helligoland, over the channel, a Lancaster Bomber flying ahead of us inexplicably blew up in mid air. Seeing parachutes falling we radioed their position to HQ and hoped the poor buggers would be picked up by Air/Sea Rescue.

On 22 April we did our 14th operation. Our target was Bremen, Germany. Another army co-op in support of ground troops in Gaggle formation with no fighter escort. Cloud cover obscured the target. Having been briefed to bomb visually, and not by H2S¹¹ we did not drop our bombs. The trip lasted 5 hours and 25 minutes.

The mission on 25 April 1945 was our last operation over enemy territory. To the coastal batteries of Wangerooge, an island in the North Sea located close to the Netherlands. There were few enemy fighters and moderate flak. The trip lasted 4 ½ hours. After this trip, our squadron was stood down to convert to the Lancaster Bomber.

Note: *Many of these operations consisted of hundreds of bombers, and in some instances over a thousand aircraft on the same target. Every Bomber was assigned a specific time on target, so as to avoid congestion in the air. That is why it was imperative to follow your flight plan and hit all your turning points en route as scheduled.*

¹¹ **H2S** - ground scanning radar system developed for the Royal Air Force's Bomber Command during World War II to identify targets on the ground for night and all-weather bombing

Chapter 9

Like Kings of the Castle

Hi Kathleen! I will continue with more tales of your dad's and my life during the war.

I firmly believe the RAF kept all the good airbases for themselves and gave the Canadians, those left over. While stationed in the U.K. we were billeted in what they called Nissan huts. Think of the 'Swamp' where Hawkeye from the T.V show M.A.S.H. lived, only a little less cluttered. It was quite the contrast to the RAF base in Moreton Valence (near Stratford on Avon) before I joined the crew.

There, I had my own private bedroom with a real bed, closet space and a dresser. And believe it or not a 'maid' that I shared with 4 or 5 other officers. She would clean our rooms, make our beds, shine our shoes, and even press our trousers. Good thing I didn't get used to it, as this was extremely uncommon, as I was soon about to learn.

At our 'Swamp' we had very narrow beds, topped by three 3" thick cushions 36" X 36" square. Aptly nicknamed "biscuits", we tried to make a real mattress of them, by stuffing the three in a sheet, wrapped as tightly as possible. Without fail during the night, the biscuits would separate and our bum would fall in between the break. It was very uncomfortable and more than annoying. I do not remember getting even one decent night of sleep on them.

Our time at H.C.U. was the worst, stationed there from late December to early March, with the freezing temperatures and biting winds of an English winter. Again I can now identify with 'Hawkeye', though ours was authentic, and not the Korean winter simulated for the show.

I recall the water main in the lavatory bursting one night as we slept, and waking in the morning, to find our boots frozen to the floor. A small coal-burning stove in the middle of the hut was our only source of heat, and the fire had gone out during the night.

Settings in the movies have the beds set up side-by-side neatly, with a lot of space between. Not in our 'Swamp'. Being so cold, we had our beds in a circle around the little stove, trying to keep warm as we slept. We each scrounged as many blankets as possible and your dad had five on his, as I remember. His bed was so close to the stove, that one night his top blanket burned right through. The hole was about 8 inches in diameter.

Usually, it was a race getting into bed, as the last one up had to run to the switch by the door to turn off the lights. Your dad and I both slept in the nude. If either of us were the last one up, our bunkmates were treated to the sight of a bare ass running to the switch at the door. I can only hope that it was too dark with the lights out, to see our front side, on the scramble back to bed.

I need to cut this short, for a trip to the bank. Next, I'll tell you of the 'coal mining' sortie your dad and I went on.

Gotta go. Love, Ed.

Chapter 10

Gotta Steal to Stay Alive

Dear Kathleen, you sure are making me work hard at trying to remember what happened so many years ago. On the other hand it is challenges like this that supports the 'use it or lose it' mantra, to maintain an active brain.

Almost everything in England was rationed during the war. With each barracks allotted only so much coal per day for the stove. And it was not nearly enough to keep 'our home away from home' warm for very long.

Arguably attributed to Fredrick the Great, the loosely paraphrased statement that, 'an army marches on its stomach', supports that 'a frozen airman cannot fly'! It was cold enough in that damn a/c, and we badly needed some real warmth, to thaw our bones after a mission.

So when called, we each took turns, two at a time, scrounging for extra coal. One night your dad and I ventured out to augment our supply. At about 1am, hoping everyone was sound asleep we snuck to where the coal was stored. Facing a high fence around the coal supply, we chose to crawl under, with 'our eyes on the prize'. While filling our bag, we heard a noise a few steps away, and decided to see who else was there, foraging. We silently crept up to this person, and to our surprise, it was the RC Padre himself. We laughed and told him we would hear his confession in the morning. Then completed our assignment, having concluded that if the padre could help himself, there was no foul for us doing the same.

Writing the above has just now reminded me of another incident involving a padre. This time it was the protestant minister, Padre Ted Light. On occasion, enemy fighters would nestle within the stream of returning bombers, a strategic ploy to evade individual radar detection. Then as our bombers were on their landing approach, attempt to shoot them down. Or strafe the aircraft on the ground. Scattered in various locations around the airfield were outside biffies (outdoor toilets). One day as enemy fighters strafed the base, Padre Light was caught in one of these biffies. Hearing the report of machine gun fire, the padre stumbled out mid business, pulling up his loose pants from around his ankles, shaking his fists at the fighters, and yelling at them, "You dirty bastards". In the face of that danger we found time for a big laugh.

This happened in 1945. Twelve years later while stationed at 1 Air Division HQ (in Metz France), as designated Executive Assistant to Air Vice Marshall Godwin, I met then Wing Commander Light, now the Air Division Command Padre, and got to know him quite well. Fast forward to 1976, I ran into Padre Light at an Air Show in Portage la Prairie, Manitoba. He was standing by the outside bar having a beer.

Knowing each other very well from those days I joined him, shortly thereafter posing the question, "Ted, you remember being caught in the biffie in Tholthorpe when the German fighters came over and strafed our station". "I sure do" he replied.

So I asked him if he would, for posterity, repeat this event and come out of one of the nearby biffie's (supplied for public use at the air show) pulling up his pants, like he did in England. And I would take a picture of him and send him a copy. He complied and I took his picture. Unfortunately, I discovered later that I had forgotten to load film into the camera. Of course Ted never got a copy of the photo and probably wondered why I never sent him one.

I can see both those events in my 'mind's eye' as clearly as the day(s) they actually happened. And shake my head and chuckle at those memories, two of very few good ones I have from that time. You know, I don't believe I ever mentioned this incident of meeting Ted Light in Portage to your dad. I'm sure he would have had a good laugh out of it.

I had a lot of respect for Padre Light. He once bravely asked the Station Commanding Officer, Group Captain Joe Leconte, for permission to accompany a bomber crew on a mission. And was immediately and emphatically denied consent to do so. One must appreciate the rationale of the C.O. not agreeing to this request. Should anything happen to Padre Light (if allowed on a mission), the C.O. would have been reprimanded by Bomber Command H.Q., with a sure demotion to Wing Commander.

Though that time, his request was denied, Padre Light had the guts another time, to stow away in one of the bombers going on a mission over Germany. Fortunately they made it back to base safely. But he sure got hell from the C.O. when they returned, told emphatically as a two word order in debriefing, "NEVER AGAIN"! In his defense, he commented in the debriefing that the experience gave him a greater understanding and appreciation of the stresses we were under, while doing our job. And that first hand knowledge and experience, made doing his job, comforting and consoling our battle fatigued forces, much easier.

Padre Ted Light ended his career most honourably as Chaplain General (one star) of the Royal Canadian Air Force.



Chapter 11

Hello Darkness My Old Friend – Simon & Garfunkel

Dear Kathleen, if you recall from Chapter 7, I promised to expand on what lead to our early assignment to the 425 Alouette Squadron, due to the heavy loss of a/c during a mission. The telling of that night appears below and is a direct account from the diary of my school chum, Flying Officer Art 'Deke' Decruyenaere, and your dad knew him from the squadron.

When we left H.C.U. and arrived at the Alouette 425 we had flown in the dawn. Walking toward the Ops area, I recognized a school friend of mine from back home, talking with some of the other aircrew boys. I snuck up behind him and patted him on the shoulder saying, "Hi Deke"! Startled by my touch, he jumped about thirty feet.

The reason he was so nervous appeared as a story published in "Memories on Parade", a book of Aircrew Recollections of World War II put out by the Wartime Pilots and Observers Association. The following is what he wrote, exactly as it appears in the book, errors and all.

TANNOY TESTING, TANNOY TESTING

*The diary of R.C.A.F. 425 Squadron notes under date 5 March 1945: "Fifteen aircraft were detailed to attack Chemnitz this evening and all took off. Aircraft MZ 845 "J" crashed after take off at Nun Mukton Grange two miles south of Linton on the south side of Ouse River, Yorks and six members of the crew were killed. The wireless-operator bailed out successfully". **An appendix to the diary adds only:** "The wireless-operator was the only survivor, there is a possibility of a collision in the clouds. The collision was apparently with an aircraft from no. 426 Squadron, Linton. There were no survivors from this crew."*

425 Squadron (better known as the "Alouettes") was based at Tholthorpe, Yorkshire, England: the aircraft flown were four engine Lancasters and Halifax heavy bombers. Knowing nothing about premonitions on that fateful day, I recall feeling apprehensive; when at noon the Tannoy (loud speakers) detailed the station to stand by for operations.

Later, while shaving, I saw eyes full of anxiety, intensely staring back from the lathered reflection. I had some overpowering feeling that something was going to happen and this emotion intensified in the afternoon, more so at the briefing and especially as the whole crew boarded the Hally. It was the W/Op's duty to close the entrance hatch after everyone was in and ensures that it was locked properly. As I did this, the words came to mind; "It's like closing the lid on a coffin". Usually, I'd leave the chest-pack parachute in the back of the kite, but this time, with foreboding, I brought it to it's proper storage at the W/Op's seat. The four mighty engines roared louder and we taxied to the end of the runway. At 16:45, the roar increased to a screaming, deafening crescendo as the skipper, Mark Anderson, pushed all four throttles to full R.P.M.'s. A few moments later, we were airborne, Bomber "J-Jig" with seven crew members, full gas tanks and 6,000 lbs of bombs, rising over the Yorkshire meadows. From scores of airdromes some 750 other bombers were similarly rumbling into the air. Some minutes into the flight, the aircraft still climbing to height through clouds, I heard nothing but the roar of the engines, then the radio transmitter two feet in front of me suddenly smashed into my face and there was a deafening: "CRASH"!!

Thinking "THIS IS IT", I grasped my parachute and found myself glued to the floor, crouched on elbows and knees, trying to lift the 'chute' to the clips on my harness. I did not realize the "G" forces were causing this pressure on my body while the a/c was in a violently spinning dive. As I finally snapped one clip on, there was another explosion. Falling free through the air, I had a momentary glimpse, coming out of the clouds, of a burning plane, with its nose and one wing gone. Thinking how strange it looked I yanked the ripcord, saw a flash of white, felt a mighty jerk, and all motion seemed to cease. How peaceful and quiet it suddenly was, but not for long! A thundering blast right below, followed two seconds later by another just to one side, rent the air. Looking down into an inferno of orange flames and black smoke, I felt sure that I was going to fall right into it.

The roar of an approaching aircraft made me look up and there was a Lancaster flying towards me, but it banked sharply starboard and I clearly saw the pilot's and tail gunner's faces staring back, as it roared past about 200 feet away. Buffeted by its slipstream, I noticed pieces of wreckage falling about. Fearing that some would tangle the chute, I tried to look up at it but could not as I was hanging by one strap only. With some difficulty I reached behind to grasp the strap and realized that my helmet, goggles, face and hands were covered with blood and gore. The zinging sounds all around from exploding ammunition made me cringe. The burning planes were now off to one side, as the chute was drifting away with the wind.

Below, cattle, bellowing and crashing through the hedges, made me think of the possibility of being stampeded once on the ground. The earth seemed to be swaying from side to side more violently all the time and finally I crumpled to the grass. Releasing the harness, I wavered up, and fell down again and fell on hands and knees once more. Staggering up, falling down, swaying in circles, I noticed three farmers approaching me, two of them with pitchforks. "He's a blooming Jerry!" I heard one say, no doubt confused by the single parachute. I noticed I had lost my right flying boot and my wristwatch with a shattered dial was hanging by the knuckles of the left hand. "Did anybody else get out?" I asked, "Did anybody else get out?" Then I heard feminine voices saying; "Hello, Canada, you'll be alright now, come along with us." There were two Red Cross nurses talking with a Canadian accent I hadn't heard in the past year; I was confused, I thought I must be dead and they were angels. One of the farmers started to gather the chute and for no reason at all I shouted at him to drop it and leave it there. The harshness in my voice hardly belied the fact that although I was 21 years old, what I wanted more than anything at that moment were my mother's comforting arms.

It was decided to take me in the Red Cross ambulance, which had just happened to be driving by, to Linton Hospital, which was near the scene. On the way we stopped near a cross-roads as one of the planes had crashed close to a church and cemetery and partially blocked the road. The nurses wouldn't let me sit up to have a look, but I noticed the swinging sign of an Inn through the ambulance window and asked the male driver to please bring me a beer. They returned with a basin of hot water, towels and a cup of tea! (Which was the best thing for me, though at the time I didn't realize it I was suffering from shock.) I wasn't suffering from much else, because, once my face was washed, the nurses assured me the gore, blood and hair which was even stuck in my teeth were not mine. I decided to tear a strip from the parachute, now tangled on the floor, as a memento to wear later as a scarf. The nurse in the back with me, whose name was Mary Logie, from Winnipeg, also wanted a souvenir and I remember we had to use my lighter to burn a hole and start to rip the chute. The next day, our Padre, Father Laplante, suggested to me that I really didn't want to go to the funeral of my crew. I agreed and after a week's leave in London I returned to the squadron as a spare W/Op to finish the war.

Today, happily married, (with four sons and four daughters and 17 grandchildren) I sometimes wonder WHY my life was spared and I can't find the answer. I simply accept it as The Will of God... or as Fate... or as Luck.... or as a combination of all three. What do YOU think?

Now Kathleen, you can understand why, when I slapped Art on the shoulder from behind, he jumped thirty feet. I had a lot of respect for Art, because after going through such an experience, he had the guts to go back on operations. He flew a few more missions over Germany as a spare W/Op. I don't know how many of us would have gone back flying after such an experience.

Art passed away about 3 years ago. The reason I'm including his story in my ramblings, is because, as I mentioned before, he and his crew (as well as a few others who were shot down that night) were one of the reasons we were called up to the squadron two weeks before we would normally have gone. Life on the squadron was very stressful. Even though we didn't let on and maintained we weren't afraid, there were many times when we were scared, and anyone who says they weren't scared are liars. Your dad was a very brave man and I know you are very proud of him, as well you should be.

Editors Note: *I read for the first time what is written above during the first edit of this story. Tears are welling in my eyes making it difficult for me to see the computer monitor in front of me.*

I do not miss any opportunity when I meet a veteran, or active member of the military, whether they served in time of war or stood/stand on the sidelines waiting for that fateful call, to thank them for their service. Their bravery to enlist, knowing full well that in doing so, they may likely be summoned to serve and die, cannot be properly appreciated, by those of us who do not. And so I thank them earnestly, at every chance presented. It is truly sad, though some do give their thanks. Many do not, due to their ignorance of the sacrifices made by these bravest of the brave. It reminds me of a chance meeting at a poker table in Las Vegas in 2012. Conversations are the buffer to the boredom of playing poker. No one plays every hand and talking to your opponents is a good way to eat up the time until the next hand begins. I like to know what everyone does to get by and pay the bills. That knowledge is a window to the mindset of those you face at the table, and an important tool to help you win.

I asked one fellow, in his late 20's I surmised, what he did for a living. I am a 'Sapper'¹² with the army on leave from Afghanistan. "Thank you for your service" I said. "Seriously?" he replied. For some reason he thought me to be insincere. I told him of my uncle Ed and what he had gone through in WW2 and reaffirmed my thanks, with a solid handshake. And finished the conversation with, "It's guys like you, that make it possible for guys like me, to be sitting here at this table playing poker and drinking beer in Vegas at 3 o'clock in the morning. So ya..... seriously..... thank you for your service!" That war still rages on today. I hope he survived it.

¹² **Sapper** - A sapper, also called pioneer or combat engineer, is a combatant or soldier who performs a variety of military engineering duties such as breaching fortifications, demolitions, bridge-building, laying or clearing minefields, preparing field defenses, as well as working on road and airfield construction and repair.

Chapter 12

Bogey at Seven O'clock High

Editor's Note: *Though the following terms were explained earlier in the telling of this tale, those definitions were included at that point for the benefit of the reader. The repeating of them to Ms. Gingras, in the correspondence below, was important for the sake of continuity, in relation to her being the inspiration for this historical document's development. Embellishing to some degree on those definitions, the following is presented verbatim from Ed's raw notes.*

Dear Kathleen,

When describing the events of our sixth operation I didn't explain what the VGO was, as well as what the Fishpond was, so I'll expand on that.

Besides a mid upper and a rear gunner in the Halifax, there was a Vickers Gas Operated machine gun in the nose of the aircraft, which was manned by the bomb aimer.

Our Halifax bomber was equipped with a special radar equipment called H2S which was under slung in the mid section of the aircraft where there used to be a belly gun turret. The turret was removed to accommodate the H2S. This piece of equipment was used for navigational purposes in that it gave the navigator a picture of the ground for map reading. The bomb aimer also used this equipment if we had to bomb through cloud when it was overcast over the target area, and we couldn't see the target visually.

Connected to the H2S was another piece of equipment called a 'Fishpond', which the W/Op used to detect any approaching aircraft and kept the gunners informed of their position in relation to our aircraft. If, for any reason, the gunners did not see the approaching aircraft by the time it reached a certain range, then the W/Op would give the command to the pilot to 'corkscrew' in whatever direction was dictated by the position of the approaching fighter.

There's not much more Kathleen, but I'll have something else for you another day.

Love Ed

P.S. Some of these trips were pretty scary Kathleen, but I don't like to dwell on it. Suffice to say that I'm glad we got through it together. It certainly made us appreciate one another. I love my crew.

Editors Note: *Sunday June 7, 2020. The world is in its 6th month of Covid-19. Millions infected and hundreds of thousands dead. And it's not even close to being over. The World is awash in protests for the needless and senseless killing, by police, of yet another unarmed Black Man, George Floyd. We are one race on this planet: The Human Race. Only mutual decency and compassion towards fellow humans should define us. Every day is a test of character. Taking place every morning; looking into a mirror, you should ask yourself: **Are you proud of what you see in that reflection?** Today's reality cannot be the defining end for the sacrifices of those who fought and died, and continue to fight and die for us today.*

*The harming of others for unjustified reasons of difference cannot rule us. Permitting such supports that they did indeed all die in vain! In unity, we **cannot** allow that to happen!*

Chapter 13

The Wars End for "C" Charlie

Good morning Kathleen: You recall me mentioning that our skipper, Louis Paquette, went on his first trip over Germany with another crew, for familiarization. Consequently, he was always one trip ahead of the rest of us. Your dad was very superstitious. When Louis did his thirteenth trip (our number twelve) on Friday the 13th of April 1945, your dad wore his chest pack (parachute) all the way to the target and back home. But when we did OUR 13th trip on the 18th of April, he didn't bother wearing his chute. I guess he figured if we made it on the Friday the 13th, we shouldn't have any problem on Wednesday the 18th!

The Allouette squadron's last operation over enemy territory during WWII was on an island called Wangerooge, near Helligoland. This was on the 24 April 1945.

Our crew, F/L Louis Paquette (Pilot), F/O Leo Menard (Navigator), F/O Louis Mallette (Bomb aimer), F/O Bruce Webster (Engineer), F/S Luc Laroche (Mid-Upper Gunner), F/S Marcel Gauthier (Rear Gunner) and F/O Ed Chenier (Wireless Air Gunner), the proud crew of "C" Charlie, dropped the last bombs over German territory, nearing the end of WWII.

After this mission, the squadron stood down to convert to the Lancaster Bomber. By the time we completed our conversion to this aircraft, the war had ended. Thank God. We were understandably joyful that we were still alive at the end of this war. And thrilled, knowing that we would be returning to our homes and loved ones in the very near future.

The 425 Allouette Squadron were among those chosen to fly our Lancasters back to Canada, via the Azores. And then proceed to the Pacific War Theatre to assist the Americans in bombing the Japanese.

I have to go Kathleen so I'll send you more, later on.

Love Ed

Editors Note: *Amendments to the information above begins the next chapter.*



Chapter 14

Home is Where Your Heart Is

Good morning Kathleen: Regarding our crew dropping the last bombs over enemy territory as stated in yesterday's e-mail, I was referring to the Allouette Squadron, not the whole of Bomber Command. Also, on checking my logbook, I noticed the date was actually the 25th and not the 24th of April.

As noted in the last chapter, the crew of "C" Charlie stood down after this operation, to train for our conversion to the new Lancaster Bombers. Between 25 April and 9 June, we flew over 80 hours, training on the Lancaster, doing x-country runs, among other exercises.

Training completed, our squadron was selected to join the "Tiger Force". Flying to Okinawa, we would assist the Americans in the Pacific Theatre, and the bombing of Japan.

Our flight path home, before reassignment to Japan, would take us to Lagens in the Azores. There we would refuel, and then fly to Gander, Newfoundland. The weather was very uncooperative at the time, both in England, and along the route to the Azores. For about two weeks, we would go for briefing at 08:30 for take-off at 11:30, when invariably due to the weather, the mission was cancelled. Meanwhile, we had all been paid, and our records sent back to Canada. That meant we could/would not be paid again until we caught up with our paperwork, suggesting careful spending habits. Returning crews were confined to base awaiting better weather. With rationing still in place there was little to buy on base. I still managed to somehow spend myself into a state of poverty, a reality that I would soon regret.

One day, the mission cancelled yet again, our gunners literally said "P**s on it, we're going into town"! The next day we went for early briefing, for take off at 11:30, but by eleven o'clock our gunners still had not returned. The Skipper said, "I have to let the C.O. know that my gunners aren't here". Fortunately, the mission was cancelled once again. Around 15:00 our gunners rolled in feeling no pain. Louis had had to put them on charge for being A.W.O.L.

On the 14th of June, the weather improved and we took off from Tholthorpe, York and flew to St. Mawgan in southern England, the 1st leg of our trans-Atlantic flight home. After an overnight stay, we took off the next morning at 08:20 and set course for the Azores. We were airborne for 6 hours and 20 minutes, landing in Lagens for a brief respite.

A final bitter reminder of what we had endured, we were billeted in one of those Nissan huts, similar to our quarters in England. Fortunately, the climate in Lagens was a complete contrast to an English winter. Pilfering coal for the stove would not be necessary.

One evening, an island native came in to our hut bearing an armful of silk (no nylons in those days) stockings, beautifully wrapped and labeled "Lydia". Wielding several bottles of Five Star Brandy as well, either for sale with a price of \$2.00 per.

In one of Deed's many letters to me, she rumored that one who spoke French could buy silk stockings in Montreal. And asked me to buy her some if I had the chance. Still broke (and I mean BROKE) I borrowed \$10.00 from your Dad and bought 5 pair of properly packaged silk stockings. No Brandy. Minimal thanks to my love, for her boundless patience and commitment, waiting for my return. So far, 70 years of love and devotion in trade for 5 pair of silk stockings. Pretty good deal for me I would say. Your dad also bought a pair or two as I remember.

The morning we departed Lagens was very foggy. It was difficult to see ahead. We made it safely to the end of the runway taking off at 07:00.

Unfortunately, one of our Lancasters piloted by (I believe) F/L Chappel, was not so lucky. In a line-up behind other aircraft, idling toward the end of the runway in this foggy condition, he taxied right in to the tail turret of another Lancaster, killing the Tail Gunner.

This tail gunner went through hell, flying a myriad of missions over Germany. Dodging flak from ground fire, machine gun rounds from enemy fighters, mid air collisions with allied aircraft, and treacherous take offs and landings. Surviving that ordeal only to die in a freak accident on the tarmac, as he finally heads home, having bravely served for months and years. The kind of tragic tale that you hear about many times over, one can only wonder, "Why?"

I had been there. But for the grace of God and a sour stomach, it could have been me!

Our flight from Lagens to Gander was 8 hours and 15 minutes. Finally back in Canada, we deplaned, and as the Pope can be seen doing on occasion, we literally kissed the ground.

From Gander, we flew to Scoudouc, New Brunswick, where we collected some pay, and then hurried to the station, to catch a train that had already left for Montreal. Arrangements were made to stop the train at a nearby crossing. We were rushed by bus to that point down the tracks, so that we did not have to wait for the tomorrow train.

After we boarded, the passengers, who had been wondering why the train had stopped, honoured us with a rousing welcome. Having been told that we had just flown our Lancasters across the Atlantic from England, and were on our way to help the Americans in the Pacific Theatre. I dare to speak for all of us, that it was our proudest moment as Canadians. We were given a month leave, ordered to then report back to Debert, Nova Scotia for regrouping. Arriving in Winnipeg on the 20th of June, Deed's birthday, I was her birthday present.

The Winnipeg Free Press posted a photographer at the CN station, to greet and take photographs of returning veterans. A photo of my mother, Deed, and I, appeared in the newspaper the following day. I thought it was on the front page, but Deed says no, it was on an inside page. I gave Deed her silk stockings for her birthday, and she was quite pleased. Throughout the month of my leave she had not worn them, a curiosity to me. When asked, she said she was saving them. Though a puzzlement, I did not think any more of it.

A month later, our leave now expired, the crew reported back to Debert NS. One day, while in the canteen having a beer with the crew, your dad made the comment that he had given his sister a pair of those silk stockings. When she tried to put them on, the foot fell off. In my next letter to Deed I asked her about it, and she confirmed the same outcome. They were not full fashion as claimed, and she could have got a better pair in the Eaton's basement (clearance department) for about 10 cents a pair. I repaid your dad the \$10 I had borrowed, realizing I'd been had.

Thinking back, that Five Star Brandy I did not buy was likely coloured tea water. Had I bought some for the guys, I don't think they would have been nearly as forgiving for the gift as was Deed. Again, you live and learn. I would carry much, if not all that knowledge, forward into my future careers, both military and civilian.



The war in the Pacific ended so there was no longer any need for the squadron to fly to Okinawa. Thankfully, the war for us was also over, so we were returned to our hometowns to be properly discharged. We fought and survived. We made it! Sadly though, many did not.

Note: *Our mid upper Gunner F/S Laroche hadn't reported back to Debert and we didn't know at the time what had happened to him. I'll explain later in future emails.*

That's it for now Kathleen.

Have a nice day.

P.S. I guess this just about brings us up to now, Kathleen. I sent an email to your uncle Bruce and to Leo Menard today, explaining what I had been doing at your request. And also forwarded all the emails I've been sending you (as well as this one), asking that they reply with their version of our wartime adventures. I recall that your dad went to Ireland on one of his leaves, but I don't remember with whom he went. It may have been your uncle Bruce, but I'm not certain. Please ask him.

We also went to Edinburgh Scotland one time, but that trip is very vague in my memory. I do recall that we went dancing at some hall there, and the girl attendants frisked us before they would let us in. I think some of us went twice, just for the frisking! Ha Ha! If you have any questions Kathleen, don't hesitate to ask. We'll keep in touch.

Love Ed

Chapter 15

Once Lost – Now Found

Dear Kathleen, the time between emails sent has me continue to remember other small, yet none-the-less important details of my time overseas. I seem to recall that on that leave we spent in London, the night the buzz bombs came over, your uncle Bruce was also with us. As my memory allows, I will expand on previous events in retrospect. Though they may seem to be trivial, none of the intricacies of episodes from that time were.

I lost contact with all members of “C” Charlie after the war. In 1952, I re-enlisted in the R.C.A.F. as a Fighter Controller. After 10 weeks at Officer's School in London Ontario I was posted to St. Hubert Quebec. Remembering that some of the crew was from Montreal, I checked the city phone book, finding phone numbers for your Dad, Bruce, and Leo.

Possibly due to the amount of fun we had that night, we all have difficulty remembering, but believe that we met at some nightclub on St. Catherine Street in Downtown Montreal.

Regardless, that is how and when I re-established contact with members of “C” Charlie. We kept in touch for many years through Christmas cards. And enjoyed a number of visits with each other over the years. Some were pleasant and some were painful.

Once in the 1970's, my tail gunner Marcel Gauthier dropped in to see us with his wife. A cousin of mine from Ponteix, Saskatchewan (Marcel's hometown), told me years later that Marcel had committed suicide around Christmas in the late 1980's. Tragically following his dad's footsteps, who committed suicide at Christmas time, when Marcel was younger.

In 1976, I believe it was, traveling through Sudbury on our way to Ottawa, I mentioned to Deed that my mid upper gunner Luc Laroche was from Sudbury. Again, the phone book showed that we were only a few blocks away from where he lived, so we dropped in to see him. I asked him why he hadn't reported back to Debert for regrouping after our rehab leave. He said he had had the worst case of poison ivy and by the time he got to Debert, the rest of the crew had gone. I asked what had happened to him and Marcel for being AWOL when we left England. He shrugged his shoulders and said, "They just gave us our commission before discharging us, and we heard nothing more of it"!

Note: *They commissioned some NCOs before discharging them at the end of the war in recognition of their contribution to the war effort.*

I did lose contact with Leo and Ray for a while. However, on one occasion in the 1980's, when Leo and his wife were in Winnipeg visiting their daughter in law & grandson, he remembered that this was where I lived. As I had done in Montreal, he checked the phone book and found me. Deed and I went to visit them at the Holiday Inn where they were staying.

Another time in the 80's, on a stopover in Montreal with a few hours to kill, I contacted your dad and Bruce and they came over to Dorval Airport for short visit.

I kept in contact with the whole crew (except our pilot) through the years, via Christmas cards and the odd phone call. We started to travel and began organizing luncheons like the one with you in Montreal. One time, we had a pool party at your mom & dad's house. Several times, we met at Leo & Rays home, and were occasionally invited to stay overnight.

No one from the crew had heard anything of our pilot, Louis Paquette, until 1995. Leo Menard called to let me know that he had contacted him, and gave me his phone number. I phoned Louis (living in Westlock, Alberta) and as it happened, he and wife Simone were planning a trip to visit some relatives in Montreal.

Deed & I invited them to stay at our place when traveling through Winnipeg. And Leo & Ray invited them to stay with them in Rigaud QC. The whole crew (except the Laroche's who had a previous engagement) got together for lunch in Hudson QC, almost fifty years to the day after the war had ended. What a re-union! And would you believe? We were, all of us, with the same spouse we each had married after the war. Louis and Simone again visited us in Winnipeg, on their return home from Montreal.

Two years ago, on our way to Ottawa, we stopped in to have a coffee with Luc & Juliette (LaRoche) in Coniston Ontario, a suburb of Sudbury. We mentioned that we were going to have lunch with the crew again in Hudson. Luc looked at his wife and asked, "Do you want to go to Montreal for lunch"? And Juliette answered: "Sure"! And they did. Your dad and Bruce hadn't seen Luc in 55 years. Taking advantage of the opportunity, Luc and Juliette stayed with Leo and Ray for a couple days before heading west on the return trip home.

Editors Note: *Saturday June 13, 2020. Saturday June 20th marks my aunt Deed's 95th birthday. She is currently residing in a Seniors Long term Care Facility in Winnipeg. Her love, my uncle Ed, has been gone nearly 6 years.*

Covid-19 continues to ravage the world, and has been especially hard on residents of homes such as aunt Deed is in. So far so good for her, and we can only hope for the best, all things considered. It cannot be easy for her, without my uncle Ed at her side.

A lesson to us all to enjoy each and every day, because if we have learned anything during this pandemic, it should be that every day is precious.

And that life can be over in as short as three days, with a lot of suffering thrown into the mix, should one contract this virus.

The quote attributed to actor James Arness (Marshall Matt Dillon on TV Western Gunsmoke), seems apt. "I was honored to have served in the Army for my country. I was at Anzio (one of the bloodiest battles over 4 months with 30,000 casualties) during WWII, and it makes you realize how very precious life is".

Ed lived on borrowed time for decades, as another fell in his place. I know for an absolute fact that not one day went by in all those years that he was not torn up about it. I also know without a doubt, that he lived every one of those days in thanks. And made it a priority in his life to conduct himself in such a manor, that he was and would be proud of what he saw gazing at his reflection in the mirror every single day.

He was the kind of person that we should all strive to be.

Not an easy thing to do, not easy at all!

Chapter 16

An Open Can of Worms

Dear Kathleen,

Good morning and another fine day for you and yours I hope.

My oldest son Glen, an electrical engineer and hardware designer/developer for Fujitsu, who lives in Dallas Texas, called yesterday. Commenting on the e-mails I've been sending you (and my own siblings and nieces and nephews) about your dad's and my crew's overseas adventures, declaring his enjoyment of them. He then prompted me to continue this narrative, with a chronicle of my post war life. I never could find a plausible reason to say no to him.

It seems that this effort to catch you up on your dad's wartime escapades has opened up a big can of worms. One that I think I am forced to eat! So here we go. Down the hatch!

When Glen was much younger, yet old enough to understand, he would ask that fateful question that many children I am sure did, "What did you do in the war, Daddy?" Holding back somewhat the more violent details, I told him tales of my training and the history of that war.

During the phone call (above) that day, he went on to say that there were incidents from my training he recalled me telling him that I had not yet mentioned in my emails to you. Those days were like living in a tornado. And with age comes a failing memory. Understandably, there are many incidents and episodes that I may not remember. That I may never remember!

However, what I can do at Glen's behest is to continue with our lives after the war, both as a civilian and in my second Air Force career. I believe that it is a story that needs to be told. A tribute to all those we left behind. Especially my friend Don Black, whose time on Earth was cut short, dramatically sacrificed; so that I could live on to tell this story. It is a debt that I can never properly repay. At the very least, in thanks, I owe him that!

With your blessing, I will include you, along with my kids, brothers and sisters, nieces and nephews, and any and all who are interested, in my future correspondences.

Since the war I've been subject to Lumbago (recurring back pain), and I get an attack occasionally. Haven't had one for a while, but it hit me again a couple days ago. At times it is near crippling. Deed's back has also started to bother her and though not contagious, she's blaming me for it. Ha! Ha! It is just another of a long line of symptoms (the curse) of aging. I still go for my 3-mile walk every day, but I don't know if that is helping or hurting the situation.

I think I'll take it easy today. And hearken back to those days so long ago, trying to remember events from my past that I have currently so far forgotten.

Love Ed

Chapter 17

Follow Your Heart

Hello Kathleen and all who are reading this.

As Glen has requested, I will continue on with our life after the war.

On 6 July 1946, Deed and I were finally married. We had our reception at the Circle "O" Hall in St. Boniface, directly across from the St. Boniface Cathedral¹³. We just had snacks and hors d'oeuvres at a cost of 0.35c a plate, a Princely sum in those days. Our 50th anniversary celebration was \$35 a plate. That's progress for ya!



¹³ **St. Boniface Cathedral-Basilica Parish** - within the Archdiocese of Saint Boniface since 1818, Mother Church of Western Canada and historical site of Manitoba



The Lovely Bride



My dad, brother and I went into the mink breeding business after the war. Seemed like a good idea at the time. We had a few hundred mink when the 1950 'Flood of the Century'¹⁴ came along and wiped us out. I'd worked in the fur trade making fur coats for a few years, but this event was a literal deal breaker.

So I got a job at the Canadian National Railway working my way up to be a machinist helper. In 1952, missing my life in the military, I decided to re-enlist in the R.C.A.F.

When I told Deed I was going back in the Air Force, she said, "Go ahead", supportive as she always was, but thinking I was too old and they wouldn't accept me anyway.

Fortunately at the time, they were looking for 'old' (age 29) guys like me with flying experience, to open up a new branch of the Air Force called "Fighter Controllers". Our job would be to control fighters in the air, to intercept enemy aircraft potentially penetrating our borders. Canada was part of NORAD¹⁵ in association with the United States.

Our new life began with a 10-week refresher at the Officer's School in London Ontario. Followed by a 10-week course at Tyndall Air Force base in Panama City Florida, learning the intricacies of ground to air instruction and control of fighter interceptors.

¹⁴ **1950 Flood of the Century** - more than 100,000 people were forced from their homes and 10,000 homes were flooded as one-eighth of Winnipeg was submerged by floodwaters.

¹⁵ **NORAD** - a partner-military entity founded in 1958 by an agreement between Canada and the United States. NORAD monitors North American airspace and maritime approaches. It also defends North American airspace.

The refresher course in London completed, we bought a 16-foot trailer, and the four of us, Deed, Gail (5 years) and Glen (1½) traveled south to Florida. There were unrelated challenges and some culture shock associated with the move. We had to build a small fence around the trailer to keep Glen from wandering and getting lost in the trailer park. And Gail was quite upset with a U.S.A F. airman who shot squirrels, taking them home for dinner.

From Florida, on a month leave, we returned to Winnipeg, selling the trailer for \$50 more than we had paid for it. Posted for several months to a radar station in Lac St. Denis in the Laurentians in Quebec, we spent the following two years at a radar station at Parent in northern Quebec. I remember that the beautiful scenery offset the isolation to some degree. But it was a challenge to keep our young family amused and entertained out there.

There were no roads to Parent, the only access being by train. It got so cold there. Milk that was dropped off at the railway station in the early morning would be frozen by the time it was delivered to our house. Conversely, in the summer, it would sometimes sour from sitting in the sun and heat before delivery. Eventually we stopped buying this milk and began ordering powdered milk in the 50lb bag from Eaton's.

One night the temperature dropped to minus 63 degrees. We lived in a side-by-side home and our neighbors were Jack and Donna Hourigan. Jack was the Chief Admin Officer. One day, Jack came over and asked if we had any heat in our house, because he and Donna were freezing in theirs. The oil tank feeding their furnace was situated in our basement. We went down to check and found the valve leading to their furnace had been turned off. Glen, who was 3 yrs old at that time, had been playing in the basement with Tim Robb (another neighbour's son) and Glen had turned off the valve. We jokingly told Jack and Donna that if they didn't behave themselves, we would again turn off their heat.

The station took its name from the lake, Lake Parent, aside which it was built. Because there were no roads into Parent, there were only military vehicles on the base, and they were for official use only. The admin offices, general living quarters and messes were situated at the end of the lake. Married personnel housing was about one half mile away. One New Years Eve it was so cold that the wives wore ski pants under their formal gowns, as we had to walk the half-mile to the Officers Mess where the party was being held. It was quite comical watching the girls take off their ski pants once we arrived at the mess.

There were many amusing events on base. Two of the funnier ones stuck with me.

Our house was right beside the school. One day Deed noticed this young (5-year old) boy in the school playground selling balloons to the other children playing there. Five balloons for a nickel. Upon a closer look Deed noticed that these were not actually balloons but condoms. Deed went to the school and explained to the teacher what was going on in the playground. Fortunately, the teacher had some real balloons in her desk, so she went outside and exchanged the condoms for her balloons. Asking the youngster where he had got the 'balloons', he said out of his parent's medical chest in their bathroom. He had dropped the condoms out the bathroom window. Then retrieved them off the ground before going to the playground. Smart kid!

Another time, Deed and I were walking down the road, on our way to the recreation center. A young child walking towards us began to cry. Concerned, we asked him what his name was and what was wrong.

He told us that he had lost his nickel for his ice cream cone. Naturally, as parents, we took him to the store next to the rec center and bought him an ice cream cone. Sending him home with a smile and a little ice cream on his face. This is when the storeowner told us that this kid did this all the time with newcomers. Deed and I both laughed.

The radar site was on top of a hill about 3 miles from the main station. This was a new site and I was the yet to be tested Ops Officer. I was nervous and lost a lot of sleep before our first scheduled exercise with the other radar stations. After the second one, I realized that there was actually nothing to worry about. That is when I adopted the attitude ... do the best you can and let someone else worry... This has been my approach to life ever since, and haven't had ulcers or a heart attack yet. Mind you, I have lost a lot of hair! In July 1955, I was transferred to 61 Aircraft and Warning Unit in Metz France. More to come in my next email.

Love Ed

APPENDIX "E"

EXTRACT FROM 110 CA 250 DATED 1 MAY 55

ESTABLISHMENT 61 AC&W SQN

<u>Administrative Unit</u>		<u>Telecommunications</u>
1 Wing Commander	OO	1 Squadron Leader
1 Flying Officer	Adj't	1 Flight Lieutenant
2 ACs		1 Flying Officer
		1 Warrant Officer First Class
		1 Warrant Officer Second Class
		5 Flight Sergeants
		16 Sergeants
		32 Corporals
		76 ACs
<u>Operations</u>		
2 Squadron Leaders		
7 Flight Lieutenants		
9 Flying Officers		
1 Flight Sergeant		
4 Sergeants		
4 Corporals		
25 ACs		

SUMMARY OF ARRIVALS

<u>Officers</u>	AS/PirC
160259 F/O	WD HAWKE 12 Jun 55
121786 F/O	DR PAIGER 27 Jun 55
203481 F/O	B DOLTYWANT 9 Jul 55
122609 F/O	J deBAGHERA 11 Jul 55
207198 F/O	FM LLSWELLIN-THOMAS . . 11 Jul 55
204484 F/O	RE LAIRD 12 Jul 55
39014 F/L	JA LEBARE 13 Jul 55
122701 F/O	FA NIXON 13 Jul 55
44740 F/O	E CHERRIER 13 Jul 55
218004 F/O	DO FRY 15 Jul 55
210574 F/O	WD O'NEKILLY 15 Jul 55
209591 F/O	JE VANCE 15 Jul 55
209520 F/O	WE VINE 26 Jul 55
20134 F/L	OF OCKENDON 1 Aug 55
210030 F/O	TE MELOCH 2 Aug 55
16721 F/O	EH COOKE 1 Feb 56 (On loan from SAGO staff)
205636 F/O	JDS DICKSON 1 Feb 56 (On loan from SAGO staff)

GCA OPERATORS

22128 WO2	J DART	26991 FS D CURRIE	} On loan. Arrived Aug 55 Left Mar 56
24574 WO2	O GIBSON	12251 FS I DARE	
23414 WO2	W PLOON	18766 FS J WRIGHT	
		18933 CPL O BRAUNHENSE	

PirOps

May 5 to May 15 56 Arrivals. Periodic arrivals of small groups from that date on until strength of 87 was reached for the opening date 1 Aug 56.

Title: Extract from 110 CA 250, dated 1 May 1955, appendic "E"

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Chapter 18

France in the 1950's

For Deed and the kids to accompany me on the same ship to France, I had to have an address in Europe where they would be able to stay until I found accommodation. I wrote my sister Terry, who was living in France, asking if she could put us up until I found suitable housing. Terry wrote back that their place was too small, so she was unable help. Luckily, during the war, I had befriended Auntie Agnes' uncle and aunt, Ernie and May Stevens, who lived just outside of London, England. Over the years after the war, because rationing was still in effect in England, we would send May and Ernie a Christmas parcel. I wrote them with the same request. They were very happy to have us. Perhaps as a way to show their appreciation for those holiday bundles. Their generosity was very much appreciated.

Recalling from earlier in this story, that I had gone overseas in 1944 on the troopship "Empress of Scotland". Sharing accommodation in the hold of the ship with hundreds of other officers and airman. And how crowded it was?

What a contrast!

On this return trip as an officer, we traveled first class. We were assigned a large cabin. And were able to arrange for Gail and Glen to eat their meals an hour before us, so that we could enjoy the entertainment in the evenings. Our cabin steward watched the kids, which allowed us to socialize in the first class lounge.

Greeted in Southampton by Ernie and May, Deed and the kids stayed with them until I found an apartment in Metz. From Southampton the ship continued on to Le Havre France. I then made my way to Metz. Getting off the train in Metz, I hailed a cab and directed the driver to take me to the Globe Hotel. "Oui monsieur" he replied. He then made a u-turn to cross the street, stopped, turned his head, and reported with a wry smile on his face, "The Globe Hotel monsieur". We both laughed. I don't recall the cost of that u-turn, but that moment was priceless. I would stay at the Globe for several weeks until I found an apartment.

I ate all my meals in restaurants. I would first order a "demi" of wine (a half a liter). By the time I'd drank my "demi", finished my meal and left the restaurant, I was walking 2 feet above ground. Never a big drinker, back home I might have a glass or two of wine with our Sunday dinner. I cut back on the wine to a small carafe. Slowly getting used to it.

Suitable housing in Metz was hard to come by. I finally managed to find a two bedroom furnished apartment. Deed, and the kids came to France and we settled in. Shortly thereafter, in late September, we were fortunate to find a furnished house on the outskirts of Metz. We spent the winter there. Family always welcome, my sister Terry and her husband Lou came to spend Christmas with us. It was nice for us to not be alone during that special time of the year.

In the spring of 1956, newly built houses similar to the one we were living in became available. We rented one of them, unfurnished. We bought furniture at the American P.X.¹⁶

¹⁶ **American "PX"** - The military term "PX" stands for "post exchange" and is historically the shopping center for U.S. Army bases. Any PX will sell consumer goods to authorized customers, which primarily includes military members, retirees and their dependents.

May and Ernie made the trip from Southampton to vacation with us that summer. With their daughter Chrissie, her husband Cyril, and their two kids. It was crowded, but we managed.

Always having made their tea from bulk leaves; they had never seen tea bags. Always a prankster, I would hang the tea bags on a 'clothesline' in the cupboard and tell them they could be reused. I hardly think they believed me. We had an electric 4-slice toaster and would buy large 24-slice loaves of white bread. They used to make their toast on top of the stove and had never seen a toaster. Working that toaster like kids playing with a new toy at Christmas, we made toast as though we were feeding the entire Air Force.

The 1950's were a time of innovation and invention. And there was no shortage of new devices and appliances, specifically designed to make family life easier.

One time Deed was washing clothes, and had the washing machine next to the bathtub for rinsing. Wanting to help, Chrissie (who had never seen a washing machine) started taking the clothes out of the hot water, to wring them out with her bare hands. Deed noticed what she was doing and showed her how to use the wringers (mangle¹⁷) on the machine.

They really enjoyed their holiday and we really enjoyed having them. Introduced to the revolutionary machines of modern convenience, upon their returned to England, May bought an electric toaster and Chrissie bought a washing machine.

During the summer of 1956, we went to Lourdes to see the Grotto where the Virgin Mary appeared to Bernadette¹⁸. While there, we found out that Bernadette's body was on display in a glass showcase in a convent in Nevers, France.

From Lourdes we traveled south and spent about ten days in a little fishing village in Lloret de Mar on the Costa Brava, in the coastal region of Catalonia in northeastern Spain. We rented a beautiful villa for the high price of \$4.00 a night. We swam in the Mediterranean every day, and lived for that short time like the 'Rich and Famous' you see and hear so much about on the television.

I had brought my own bottle of Seagrams V.O. whisky back in Metz that I had paid \$1.25 for, only to discover that I could have bought the same bottle in Spain for 90 cents.

On our return to Metz, we went by the convent at Nevers. The attending nun allowed us in to view St. Bernadette's body. It had been exhumed after being in the ground for forty years. It was completely preserved. An awesome sight! That's all I have time for now. More next time.

Love.... Ed/Dad/Granddad

¹⁷ **A mangle or wringer** - a mechanical laundry aid consisting of two rollers in a sturdy frame, connected by cogs and, in its home version, powered by a hand crank or electricity. While the appliance was originally used to wring water from wet laundry, today mangles are used to press or flatten sheets, tablecloths, kitchen towels, or clothing and other laundry.

¹⁸ **St. Bernadette of Lourdes** was a French nun who lived in the 1800s. As a young teenager, she had a series of visions of the Virgin Mary in the Massabielle grotto, ultimately leading to the founding of the shrine of Lourdes.

Chapter 19

Remembering Things Forgotten

. Lost memories are one of the many curses of aging. And I am recounting events from our lives that happened almost 50 years ago, when I still had hair on top! After reading the last chapter Glen has kindly volunteered to fill in some of the blanks of those days overseas.

Editor's Note: *Following is e-mail sent by Glen to his dad, recounting some of what he remembered as a young boy, traveling the world. I think it important to include in the telling of Ed's story, as children have a much different perspective than adults, when it comes to remembering the same happenings common to both, father and mother and son and daughter.*

My cousin Glen was a brilliant Electrical Engineer. Working for the Federal Canadian Government in the 1970's, he was the system maintenance technician responsible for the uninterrupted operation of the Canadian portion of the D.E.W. Line¹⁹.

*Some of the fondest memories I have of my youth were from the 1960's, visiting Uncle Ed and Aunt Deed on Saturdays, and going with Glen to the local drugstore to sift through the reject bins of supposedly burnt out vacuum tubes²⁰. Some were not burned out and Glen would retrieve them for future use. I believe that he built his first Ham Radio²¹ from these tubes. And I believe that he designed and crafted his own integrated circuits from scratch. He was by definition **brilliant** and perhaps the smartest person I have ever known.*

At breakfast one morning in Parent, Gail told me that we were going to take a trip on a train that day. I still remember how exciting that sounded. On the train, we were several cars back from the big black steam locomotive. Gail showed me how we could press our cheeks against the window and see the engine, as the train went around the curves. I recall lying in a berth looking out the window at the sidetracks going by in the moonlight, as I pretended to be asleep. I am not sure if this was on our return trip to Winnipeg before the trip overseas. It may have been on the return trip east to board the ship to Europe.

I remember many events from those days, but not necessarily in the correct order.

Nanny had that big water tank in the kitchen, and dipping water out while trying not to fall in was a challenge. Old Mr. Laverly would deliver water in a wagon pulled by two horses. And the walk to the biffy at night: the sharp blades of grass poking up between the slats of the wooden walkway that would cut up my poor little feet.

I also remember visiting Mamere (grandmother) and Papere (grandfather) and meeting many aunts and uncles and cousins. One uncle had a car with flip out turn signals. And I remember driving around the block with Dad waiting for Mom to finish shopping in Eatons.

¹⁹ **The Distant Early Warning Line** - also known as the DEW Line or Early Warning Line, was a system of radar stations in the far northern Arctic region of Canada, with additional stations along the North Coast and Aleutian Islands of Alaska (see Project Stretchout and Project Bluegrass), in addition to the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Iceland. It was set up to detect incoming Soviet bombers during the Cold War, and provide early warning of any sea-and-land invasion.

²⁰ **Vacuum tube** - an electron tube, or valve (British usage) or, colloquially, a tube (North America), is a device that controls electric current flow in a high vacuum between electrodes to which an electric potential difference has been applied.

²¹ **Amateur radio/Ham radio** - is the use of radio frequency spectrums for the non-commercial exchange of messages, private recreation, training, wireless experimentation, and emergency communication with a purely personal intent without compensation.

There were elevators in Eatons with green sliding cage doors and real live elevator operators, and streetcars on the roads.

In Quebec City, we stayed at a hotel, where for the first time I saw bar soap, and thought how wonderful that it floated in the water in the sink. We walked to the docks to see the Homeric, the ocean liner we were to sail on the next day. Standing there looking up, Gail asked in a dismayed voice "How are we going to get on it"? As the deck was miles above us, and the gangway hadn't been set up yet.

The Ocean Liner was so impressive then (I recently found a picture of it on the internet - what an old tub it looked like!). Also the dock smell was terrible; they still used a lot of horses back then. My only clear memory of the ocean voyage was the nursery; a large room where the nurse would watch us kids, probably while Mom and Dad had their dinners. I kept trying to sneak out, but the nurse had eyes like a hawk and always caught me and hauled me back. One end of the room had a big glassed in train on display, and I asked the nurse to make it run, but she told me it was broken. It had been torn out on the trip back from France. Also, I remember walking throughout the ship with Gail and using the elevators. Maybe that was the time I went exploring and got 'lost'. Heck, I wasn't lost!

I don't remember staying with May and Ernie in England, but I remember the temporary apartment in France. That's where I first learned to tie my shoes and how to pronounce the 'F' sound like an F and not an S. The landlady, old Madame Creb raised turkeys. Maybe Gail remembers the time she showed them to us and tried to get Gail to hug a turkey. Gail would have nothing to do with that! Ms. Creb hugged one herself, to show there was nothing to fear. The turkey didn't like it much.

Our first house in Metz was white on the outside, I think. Then we moved into a larger house nearby across the cow pasture that was blue stucco with the sewer pipe from the upstairs bathroom running down the outside. Mom used to have a maid come in to help with the housework. Nadée I think her name was. I still remember them scrubbing the old wax off the wood floors with a coarse steel wool pad on a machine operated by foot power. We borrowed a record player and some 45-rpm records from a neighbor (Charlie Brown, Singing the Blues etc). Then Mom and Dad bought a big console 'HiFi' set (no boom boxes in those days). No dishwashers either. I had to help dry dishes.

I still remember Mom's wringer washer and getting my thumb caught in the rollers. Also a big drum iron of Mom's that I burned my fingers on one day. I was a walking accident. One night I unscrewed the bulb from the lamp on the bunk bed headboard, and turned the rotary switch a few times. Unable to find the empty socket in the dark, I felt around for it with my finger. Found it first try! And yes, it was on - 220 volts! Remember how I hollered, Dad? Also, I once rode my bike down the sloping driveway (actually couldn't stop) to the basement garage and smashed into the wall. Didn't break anything, but had a few bruises.

Tried to build an electric motor one morning with my Meccano²² set, how the sparks flew when I plugged it in! Dad, did you ever wonder why the fuse was blown?

²² **Meccano** is a model construction system created in 1898 by Frank Hornby in Liverpool, United Kingdom. The system consists of reusable metal strips, plates, angle girders, wheels, axles and gears, and plastic parts that are connected using nuts and bolts. It enables the building of working models and mechanical devices. Meccano maintains a manufacturing facility in Calais, France. In 2013, the Meccano brand was acquired by the Canadian toy company Spin Master.

There was a coal burning furnace in the basement, and every morning in winter Dad would go down and throw in a few shovel fulls of coal from the coal bin, which opened to the outside for coal delivery. Hot water radiators as well.

I remember the visit from Chrissie and Cyril, with their kids Pat and Maureen. I was playing with a skipping rope one day in the driveway and hit Maureen in the eye with it - hurt a lot. I felt bad but didn't do it on purpose.

Gail had to spend a long time in a cast from a hula-hoop injury, and we would watch the trains go by, and of course fight temptation to play in the forbidden gravel pit.

The cow pasture just beyond our back yard was another great place to play. When the cows weren't there (we were warned that the bull would chase us, and we took that warning seriously - that was a big animal)! Was it Ed Boland that once took a shortcut across the pasture and had to run for it? And the pond that we would skate on in winter frozen over. One spring morning the cows got through the barbwire fence and were eating everybody's flowers.

Another exciting time was when you told us 'Gypsies' were seen in the woods and we had to stay away because they might kidnap us and hold us for ransom. You and mom did everything you could to protect us from the many dangers just few feet away from the house.

We had a little black Opel that we would travel Europe in. It had a horn that sounded like a sick cow Mom always said. The farmer down the road once set the valve clearance for Dad. I remember seeing that intricate, fascinating mechanism running with the valve cover off. I remember all the trips and the steaming piles of manure piled high and deep beside the 'highway' in every little town.

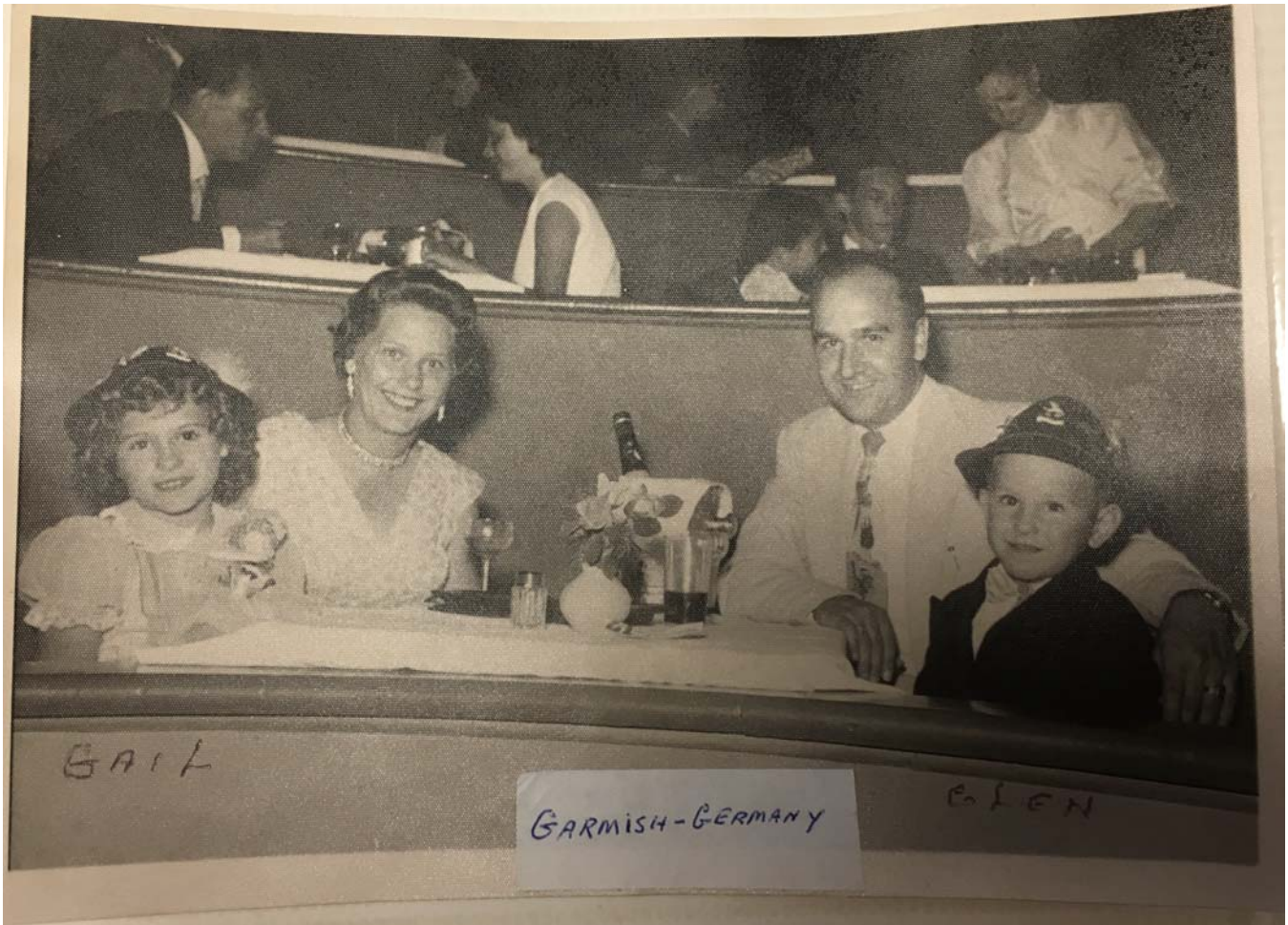
Spain (the Mediterranean beach), Germany (castles), Switzerland (model railroad display and cows visiting our table at an outdoor restaurant in the Alps), Paris to visit Terry and Lou and the Eiffel Tower, Lourdes, ham subs (jambons) for lunch while traveling. England to visit May and Ernie and Chrissie and Cyril. While there we shelled peas from their garden (ate a lot of them while at it) and would throw out the occasional pods with little green worms inside. Saw the wax museum of torture, Buckingham Palace, and Robin Hood's Major Oak Tree²³.

I was always hungry then. Ernie had a workshop in his back shed with a lathe and was building a steam powered locomotive for Patrick - wheels and lower chassis completed at the time – I was so impressed with his work. Dad, do you know if that locomotive was ever finished and did it run?

At one point Nanny wrote to say they had indoor plumbing installed. Good-bye biffy and sharp grass! Also that the streetcar tracks were being removed in favor of buses and Gail was very disappointed to hear that.

There are lots more I could dredge up. Went up the Eiffel Tower again, this time all the way to the top. Didn't chase pigeons this time. The first time up the Tower it had been raining and the outside deck was wet. I had chased some pigeons and slipped and fell flat on my rear.

²³ **The Major Oak** is a large English oak (*Quercus robur*) near the village of Edwinstowe in the midst of Sherwood Forest, Nottinghamshire, England. According to local folklore, it was Robin Hood's shelter where he and his merry men slept. It weighs an estimated 23 tons, has a girth of 33 feet (10 metres), a canopy of 92 feet (28 metres), and is about 800–1000 years old. In a 2002 survey, it was voted "Britain's favourite tree". In 2014, it was voted 'England's Tree of the Year' by a public poll by the Woodland Trust, receiving 18% of the votes. Its name originates from Major Hayman Rooke's description of it in 1790. – Courtesy Wikipedia



I was mad because everyone laughed at me! We stayed for a bit with Auntie Terry in Paris before sailing on the Homeric again. Auntie Terry had a beautiful rose garden and I had my first camera to play with.

The return trip home to Canada with my new baby brother, Mark. Dad had bought me a kite plane, a red and yellow plastic airplane with rotating wings that trailed out behind the ship on a string that was spooled up on a handle like a fishing rod. But the wind was too strong and the string broke the first time I used it and it became shark food. Saw lots of icebergs, but no whales.

Again Gail and I ate meals on our own during the children's dinnertime. We would leave as they were setting up for the adult's meal. They would put out a display of deserts and disc shaped after-dinner mints - purple, yellow, white, red. Gail and I would steal handfuls of them to sneak back to our cabin and pig out while Mom and Dad were at dinner. I don't think you ever knew about the mints. One time a steward caught us and gave us s--t, but that didn't stop us!

One evening after dinner I found a small orchestra setting up in a lounge. I sat in the front row of seats to listen, the violinist snuck up behind me and while playing tickled me on the head with his bow as a joke. Then Dad found me, had been searching all over for me and made me come back to the cabin since I wasn't supposed to be in the adult entertainment lounge. Guess I made you late for dinner that night?



After a week on the high seas, we sailed up the St Lawrence Seaway. Canada seemed like a foreign country to me then. I think we docked in Montreal, and then drove to Winnipeg, in our '56 gray/white DeSoto. Dad waited 3 hours to photograph it being lifted out of the ship's hold. Was Mom ever PO'd!

I remember we arrived in Winnipeg a day early, but Mom didn't want to go see Nanny and Bill until the next day since Bill had a weak heart and the surprise might cause an attack. The next day Gail and I went running up the steps to their back shed yelling "Nanny! Nanny!" as she was the first one out, and looked so surprised at how we'd grown as we hugged her. It was great to see them again as I still remembered them. But that month between arrival in Winnipeg and on to Cold Lake Alberta was the longest month of my life. No toys, nothing to do. Built a lot of model airplanes, one a day. I got so good at it I could build one in under an hour, and then be bored again.

On another trip to Winnipeg a few years later I did visit with my cousin Donald and phoned him often. What technological advances in just a few years. Nanny now had a TV set and a dial telephone! Our phone in Cold Lake was a great example of modern technology. Made of wood, with a crank that you turned to get the operator. And lots of interesting party line conversations to listen to, not that I ever did.

Especially exciting for me was driving the new '56 DeSoto with the push button gearshift, down a country road with Dad in the shotgun seat. Along with kids' Christmas parties, school, and going to the Grey Cup game. But I should keep this short.

Anyway, that's what I remember most about our trip to France and the return to Canada.

Love, Glen

Chapter 20

N.A.T.O. Defending the Free World

As a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization²⁴ (NATO), Canada was instrumental in providing radar surveillance over Europe.

I arrived at 61 Aircraft Control and Warning Unit (61 AC&WU) in Metz France in July 1955. The unit was not yet operational. We got things organized over the next few months and became operational shortly after. We had a British search radar (Type 80) as well as a British height finder. This was the best radar system I ever worked on. We could pick up aircraft as far away as 200 miles (320km). We became known as the best radar site in Europe. Our call sign was Yellowjack. I was Yellowjack 4, in charge of "A" Crew.

When Americans squadrons were flying to Europe from the States (crossing the pond), they were briefed that if they developed an emergency over Europe, they were to call Yellowjack on the distress channel (121.5).

One day we had as many as five emergencies happening at the same time and over our eight-hour shift, we had a total of eight. It was a nerve-wracking business at times. But we were good at our job and knew that the allied aircrews appreciated us

Our unit was part of No. 1 Air division HQ in Metz. We had four airbases in Europe. Two in France: Marville (1 Wing) and Gros Tenquin (2 Wing). And two in Germany: Zweibrucken (3 Wing) and Baden Sollingen (4 Wing).

Each wing had three squadrons flying the F86 Sabre jet fighter. Yellowjack 61 Squadron had 16 officers (initially) and a couple hundred airmen and airwomen. The Commanding Officer, the chief Operations Officer, the Ops Officer and the Adjutant administrated the base. The remaining twelve officers were split into four crews, to provide ground control to our squadrons when they were in the air.

Once the tasks to ready the base were completed, the majority of us hadn't been on the radarscope for several months. So naturally we were sort of rusty. Now operational, and for my first time, I had 11 fighters under my control doing practice fighter interceptions. This consisted of two sections of four fighters each, and one section of three. I used one section as the target, and the other two as interceptors.

I would direct the target section on a particular course, and then vector the other two sections to intercept the target. When all these fighters came into contact, they would attempt to shoot one another down, like dogfights you may have seen in the movies. They would all initially start at around thirty five thousand feet. And end up at around ten thousand feet. I would then separate them by giving them reciprocal courses, and then start the exercise all over again.

We were on a nine-day shift schedule, three days full crew, three nights half crew on evenings, the other half on midnight shift, then three days off.

²⁴ **The North Atlantic Treaty Organization** - also called the North Atlantic Alliance, is an intergovernmental military alliance between 30 North American and European countries. The organization implements the North Atlantic Treaty that was signed on 4 April 1949. NATO constitutes a system of collective defense whereby its independent member states agree to mutual defense in response to an attack by any external party.

Occasionally, we would be involved in Air Defense exercises involving the French Air Force, the American Air Force, the Royal Air Force and ourselves. Simulated enemy bombers would attempt to penetrate our air space. It was our job to detect their penetration, scramble our fighters to intercept them, and shoot them down.

On occasion the army was involved, requiring some of our personnel to be assigned to ground defense duties. The army's goal was to penetrate our ground station (our base), and sabotage it. During these types of exercises, we would be on 12 hour and occasionally 16 hour shifts. Scheduling called for 8 hours operations, 4 hours ground defense, and 4 hours off, then a return to 8 hours operations and so on. Fortunately, these types of exercises would only last for five or six days. By the end of one of these marathons, we sure were glad to see our beds.

Note: *On the last day of one of these exercises, when everyone was tired and anxious to finish their shift, Flying Officer Doug Dickson and Flying Officer Bill Vine flew over the radar station at low altitude and bombed the site with toilet paper. It was a nice diversion for us. As a result, the French grounded Doug Dickson for unauthorized low flying.*

Because we were working with both the French Air Force and the American Air Force, it was compulsory to have bilingual personnel on all crews. Invariably, either the French or the Americans would call and ask us to interpret for them. We always obliged. Our personnel's high school French came in very handy. And it was much appreciated by both nations.

In 1956 or 1957, squadrons of 'All Weather Interceptors'²⁵, flying the CF 100 aircraft were sent to Europe, which demanded a different style of control. But we quickly adapted to their needs. With the Sabres, we would direct them to the target, until they made visual contact, and then they would take over. Whereas with the CF100, we would direct them to their target, and they would only take over once they had established contact on their radar.



²⁵ **All-weather interceptor** - A night fighter also known as all-weather fighter or all-weather interceptor for a period of time after World War II is a fighter aircraft adapted for use at night or in other times of bad visibility.

Chapter 21

Yellowjack 61 Squadron

Before continuing, I should give you a little more insight as to what our duties were at Yellowjack. Our main responsibility was to provide 24 hour-365 days a year radar surveillance, to prevent an enemy attack against any European city or strategic target. If any unidentified aircraft entered our coverage, and was declared as unknown or hostile, within 2 minutes we would scramble fighters to intercept. On occasion, Russian aircraft would penetrate our area, we would scramble fighters to intercept them, and they would then return to their own area.

At times, we would have an "unknown" penetrating our territory at 70,000+ ft. We would scramble fighters to intercept. The fighters would report their target at 70,000 ft, and we would then be told by the Americans to abort the intercept, as the target was on a classified mission. It wasn't until later that we found out it was the U2 American spy plane, returning from a mission over Russian territory.

Bear in mind that our Sabres (F86) would struggle to get to 50,000ft. So you can well imagine the pilot's reaction, when they saw their target at 70,000ft. U2²⁶ pilot Gary Powers may have been on one of these flights, prior to being shot down behind the Iron Curtain. Who knows?

I have to go now but will get back to this later.

While I was away, Glen sent an e-mail reminding me of a N.A.T.O "Escape and Evasion" exercise I participated in while I was still at Yellowjack.

The army was conducting an exercise requiring volunteers to act as enemy aircrew, that had just been shot down, and were attempting to escape and evade detection, until they got back to 'friendly' territory. Tom Wallis and I volunteered. We were released in a certain location and had to make our way through about 20 miles of 'enemy territory' to get back to our own 'friendly' area. The local Gendarmes (police) had been briefed on this exercise and were instructed to arrest us if they caught us.

The exercise was to last three days. If we were caught, we would be taken in for interrogation and treated as enemy invaders. The interrogators were comprised of RAF and RCAF Intelligence staff. The first night we traveled through the bushes and empty fields, keeping off the main roads. At dawn, we happened upon some farm buildings, and were not sure if they were inhabited. At the end of a row of buildings were two outside biffies. We went in to the furthest one, and took turns trying to sleep, while the other kept watch. We could hear voices in some of the buildings. Fortunately, when they had to use the biffy, they used the other one.

It had been a long day, and at dusk, we left our '5 star hotel room' and hit the road again. Any time we heard voices, we would duck into the bushes to escape detection. By the second night, we had covered about 15 miles. Tom and I were good at map reading, and had no difficulty knowing where we were at all times. At dusk we were lucky enough to find an old abandoned stone building, and crawled into the loft of a barn attached to this building.

²⁶ U-2 - Built by Lockheed in the mid 1950's the U-2 is an American high altitude reconnaissance aircraft operated by the United States Air Force to provide all-weather intelligence gathering at high-altitude (21,300 meters/70,000 feet).

Satisfied there was no one around, we investigated, and found an old kitchen that looked as though it had been deserted in a big hurry. There was an aluminum pot on the stove with dried baked beans in it. We actually got some firewood and lit the stove and cooked a hot meal with food we had with us. We felt like we were living in a first class hotel. We may have been a little lax in lighting the stove, concerned that the locals would see the smoke coming out of the chimney, but we were cold and welcomed the heat. We slept on old cots covered with straw, and had a fairly restful day.

The third night we traveled, we again avoided roads and inhabited areas. As dawn broke we checked our map. By our reckoning, we figured we were out of the exercise area, and started walking in the middle of a local road. Some military police caught up to us and attempted to arrest us. But when we checked our map with them, they were forced to agree that we were in the clear.

Anyone who was caught was treated as a real prisoner, thrown into a jail cell, and interrogated at great length in an attempt to make them break down. The interrogators would get close up to the prisoners face, and yell at them to get some information out of them. When the prisoners would try to sleep, they would make all sorts of noise with baseball bats and pots and pans to prevent them from sleeping.

Our Commanding Officer, Wing Commander Gord Ockenden (who in later years became a Air Vice Marshall and Deputy Commander of NORAD at Colorado Springs) was caught and taken in for interrogation. They put him in a jail cell and had him strip and sit on a metal bench to which were connected (hidden) electric strobes. They would then give him electric shocks. Two RAF officers interrogated him and he would only give them his name, number and rank, as stipulated in the Geneva Convention. These two interrogators were getting nowhere with him so they had him bend over (in the nude) and with a small two inch paint brush, painted his behind the letters " W/C" and said: "Now we know you're a Wing Commander". Gord was a good sport and took it in stride.

Tom and I received our EVADERS Certificate, acknowledging that we had successfully evaded our enemies. Gord didn't get his.

See you later.

Love

Dad/Granddad

Note: Gord Ockenden passed away in 2000.



Chapter 22

Holidays in England

In the summer of 1957, on a month leave, we returned to England to visit May and Ernie, Cyril and Chrissie, and their kids. A memorable visit was to Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum. I am sure that Glen remembers the Chamber of Horrors, and the Jack the Ripper²⁷ display. I recall taking a picture of Glen and Gail standing next to the guards at Buckingham Palace. We visited Blenheim Castle, which had been the home of Winston Churchill²⁸. They had some of his childhood curls on display. And to Hampton Court, with Deed reminding us that her grandfather, William Keeble, drove the first electric tram from Shepherds Bush to Hampton Court in 1895. Then onto the London Zoo, with the monkeys having a tea party.

From London, we went to Stratford on Avon, and stayed in a Bed & Breakfast home owned by the gentleman who had been Billy Bishop's²⁹ mechanic during WW1. He gave Glen a model of Billy Bishop's aircraft. In thanks, I gave the man a 26oz bottle of Seagrams VO Canadian whisky. I recall standing in line for hours at the Stratford Theatre to see the stage play, "The Merchant of Venice", The wait was so long that Deed took Gail for a sandwich and then relieved me to go and have a sandwich with Glen. Reaching the head of the line, we were told that it was sold out. We didn't see the play, which I am sure would have been enjoyable for Deed and the kids, as I had seen it in 1944, when I was stationed nearby.

From Stratford, we went to Scotland via Sherwood Forest. And climbed inside the Major Oak, the tree that Robin Hood³⁰ and his men hid in to escape the Sheriff of Nottingham³¹ (noted earlier in Glen's email in Chapter 19). After visiting Edinburgh Castle³² we made our way back to France. While waiting for the ferry in Dover, there was a man advertising a 'Mickey Mouse' circus. To kill time, we took the kids in to see it. It was just a bunch of mice running around and Deed was so angry that she made the guy refund our admission fee.

After leaving Dover, and upon our arrival in Calais, France, we went to the 1957 World's Fair in Brussels, where we saw colored television for the first time there. Of course we saw the 'Manneken Pis'³³ but were disappointed that the statue was so small.

²⁷ **Jack the Ripper** was an unidentified serial killer active in the largely impoverished areas in and around the Whitechapel district of London in 1888. In both the criminal case files and contemporary journalistic accounts, the killer was called the Whitechapel Murderer and Leather Apron.

²⁸ **Sir Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill** (30 November 1874 – 24 January 1965) was a British politician, army officer, and writer. He was Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1940 to 1945, when he led the country to victory in the Second World War, and again from 1951 to 1955.

²⁹ **William Avery Bishop** - VC, CB, DSO & Bar, MC, DFC, ED (8 February 1894 – 11 September 1956 born in Owen Sound, Ontario) was a Canadian flying ace of the First World War. He was officially credited with 72 victories, making him the top Canadian and British Empire ace of the war. He was an Air Marshal and a Victoria Cross recipient.

³⁰ **Robin Hood** is a legendary heroic outlaw originally depicted in English folklore and subsequently featured in literature and film. According to legend, he was a highly skilled archer and swordsman.

³¹ **The Sheriff of Nottingham** was historically the office responsible for enforcing law and order in Nottingham and bringing criminals to justice. For years the post has been directly appointed by the Lord Mayor of Nottingham and in modern times, with the existence of the police force, the position is entirely ceremonial and sustained to boost tourism due to the legendary connection with the fictional Sheriff of Nottingham in the tales of Robin Hood.

³² **Edinburgh Castle** is a historic fortress, which dominates the skyline of Edinburgh, the capital city of Scotland, from its position on the Castle Rock. Archaeologists have established human occupation of the rock since at least the Iron Age (2nd century AD), although the nature of the early settlement is unclear.

³³ **Manneken Pis** is a landmark 61 cm (24 in) bronze fountain sculpture in the centre of Brussels, depicting a naked little boy urinating into the fountain's basin. It was designed by Jérôme Duquesnoy the Elder and put in place in 1618 or 1619.

On our way back to Metz, we went via St. Omer near where Deed's father Bill had been stationed for a time during WW1. He had told us (facetiously it turns out) that if we did go to St. Omer that we should look around to see if anyone there looked like him, alluding to us that he may have fathered a child while overseas during the war. When we returned to Winnipeg, we told him that we did see someone who looked like him. He laughed and said that the joke was on us because when he passed through there on leave, they wouldn't let them get off the train.

As a life long military family, the highlight of our holiday was visiting 'Vimy Ridge' the famous hill that the British and Americans failed to take during WW1.

And then they sent in the Canadians, and they succeeded where the others had failed. When the tour guide learned that we were Canadians, he went out of his way to make sure that we had a good spot during the whole tour. The enemy trenches were so close to each other, soldiers could almost shake hands. Deed's Dad was a stretcher-bearer at Vimy Ridge. The fact is, his height, about 5' 2" is probably why he survived. His head was below the top of the trenches. He lost two of his stretcher-bearer buddies because they were both over 6 feet.

The monument there is so impressive. It can be seen for miles around. They have people working continuously repairing the names of all those who were killed at Vimy Ridge. The whole area there has been declared Canadian soil. We were so proud that day.

Will be back soon

Love

Dad/Grandad

Editor's Note: *The Battle of Vimy Ridge is too significant an event in Canadian History to warrant a mere footnote. Thanks to Wikipedia for the verbatim reference material below.*

The Battle of Vimy Ridge was part of the Battle of Arras, in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region of France, during the First World War. The main combatants were the four divisions of the Canadian Corps in the First Army, against three divisions of the German 6th Army. The battle took place from 9 to 12 April 1917 at the beginning of the Battle of Arras, the first attack of the Nivelle Offensive, which was intended to attract German reserves from the French, before their attempt at a decisive offensive on the Aisne and the Chemin des Dames ridge further south.

The Canadian Corps was to capture the German-held high ground of Vimy Ridge, an escarpment on the northern flank of the Arras front. This would protect the First Army and the Third Army farther south from German enfilade fire. Supported by a creeping barrage, the Canadian Corps captured most of the ridge during the first day of the attack. The village of Thélus fell during the second day, as did the crest of the ridge, once the Canadian Corps overran a salient against considerable German resistance. The final objective, a fortified knoll located outside the village of Givenchy-en-Gohelle, fell to the Canadians on 12 April. The 6th Army then retreated to the Oppy-Méricourt line.

Historians attribute the success of the Canadian Corps to technical and tactical innovation, meticulous planning, powerful artillery support and extensive training, as well as the inability of the 6th Army to properly apply the new German defensive doctrine. The battle was the first occasion when the four divisions of the Canadian Expeditionary Force fought together and it was made a symbol of Canadian national achievement and sacrifice. A 100-hectare (250-acre) portion of the former battleground serves as a memorial park and site of the Canadian National Vimy Memorial.

Chapter 23

Aide de Camp

Returning to 61 Squadron, I was advised that I had been selected to be AVM Godwin's Executive Assistant. And that I would be going to the Officer School in London Ontario for a ten week administrative course. I flew from Paris on a stretch Constellation, a four-engine passenger airliner that was top of the line at that time. I remember shortly after getting airborne the crew serving us a filet mignon dinner with wine and all the trimmings. Of course, this was first class travel and I sure enjoyed it. We landed in London, England where some passengers got off and others came on board. Again, shortly after take off, we were served another meal, again filet mignon and all the trimmings, and I didn't refuse, I just enjoyed it all over again. It was a long Trans Atlantic flight, and I was worn out by the time we landed in Toronto.

While taking my course, I met Flight Lieutenant Ken Jaques who was destined to be Aide de Camp to G/C Macdonald at 3 Fighter Wing in Zweibrücken, Germany. We became good friends. With Deed's agreement, I invited him and his family to stay with us in Metz when they arrived in Europe, until he could find accommodations in Zweibrücken.

My return flight from Canada to France, after completing my admin course, was quite a contrast to my earlier flight from Paris to Toronto. I flew back in a North Star transport aircraft, which was very noisy and cold. I stuffed my ears with special earplugs, but they didn't muffle the noise to any appreciable extent. By the time we landed at Langar in England I was completely pooped out. And stranded in Langar for about three days, before catching a flight on a Dakota aircraft to Gros Tenquin in France. As we landed at Gros Tenquin I was looking out of the astro dome as we taxied to dispersal. And saw in the crowd waiting for us, a beautiful young lady. I then realized it was Deed. She'd had her hair dyed and looked different somehow. She sure looked good. I was so happy to be back home.

Working with AVM Godwin was very interesting. During my year as his aide de camp, I had the opportunity to meet many dignitaries, such as the President of France, Mr. Pierre Mendès-France, as well as Canadian Prime Minister, Mr. John Deifenbaker. I recall translating a few words (from English to French) for Mr. Deifenbaker who was being interviewed on Nancy TV. I often wondered if the people understood him, as his delivery in French was quite poor. AVM Godwin did not like to keep officers away from their prime positions for extended periods. So after one year, I was transferred back to Metz 6 Tactical Air Control Center, to be the Administrative Officer to Group Captain Cam Underhill, my former CO in Parent, Quebec.

The winter of 1958/59 was a difficult one for Deed. Her gynecologist at Zweibrücken had told her that chances of getting pregnant were maybe one in a million. She did defy the odds though, and did become pregnant with Mark. She had been sick with all her pregnancies, but this one was worse than the others. Finally, when the time came, we drove to Zweibrücken and spent the weekend with Ken and Ann Jaques, waiting for the big moment to happen. We spent Sunday afternoon visiting a beer garden. Gail, Glen and I had to leave Zweibrücken Sunday evening as they had to go to school on Monday, and I had to go to work. Shortly after going to bed Sunday evening, Deed's water broke, and Ken drove her to the hospital where our little 'Deutsche Mark' made his appearance, at approximately 05:30 hrs. 8 June 1959. I never dreamed in 1945 while bombing Zweibrücken, that my youngest son would be born there in 1959. Six weeks later we left Europe, and returned to Canada for my next assignment, in Cold Lake Alberta.

Chapter 24

The Homeric – Homeward Bound

We were scheduled to leave France in early July. Again traveling on the Homeric, the same ship we had come over on in 1955. We had enjoyed that crossing so much that I requested we return to Canada on the same ship.

We knew many of the passengers aboard, as they were Air Force personnel like us, returning to Canada after their service in Europe ended. I had met many of them while in France, which made our social life on the ship for the return, a more comforting experience.

Traveling east to west, we gained one hour every day. This made a big difference for us, as we were traveling with a 6-week-old baby (Mark). Gail and Glen were registered for the early meal in the dining room, which gave us time to feed the baby and get him settled for the night. Gail and Glen would then baby sit while we had our dinner, enjoying the entertainment in the lounge for a time after we ate. Our cabin steward would look in on the kids throughout the evening, affording us time to relax and socialize with our friends.

The Entertainment Officer on the ship organized a Paris Revue night, and coerced some of us officers to perform the "Can Can"³³ as the girls would do in the Folies Bergère³⁴.

Here we were, one Group Captain, one Wing Commander, two Squadron Leaders and two Flight Lieutenants dressed as Can Can girls, lifting up our skirts for the audience. The Entertainment Officer thanked us for having such "Joie de Vivre"³⁵.

It was a pleasure to sail down through the Gulf of St. Laurence and enjoy the Canadian scenery. We had been away four years and greatly appreciated being back in our own country.

We docked in Quebec first, where we had to go through customs. We had all our papers ready and everything went smoothly for us.

Not so for Danny Gagnon and his wife, Lilly, who also had a baby boy born in Europe. For some unknown reason, they were missing one important piece of paper. Now this kid had been acting up the whole trip and his mother was challenged caring for him.

Note: *Danny had taken over as E/A when I was transferred to 6 T.A.C.C. Lilly had had a Nanny to help look after the boy while Danny was the AVM's aide. Having other children as well, and no longer having a Nanny, she likely found it difficult to re-adjust.*

³³ **Can Can** - The can-can is a high-energy, physically demanding dance that became a popular music-hall dance in the 1840s, continuing in popularity in French cabaret to this day. Originally danced by both sexes, it is now traditionally associated with a chorus line of female dancers. The main features of the dance are the vigorous manipulation of skirts and petticoats, along with high kicks, splits, and cartwheels.

³⁴ **Folies Bergère** - The Folies Bergère is a cabaret music hall, located in Paris, France. Located at 32 rue Richer in the 9th Arrondissement, the Folies Bergère was built as an opera house by the architect Plumeret. It opened on 2 May 1869 as the Folies Tréville, with light entertainment including operettas, comic opera, popular songs, and gymnastics. It became the Folies Bergère on 13 September 1872, named after nearby rue Bergère. The house was at the height of its fame and popularity from the 1890s' Belle Époque through the 1920s.

³⁵ **Joie de Vivre** - Joie de vivre is a French phrase often used in English to express a cheerful enjoyment of life; an exultation of spirit.

A heated argument ensued over the missing paperwork. Danny and Lilly (holding the baby), on one side of a kiosk and the customs people on the other, refusing entry for the entire family until the proper papers were produced.

It all came to a head, when a fully distressed Lilly handed the kid to the customs officer stating, "Here, you keep him. I'm so fed up with him that you can have him." The customs officer was flabbergasted. Ploy or not, it worked. I don't recall how they resolved the situation. But Dan and Lilly did enter the country with all of their offspring, even without the missing form.

The arrival in Montreal was quite an exciting experience. In retrospect, I realized that I was very unfair to Deed for a time after we docked. Anxious to see them offload our 1956 DeSoto, and with camera in hand, I stood at the railing for a long while, to witness the event.

In the meantime, having been abandoned, Deed was trying to finish the packing, on her own, with three young children to mind as well. Not an easy chore to say the least, especially with our little explorer using any window of opportunity, to venture out on yet another of his never-ending quests of discovery and enlightenment.

And wouldn't you know, Glen got lost traveling up and down the elevator. The crew, including our cabin steward, had received their gratuities and didn't hang around. So Deed was on her own, trying to cope with everything, including the lost son, while I was casually watching them unload our car.

I do not know how long he went missing. Or where she found him. But I've been apologizing to her ever since. And of course she never let's me forget about it.

My cousins, Vic and Cecile Stubbings, met us at the dock and we spent a couple days as guests in their home, before yet another long road trip.



Chapter 25

Back Home in Canada

After four years in France, being back on Canadian soil again was quite nostalgic. Vic and Cecile were the perfect hosts and treated us royally. I recall Cecile's parents, uncle Alec and auntie Bernadette (of Fort William) as well as Cecile's sister Helen and her husband Al Stewart (of Toronto) were also guests of theirs at the time.

As a welcoming gesture, Vic and Cecile organized a cocktail party in our honor. And during the course of the evening, I recall Al pulling a fast one on Deed, and one that honestly should be forever forgotten. I have too far many poorly thought out acts in my file of foolish pranks, or those I allowed to happen, of which I have yet to atone. Though stated.

While the rest of us were enjoying the evening with drink in hand, an exhausted Deed lay down on the couch and dozed off. Al put a few bottles of liquor with a ½ empty glass on a coffee table in front of Deed and fashioned a crude sign: "Deed...nursing mother" which he placed on the back of the couch. He then took a picture to record the event.

The gathering now ended, upon waking and rising, Deed showed no reaction to the sign propped up against the wall at the rear of the couch upon which she rested. Nor to the staged scene of liquor bottles on the table in front of that couch. Apparently so tired from the ordeal of our long journey home, it either did not register with her, or she just plain did not care. I do not know what came of that photo, but it is a bitter reminder best lost, and never found.

Note: *Mark, our new arrival, had been born only six weeks before. And with doing all the packing, readying for our road trip from Metz to Le Havre, sailing across the Atlantic, packing again in our stateroom to disembark (while I was thoughtlessly taking pictures of the crew unloading our car) Deed was exhausted. And she just this minute, seeing me write these words, reminded me, again PISSED OFF! I guess she had every reason to be exhausted at the time. One would think that by this time I would have known better. Old dog. Old tricks.*

The party over and clean up completed, auntie Bernadette, Cecile, and Deed went to bed as the rest of us played some poker. Uncle Alec really enjoyed himself that night, and at about six o'clock in the morning, as he undressed for bed, his wife Bernadette, not realizing that he'd been up all night, woke and asked him.

"What are you doing?" to which he answered: "I had to go to the bathroom"

Oh the stories we tell our best half, to keep the peace, when we husbands harmlessly misbehave.

I don't know if she ever found out that he'd been playing poker all night. But again it is better that she did not.

After a wonderful few days with Vic and Cecile and their other guests, we loaded the car and hit the road west to Winnipeg, the city we always considered to be our real home.

Chapter 26

Westward Ho - Winnipeg

When Mark was born, friends sold us a collapsible baby carriage that they no longer needed. The price was reasonable and it was ideal for the trip. Fitting sideways in the back seat of the De Soto perfectly, between Gail and Glen. With a dual purpose of keeping them apart, making it difficult for them to fight with each other, as siblings often do.

We left Montreal in the wee hours, hoping to reach London Ontario later in the afternoon. Along the way, Deed remembers a stop on the roadside, having spotted a running brook through the passenger window of the car. A result of her pregnancy with Mark was swollen feet. Shoes off, she sat on the bank of the stream and dipped her feet, soaking them for a few minutes of badly needed relief.

We arrived in London at around 5'oclock, for our first overnight stop. Traditionally, when traveling, especially with the young ones in tow, we preferred to start each leg of a trip early. Stopping at a reasonable point in the afternoon, between four and five. Allowing us time to care for and feed the kids, and giving the adults the chance to unwind with a good night's rest, before continuing the next day.

We got up early the next morning and hit the road, crossing into the U.S.A. at Port Huron/Sarnia. Going north on Hwy 23 to Hwy 75 towards the Mackinack straight. There was no bridge there at the time, so we had to take the ferry to get to the other side.

Note: *Driving through the United States, instead of staying 'in country' and driving along the Trans Canada Highway was a shorter route. Saving us at least a full day of travel time, with one less overnight stop returning to Winnipeg.*

During that leg of our journey, we rested at a small chapel in a well-treed area on the outskirts of St. Ignace, Michigan. The little church was known for their large exhibit of dolls, dressed in different styles of nun's attire, as well as a large (approx. 5 ft x 10 ft) tapestry of the Last Supper. This masterpiece, crafted by local native women, was on loan to the chapel for display. Constructed with hundreds of thousands of tiny colored beads, it was insured for \$1,000,000.00. Walking on a pathway outside of the chapel we came upon an exceptionally tall cross. It must have been at least 75ft tall. We relaxed in this beautiful peaceful setting for a time, saying a prayer, asking the Good Lord for a safe trip. And then continued down the road.

We traveled through the northern part of Michigan on Hwy #2, through Wisconsin and through Duluth, Minnesota. Going through Duluth in 1959 was a chore. One hill after another, and you had to go right through the center of town. It took a long while. Unlike today, with several bypasses from which to choose, to shorten both the time and distance it took to get to the other side.

On the third day, traveling through North Dakota in mid afternoon, it was real hot, and the DeSoto did not have air conditioning. Deed had been holding the baby in her arms for some time, and so asked Gail to take him and put him in his bed. In the process of handing him over from the front seat to the back seat, holding him high, a whole lot of mustard (poop) leaked out of his loosely fitted diaper. Not quite as loose as diarrhea, but very runny. Sadly, it spilled all over the beautiful new nylon skirt Deed had recently made (strictly for traveling).

Deed had purposely diapered him loosely, so that he would be more comfortable in the extreme heat. Luckily it happened in front of a small resort, as we were passing through a little village named Ballpark. Though it was earlier than when we would normally stop for the night, we made a U-turn, rented a cabin at the resort, and Deed rinsed her skirt for the next day.

Some of what I document in these pages could be thought of as mundane. But that is the life of those who choose career military service. Members and their families waver between the ebb and flow of long periods of marking time, with the boring chores of everyday existence, and moments of trepidation, when called upon to fulfill their duty.

I can tell you from experience, that hoping to merely survive the horrors of war, bullets flying and bombs exploding, and friends who never return, there are no atheists in foxholes. And every one of us 'in the trenches' prays for a chance to return to that boring life left behind.

The owner of the resort was a recently retired ex-serviceman, and I believe we were his first customers. He was very cognizant of our predicament and couldn't have been any nicer. He wasn't yet organized to serve meals, but understood our situation. He went out and bought ham steaks, and cooked a nice ham dinner. As a retired serviceman, he appreciated the challenges military couples face, especially traveling with children, from base to base.

Only someone who has served their country for an extended period can fully understand the demands of routine deployments. From one base to the next, one town to the next, changing faces, changing houses, and a life that curiously enough, does not change that much itself.

Arriving in Bemidji Minnesota, we spent our fourth night. The drive to Winnipeg from Bemidji is a short one. So after breakfast we took the kids to see the giant statue of Paul Bunyon and his Blue Ox 'Babe' on display in the town square. The kids were excited seeing the big lumberjack. And a break from the daily driving was greatly appreciated by the whole family. By mid morning we again hit the road. After a stop in Pembina to clear customs and pick up some duty free spirits, it was on to Winnipeg for a mid afternoon arrival.



Chapter 27

Cold Lake Alberta

Away from Winnipeg for over four years, we had a lot of catching up to do. We stayed with Deed's Mom & Dad in their tiny house on Oustic Avenue off St. Mary's Rd. I do not recall where we all slept, but we managed.

Regretfully, I had to again leave and drive to Cold Lake, Alberta, where I would be on staff at 42 AC&W (Aircraft Control and Warning) Squadron. One never gets used to leaving the family behind. It just comes with the territory, and acceptance is the only option.

There was no housing available on the base. For that lack of consideration, I was extremely "pissed off" at the Air Force. You'd think they would make some small effort toward accommodations, as a mere gesture of thanks, for someone returning from fighting in that war, and surviving those years overseas. So, upon arrival in Cold Lake, my first task was to find suitable lodging for the family (who would soon join me), in the small village of Grand Center, a few miles away.

Apparently, I was supposed to have had a house allotted to me, but they gave it to some American Captain who was posted to Cold Lake on Exchange Duties. That meant that I would have to fend for the family without assistance, until a house on base became available.

There was nothing suitable in Grand Center, so I continued the search in the actual town of Cold Lake, which was further from the base, and situated right on the lake. With nothing available in town, I was fortunate to find a small 2-bedroom suite at Oscar and June Berube's lakeside resort. The location was fantastic, right on Cold Lake itself, with a nice sandy beach, just a few feet from the water's edge.

An idyllic scene entered my mind, of the kids enjoying the lake in the summertime, and bonfires warming us outside as they played in the snow in winter. The apartment wasn't yet finished. But I told Oscar how desperate I was to get the family together, offering to help him complete the work. Surprised that anyone would be willing to volunteer to do so, Oscar and I became close friends, getting it done and ready for occupancy in record time.

I drove back to Winnipeg in early October, picking up the family for the return trip to Cold Lake. We ran into some dicey winter weather just past Saskatoon, heading towards North Battleford. The road was very slippery. Even at 35 mph, the car started sliding every which way. Fortunately there was one of those rotating knobs on the steering wheel, that you see in movies from the 50's, which theoretically made it easier to control the car.

Notwithstanding that so-called control knob, the car did a full 360-degree turn, like the Tea Cup ride at a Summer Fair, in the middle of the road, and we ended up sliding into a ditch.

While the car was spinning, the kids got excited, understandably screaming as we spun in a circle. I must give Deed full credit, though she does not do it often, she yelled at them once, and told them to be quiet. That Dad had enough problems without having to put up with their squealing. Ending with something like, they either would get, or never ever again get, ice cream I think it was, depending on their behaviour. Even sitting in a ditch, it was kind of funny looking back through the rear view mirror, at those little faces with those big eyes bugging out, reacting to their mom's totally out of character handling of the situation.

I must say that if one has to end up in a ditch, this was the type of ditch you would want to hit. It was wide and shallow, with just enough snow within it to slow us to an easy halt. We ended up on the other side of it, atop a big snowdrift. With the engine revving at full throttle, though my feet were well away, wheels spinning freely, and the speedometer lying to us that we were going 50mph.

I turned off the ignition. Then inspected the pedals, to figure out and hopefully correct the problem. Using the deductive reasoning skills I had learned during those training sessions to prepare me for war. I determined that because we had been driving through wet snow for some time. And DeSoto's not exactly famous for a tight fit between body parts, or for the most efficient heating system, wet snow had infiltrated the floorboards. And ice formed to freeze the gas pedal at the speed we were traveling. Once I freed up the pedals, we settled the kids down, and I backed out of the of the snow bank, and got us back onto the road.

We hit even worse bad weather just past North Battleford heading towards Meadow Lake Saskatchewan. By the time we got to Meadow Lake, there was at least 2½ inches of ice on the entire drivers side of the car. In all my years of driving, I've never seen anything like it. Even flying at 30,000 feet in an unheated bomber. Fingers crossed, I never see it again.

We booked a room in the town's only hotel and went to a restaurant for a family dinner. Deed asked a waitress for directions to the washroom. The young lady pointed to a door at the end of a hallway. Opening the door, she found herself looking out to the parking lot. Just like the old days at her parent's home on Oustic Ave. back in the 40's. Another funny moment that relieved the stress of our journey. By the time we got to Cold Lake, we were exhausted. However, Oscar and June Berube's warm welcome completely erased the memory of that trip.

We stayed with June and Oscar through the winter. Believe me when I say, they don't call it Cold Lake for nothing. Many days I would need to borrow a second battery from Oscar, and hook them up to generate the cranking amps necessary to start the DeSoto. A little bit of know-how I learned in the war, which I passed on to Oscar in thanks for their generosity.

That Christmas of 1959 we spent with June and Oscar. On Christmas Eve, Oscar came up to our apartment with holiday greetings. As a courtesy I offered him a drink, not knowing that he and June were on the 'program', and hadn't a drink since the previous New Year. I told him he was not obliged. He accepted nonetheless. Deed & I were invited to a New Years Eve party at June and Oscar's. All the invited guests (except Deed & I) were alcoholics, and all belonged to Alcoholics Anonymous. June and Oscar were celebrating their first year of sobriety. The drink Oscar and I had a week prior was accepted as an act of respect more than anything, and not a breach of their commitment to sobriety. We had a real nice evening, and no one had a headache the next morning.

Cold Lake³⁶ is one of the larger Air Force Stations in Canada. The Operational Training Unit (O.T.U.) was tasked with training crews (Pilot & Navigator) in a rigorous flying program. The 42 AC&W Squadron was responsible for assisting them with radar control and surveillance. It wasn't as interesting as controlling had been in Europe at Yellowjack.

³⁶ **Cold Lake Air Force Base** - Canadian Forces Base Cold Lake (IATA: YOD, ICAO: CYOD), commonly abbreviated CFB Cold Lake, is a Canadian Forces Base located 5.5 nautical miles (10.2 km; 6.3 mi) southwest of Cold Lake, Alberta. It is operated as an air force base by the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) and is one of two bases in the country housing the CF-18 Hornet fighter, the other being CFB Bagotville. Its primary RCAF lodger unit is 4 Wing, commonly referred to as 4 Wing Cold Lake.

Finally, in the spring of 1960, we were allotted a two-bedroom house on the base, and a four-bedroom house a few months later. No more driving the kids to school from town. They were now just a stone's throw away.

R.C.A.F. Station Cold Lake itself was like a small town. It had all the necessary amenities, grocery store, movie theatre, bank, library, recreation hall etc. There was even a nine-hole golf course, with a very reasonable yearly membership fee of \$5.00 per family I recall. If I woke early and couldn't get back to sleep, I would sneak out, as early as 5 a.m. and shoot nine holes before breakfast. I tried to talk Deed into golf. And we did take lessons together. But with a one-year-old baby to look after, she found that she did not have the time.

In late August of 1960, Deed's father came to visit us. As an ex-army man, being on a military base again was a nostalgic experience. The day after his arrival, at the swimming pool, he swam the full length, and was really puffing at the other end. We actually thought he had overdone it. Being a Sunday, we went to the Officer's Mess for dinner. We introduced him to the mess manager, also an ex-army veteran. The way they took to each other, you would think they had shared a trench during the First World War, the war they fought in.

In the wee hours of Monday morning, Deed got up to check on the baby. Her Dad called out to her and said he was having chest pains. I got dressed and drove him to the base hospital. The doctor examined him and told us that he had a myocardial infarction (heart attack). The doctor admitted him and told us to go home. Telling us there was nothing we could do, and that they would keep us informed. The phone rang at approximately 6:30 a.m. and we rushed to the hospital only to be told that he had just passed away peacefully, in his sleep.

Deed escorted her Dad to Winnipeg by rail. A friend flying to Winnipeg in a T-33³⁷ gave me a ride. Arriving in Winnipeg much earlier, I escorted Deed's mother and family to Union Station to meet her. He was buried with full Military Honors, members of the Imperial Veterans in attendance. Tears filled my eyes when they played the Last Post³⁸.

A few days after the funeral, Deed and I flew back in a C119³⁹ (Boxcar freighter) that was re-fueling in Winnipeg on its way to Cold Lake. I recall the look of apprehension on Deed's face when the crewman secured the back door with a length of rope. Sitting in webbed seats in a freighter aircraft, the load tied down with straps, is not the most comfortable way to fly, but the price was right.

Shortly after the funeral, Deed's sister Edna, husband Bernie and their kids, took the train to Cold Lake to spend a couple of weeks. On the Saturday morning of a long weekend, with no milk delivery on Monday, I found 16 quarts of milk on the porch. With nine people in the house, we needed it. To save money we reverted back to using powdered milk. Our milkman was not happy. He said that order of 16 quarts, made us his best customers. Money is always tight on a military salary, so saving a little here and there goes a long way to buy other things.

A big downside of military life is constant redeployment. And in the spring of 1962, I was transferred to R.C.A.F. Station Chibougamau, in northern Quebec.

³⁷ **Lockheed T-33 Shooting Star** - The Lockheed T-33 Shooting Star (or T-Bird) is a subsonic American jet trainer. It was produced by Lockheed and made its first flight in 1948.

³⁸ **Last Post** - The "Last Post" is a bugle call or a cavalry trumpet call used at Commonwealth military funerals, and ceremonies, commemorating those who have been killed in war.

³⁹ **C-119 Flying Boxcar** - The Fairchild C-119 Flying Boxcar, developed from the World War II Fairchild C-82, was designed to carry cargo, personnel, litter patients and mechanized equipment, and to drop cargo and troops by parachute.

Chapter 28

Chibougamau Station

When I told Deed of the transfer to Chibougamau, she cried for three days. So upset, it took her about three days to learn to spell and pronounce it. And she spoke fluent French!

R.C.A.F. Station Chibougamau⁴⁰ was a new radar station, part of the mid Canada line radar chain, located in northern Quebec, north of Val d'Or and Parent. My position was to be Chief Operations Officer.

As my posting would not take effect for three months, I took advantage of a request from Station Lac St. Denis (100km north of Montreal), to have an officer posted there on temporary duty to assist in operations. While there, I arranged a trip to Chibougamau for a few days to familiarize myself with the base.

The trip gave me the opportunity to meet the CO, Wing Commander Lacombe, and some of his staff. It also gave me the chance to check the housing availability, which consisted of double wide prefabricated three bedroom houses, with no basements. They were trucked in on flat beds in ½ portions, fastened together on site, placed on cement piles. The inside joint was covered with a metal strip. Noting that the kitchen was rather small, with the fact that we didn't own a kitchen table, when I got back to Cold Lake, I built a small folding table that would attach to the kitchen wall.

Seeing Cold Lake get ever smaller through the rear window of the DeSoto, as we began the trip Chibougamau, saddened us. The family enjoyed Cold Lake. We all made good friends, and there was lots to do on the base and in town. Not wanting to arrive at the base before the van transporting our furniture did, we took our time, stopping in Winnipeg for a few days, to visit family and friends that we had not seen since the funeral. The last leg of the trip was on a rough and dusty lumber road from St. Filicien to Chibougamau. I'll relay an incident on that road later in this story. (See note 3 below)

Time spent in Winnipeg was a waste, as the delivery driver took only six days to cover the 2000 miles to Chibougamau, quite a feat considering the quality of the roads at that time.

With us not there to guide him he hastily dumped our furniture in the wrong house. In addition, and it might seem comical to some, but not to us, considering the stresses of yet another cross country move, the bedroom furniture was in the living room, the living room furniture in the bedroom, the freezer in the kitchen facing the wrong way right up against the wall, well you get the idea, it was a mess.

Because all houses were the same we arranged to stay in the wrong one to avoid having to move everything. (See note 1 below)

Compelled to complain, I later learned the driver was fired due to this negligence.

As C.Ops.O, I should have had the house next to the Commanding Officer. The error did work out to our advantage though, and I'll explain later why that was so. (See note 2)

⁴⁰ **CFS Chibougamau** - RCAF Station Chibougamau (pre-1967) housed 10 Radar Squadron, a military radar installation in Chibougamau, Quebec, Canada, that formed part of the Pinetree Line. Shortly after opening, in 1963, it was converted to semi-automated operation using the NORAD SAGE system.

Note 1: *F/L deBagheera, also from Cold Lake, was transferred to Chibougamau at the same time as my Operations Officer. His furniture transported in the same van as ours. And the driver put his furniture in our house and vice versa. Not a funny event for his family either. After a short discussion, we agreed that moving everything from one house to the other was a lot more work than either of us wanted to do, so we just stayed put with our belongings.*

Once we got to know all the base personnel, we enjoyed our year at Chibougamau. Though Gail will remember the bad time she had at school. I guess I should explain.

Because we came from Alberta, the Principal, Ms. Haslam, wanted to hold back both Gail and Glen. I was the Air Force representative on the school board. I went to speak to Ms. Haslam and I told her that I knew my children's capabilities and insisted that Gail go into grade 10 and Glen into grade 6. I also said that if, when the Christmas report came out, I wasn't happy, then we would have another look at it.

Deed and I weren't happy with Gail's year-end report, as she had 39 in chemistry. I went to see Ms. Haslam and we discussed her grade of 39 in chemistry. And stated that I would now consider her going back to grade nine. She hesitated for a moment, and said: "Well, just a minute Mr. Chenier, I don't believe that will be necessary". It turned out that Gail's grade of 39 was the highest in the class. So I explained to Ms. Haslam, that in my mind, this indicated that the teaching was inadequate. Needless to say, she wasn't impressed with my opinion. Regardless of the failing score, Gail stayed in grade 10, and Glen in grade 6. But this was a bad time for Gail. Thank the Lord we were in Chibougamau for only one school year.

The winter of 1963 was a frigid one. We thought Cold Lake was cold. But this was much colder. We had years ago experienced -63° in Parent. However, one night, the temperature plunged to -65°. There was no skirting around the bottom of the house, leaving it wide open to all kinds of windy weather conditions. The floors were as cold as an ice rink. I remember Deed yelling blue murder, having stepped on the metal strip joining the house halves, in bare feet.

Note 2: *I mentioned earlier that I was happy that we hadn't moved into the house next to the CO's. Our youngest son, Mark, who was four years old at the time, was a holy terror. He and a friend, Darryl Steffensen used to get into real trouble. What one wouldn't think of doing, the other one would. One Sunday morning Mark got up early, and took a bucket of water and a few dirty rags over to the C.O's driveway, and washed his staff car. Remembering that Mark was 4 years old at the time, you can only imagine what the car looked like. W/C Lacombe thought it was funny. But I was just as happy that we weren't living next door to him.*

The topography around Chibougamau was not conducive to radio reception, so we got permission from the CRTC to create our own radio station. I believe our station letters were "CHIB" Chibougamau. The teenagers had their own program of which both Gail and Glen were a part. They were disc jockeys and really enjoyed it. Going in on a regular shift and choosing they're own selection of music.

Early on weekends Glen would open up the station. Beginning the broadcast day with a program he created. It was well received and greatly appreciated, by both base personnel and the town people, as outside reception was practically unavailable. One of my staff, Sgt. Gil Pettigrew, had a children's program that was exceptionally popular. He called himself "Uncle Bob" and had a little mouse that he called "Clicker", that he spoke as, using a noisemaker that would make a clicking sound like a mouse. The kids really loved Uncle Bob and "Clicker".

Chibougamau was a small mining town and the people were very friendly. I was the President of the Officers Mess Committee. As a community relations initiative I invited some of the business people in town to become associate members of our Mess. And encouraged them to come to our T.G.I.F. functions and social events we hosted on the weekends.

Christmas in Chibougamau in 1963 was a joyful one. I remember taking the kids out into the bush near the base to harvest a Christmas tree. Loaded down with my biggest saw, we trekked through the bush for quite a while before we saw the one we wanted. It was the top part of a fifty-foot pine tree that seemingly dared us to cut it down. Bringing down that size of tree with a small handsaw was a challenge, and family effort. I started sawing, and then Glen tried his hand for a while, and Gail had a go at it, and finally little Mark put in his contribution. Finally down it came, with all of us yelling "TIMBERRR" into the cool winter air. We then measured 6 feet from the top, sawed that portion off, and dragged it home. There are some consolations being stranded up north, miles from civilization. We were able to enjoy the natural wilderness. The kids really enjoyed their outing, one that was quite different from the norm.

For Christmas that year I was at a loss as to what to get Deed for a gift. After what I believed in error was deep thought, I bought her an exceptionally expensive sheer black peignoir set⁴¹. In retrospect, and the current weather and landscape considered, the purchase may have been more for my benefit than hers, as something she would have appreciated.

Christmas morning, when she opened her gift, she looked at me and said wryly: "If you think I'm wearing this in such a cold god forsaken place, you've got another thing coming"!

At her first chance, she returned it and bought a pair of ski pants and a sweater. It appears that she is more practical than I. Gail was very disappointed though. She thought the nightgown was beautiful. I seem to recall another time I bought Deed a gift of a musical powder box, which she promptly exchanged for a waffle iron. That's my girl! She certainly didn't want a lot of expensive gifts, which we really couldn't afford in those days anyway.

On another occasion, Deed ordered a bra from the Eaton's catalogue. They sent her the right size box, but a wrong size bra. She returned it explaining the problem. They sent her a new parcel, with the same result. So she sent it back again with same explanation. Again the same thing happened. The third time she sent it back with the following note: Attention: The Manager, "Please note, I wear the bra, not the box". The next parcel had the correct size bra.

One weekend, we were invited to visit Bill and Micheline Shimbashi, who had recently been transferred to 3 Wing Bagotville, a 15-minute ride from Chicoutimi where they lived. We had a lovely weekend together. However, when we left on Sunday morning and attempted to stop at the stop sign at the end of their street. No brakes!!! Fortunately we were able to gradually stop and turn around to go back to the Shimbashi's.

There is a very steep hill, and I mean steep, at the end of the street from Bill's house. Because we had no brakes, Bill drove his little Hillman in front of me and we went down the hill with my front bumper against his back bumper until we got to the bottom. Being a Sunday, I was very fortunate to find a garage that was open. An inspection found a broken brake fluid line. The mechanic quickly replaced it and we got back on the road for home.

⁴¹ **Peignoir** - A peignoir is a long outer garment for women, which is frequently sheer and made of chiffon or another translucent fabric, worn while brushing one's hair, originally referring to a dressing gown or bathrobe. Contemporary 3 piece peignoirs are usually sold with a matching nightgown and/or panties.

Because of the rough and dusty road conditions from St. Filicien to Chibougamau, it was standard operating procedure to stop in St. Filicien, to seal the trunk, the front hood, as well as all the doors, with tape, to keep dust out of the car before proceeding to Chibougamau. The distance from Chicoutimi to Chibougamau is 360 km. about a 5-hour drive. An hour out of St. Filicien, we stopped to rest and eat the lunch we had prepared prior to our departure.

Note 3: *I mentioned earlier about an incident on that rough and dusty lumber road from St. Filicien to Chibougamau. After we ate, I attempted to start the DeSoto. Nothing happened. I opened the hood, discovering that the rough road had caused the battery to dislodge, dead shorting on the body of the car. Now what? We were stranded on a deserted road that was sparsely traveled at the best of times. It's a Sunday afternoon, so the usual lumber trucks traveling this way are nonexistent. So we sat and waited. I recalled seeing a lumber camp, a few miles farther down the road, we passed on our way the previous Friday. I was about to start walking to get help, when lo and behold, a truck of workmen drove up. Fluent in French, I explained our problem. In no time at all they had jumper cables on to our battery, and got us mobile again. I offered to pay them, but they wouldn't take anything. What a day? First the brakes and the delay that caused, then the hill and the dented bumper, then the dead battery!*

By the time we got home, we were thoroughly exhausted. Oh well. As we used to say in the Air Force (less than a motto and more of a warning), "Don't join up if you can't take a joke"

R.C.A.F. Station Chibougamau being such a small base, we didn't have an on site doctor or dentist. These professionals only made sporadic visits throughout the year. On one occasion the dentist stayed a few days, caring for those that specifically needed work done for their 'false teeth'. When done, he returned to his unit and had the dental lab do the necessary denture work. When the work was completed, the dentist would then identify the dentures with the patients name and send the dentures to the unit by mail. The Commanding Officer, Chief Technical Officer and Chief Administration Officer all had denture work done.

A self proclaimed jokester myself, I can appreciate that when the dentures arrived, the dentist had placed all of them together in one box, I assume in jest, with no identification. Picture these three high-ranking officers in a room addressing each other. "No, these aren't mine, they must be yours!" Trying on each other's teeth until they finally got it sorted out. It would be funny enough to use as a television comedy routine. Humor being one of the few things that can take the edge off both the dangers and boredom of military service, the next time the dentist came to the base everyone had a good laugh.

We made some good friends in Chibougamau. Rose and Paul Ellis (now divorced) and Norma & Eric Steffensen (still happily married and living in Cochrane Alberta), Peg and Ed Hope (Chief Admin Officer) and Micheline and Bill Shimbashi (Adjutant). We still keep in touch with Eric & Norma as well as with Rose (now Fraser) who lives in Kelowna, BC.

Note: *I just received the following from Glen, which I'm including in my story, addressed to all of us, and now privy to all of you who are now reading this.*

Dad, your writings bring back so many memories. Remember in Cold Lake when you salvaged some drones that we turned into rocket ships (with seat cutouts) on that old wagon? One was black and white and the other was red. You have a picture of Mark riding in one of them. And all those sonar buoys you brought home that I took apart.

And that beautiful bench you built for me with all those drawers to store parts in. I still have one of the end drawers.

Remember in Parent, my graduation from crib to the bed you built with the three drawers?

And in Armstrong when the fish stole my fishing rod from the back of the boat and you went diving in after it in your underwear?

And the clam chowder that Mom made from my clam hunt?

And the mousetraps I looked after in the officers' cabin?

Remember when we went fishing and that old green Evinrude motor quit, and it took four hours of rowing and a tow to get back?

The toboggan/bobsled run in Cold Lake?

Something I never told you before, but in the same area was a culvert that discharged water into the creek. One winter I was silly enough to climb on the ice just beneath the culvert and then started to slide down the ice. There was a 10-foot drop off at the edge of the ice. Fortunately I was able to stop sliding before the drop off. If I hadn't been able to stop, I might have ended up with a broken leg.

The things we manage to survive in childhood.

Gail, wasn't it Cold Lake where Bob Glanville was your special friend? I still remember Sherry Boyd from Cold Lake, my girlfriend just before we moved to Chibougamau.

Remember St. Margaret's when I slept in the barracks so you and Mom could have some 'privacy' in the trailer? And the sonofabitch that banged on my door one morning when he found out it was not you in there? I was so afraid. I heard you giving him s#!t for that, and I thought "Kick his ass, Dad!"

Keep the stories coming. More memories will surely follow.

Love y'all, Glen

Editor's Note: *The belief that the reporting of everyday events in anyone's life has little relevance or meaning to a story is so wrong, especially in the telling of a tale, of the life of a career military family. Few who work in any field, face the daily prospect of death, as an accepted prerequisite in their job description. There are dangers associated with any form of employment. But if you were told during your interview, for whatever you do to pay the bills that you should **expect** to die at work, every single day, would you accept that position?*

I can only believe that for people serving in the military, the excitement and symbolic importance of returning home to family, having once more cheated death in the service of one's country, far outweighs the fear one must feel, that comes with the ongoing challenge of surviving the work day, day after day, to count as a victory, the return to what those having no clue what it takes to serve, would think to be a humdrum, dull, boring, tedious, monotonous, and tiresome existence, identified as such in error. Yet being the essence of life itself.

We all should hope that we never have to do our jobs, with a conscious haunting fear of the Grim Reaper, perhaps mere steps behind us. That safely returning home from work is not the most exciting and rewarding part of our day! Though it should be for us, as it is for them!

Chapter 29

Armstrong via Beausejour

We left Chibougamau after just one year, when I was transferred to R.C.A.F Station Beausejour, the east/west centre of the Pine Tree Line⁴² about 80 km northeast of Winnipeg.

Long distance travel as a family, with children of varying ages in tow, presents a number of different challenges that are often defined by those varying ages.

Gail (our oldest) had made a friend in Chibougamau, Fred Aberle, who wished to return to his hometown, Elliot Lake, Ontario. Not too far off our path to Beausejour, we took him along with us. Dropping him off at a garage on the highway near the town, where he arranged for a family member to meet him to complete his journey home.

Mark (our youngest) hadn't been feeling well for a few days prior to our departure, with we thought was some form of flu. Before the first fifty miles were behind us, he got sick and threw up all over Deed. That event dictated an unscheduled stop in St. Filicien, at a clothing store for Deed to shop for new clothes. Is there a better of a reason for a shopping spree?

Note (10 May, 2007): *I picked up Mark at the airport yesterday and informed him where I was in my story. He was reminded and so reminded me, of something that happened on that trip which I had forgotten. He had to go to the bathroom and I wouldn't pull over. So his Mom had him pee in a Campbell soup can. Unable to stop it overflowed, and his mother was soaked with his pee, hands and lap. Oh the joy of being a mother. That shopping spree in St. Filicien served us again. And a teachable moment for me, as next time he said he had to pee, I quickly slid onto the shoulder of the road, to allow that function without Deed being soiled as before.*

We visited my cousin Cecile and her husband Vic Stubbings in Montreal for a couple days. One evening Cecile made Deed a "Troika", a concoction of Vodka, Amaretto, Sloe Gin and Lemon Juice. After a while, we noticed that Deed was missing. I found her on the floor of the bathroom, leaning over the toilet bowl. She hadn't been feeling well since beginning our trip and the "Troika" did not help in any way. Actually, by the time we got to Winnipeg, all of us were sick at one time or another. Perhaps catching it from each other, being in such a confined space as the inside of a car. It was rough driving while I had it.

In Winnipeg, we stayed with Deed's Mom & Dad again, and started looking for a house in Beausejour. Again there was nothing available on the base, and we couldn't find anything in Beausejour. So we bought a house in Transcona, a small railway town of about 10,000 people, a few miles from Winnipeg and near the highway to Beausejour, a half hour drive away.

A week before I was to report to Beausejour, my transfer was cancelled and I was posted to R.C.A.F. Station Armstrong⁴³ as C.Ops.O. This was a one-year isolated posting of a strategic and sensitive nature that would not allow for the family to accompany me.

⁴² **Pine Tree Line** - A series of radar stations located across the northern United States and southern Canada at about the 50th parallel north, and the first coordinated system for early detection of a Soviet bomber attack on North America. The early 1950s radar technology quickly became outdated and it was in full operation only for a short time.

⁴³ **Canadian Forces Station Armstrong (ADC ID: C-15)** - A former General Surveillance Radar station. It is located 1.1 miles east of Armstrong, Thunder Bay District, Ontario. It was operated as part of the Pinetree Line network controlled by NORAD. It was closed in 1974.

Once more, the joys of Air Force life come to pass! Oh well, as Deed was prone to state many times: "Our marriage wouldn't have lasted, if we didn't love each other so much and respect each other as we did, and had such a close and loving relationship"

It is only in reflection, as I write our story, that I realize how difficult it must have been for Deed. While I was away on temporary duty, or as in this case, on an isolated posting, she dealt with the inconveniences of doing everything for herself and for the family; the household chores, getting the kids off to school and to special functions, the banking (see note below), mowing the grass and shoveling snow. Fortunately, we had some good kids and they helped their Mom a lot. I can't shake the feeling though, of her living the life of a widow with children, as I fulfilled my duty in defense of this country and as an extension, the free world.

Note: *Deed, reading this as I type, just reminded me. I would send her \$300.00 a month (direct bank deposit) that covered cheques written for household expenses. One month her statement reported NSF on some of her cheques and she couldn't understand why. It turned out that my monthly cheque hadn't been deposited. We had the Treasury Board send another. We never found out why it happened, but Deed was quite concerned for a while of a repeat.*

So off to Armstrong yours truly went. Six officers from the base corralled me at the CNR station after I arrived as I stepped off the platform. The first question they asked me was "Do you cut hair?" I said yes, with the result of becoming the barber to all the officers on the base. And the C.O. W/C Jim Dunlop became my barber. Apparently, there was so little to do in one's spare time, that going to meet the train was a diversion that a lot of the personnel engaged in.

Living in quarters on the base and eating in the Officer's Mess became routine. Noticing that my battle dress started to feel tight, I decided to change my eating habits as I was putting on a lot of weight. Living at home, one can control their diet and eating habits much easier than when living in Quarters. Imagine that the dining room is a free buffet and it's all there in front of you. Perhaps out of boredom or to quell the solace of missing family and loved ones you eat. And if your will power is low, you succumb, and go back for seconds, thirds and even fourths. I had to challenge myself to push away from the table, most especially, the desert table!

Fighter Corp Crews in the operations section at most radar stations work nine-day shifts, 6 days on and 3 days off. It works well when personnel have their families living nearby. Armstrong being an isolated radar station, most families were either living in Winnipeg or in Fort William/Port Arthur (now Thunder Bay). This 6/3 schedule was in effect when I arrived. So every six days personnel would take off for either Winnipeg or the Lakehead, if they could afford it. Taking traveling time into consideration, this did not give the individuals much time at home with the family and was a strain on the pocketbook, to do every nine days. Discussing it with the C.O. and upon his approval, I called a meeting of all operations personnel, putting forth the following proposal. I was willing to change the shift schedule to twelve days on and six days off. This would save everyone traveling expenses and give them six days with their families every twelve rather than three days every six. The crews were ecstatic and I apparently made a lot of friends that day. I was on a five-day schedule and consequently did not get the opportunity to get away as often. (see note below)

Note: *In the 1970's after I retired, I met one of my then NCO's in Armstrong, in the Officer's Mess in Winnipeg. He reminded me of that shift change I had brought in, and how it had boosted base morale. I told him that had been my purpose. And he said: "Well, it was sure appreciated." One short sentence of thanks sent me home from work wearing a smile. It truly is the little things one does during any given day that has the biggest effect in another's life.*

Deed was generally a good sport and took most things in stride, rarely rising to anger. One time though she really got peeved, no I guess I should say mad, and by mad I mean angry. Home on four days leave from Armstrong, I had just stepped through the door when my brother Lucky called, inviting me to play poker with my other brothers. Lucky's loud invite escaped the phone, and Deed was off.

"No bloody way are you going to play poker, when I've been alone with these kids for the last six weeks. If you think you're going to leave me here for another few hours while you go play poker, you've got another thing coming."

Needless to say, I didn't attend the game. I couldn't blame her as she had a good point. It was a negotiation that I couldn't win. She says I pouted for a few days. But I don't think I did.

Note: *Again looking over my shoulder as I was typing the above, and then reading what I had written, she said, and I quote: "And you can tell them I was PISSED OFF"... unquote.*

Also, she just reminded me about the problems she had with the car. It always seemed okay when I was in town driving it. But the moment she dropped me at the railway station it would act up on her way home. Fortunately, we had a friend at Station Winnipeg, who was the M.E. Officer and knew vehicles from bumper to bumper. Deed would call him and explain the symptoms, and he would tell her what he thought was wrong. When she took the car to the garage and explained the problem, the mechanic would think. This gal knows cars!

I bought a 16-foot trailer from a civilian radar technician who had been transferred that fall. Unable to get it to the highway because of the poor road conditions at the time, he was forced to sell it. I paid \$700.00.

Radar Station Armstrong had been a U.S.A.F. base prior to the R.C.A.F. taking it over. The last U.S.A.F. Commanding Officer built a cottage just a few miles from the base, on Lake McKenzie. Every spring, he would return for a week or so to do some fishing. Then arrange to rent the cottage to another officer for the summer.

I explained to this retired Colonel that I had a trailer, and asked if he would mind my parking it beside his cottage. Not only did he say yes, he even suggested we dig a hole and place an empty 45-gallon oil drum with holes punched in the side for drainage, and connect the sanitary toilet to it. He also allowed me to attach a hose to his outside water tap so we would have running water in the trailer. With this arrangement, I could have Deed and the kids join me for the summer, with all the comforts of home, or as close to that reality as possible.

About a week before I had planned to pick up the family and bring them back to Lake McKenzie for the summer, Deed called. "I've had it with these kids. I'm driving to Fort William tomorrow and we'll stay at auntie Bernadette's (who lived in Fort William) until you come and pick us up."

Fortunately, one of the crews was doing their last shift that evening, so I hitched a ride with those who were going to Fort William for their 6-day furlough. It was a stormy rainy night, and the lumber road was in very bad shape.

The driver went through a large and deep puddle. Water washed like an ocean wave over the whole car. I thought to myself, "I'll have to ease over on the right of that rut, when I drive in tomorrow."

Procedure was to call the base guardhouse when leaving the highway at Hurkett, onto the lumber road leading to Armstrong. If they didn't report within 5 hours, a search party would be sent out. Driving in the next day, we arrived at the large puddle that swamped us the day before. I eased over to the right, trying to miss what I thought was the worst part. We got stuck.

The DeSoto was leaning at a pretty steep angle. Allowing at least 4 inches of water to invade the cab. Deed & I took off our socks and shoes. I rolled up my pants and Deed tucked her skirt into her 'undies', and we got out to see what we could do. I put Gail behind the wheel, with her foot on the gas to keep it idling (the exhaust pipe was under water). A few large 6 inch by 8 inch pieces of lumber were floating around. That is how big the puddle was.

I put one under the car, and using it like a lever, tried to lift the DeSoto enough so we could put some of the others under the wheels. Now that I think of it, those posts were likely there to act as a bridge over the deep rut and had floated away with the rain as it filled up.

Helping me as best she could, Deed slipped and fell on her behind, and sat waist deep in this dirty mucky water. I was disappointed, because both of our still frame and movie cameras were locked in the trunk, and I couldn't take a picture. Again, now that I think about it, taking a picture of Deed sitting dejected in that puddle probably was not a good idea. I tested her love for me many times over the years. Testing her with taking a picture that time might have resulted in a failing grade for me!

Eventually a jeep with a winch on the front bumper drove up and the driver hooked us up and pulled us out.

We reported at the base just in time. They had just started organizing a search party. We then drove onward to Lake McKenzie and settled into our trailer. (See note below)

Note: *At our 50th wedding anniversary celebration at the Officers Mess in Winnipeg in 1996, our daughter Gail who M.C.'d the event related this episode to the guests, ending with the following.*

"After all this unfortunate occurrence of getting soaked in that dirty water and the concern of being stuck there for an indefinite length of time, the uncertainty of what to expect when we got to the other end, and everything in general, Mom never complained, or got mad at Dad, or yelled at us kids to behave. No. All she could think to say, in a very calm tone of voice was, and I remember hearing it as clearly today after all these years, as I did at the time.

Quote... ***"You shouldn't have joined up if you can't take a joke."** ...Unquote.*

Gail (15 years young) only stayed with us a few days, returning to Winnipeg by train, to begin a summer job, working with handicapped children.

Having the trailer parked right by the lake, meant that the boys could fish right off the dock. We had a 10-foot aluminum boat, powered by a very old and heavy 9.9hp Johnson motor. It was tied to the dock with a long rope. Mark (four at the time) with his life jacket on, would paddle away to exhaustion, going no farther than the length of rope would allow.

Soon after we were settled in our trailer, the C.O. went on a 2-week leave. As the acting C.O. the staff car was at my disposal, so Deed had use of the DeSoto while I was at work.

A young officer, Brian (I can't remember his last name) and his wife had rented the cottage for a part of the summer. They had a son (Doug), who was Glen's age, and they soon became good friends. One day I took them fishing to Lake Pesigi, a few miles away. To access a spot known for good fishing, we had to go ½ hour down river leading up to the lake, and then about another ½ hour across the lake.

As we were approaching the area where we would drop our hooks, the motor conked out. All attempts to restart it were unsuccessful, even after cleaning the plug. I was more than concerned being stranded so far from civilization. The kids were eager to fish but all I could think about was camping overnight in a mosquito-infested forest, waiting to be rescued. I had packed a few sandwiches for our lunch, so I rationed them in case we had to spend the night.

I had told Brian where I was taking the kids, so I wasn't completely concerned. I figured we would be rescued eventually. While we waited and ate a little, I tried once more to start the motor. Fortunately it started. So we headed back, just in case it stalled again. The boys were disappointed that they didn't have the chance to fish, but getting us home was more important.

I think it's my military training that kicks in to remind me that survival is the primary goal, if faced with that need. And everything else comes second, even a day of fishing with your kid!

Heading back across the lake towards the river leading to home, I noticed another boat coming from the opposite direction. I thought to myself good! If we get into trouble again, they will have to come back this way eventually, so assistance and our rescue would be imminent.

Sure enough, the motor conked out again. But this time there was no luck getting it started. So we settled down, and the boys dropped their lines into the lake getting in a little fishing as promised. I do not remember if the boys caught anything, or how long it took until the other boat came into view. When it eventually did, we waved them down. They kindly towed us all the way down the river to where our car was parked. In thanks, I offered to fill their gas tank with fuel, but they declined. Thanking them for their help, we piled into the car, arriving home a little later than planned, but safe and sound. I was quite relieved the way things turned out.

One day in the summer of 1963 the guardhouse called, telling me that my brother Ernie was at the gate. I had the guard bring him to my office and we chatted a while. Then went to the trailer to relax after work. Ernie had brought a pup tent with him, so he stayed with us for a few days, doing some fishing and visiting with the kids, before returning to Fort William.

Before leaving, Ernie mentioned that Vic and Cecile were in from Montreal. And my other cousin Bobby was in from L.A. visiting family in Port Arthur. I told him to let them know that if they wanted to go to Winnipeg to visit their cousins (my brothers & sisters), they could stay in our 4-bedroom house. Our daughter Gail was a counselor at a camp for handicapped children, and lived on-site. So the house was vacant, and they were welcome to use it.

So Vic and Cecile, Bobby, Irene, Denise and Simone took advantage of the opportunity to visit cousins in Winnipeg, and as I was told, they all had a wonderful time.

I recall when W/C Dunlop, myself and another officer were invited to visit the Fighter Squadron that we worked with in Duluth, Minnesota, 350 miles or so SSW of our base. And at the time, about an eight to ten hour drive, weather permitting and the Good Lord willing.

We drove down in the base staff car, and had an enlightening tour of their operations, reciprocating with an invite for them to visit our radar station. On our return trip to base, poor road conditions on the lumber road from Hurkett to Armstrong had us stranded in Fort William.

For search and rescue purposes, we had an Otter aircraft in our inventory. For a quicker return to the base, the C/O called F/L Murray, a pilot/controller on staff, to fly over and pick us up. I had bought a small 2-wheel bike for Mark's birthday so we loaded this on the aircraft and flew into Armstrong. The staff car was returned to the base once road conditions improved.

We wanted to renovate the bar in the Officers Mess and decided that we would do it ourselves in our leisure time. Not a lot of humor comes with military life. And it is not often that it does. We had all worked exceptionally hard one day, and had a mess dinner planned for that evening. Everyone had left to clean up except the C/O and myself. Holding a broom as I stood over the pile of dirt I had just swept up, looking around the empty room, I said to my boss, in reflection perhaps of how one's station plays little in the military at times. "Here we are, the C/O and C/Ops/O of the base, sweeping the floor of the Officers Mess." We had a good laugh.

The attire in the mess in the 1960's was more formal than it is today. We always wore a tie. Someone came up with the idea of having an "uncouth night" one Sunday every month, allowing us to dine informally in our 'civvies'.

To balance things out and mix things up, we then decided that once a month we would have a "couth night" and dine in our Dress Blues (no battle dress allowed). At one of these "Couth Nights" when I was acting C/O I asked F/L Murray to say Grace. "You're kidding," he said. I replied, "No, this is a 'Couth Night' and we should say Grace" So we all bowed our heads and F/L Murray stood up and said "Grace" and promptly sat down to eat.

While I was still acting CO, the fighter boys from Duluth took us up on our invite. They flew in from Duluth in a Dakota aircraft and some of us met them at the landing strip. The boys had suggested that I dress up as a Confederate soldier with a red polka dot handkerchief tied around my forehead and use a "crutch", limping over to meet them. I took them on a tour of the Operations Area and then to the Officers Mess. We had put a sign over the bar that said: "We accept both Confederate and American money at par." The Americans had a good time, and so did we. But I'm not sure that kind of behaviour would be as well received in today's world.

Considering that I was originally assigned to Beausejour, and that we had bought and still owned a house in Transcona, today a part of Winnipeg⁴⁴, I requested a transfer to Beausejour and it was honored. When my year at Armstrong was completed, I left Armstrong and headed west to Winnipeg. As always, I met and befriended many people that year I was posted to Armstrong, both military and civilian. Leaving them behind was bittersweet.

⁴⁴ **Unicity Winnipeg** - The City of Winnipeg, several surrounding municipalities and the Metropolitan Corporation of Greater Winnipeg were subject to a municipal amalgamation on January 1, 1972, that created a unicity or unified city. The creation of the current City of Winnipeg as a unicity was an ambitious experiment in local government reform. Until that point, the greater Winnipeg area comprised 12 municipalities under a single metropolitan government, in a "two-tier" system. The City of Winnipeg Act amalgamated the rural municipalities of Charleswood, Fort Garry, North Kildonan, and Old Kildonan, the Town of Tuxedo, the cities of East Kildonan, West Kildonan, St. Vital, Transcona, St. Boniface, and St. James-Assiniboia, the city of Winnipeg, and the Metropolitan Corporation of Greater Winnipeg into one city. The unicity system replaced the two-tier metropolitan system established in 1960. Winnipeg City Council consisted of 50 councilors elected on the basis of one from each of the 50 wards, and a mayor elected from the city at large. Widely regarded as a failure in that it did not achieve many of its lofty goals, it did have some success in equalizing property tax rates across the city, eliminating the suburban "property tax havens" which had coupled low tax rates with a high level of services provided by the city at the cost of higher tax rates overall. In 1992, the council was reduced to 15 members.

Chapter 30

Beausejour Revisited - Finally

Not wishing to rewrite the long chapter above, and before proceeding on to Beausejour, I need to go back to that weekend trip we took to Chicoutimi. When we visited the Shimbashi's.

Gail reminded me of an event that took place that could have had dire consequences, had we not rectified the problem before hitting that dusty gravel road back to Chibougamau.

While driving around Chicoutimi, I heard a funny rumbling noise that seemed to be coming from the rear of the car. It sounded as if we were dragging something. Couldn't see anything amiss when I visually checked the car, so I decided to take the wheel cover off. I discovered that the wheel rim was almost completely split, held together by about two inches that was not. I installed the spare and had the rim welded, using it as the spare until the wheel could be replaced. As if we weren't having enough problems that weekend.

The Good Lord was looking out for us again. Thank you Lord! Thank you...Thank you.

From over my shoulder, Deed just reminded me of another incident from Armstrong. I had a young officer working in Telecommunications who was to go on leave to Saskatchewan to get married. We had a stag for him in the mess. A few officers tried to get him loaded enough to pass out. With the intention of painting his mid section from the belly button to his thighs, with Mercurochrome liberated from the medical inspection room. Failing to get him drunk, they instead held him down, and locked a chain with a steel ball attached, to his ankle.

He walked around the base all the next day begging anyone who would listen to remove the chain. He was leaving in a few hours and thought his fiancée would not be happy. Many of us gathered at the railway station to see him off while he was pleading to have the ball and chain removed.

Thinking he would be freed before the train left the station, he had a frantic look in his eyes as it did, and he was not. The fellows involved apologetically told him they had thrown away the key. The key however, to make the prank even more effective, had been given to the conductor, with instructions to free him when they got to Sioux Lookout. He must have been relieved when the conductor finally freed him. Looking back, it was probably the better idea for a prank, to have use a ball and chain that could be unfastened. Rather than staining him with Mercurochrome, which would be difficult to remove before the wedding, as originally planned.

Now this prank may have seemed cruel by modern measure. But fifty years ago the military viewed such practices as bonding experiences, for those who would one day likely share a foxhole. Relying on each other to survive battles and wars. It worked then. But I do not think that such events would be accepted in the armed forces of today, and society in general.

Now I continue the tale, and on to Beausejour.

CFS Beausejour (closed in 1986) was not actually located in Beausejour, but nearer to Lac du Bonnet, a very small town at that time. I was there as C/Ops/O. Perhaps due to age my recollection of Beausejour is vague.

W/C Anderson was the CO and lived on the base.

Operationally, if a limpid memory serves me correctly, our radar information was fed to the Control Center in Duluth, and for training purposes, to the Navigational School in Winnipeg.

Deed & I are both from Winnipeg. We both have many relatives in the city and region, and the province of Manitoba. They all knew that I had gone overseas to fight in WWII. But to show everyone what I now did for a living, I organized a visit of the base for family and friends.

I took them through the giant balloon building that housed the large radar antenna, used for both aircraft search and height determination. The roofs of such buildings are pressurized. One has to go through a room that is decompressed, and then recompressed, to achieve an equal pressurization as the roof, before opening the door to gain entry. Deed's sister Edna, who is afraid of heights, needed assistance getting down from the height finder area.

F/O Ned Page, one of my controllers, lived in the same little town (Transcona), as we did. When feasible, we car-pooled to work. One day, Ned picked me up and we were well on the way on Hwy 15 when I realized I had the wrong pair of pants on. I didn't want to disturb Deed's sleep that morning so had dressed in the dark. Civilian pants don't go well with the Air Force blue. We were forced to turn back so that I could redress properly in my full uniform. The military is kind of fussy that way, unlike what you see in modern movies such as M.A.S.H.

Beausejour being an automated unit, all information was passed on automatically to Duluth. Of all the radar stations where I served, this was the one with the fewest duties. Orders from HQ, mandated that I had to have a Controller on a 1-minute call 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. No operational days off in the military. Cell phones weren't invented yet, so when Standby Controllers left one area of the base for another, perhaps from the Officers Mess to his quarters, they needed to inform the Control Centre in Duluth they were doing so.

It was in Beausejour that I had a problem with a planter's wart on my left foot. I made the mistake of going to the Beausejour Hospital to have it removed. I swear the doctor cut out a pound of meat and I was on crutches for a couple weeks.

On New Year's Eve, Deed and I were traveling from home to the base, to attend the New Year's Eve dance in the Officers Mess. It was a very stormy night, and truthfully, we should have stayed home. Highway 44, the main route to the base, was covered in snow and ice, with just enough exposed cement in the middle, for the safe navigation of one vehicle. The headlights of an oncoming car blinding me, I pulled over as far as possible to avoid a collision. The other driver did not give an inch, and my front wheel caught the shoulder. Due to another relatively poor choice of driving in bad winter weather, we again ended up in a ditch.

The other car just kept going. Fortunately, we spied a farmhouse nearby. We walked the short distance to it and knocked on the door. Describing what had happened, we implored the farmer who answered to help. The man asked if I had been drinking, stating if I had been, he wouldn't help us. I truthfully said no, and explained that we were on our way to the base for the New Year dinner and dance. I was wearing my formal Mess Kit and Deed was in her long formal gown. The fellow got dressed, drove his tractor over to our car and pulled us out. We arrived a little late, deciding by then it would be safer to spend the night in the V.I.P. quarters.

By morning the storm had subsided. So we chanced driving home, to attend the 11am mass at Blessed Sacrament Church in Transcona, sitting with Gail and her new beau Danny. During the service Gail flashed her hand in front of us, and Deed noticed an engagement ring on her finger. After the service we hugged Gail and congratulated Dan. (see note below)

Note: Ironically, Deed had mentioned on the drive from the base to the church, that Danny had not proposed to Gail at Christmas. Surmising that because he had just recently bought a car, he probably was not in a financial position to ask. Thinking for a moment, I more or less agreed with her. As we all know now, we were wrong. It was one of those rare times in life that being wrong about something had a much better result than being correct. They have been together ever since. Proof that they are as well suited a couple, as are Deed and myself.

In March 1966, the province experienced a massive snowstorm that completely paralyzed the whole of southern Manitoba. Fortunately for me I was off duty and home at the time. The snow was so deep that people were plunging long brooms with red flags attached, into the snow above where their vehicles were parked. Hoping that the plow drivers would see them and not destroy the family car while cleaning the streets and removing the snow.

Editor's Note: Born and raised in Manitoba, living in the same small town (Transcona), I remember that storm like it was yesterday. I was 11 years old, and that blizzard was the most amazing event of my then short life. Starting just after midnight March 4th it raged on for almost 3 days. Once it ended, everyone in the region was snowbound. And it was cold! But it was the wind that was the villain. Extreme cold makes it very difficult for snow to fall. However, just a small amount of falling snow, driven by very high winds, is what causes a blizzard. And the winds howled for those nearly three days and nights. Driving that small amount of falling snow up against the sides of buildings and houses. Drifting to the extent that our house, like most others in the region, was almost completely covered. I still remember my dad shoving me out of the only widow of the house that was not fully blocked, my mom and dad's bedroom window. A snow shovel followed me. I then dug a path to the back door, so that my dad could exit the house and continue what I had started, clearing a trail to the front door and down the sidewalk to the street. There was a picture taken of me, standing on our front sidewalk after my dad finished clearing it. Showing a wall of snow on each side, that towered over me, and had to be at least eight feet high. As long as I live I will never forget that storm.

An interesting sidebar: In the early 1960's, the Beausejour Lions Club organized the initial event of what is now the Canadian Power Toboggan Championships⁴⁵. Several Radar Station personnel were greatly involved. Especially F/L Smith, who was instrumental in helping to organize that first of many events held since.

After a year in Beausejour, I was transferred to R.C.A.F. Station, North Bay Ontario.

⁴⁵ **Canadian Power Toboggan Championships** - Snowmobile racing originally got its start in Beausejour at the end of February 1962. The Beausejour Lions Club was planning its annual winter "blow-out," a special end-of-February festival to pick up everyone's spirits after the long, cold winter season. One of the Lions' members suggested it would be fun to match local snowmobile builder Mike Bosak's machines against some of the other new machines in a race during the 1962 festival. The idea of having a power toboggan race to stimulate attendance was warmly accepted and rapid organization was started. The power toboggan event was given high billing, right behind the horse-and-cutter races.

The first track was laid out on the school grounds in Beausejour. Hay bales were placed in a rough semi-circle. Six daring drivers raced their power toboggans around the course at an estimated speed of 15 miles per hour. The cheering crowd loved it. As soon as the race was over, eager spectators had a chance to take a ride on these mechanical marvels by themselves, and the power toboggans raced around the schoolyard the rest of the day.

The following article about how the races got started was written by Eyfi Walterson, past president of the Beausejour Lions Club (1963) and of the CPTC (1971). It appeared in the 1997 CPTC program in celebration of our 35th anniversary.

"The Canadian Power Toboggan Championship Races destined to be held annually at Beausejour, Manitoba was conceived on a very cold January evening in 1963. To read the full article go to <https://cptcracing.com/about-us/cptc-history>

31Chapter

R.C.A.F. Station North Bay

By the time my transfer to North Bay came through, Gail graduated High School and had found a job. So she did not accompany us, instead moving in with her Nanny in St. Vital.

We arrived in North Bay in June 1965 and stationed our trailer at a park in the town of Callander (home of the Dionne quintuplets). We had a beautiful spot right on Lake Nipissing (the home of big Sturgeon) just as we had on Lake McKenzie.

Again, there was no base housing available, (see note below). So we contacted our old neighbour from Chibougamau, Bill Shimbashi, now retired from the Air Force, who had moved into real estate. Bill found us a house at 2 Superior Crescent, not too far from the base.

We delayed the possession date for this house until September 1st for two reasons. First, we had to wait for the close on the sale of our house in Transcona. And second, because we had a nice spot by the lake for the trailer, and wanted to enjoy it throughout the summer. I bought a canvas tent attachment with privacy curtains that hooked onto the trailer. We used this as a den, with a cot, for Glen to use as a bedroom. Of course while there we visited the home in which the Dionne Quintuplets had been born.

Note: *I recall one time, my brother Lucky and I were discussing housing for military personnel and he made the comment. "Of course you don't have to worry about paying rent, because you get free housing through the military". Don't I wish? I don't know where Lucky got that impression. Of course we were charged for living in military housing! Everyone was!*

Because we were going cash to mortgage, there would be no financing issues with our new home. So Bill gave us the key to the house early, allowing access for us to do a few renovations and upgrades. We rented a commercial sander and refinished the hardwood floors. Then started to build a rec room in the basement, during our spare time throughout the summer. Glen helped with the electrical work in the rec room.

Editor's Note: *My cousin Glen (now deceased) was brilliant, even as a young man. He graduated from Red River Community College in Winnipeg, one of the few post secondary institutions in the country and world at the time, that offered advanced technical courses. He had a very long illustrious and noteworthy career as an Electrical Engineer. In the 1970's Glen was hired by the Government of Canada to be the system maintenance technician for the Canadian portion of the D.E.W. Line⁴⁶. Before moving on to become a renowned hardware designer for a number of tech companies such as Fujitsu. Downsized in the Dot.com industry bust, he started a business called Teeter Totter Tree Stuff, making things out of wood and distributing woodworking tools. He became a well known 'go to fixer' of model trains and slot cars, often designing and manufacturing replacement parts in his home workshop. Sadly he passed away in 2016 at age 64, after a short bout fighting a rapidly advancing form of cancer. To read more about Glen go to - <https://www.edn.com/memories-of-glen-chenier/>*

⁴⁶ **D.E.W. Line** - The Distant Early Warning Line, also known as the DEW Line or Early Warning Line, was a system of radar stations in the far northern Arctic region of Canada, with additional stations along the North Coast and Aleutian Islands of Alaska (see Project Stretchout and Project Bluegrass), in addition to the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Iceland. It was set up to detect incoming Soviet bombers during the Cold War, and provide early warning of any sea-and-land invasion.

My introduction to the “hole” at R.C.A.F. Station North Bay was quite an eye opener. A three-story structure sitting on large oversized shock-absorbing springs, built completely inside a mountain. The door at the entrance was almost two feet thick and must have weighed tons. It was a 20-minute ride on the bus before arriving at the entrance. My first time walking into the facility was like being in a movie. The location was Top Secret, and only the people who worked there knew of its existence. So overwhelmed by it, I remember little of my time there.

I worked in Operations, within a large dimly lit room, housing row upon row of computer consoles. Aptly nicknamed the “Blue Room”, because of the bluish glow of light emanating from the controls, everything was automated, managed by the many computers in the room.

Until then, all the fighter aircraft controlling I had been involved in was “Manual Control”. As a manual controller, I had reached the top level of “Controller Expert”. This computerization was all new to me, and I had to start at the bottom and work up. With my years of experience in controlling, it didn’t take too long to adapt. I was in the “Expert ” category again very quickly.

There were two large computer rooms (computer “A” and computer “B”) on the third floor of this building. Each one as large as a tennis court, loaded with computer hardware. While one was operational, the other was on a regular maintenance schedule, and vice versa.

The posting in North Bay allowed us to renew our friendship with Rose and Paul Ellis. They lived only a block away, so we socialized frequently. Also stationed in North Bay were Alec & Louise Short from Parent. From Yellowjack, Don & Norma Symington, Don & Phyllis Hawke, Bill and Marian Vine, Jack & Ella Spiller, Ross and Noreen Vance. It was like a having a family reunion, because in the military friends become family. It was the best part of the post. Friendships were the best part of any post, giving some stability to an otherwise chaotic life.

In the spring of 1967 Bert and Pauline Adair (Danny’s parents), along with daughter Dawn, traveled by train to Toronto. North Bay being en-route, they interrupted their journey to pay us a visit. Deed made plans for a turkey dinner and invited our friends from the base for cocktails in the afternoon. I concocted a punch, combining two bottles of (homemade potato) Champagne, with one bottle of white wine, 20 ounces of peach brandy, and one small bottle of club soda. It tasted great, but kicked like a mule. I ran short of booze, so I went to the Officers Mess and bought a bottle of rye whisky. By the time our Air Force guests had left, Deed felt no pain. She literally crawled up the stairs to the kitchen to prepare dinner. It was a couple of hours later than when we had originally planned to eat. She pulled a turkey out of the oven that was more than well done, to the point that we had trouble finding the stuffing.

Danny’s parents and sister were to leave for Toronto on the 10:40 train in the morning, but not up to it (my punch, so my bad), but thankfully were well enough to catch the noon train.

Owning a trailer proved to be beneficial for our plans to visit Expo ’67 in Montreal. I had made arrangements with a trailer court in Montreal to park the unit there for a few months. Then advertised it’s availability for rent at Expo, in the North Bay newspaper. The family, accompanied by Deed’s Mom went to Montreal in early May, to set the trailer up. We visited Expo for a week. And the unit was rented for the rest of the summer, until early October. The weekly rental fee at the park was \$30. The fee we charged for the trailer was \$90, giving us a \$60 weekly profit. The only damage over the summer was a cracked window. It was a good deal everyone, as hotel room prices in Montreal skyrocketed during the Expo World’s Fair.

We had a great time at Expo. And as Deed’s Mom was in a wheelchair, we enjoyed special treatment for entry into most pavilions. Our only regret was not having Gail with us.

In early October, we returned to Montreal to retrieve the trailer, and had another week at Expo, this time without Deed's mother, who had returned to Winnipeg. While in Montreal (both times) we visited Vic and Cecile Stubbings as well as my cousin Eugene Chenier. On one occasion (not sure which) my uncle Jos Chenier passed away, so we attended his funeral.

1967 was an exceptionally busy year for us. Deed went to Winnipeg in mid June to attend my niece Margie's wedding to Luc Malo and stayed the whole summer. Kept busy by sewing our daughter's trousseau, as Gail and Dan were to be married on August 26th.

In July, my cousin Bobby and her mother, my aunt Bernadette, stopped in North Bay for a visit, on their way to Fort William. I grilled a couple of chickens on the BBQ, and we had a nice leisurely lunch, with white wine and a lemon cream pie for desert. I wanted them to stay the night, but they were anxious to get to Fort William, regrettably declining my invite.

Glen was very interested in electronics, getting his amateur (HAM) radio license when he had just turned 14. He got a job in a store that sold TV's, and electronic organs. Glen played the organ beautifully. And was often asked by the owner to play for customers, who were interested in making a purchase, receiving a bonus if the customer bought one.

Editor's Note: *In the early 1960's, I spent a lot of Saturdays with Glen. A few years older, he was my mentor, and the smartest person I've ever known. Even when we spoke to each other as adults, discussing electronics and technology, maybe 10% of what he said registered. His influence was instrumental, relating to my understanding of modern tech.*

Televisions, still in the early stages of development, were powered for the most part by vacuum tubes. Only those above a certain age will remember the Vacuum Tube Testers⁴⁷ that sat in virtually every drug store in every city. I would bike to Glen's on Saturday mornings, and we would make our way to the strip mall a few blocks away. I would help Glen inspect the rejected tubes in the barrel beside the tester. Glen had a knack for identifying tubes that were likely still usable, just by looking at them. Retesting many, with some indeed still good, we would bag them and take them back to his house. He built his first ham radio from those parts, and many other things with what we harvested.

Amazingly, he would make the circuit boards he needed for a project, from scratch. First designing them, then hand drilling the holes on the plastic plate, then form the little 'trails of solder' that joined the parts, diodes, condensers, tubes etc. so that what he was building would work. The neatest thing was his homemade Van de Graaf Generator⁴⁸ that he kept in the basement. Lights off, we would spend hours in the dark, watching the artificial lightning dance.

He and I would talk on the phone from time to time, but never discussed the Saturdays we shared as kids. Now in my mid 60's, I miss those days of innocent youth, and I miss Glen. And would sacrifice a limb, for one last opportunity to reminisce with him, and revisit our youth.

Glen, Mark and I stayed in North Bay until mid August. Then drove to Winnipeg via Duluth Minnesota. Our son in law Danny newly married to Gail, garnered insight into long-term

⁴⁷ **Vacuum Tube Testers** - A tube tester is an electronic instrument designed to test certain characteristics of vacuum tubes (thermionic valves). Tube testers evolved along with the vacuum tube to satisfy the demands of the time, and their evolution ended with the tube era. The first tube testers were simple units designed for specific tubes to be used in the battlefields of World War I by radio operators, so they could easily test the tubes of their communication equipment.

⁴⁸ **Van de Graaff Generator** - an electrostatic generator that uses a moving belt to accumulate electric charge on a hollow metal globe on the top of an insulated column creating very high electric potentials. It produces very high voltage direct current (DC) electricity at low current levels.

marriage one day during that trip home. I believe it was a Friday afternoon, with him visiting our house. Told to me by Deed, it was around 4:45 p.m. when she said to Danny, "Ed left North Bay early this morning and he should be getting into Duluth anytime now. So I expect him to call me in about 15 minutes." I stopped to visit friends in Duluth who had invited us to spend the night on our way through, and we got there at about 5:30 p.m. After bringing in our suitcases and getting settled, I called at precisely 6 o'clock, (5:00 Winnipeg time). Immediately after she hung up the phone, a wide-eyed Dan said to her, looking a little frightened: "I'm not sure that I would want anyone to know me that well!"

Quite a few of our relatives from Winnipeg who visited Montreal during the summer of Expo1967 used our home in North Bay as a stopover point on the way east. As the house would be vacant while we were in Winnipeg for Gail's wedding, and for a time afterward, it seemed only fitting to offer it as a respite to those planning to attend Expo. My brother Tony and wife Isabelle as well as my nephew Denis and wife Michelle were two couples that I recall.

In the spring of '68, I went to Tyndall Air Force Base near Panama City, Florida for a course in a new version of computer aircraft control, called BUIC (Back Up Intercept Control). As I only had a few years to go before retirement, and was hoping to stay in North Bay until then, I was none too pleased with that assignment. I finished the course, and returned home. Shortly after, we left North Bay heading east for a much-needed vacation, planning a route through Niagara Falls and into the US to our destination, St. Margarets, New Brunswick.

On our way out of town, we passed the car dealership "Mac Lang" located on the outskirts of North Bay. Deed made the comment: "Why don't we stop here and buy a new car" Of course I said, "No, the DeSoto will be fine." Famous last words! We planned to make our way to St. Margarets, via Niagara Falls and then through the States to the east coast. So, we had informed Vic and Cecile Stubbings that we would be passing through Toronto, and would visit for a day or two. When we got to Barrie, the car was acting up. I stopped at a garage and the owner allowed us to leave the trailer there for a few days until I could pick it up. On our way to Toronto, the car threw a rod. Of course this would have to happen on Hwy 400, on Sunday afternoon, with traffic bumper to bumper. Though extremely dangerous to do so, we pushed the car for a few miles to a service area pull off on the side of the highway.

I called Vic In Toronto and asked him to pick us up. Cecile answered the phone and explained that Vic was out of town, so she came on her own. We loaded our stuff in Cecile's van and put the boat on top. We ended up selling the DeSoto for \$10.00, with a full tank of gas and really good tires. What else could we do? I should have listened to Deed and bought a new car at Mac Lang's. I now realize that I should have taken her advice for more often than I had, over these many decades that we have been together! It is perhaps my biggest failing! It is perhaps every husband's biggest failing. Not seriously heeding the words of 'The Wife'!

The next day I went to a Chrysler dealer and bought a 1968 Newport. I had it fitted with a trailer hitch and went back to Barry to pick up the trailer. Back in Toronto just long enough to load the new car, we hit the road for New Brunswick. Having to deal with the breakdown and buying a new car, we did not have enough time for the run south through the 'Falls', opting to stay in Canada for the remainder of the trip.

Chapter 32

My Last Transfer - The Final Frontier

Having arrived in St. Margarets, there was again no housing available, (a constant theme in a military career it would seem) so we stayed in the trailer until we found something. Because Glen couldn't get the grade 12 subjects he needed, he only stayed with us for a few weeks, until just prior to the start of the school year. Then we sent him back to Winnipeg, where he stayed with his newly wed sister, to attend Murdoch McKay Collegiate in Transcona.

Still in the trailer that October, with fall turning to winter, and frigid temperatures setting in, we rented the Mayor of Chatham's summer home on the Miramichi River. Now, one would think that this was posh living, but in fact we were roughing it. The house was an old story and a half, built in the early 1900's. The back shed was rife with flies. The basement was home to river rats looking for warm winter accommodations. Everywhere Deed went she took Pixie, our dog (a Terrier/Chihuahua cross), a dedicated vermin hunter who loved to chase mice and rats.

The rent was only \$80.00 a month, but the cost of heating the place was nearly twice that amount. Fortunately, a house became available on the base after only a few weeks. It was only a two-bedroom, but under the circumstances we couldn't afford to be fussy.

The housing shortage not only affected the officers, but enlisted personnel as well. We felt sorry for the airman and his wife who moved into the Mayor's house after we moved out. Not only because of the wildlife situation in the basement, but also because of the cost to heat the house. I know it was hard on their budget. I was paid much more and it was hard on us.

Operationally, the work was very similar to North Bay, but for a slight difference in the equipment. Every so often came the chance to control fighters manually. Manual control versus computer control was far more challenging, and something I greatly enjoyed doing.

I recall a time when I was handling two CF100's (manually) carrying out an exercise, using one as a target and the other as an interceptor. Another controller (Dutch Holland) took on another CF100 but didn't have a target aircraft. He asked if he could use my target aircraft. In agreement, I told him to follow my interceptor and proceeded with the exercise. The end result was that Dutch and I accomplished more intercepts for the fighters manually as a team, than if we had used the computer. The aircrews were thrilled with the number of intercepts they had accomplished. And if they were happy, we were happy. I recall Dutch making the comment after the exercise, "I didn't know what I was doing so I just followed Ed's fighter and everything went tickety boo." I had a lot more manual control experience than Dutch.

While in New Brunswick, we took advantage of our location and took the trailer on a trip into Nova Scotia. We visited the Alexander Graham Bell Museum in Baddeck and also drove along the Cabot Trail, which they say is beautiful. Unfortunately it was so foggy that all we saw of it was the license plate of the car ahead of us. And it did not clear up the whole time we were on the trail. A second trip was not possible as my leave was over, and I had to report back to base,.

Notwithstanding, seeing the Cabot Trail, visiting the museum made the trip worthwhile. If ever you have the chance to visit the Bell Museum, I would highly recommend that you do.

And being in the Maritimes, one had to have fish and lobster for dinner more often than one would normally. I recall having lobster at our T.G.I.F. functions and Mess Dinners. If my memory serves me, the price at the dock from the fishermen who caught them was 0.75lb. Mark was 8 years young when we were in St. Margarets and I recall once when we were at the dock watching the fishermen return from fishing, Mark hollering, "Did you catch anything?"

We get a lot of snow in Manitoba. But it is dry snow and not too heavy to shovel. The snow in the Maritimes is a wet snow, and very heavy. And there is always lots of it. I had to go on a 10-week Bomarc Missile Control Course in Biloxi Mississippi, leaving Deed alone to shovel all that heavy snow. We shared a driveway with a family that had four boys who would shovel their half of the driveway. One would think they would help Deed out with our half. No way! Finally Deed called the Engineer Section and told them, "My husband's on T.D. in Biloxi. And I don't have the strength to shovel myself out to go off base to Chatham or Fredericton for errands and grocery shopping. So I need someone to clean my driveway." From then on the Engineers cleared the driveway when it was necessary to do so.

When I got back from Biloxi, the shoveled path outside the front door was over my head, well over six feet high. Like I said about maritime snow. There's always lots of it!

We made some life long friends in St. Margarets. Such as the CO, Colonel John Collins and his wife Mirandy, and the COpsO, Major Gord Begley and his wife Edie. We have stayed friends with all of them over these many years.

Spending Christmas in Winnipeg that year, my brother in law Art Antoine (my dad) and I decided to partner up and buy a small grocery store. He would manage the store. And after getting my release from the Air Force, I would take a meat-cutting course at Red River College and operate the meat section.

My CO John Collins was disappointed that I wanted to retire, promising me a 'stateside' transfer if I would consider deferring my retirement. I told him it was too late. I hadn't been too pleased with the treatment I received from the Air Force, since coming back from overseas (housing and transfer wise). I would likely have been promoted to Major, had I stayed. But didn't feel that neglecting my family just to please the Air Force was in my best interest.

While in St. Margarets, I went to the University of Chatham and took a bookkeeping course, which I felt would be beneficial in my projected civilian life.

Prior to leaving St. Margarets, I sold our trailer for \$1,200.00. I could have gotten more, but we only paid \$700.00 for it, so we were more than satisfied with the sale price.

Captain Jock Fenwick was retiring from the service at the same time as I was, so the staff had a mess dinner in our honor. As a parting gift they gave me a beautiful large silver Hostess Tray with the following inscription:

Capt. E.J.Chenier

On Retirement Officer's Mess St. Margarets

Jul 1942 - Jan 1970

Chapter 33

Civilian Life

We returned to Winnipeg and started house hunting in the Transcona area, where we had lived when I was stationed in Armstrong and Beausejour.

We found a nice three-bedroom bungalow at 33 Blue Heron Crescent about a block away from Deed's sister Edna and husband Bernie.

Since Deed's Dad's passing in 1961, her Mom had been living on her own in St. Vital. She'd had rheumatoid arthritis for years and walked with a cane. When we moved to 33 Blue Heron Crescent we invited her to come live with us.

Once settled in our new home, I took a meat-cutting course at Red River College, and then went to work with Art in the store. Competition from the major chains was too great for a small corner store, so in the spring of 1971, I moved on to look for something else.

In 1971, our children surprised us with a 25th Wedding Anniversary party, with a few Air Force friends in attendance. Our former next-door neighbour from Cold Lake, Bert Meindl, invited me to go into real estate with him at Hearth & Home Realty. His office was way out in St. James, the extreme opposite end of Winnipeg from Transcona. I felt it was too far from our home, but he did put the real estate bug in my ear. Eventually I joined a small independent company closer to where we lived, Ross Realty.

It is very difficult to get into the real estate business, if one doesn't have a bit of money in the bank to live on until their first sale. Working on commission, you don't see a paycheck until you sell a house and then not until all the legalities are completed.

I started with Ross Realty in October 1971, selling my first house on Christmas Eve (even though my co-workers made the comment: "Nobody sells houses during the holidays"). Of course being new at the game, I didn't know that. Ha! Ha! I didn't get my commission cheque until early March. But by that time I had made a few more sales and the money started coming in regularly soon after.

It was quite difficult for Deed at times, with her mother living with us. Mark was ten years old and it was a constant battle between him and his grandmother as to what to watch on T.V. Being 10, he wanted to watch kids programs. Being a senior, she wanted to watch her soap operas. Often times, Deed went to the basement for a good cry to relieve the tension. That was when we decided that we would never live with our kids when we got older. It would not be fair to them, nor to us, especially when you're still raising young ones.

I loved the real estate business and did very well at it. Only in my second year, I ranked in the top twenty on the Multiple Listing Service List in Winnipeg, with total sales (40 - 50 units) in excess of \$1,000,000.00.

House prices at that time were in the \$10,000 to \$25,000 range. Today an agent could make just a few sales to reach the million-dollar mark. That's when my accountant suggested that Deed should get into it to split our income. We worked as a team and didn't compete with each other. Some couples compete and first thing you know they're splitting up. Our close relationship wouldn't allow that to happen. We were very happy to complement each other.

We didn't take many weekends off. That is when you're most busy showing homes and having Open Houses. Every so often on a Sunday, Deed and I went to Winnipeg's Assiniboine Park, treating ourselves to the Big Band music of Ron Paley and his Orchestra. He played our kind of music. I carried a pager just in case I was needed at a property that I represented.

Both Deed and I had been working long hours. Deed's nerves were more than a little frazzled trying to keep the peace between her mother and Mark. We felt trapped in our life and knew that we needed a holiday. We couldn't leave Mark alone with Deed's Mom because of her poor health and arthritis. Our niece, Debra volunteered to come to Winnipeg from Ottawa and stay with them to look after things, while we drove from Winnipeg to Ottawa to visit Edna and Bernie for a few weeks. Debra arrived, and Deed and I left by car early the next morning. We had traveled just a few miles east along the Trans Canada Hwy when the engine of the car threw a rod. Those few miles were as far as we got on that trip. Naturally Deed was extremely disappointed with the trip cut short, and being forced to return home to our normal routine.

Deed's Mom passed away the day before Christmas 1974. Needless to say, Deed was devastated. Edna and Bernie came in from Ottawa in support, which was greatly appreciated. In secret, I arranged a flight to Ottawa on Air Canada for us, and we went back with Edna and Bernie, spending a few weeks with them. I thought that this would be comforting for Deed.

With Deed's Mom's passing, and Mark now in his teens, we decided that our life in real estate shouldn't be all work and no play, and that it was time we did some traveling.

In 1975, I think it was, we took some time off to attend a Real Estate Convention in Hawaii. It was a rare chance to mix business with pleasure, and was tax deductible to boot. We stayed at the Sheraton Waikiki. We visited the four islands, and while in Maui met Brother Laurin, my Grade 10 teacher, who had correctly predicted my future involvement in WW2.

A couple months before that convention, Addie (my old crewmate now a doctor) and Marge Bourgeois and Deed and I attended Brother Laurin's retirement party at the Holiday Inn. Addie was asked to make a short speech and propose a toast to Brother Laurin. In his reply to the toast, Brother Laurin summarized his career as a Brother and as a teacher. And related an incident that happened when he was a novitiate, at sixteen years of age.

This is what he said, and I quote.

"Every Sunday morning, the novitiates, would attend the nine o'clock mass at the St. Jean Baptiste Cathedral and sit in the balcony nearest the altar. On the opposite side of the church in the balcony were the young lady novitiates. I was sitting in the front row and I had my eye on a young girl who was also sitting in the front row across from me. I put my index finger on the railing in front of me, and she put her index finger on the railing in front of her. Wow I thought, she's got her eye on me, so I put my second finger across the railing, and she put her second finger across the railing. Well, I've gone this far; I may as well put my third finger across the railing. Just then Brother Berger grabbed me by my neck collar, pulled me back and said: "Sit here and behave." So to this day my love life never got passed my second finger."

I am not quite sure what the point of the story was, but it was well received regardless.

After the dinner, I mentioned to Brother Laurin that we were going to a real estate convention in Waikiki and that we would be visiting the four islands. He invited us to contact him while in Maui, where the Brothers had a school and retirement community.

We had just checked into our accommodation in Maui, when we got a call from Brother Laurin inviting us to dinner at a nearby restaurant. He and another brother were going to pick us up. When they arrived, they mentioned that they stopped at the restaurant to make a reservation, but the doors were locked and the place was closed up. So I made a reservation at our hotel restaurant. The next day, Brother Laurin took us for a drive around the island and took us for lunch. All in all it was a nice relaxing holiday.

In the summer of 1975 we took a trip to Florida with Edna and Bernie, spending a month in Largo, close to St. Petersburg. I recall going to see Roger Whittaker at the Concert Hall in Tampa. Our accommodations in Largo were somewhat less than expected, and frankly the whole experience throughout the entire trip was a little on the weird side.

What happened was that we saw an ad in the paper advertising this place in Largo, and we arranged to rent it. The owner, who lived in Winnipeg, had his mother living in this house in Largo. Deed and I had a small apartment in the house. Edna and Bernie lived in a converted garage. The rent was reasonable, but the owner expected us to look after his mother during our stay. She would attend church with us, but didn't like Edna and Bernie because our time with them took our attention away from her. Am I crazy? Or is that more than a little weird.

For me, retired from the military and a pilot, the most awesome event was a trip to Cape Kennedy to see the lift off of the last Apollo rocket. It was the one that docked with the Russian Soyuz capsule, and the first International Space Mission⁴⁹.

We packed a lunch of tuna sandwiches, some drinks for the girls and beer for Bernie and I. The count down got as far as 14 seconds to lift off, when the flight was aborted. So we went to visit Cape Kennedy before returning to Largo. A display at Cape Kennedy had an astronaut dummy sitting in a moon buggy. I had Deed sit beside him so that I could take her picture. Suddenly she jumped away when this supposed astronaut dummy put his gloved hand on her knee. None of us realized that it was a live person dressed as an astronaut. Once our hearts stop racing we had a good laugh, and I took the picture as the 'dummy' sat still.

The aborted launch was postponed until the following week. So we returned to watch the lift off. What an exciting sight. It was well worth the second trip.

Glen loved the organist Lenny Dee, as did we. And it so happened that Lenny Dee was performing at a nightclub not too far away from Largo. We saw him a few times and loved his performances. The only thing that would have made it better was if Glen had been with us.

My brother Leo and his wife Florence did a lot of traveling when they retired. Deed and I had done a lot of traveling while we were in the Air Force. But now that we were working in civilian life, we were concentrating on building a nest egg for our own future retirement.

However, one day at a family luncheon with my brother Bill at the Tache Hospice where he was living, Florence mentioned to Deed that she and Leo were going on a bus tour to Tampa Florida. And would then take a 7-day Caribbean cruise.

⁴⁹ **Apollo-Soyuz** was the first international space mission, carried out jointly by the United States and the Soviet Union in July 1975. Millions of people around the world watched on television as a United States Apollo module docked with a Soviet Union Soyuz capsule. The project, and its memorable handshake in space, was a symbol of détente between the two superpowers. It is generally considered to mark the end of the Space Race, which had begun in 1957 with the launch of Sputnik 1. The mission was officially known as the Apollo-Soyuz Test Project (ASTP) and commonly referred to in the Soviet Union as Soyuz-Apollo. The Soviets officially designated the mission as Soyuz 19. In contrast, the American vehicle was unnumbered, as it was left over from the canceled Apollo missions and was the last Apollo module to fly.

Florence asked Deed if we would like to join with them. It took Deed mere seconds to say yes. But after sitting down and discussing it, we decided rather than take the bus tour, we would fly to Tampa, take the cruise, then rent a car and spend a month in a condo at Fort Myers Beach in south Florida. We figured a holiday would be good for us and we could concentrate on selling houses when we got back.

The cruise ship was the Vera Cruz, one of the smaller cruise ships. We called it the "Poor Man's Cruise" There were less than 800 passengers, but everyone was very friendly.

I recall that it was very cold by Tampa standards (around 45°F) the morning that we boarded the ship. The stevedores working the docks were wearing parkas, mitts and earmuffs. The crew that should have been at the bottom of the gangplank to greet us as we boarded were already on the ship due to the cold temperatures.

As luck would have it, Deed tripped on the lip of the gangplank and fell hard to the ground exclaiming, "I think I broke my big toe!" The crew hurried down the gangplank to help her up, even though I had already done so. One crewman on each side, they walked her up the gangplank. As a doctor prescribing pain medicine would, a lounge Steward carrying a tray of drinks asked Deed, as her feet met the ship, "Harvey Wallbanger lady? Eighty five cents!"

One of the crew took us to see the ship's doctor, who, upon examining Deed's foot confirmed that she had broken a big toe. He explained that there wasn't much he could do. And informed her that she should elevate her leg and rest her foot. Deed asked, "Do you mean to say that I can't dance?" The doctor reiterated that definitely she shouldn't dance. Undaunted she replied, "If you think I paid all this money to take this cruise, and I can't dance, you've got another thing coming." So we did dance; comically, with a broken toe sticking out of her shoe.

We got to know the doctor very well during the voyage. As a group of us were having a drink together in the lounge, and the doctor walked by. I greeted him with an invite to have a drink with us, and introduced him to the other passengers at the table. He sat next to one of the ladies who asked, "Are you the ship's doctor?" Confirming that he was, she continued, "Oh doctor I've had such a bad case of diarrhea. What would you suggest I take for it?" In reply, he called a nearby waiter and ordered a bottle of the ship's best champagne, instructing the waiter to charge it to the lady's cabin. She exclaimed, "Doctor, do you mean that the champagne will cure my diarrhea?" The doctor answered, "No madam, the champagne is for me, the cork is for you!" Everyone, including the lady with the 'tummy' issue in question, had a hearty laugh.

I remember the cabins being so small that there was no room to store empty suitcases. So they were stored in the hold. It was also a challenge to take a shower in the exceedingly tiny shower stall. We all wondered how one excessively heavy gentleman managed the task. Knowing what we knew from our experience, we actually felt sorry for him.

To date, Deed and I have been on a half dozen or more cruises, on much larger ships. The Vera Cruise, however, was the one on which we had the most fun. Our group of friends won six bottles of Champagne on that voyage. We participated in all the scheduled events. In one instance, our team won an organized "Scavenger Hunt", hands down. Among the several items listed for the participants to find were:

1. Two women's bras (without the women in them)! Deed and Florence were both wearing loose fitting blouses, so they whipped off their bras in seconds.

2. They also asked for two pair of men's trousers (without men in them). Vic and Leo quickly went behind drapes hanging on a wall, and took off their trousers. And the girls turned them in. Adding to the merriment, as Vic was taking his pants off, his bum was sticking out the break in the curtains, showing his jockey shorts, and his legs struggling out of his trousers. The entire lounge full of people thought this was hilarious, and the room roared with laughter!

One afternoon as we sat by the pool, a surprise Wet-T-Shirt contest was announced. Deed quickly borrowed Leo's shirt and jumped in first, winning another bottle of Champagne.

Immediately after, they announced a beer-drinking contest. Vic, Leo and I, and another fellow who we met that day made up a foursome. There were four teams of four people each. The other teams were all younger men and did not have the experience we did. Having trained for such an event all our lives, our team won, each of us receiving a bottle of champagne for the effort. Then, not realizing how badly they were outmatched, a group of young fellows challenged us, and we beat them as well.

One night, the entertainment was to be provided by the passengers. We decided to dress Leo as Miss Vera Cruise and myself as the Flying Nun. We were in Leo and Florence's stateroom with Leo putting on a navy blue pleated skirt and ivory satin top with a long pearl necklace and some large bangle earrings. His hair was curled in bangs on his forehead, and he was plastered with lipstick and rouge. He looked beautiful. While Florence was helping him get his make up on, Deed was sitting on the bed laughing so hard that she farted. Florence, pointing to the bathroom, said to Deed without missing a beat, "The toilet is over there!"

I wore a floor length Hawaiian Muu Muu that Deed bought when we were at the real estate convention in Honolulu, and some kind of a headgear to try and make me look like the "Flying Nun." I didn't win a prize, but I believe Leo did.

Everyone had a ball and the laughter didn't stop throughout the evening. Later on that night, the M.C. said to us, "If it wasn't for you Canadians, this ship would be dead."

While living at 33 Blue Heron Crescent, we were blessed with wonderful neighbors. On our left were Siggy and Trudy Klatt with three very well behaved children, a daughter Sylvia and two boys, Michael and Andrew. Sylvia and Andrew are now married.

On our right, Bill and Carol Shinn, also a lovely couple, that had a son and daughter named Chris and Brenda.

You couldn't ask for better neighbors. We still get together with Siggy and Trudy a couple times a year. We don't see Carol and Bill that often but we did attend Bill's birthday a few years back.

Chapter 34

Commonwealth Aircrew Reunion

When I retired from the Air Force in 1970, I had a few months leave and was in Winnipeg when the Wartime Pilots and Observers Association held their Commonwealth Aircrew Reunion, commemorating Manitoba's 100th anniversary. Unfortunately, I hadn't heard about it, and to my sorrow, did not attend.

Because it was such a success, I made sure I attended the next reunion in 1976.

It was a four-day event held at the Winnipeg Convention Center. For me it was like old home week. Being in the peacetime Air Force for so many years, I had met a lot of wartime veterans like myself who had served in peacetime and were now retired.

At one of the "Greet Your Wartime Buddies" sessions, eighteen of us gathered in a group, telling old war stories (some exaggerated, some true). I knew most of the vets in that bunch, some of which I had served with overseas in WW2 and the peacetime that followed.

Included was Air Vice Marshall Gord Ockenden (retired) former Commanding Officer at 61 AC&W Squadron in Metz France. You may recall, that Gord was the Wing Commander I noted to be the fellow who had W/C painted on his ass by the Interrogating Intelligence people, after he was captured in the Escape and Evasion Exercises back in 1956.

Many of the dignitaries at this reunion were wartime heroes from different countries.

In no particular order the VIP guests were as follows: Lt/General Bill Carr (R.C.A.F.), Group Captain Sir Douglas Bader (the legless air ace) R.A.F., General. R.J. Dixon (U.S.A.F.), Lt. General. J.H. Doolittle (U.S.A.F.), A/C Sir J.E. Fauquier (R.C.A.F.), Colonel F.S. Grabeski (U.S.A.F.), Lt. General Adolph Gallant (German Air Force), AVM Johnnie Johnsom (R.A.F.), AVM Sir Dennis Smallwood (R.A.F.), and G/C Tiny White (R.N.Z./A.F.)

Note: *Lt. General Adolph Gallant was the officer, who when asked by German General Hermann Goering, what he could do to help defeat the British, famously declared, "Give me a squadron of Spitfires!" He had been invited to attend the reunion and had graciously accepted.*

While getting dressed for the formal Dinner and Dance celebration on the Saturday evening, I got a call from someone, who asked as I put the phone to my ear, "Is this Ed Chenier who was in Calgary wireless school back in 1943?" I replied in the affirmative, and he said in reply, "You probably won't remember me, but my name is Jack Smallbone." To which I exclaimed, "Oh, Tubby". Right away he stated, "You remember me."

Jack Smallbone had flown in from Australia to attend the reunion. We arranged to meet at the function later on in the evening. We exchanged Christmas cards for years after.

The dinner/dance was wonderful. The Air Command Band played throughout the night, and we did a lot of dancing. I would have loved to wear my formal Mess Kit, but it was too tight.

Note: *When I retired from military service in 1970, I donated my uniforms and mess kit to the local Air Museum. They were kind enough to lend it to me for this occasion. But I think it shrunk during the dry-cleaning process. Deed joked that I had gotten a little chubby!*

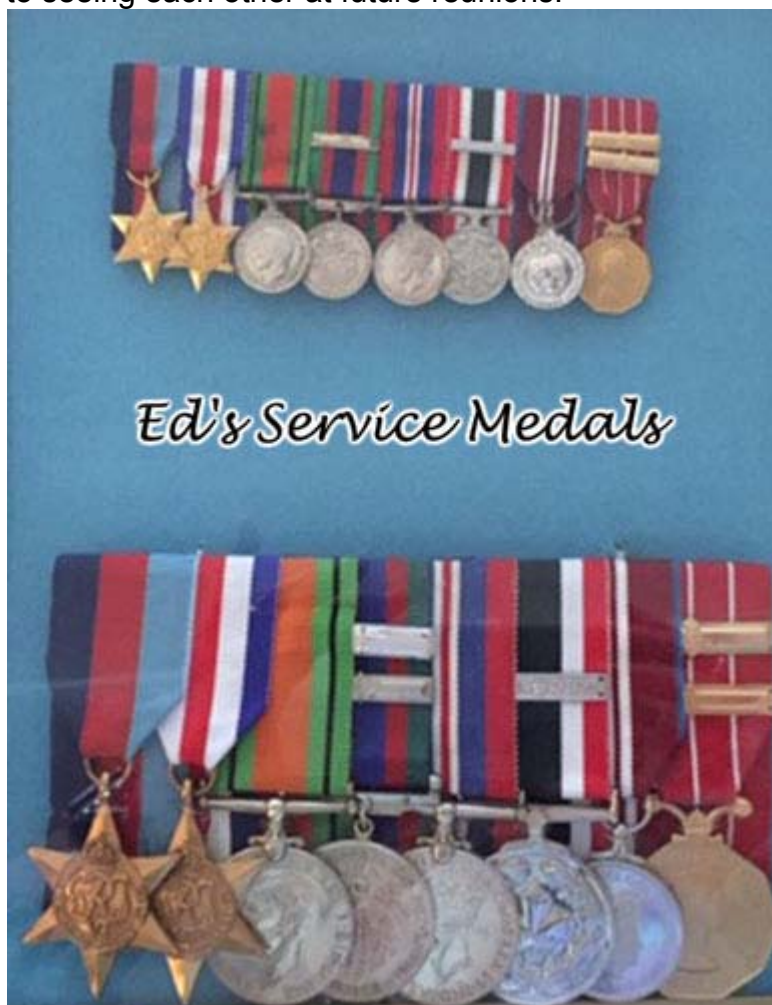
Leaving the convention center after the dance, an elderly gentleman (walking with the support of two canes) and his wife were getting on the escalator ahead of us. We overheard the gentleman say to his wife in a pronounced British accent, "I guess we'll have to hail a taxi." Deed and I took the opportunity to introduce ourselves. And offered them a ride to their hotel. Their names were Philip and Maisie Townsend, and they hailed from England.

Philip Townsend was born on the 12th of May 1899 in Leeds, England. He was a pilot, with experience in both World Wars. He had flown in France in 1918 and in WW2 served in England and France, and in Canada as CGI (Chief Ground Instructor) in North Battleford Sask.

Philip was walking with two canes, as shortly before coming to Canada for the reunion, he had a double hip replacement, and was in the recuperation stage.

We dropped them at the Winnipeg Inn (now the Fairmont) and arranged to pick them up the next morning to go on parade.

Arriving at our destination, Philip and I joined the other ex-airmen who were assembled in the parking lot behind the Convention Center to form a parade. We marched via Hargrave Street to Portage Avenue, and to the Cenotaph on Memorial Street, for the formal portion of the ceremonies. We then marched back to the Convention Center for the final farewell. Maisie and Deed watched the parade from the convention center. The four of us became good friends and looked forward to seeing each other at future reunions.



Chapter 35

Real Estate and Retirement

Between holidays, we did carry on some work in real estate. In the late 70's or early 80's Ross Realty had been sold. Unfortunately an economic recession was taking place, and everything was going downhill. Out of loyalty we did stay on a while, but eventually had to make a move. So we went to work with Harry and Bert Deleuw at Delbro Real Estate.

In 1984, we attended another Commonwealth Aircrew Reunion and stayed at the Best Western Beachcomber Hotel on Graham Avenue, directly across from the Convention Center. This time when we saw Philip and Maisie Townsend, he was fully recovered from his surgery. And did a little dance to show us that his hips had healed beautifully. He was 85 years young then, and in very good shape.

In 1985, we decided that real estate was interfering with our social life. So we decided to call it quits and concentrate on living life to the fullest. That's when I facetiously said that Deed and I took a course in 'How To Enjoy Life.' We passed with honors, and now, we're working towards our Masters and eventual Ph.D.

Since 1953, when stationed at RCAF Station Parent, in Quebec, feeling overstressed in my position as Operations Officer, I stopped to reflect that I could only do so much. And worrying about the outcome didn't help any. So that's when I adopted the attitude, "Do the best you can. Give it your best effort. And let nature take its course." Believe it or not, it worked!

In 1988, we attended an Ex-Air Gunners Reunion in Thunder Bay. My sister Terry who was visiting from France came with us, and visited with our cousins Eugene and Denise while Deed and I enjoyed the camaraderie of wartime friends at the reunion. We met Olgar and Anice Magnussen at that reunion, and in later years visited them at their home in Pacific Palisades California.

We did some traveling with my brother Leo and his wife Florence on many occasions. As well as with Deed's sister Edna and husband Bernie.

We took a 5-week car trip with Leo and Florence to Mesa, Palm Springs, (spending a few days with our friends Marge and Addie Bourgeois), Escondido (Laurence Welk country) San Diego, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Paso Robles (where we dropped in to see an old friend Gus Johnston and his wife Dyane) and then headed back home. We were on the road for more than a month, and were still friends when we returned home. If you, who are reading this tale, have been married for any length of time, and in addition have raised a family, you must certainly agree, that's an accomplishment!

With Edna and Bernie, we took a month long trip to Costa Rica. Visiting a Basilica where the legend is that the church burned down. Was rebuilt in the same location. Then burned down again. The legend continues, stating that the Virgin Mary appeared to some locals on a huge stone (the size of a large SUV) and wanted the church to be built where she stood. So that is where they rebuilt the church, and many miracles have happened there. The stone upon which The Virgin Mary is said to have appeared is in the basement of the church. Along the path to the stairway to the basement are mementos to the Virgin. Crutches, pictures of people healed, walkers etc. We went downstairs and touched the stone. And there seems to be an aura about you that reflects the presence of the Virgin Mary. It was awesome.

Chapter 36

Condo Living and Traveling the World

We had been living at 33 Blue Heron Crescent since 1969 when I retired from the Air Force. We were very happy there, having the best neighbors one could wish for. However, upon returning from a holiday in Florida, neighbors Bill and Carol Shinn had sold their house and were moving to the country. Making matters worse, neighbors Trudy and Siggy Klatt had put a For Sale sign up on their house. So we figured it was time for us to make a move as well.

We looked at variety of condo complexes. But after seeing deer running along the banks of the Seine River from a window of an apartment on St. Anne's Road on Old St. Vital, we figured this is the one for us. 1200 square feet, with a large master bedroom, a 2-piece ensuite, a walk-in closet, a large living room, a large dining room, and a kitchen with lots of cabinets, underground parking with a car wash, and a doublewide storage area. The complex also featured a large visitor parking lot. We moved into on the 25 August 1992.

Prior to that move, we attended the last Commonwealth Aircrew Reunion to be held in Winnipeg, again at the Convention Center in June 1992. There were attendees from all over the World.

On one Thursday morning when I had dropped Deed off and went to park the car, a reporter from a French CBC TV affiliate saw Deed's name tag, and asked if her husband spoke French. She answered in the affirmative. He requested to stay with her as he wished to interview a French-speaking veteran. So when I came back to the hall he interviewed me.

The interview set up perfectly; with me entering the hall as I was greeted by a large group of air force friends that I had worked with in France. The cameraman was thrilled to get that footage. After the interview, the CBC crew accompanied me to the Imperial Legion down the street, where the Ex-Air Gunners Association was displaying a rear gun turret and .303 machine guns. There was a picture of my crew in the display. The cameraman took a close up of that photo, and the interview aired on the French TV network later that evening.

The next day my nephew called to say, "Uncle Ed, I didn't know you could speak such good French." To which I answered with a laugh, "They did a lot of editing!"

CBC gave me a VCR Tape of the interview, and my navigator had copies made so that all the members of my crew would have one as a memento of the occasion.

After the parade to the Cenotaph on Sunday morning, we were invited to Eric (DFC)⁵⁰ and Doreen Parker's house for cocktails. Eric had been in the RAF during the war, and invited some friends from England, Australia, and New Zealand, as well as Deed and myself.

These veterans of WW2 looked forward to Monday's Winnipeg Free Press newspaper. Expecting to see coverage of the parade to the Cenotaph, and comments in regard to representatives from so many different countries being in attendance, to this, the 6th and last Commonwealth Aircrew Reunion sponsored by the Wartime Pilots and Observers Association.

⁵⁰ **D.F.C.** - The Distinguished Flying Cross is a military decoration awarded to any officer or enlisted member of the United States Armed Forces who distinguishes himself or herself in support of operations by "heroism or extraordinary achievement while participating in an aerial flight, subsequent to November 11, 1918."

Having received my paper Monday morning I was extremely disappointed that the Winnipeg Free Press had no coverage whatsoever of the parade, and no mention at all of the reunion. The front page showed a picture of a marathon that had taken place the previous day.

I was so upset, that I phoned the paper and cancelled my subscription, telling them why. An editor who was checking into my complaint called back, and I told him how angry I was with the Free Press for the snub and lack of coverage of our event. I took the Winnipeg Tribune for over 5 years, until it ceased operations, and then reluctantly went back to the Free Press.

Editors Note: *A quote from American General William Westmoreland emphatically states: "The military don't start wars. Politicians start wars." There is another saying that states: "Those who can, do! Those who can't, teach! Those who can do neither, run for office!" I would bet dollars to donuts that if politicians had to actually fight and die in the wars they start that the Earth would be a much more peaceful planet!*

The mantra for Remembrance Day is 'Lest We Forget'. It is a shout out to all of us, living, dead and yet to be born, to remember, that so many who came before us fought those wars that politicians started. And died fighting in the wars those politicians started. And will continue to fight and die in the wars that politicians start. And for what good reason?

From 1988 to 1998 we'd been spending our winter months in Mesa at Val Vista Trailer Park. And then for the next seven years we've been going to Desert Hot Springs in the Palm Springs area. In August 2004, we were invited to attend Marge and Addie Bourgeois' 60th wedding anniversary in British Columbia. We decided to make it a summer holiday this time and visit friends along the way.

Our first stop was in Calgary to visit Deed's brother Ted. We had difficulty finding Ted's apartment and got into an unfortunate accident that saw our car totaled. We had very good insurance though, and were authorized for a rental that would allow us to continue our trip.

This vacation was a whirlwind event.

We visited our friends Eric and Norma Steffensen in Cochrane, then on to Kelowna for a few days with Rose Fraser (an ex Air Force friend). Continuing west to Vancouver for Marge and Addie's anniversary celebration at their daughter Roselle's house in North Vancouver. Also invited to the reception were a few ex Air Force friends who had been on course with us in Calgary during the war.

The next day we headed back home via Osoyoos, visiting my nephew Pierre and his wife Doris at their home that sported a gorgeous lakeside view. From Osoyoos, we spent a few days with Lotar and Beate Disser (friends we met in Desert Hot Springs) at their beautiful home that is right on Okanagan Lake.

The return trip was a reverse of the trip west, with second stops to spend a few more days with Rose Fraser on our way through Kelowna, with Eric and Norma in Cochrane and then a final day with Ted and Mary Louise in Calgary. Returning our rental car, we flew back to Winnipeg in the company of my niece Janine who had been visiting her sister in Calgary.

In 2005 we celebrated the 51st anniversary of Deed's 29th birthday. Ask any of our grandchildren and great grandchildren how old Nana is and they'll all say TWENTY-NINE! As a family, we organized a surprise dinner at the Canad Inn/Club Regent Casino for this momentous event.

Out of 95 invited guests I believe 86 showed up. We managed to keep the scope of it a secret from Deed, though she kind of thought that a few of the immediate family would be there. But she did not expect to see what she saw when she walked into the dining room. As we slowly walked around the room greeting everyone, Deed's knees buckled and she almost fainted. I had to support her to keep from falling. She was surprised to see her sister Edna and husband Bernie. She hadn't expected them to be there, as Edna had phoned her to wish her a happy birthday a couple of hours before, and Deed thought she was calling from Ottawa.

A good friend, Dan, a Marriage Counselor, performed a "Blessing of Our Marriage" ceremony and then dinner was served. For the dinner, I had hired a pianist, Len Andre, who played beautifully while we ate.

During the course of the evening, Deed introduced Dana's husband Richie, to Ron and Eunice O'Donovan, who explained to him how they had started the program "Grow a Row". This program encouraged people with gardens to grow an extra row of food for the Food Bank, to help needy families. This program is now popular throughout Canada, and is beginning to take shape in the United States.

During the course of the conversation Deed asked Ron, "How come you haven't been awarded the 'Order of Canada?" To which Ron simply replied, "Nobody has ever nominated me". Shortly thereafter Deed and I nominated Ron for the 'Order of Canada'.

While watching the November 11, 1994 Remembrance Day ceremonies, I mentioned to Deed that I had always wanted to go to Ottawa, to lay a wreath in remembrance of my friends who didn't return from the war. With 2005 being the 60th anniversary of the end of the war, I decided to do just that.

On the 3rd Thursday of every month, some of us 'Wags' and Air Gunners meet at the St. James Legion in Winnipeg. At the next meeting I mentioned my wishes to the members, and all agreed that I should go and represent the Ex Air Gunners Association. We ordered a wreath through the Ottawa Legion. I asked my grandson Jeremy, a Captain in the Air Cadets to escort me. Together we went to Ottawa for that years Remembrance Day service, and did just that. I must admit, that I had tears in my eyes while laying the wreath at the Cenotaph⁵¹ that morning. I paid all our expenses, including the wreath. It was quite costly, but more than worth it. There is no price to be put on the lives of those who died to save and preserve our freedom, and the freedom of the world in that war and in all wars fought before and since.

I had arranged to meet the crew at the Auberge Willow Inn in Hudson Quebec at 11:30am the following day. Jeremy and I were the first to arrive so we decided to have a beer at the bar. Two young ladies were busy getting organized and informed us that the bar opened at 11:30. We started talking to them and explained that we had come from Winnipeg to Ottawa and had laid a wreath at the Nov.11 Remembrance Day ceremonies. I was wearing my Air Force blazer with the RCAF crest. One of the ladies said that she had never paid much attention to Remembrance Day until recently, when her daughter was involved in one. And then said, "What the heck, it's close to 11:30 so we'll open up. What'll you have?" We ordered two pints and were arguing to see who was going to pay. "It's on the House, and thanks." the woman said. A single free beer completed that trip, like a cherry on top of a sundae!

⁵¹ **The National War Memorial** - also known as "The Response," is a cenotaph symbolizing the sacrifice of all Canadian Armed Forces personnel who have served Canada in time of war in the cause of peace and freedom--past, present and future. The memorial is the site of the national Remembrance Day Ceremony on November 11. Courtesy Veterans Affairs Canada

Ex-air gunner to lay wreath at ceremony

By Kevin Rollason

The memories of Second World War comrades who never returned to Canada will be in Ed Chenier's thoughts as he lays a wreath in their honour during the National Remembrance Day ceremonies in Ottawa.

Chenier, 81, has been chosen to lay the wreath on behalf of the Ex-Air Gunners Association of Canada at the National War Memorial on Nov. 11. He is flying to Ottawa next week.

"I'll be thinking of friends that I lost," Chenier said yesterday.

"My grandson was a warrant officer in the Air Cadets... he will be accompanying me to lay the wreath."

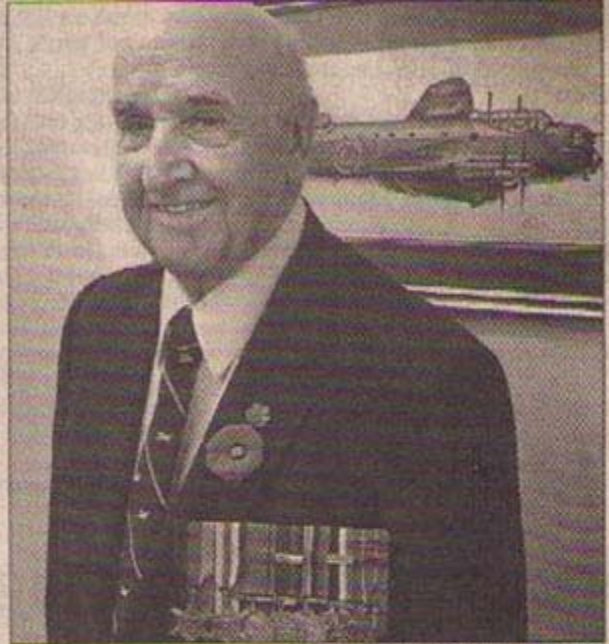
Unlike other branches of the military and veteran's organizations, the ranks of the ex-air gunners grow thinner each year because there hasn't been an active air gunner in the ranks of the Canadian air force since the Second World War.

Chenier said up until recently there were five of them locally who met on a monthly basis at the St. James Legion. In the last few weeks there are now only four.

"There's not too many of us left," he said.

"We used to have reunions across the country in the 1980s, but there are too few now."

Chenier was not only trained to operate the guns on bombers, but he received extra training to be able to run the wireless radio on the aircraft. He said his primary role was radio operator, but the extra training allowed him to take



WAYNE BLOWACKI / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

Veteran Ed Chenier stands in front of a cross-stitch pattern of a Lancaster bomber, crafted by his wife.

over the guns if the regular operator was injured or killed.

He said during the 15 bombing run missions he took part in over Europe, he never had to take over the gunner's role.

But Chenier said he did fire some shots during a training mission — but the results weren't expected.

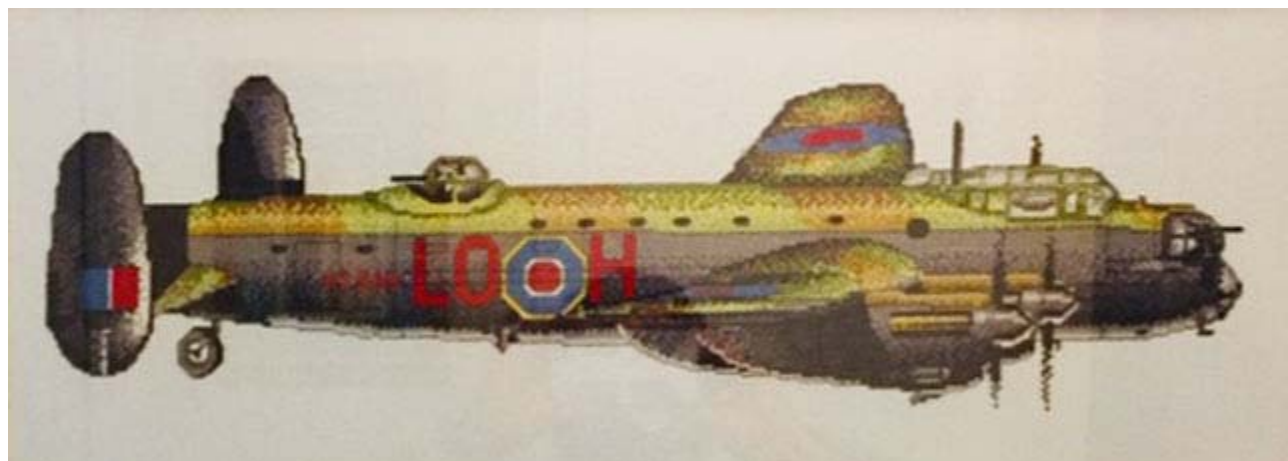
"The gunner asked me would I like to fire some rounds and I said sure," he said with a chuckle.

"He got out and I got in but we didn't realize the skipper was saying to cease firing. I didn't hear it so I fired into the North Sea.

"Then I saw some guys jumping out of a fishing boat. I stopped immediately."

Kevin.rollason@freepress.mb.ca

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When lunch was over and we were reminiscing about old times, we decided to call our pilot, Louis Paquette, now living in Alberta. When I got him on the phone, he said, "Hey Ed, I saw you on TV yesterday." Leo Menard my navigator and Bruce Webster my engineer both talked to Louis. We then called my mid upper gunner, who lives in Sudbury, and he said the exact same thing, "Ed, I saw you on TV yesterday." Leo and Bruce talked to him as well.

Note: *When Jeremy and I placed the wreath at the Cenotaph the day before, the CTV camera had a full face shot of Jeremy and me when we turned around after laying the wreath.*

The winter of 2005, we stayed in Winnipeg and enjoyed the winter weather.

The year 2006 was a busy one for us. Deed and I decided that we would take Gail and Danny on a 3-week tour of places that she and I had been to previously, and wanted them to enjoy just as we had.

First to Orlando via St. Louis where we went to the top of Gateway Arch⁵² in these small cramped cubicles that afforded a perfect view of the city. We visited what Deed and I consider the most beautiful Basilica we've ever seen. And we've seen lots of them all over the world.

From St. Louis, we drove to Graceland⁵³. Danny and Gail went to see Elvis Presley's home. Deed and I had visited there some years before so we did not repeat the trip. Gail and Dan went solo. Continuing south, we spent 6 days in Orlando and 4 days in Fort Lauderdale. From there we took a 3-day cruise to the Bahamas. Then enjoyed 4 days in Daytona Beach, in a suite right on the ocean. We had a ball. On the trip home via the Kennedy Space Center, we took the VIP tour of NASA, with a last stop in Nashville before returning to Winnipeg. Though our trip took place during hurricane season, we were fortunate enough that no major storms hit the region all the time we were there.

Deed and I had always wanted to take a Panama Canal cruise. So for our 60th wedding anniversary we did so. Boarding the Holland America "Ryndam" in Los Angeles, we sailed for 3 weeks, going through the Canal and docking in Tampa Florida to end the journey.

On this cruise, we met two lovely couples with whom we spent a lot of time. Jos and Rose Spina from Holiday Florida and Grant Scott and his daughter Janine Anderson from Cambridge Ontario. Grant had arranged the trip for he and his wife, but she, at the last minute, couldn't travel so he brought his daughter along. These two couples were great dancers. Even though Deed walks with a cane, she was a good dancer and we danced the night away many times. People kept asking Deed, "You walk with a cane, so how come you can dance?" To which she answered, "When I'm dancing, I don't have to bend my knees."

Every night after dinner there was entertainment. And we always sat upstairs in the front row of the balcony. One night they had a contest called "How well do you know your spouse?" The M.C. selected couples from the audience asking for someone who was married fifty years. Someone from the audience yelled, "How about fifty five years?"

⁵² **The Gateway Arch** - is a 630-foot monument in St. Louis, Missouri, United States. Clad in stainless steel and built in the form of a weighted catenary arch, it is the world's tallest arch, the tallest man-made monument in the Western Hemisphere, and Missouri's tallest accessible building.

⁵³ **Graceland** - a mansion on a 13.8-acre estate in Memphis, Tennessee, United States, once owned by singer and actor Elvis Presley. His daughter, Lisa Marie Presley, has been the owner of Graceland since his death in 1977. Graceland is located at 3764 Elvis Presley Boulevard in the vast Whitehaven community, about 9 miles (14 km) from Downtown and less than 4 miles (6.4 km) north of the Mississippi border.

I had gone to the Photo Shop to check on something. Sitting alone Deed yelled, "How about sixty years?" The M.C. Bobby Broughton returned with, "Where's your husband?" Deed answered, "He's gone to the Photo Shop." Bobby yelled back, "Get your husband and run down here!" Deed held up her cane and said, "You've got to be kidding!" Bobby laughed and told her to take her time. Getting back, I was told to get down to the stage and be a contestant.

There were four couples on stage. Deed and I were the oldest. They sent the ladies to a room where they couldn't hear the goings on and started asking the men personal questions.

If your wife phoned you at work and asked, "Honey, on your way home, would you stop at Victoria's Secrets and buy me a bra? Would you know what size to get?

My answer was size #36C. Another fellow said size #34B. I don't recall the others two answers, but I was the only husband with the correct one. Funny enough, the size #34B wife said she was a size #42D. I don't believe they had been married very long.

I don't recall all the questions but one that comes to mind was, "What would you say was your most romantic holiday?

I answered, "Well, we've had so many romantic holidays that it's difficult to pick and choose, but I'd have to say Hawaii."

Deed's answer was almost word for word the same as mine, "Well, we've had so many romantic holidays, it's hard to decide but I'd have to say Hawaii."

The response from the audience was raucous laughter. Every couple was awarded a bottle of Champagne just for playing. But because we were deemed the winners, they gave us a beautiful Holland America picture frame for a photo that we had taken on the ship.

If you recall my mentioning that we had nominated Ron O'Donovan for the "Order of Canada"⁵⁴. Well, at our 60th wedding anniversary celebration, I asked Ron if he had heard anything. He confided to me that he had received a call the previous week with confidential news that he had been accepted. And would be informed when the presentation would take place in a follow up call. He broke confidence telling me, only because we had nominated him, asking me to keep his secret. I assured him that other than Deed, I would tell no one.

The award ceremony was scheduled for Friday December 15 in Ottawa. Deed and I received an invitation from the Governor General, Michaëlle Jean⁵⁵, to attend the presentation.

The timing worked well for us. We had planned to go to Montreal to spend Christmas and New Years with our son Mark and his wife Irene. We would travel to Ottawa for the "Order of Canada" ceremonies. Then have lunch with my crew in Hudson on the Saturday. Moving on to Montreal to spend the Christmas Season with Mark and Irene. We returned to Ottawa on January 2nd to spend a few days with Edna and Bernie. We flew back to Winnipeg on the 7th.

⁵⁴ **The Order of Canada (French: Ordre du Canada)** is a Canadian national order and the second highest honour for merit in the system of orders, decorations, and medals of Canada, after the Order of Merit. To coincide with the centennial of Canadian Confederation, the three-tiered order was established in 1967 as a fellowship that recognizes the outstanding merit or distinguished service of Canadians who make a major difference to Canada through lifelong contributions in every field of endeavour, as well as the efforts by non-Canadians who have made the world better by their actions.

⁵⁵ **Michaëlle Jean** is a Canadian stateswoman and former journalist who was the Governor General of Canada from 2005 to 2010, the 27th since Canadian Confederation. She is the first Black Canadian to hold this office.



Ed & Deed 65th Anniversary

Chapter 37

Past ~ Present ~ Future

This year, 2007, we spent the month of February at a condo in Palm Springs with Deed's sister and husband Bernie. Their daughters Jan and Jennifer joined us for a few days.

What has kept me busy for the last few months since, was my effort to get the Ottawa Museum to remove a plaque in the new War Museum, that implied that we veterans who bombed Germany in WW2 are war criminals. Nothing could be farther from the truth. We as mere children answered the call from our country, and from the free world, to fight and die in defense and preservation of those freedoms we all enjoy today. We fought and died standing against all the real war criminals. Those who started that war. Those who sat in judgment of all others, claiming superiority to the point that they alone felt so entitled to judge. We did what we had to do. What we were forced by decency to do. To protect the innocent from true evil.

Following is some of the correspondence I've sent to various newspapers across Canada. The Winnipeg Free Press (oxymoron?) refused to print my letter. So I sent it to the Winnipeg Sun, and after a little editing, they printed it.

Editor's Note: *The following words are unaltered and presented verbatim.*

From: E.J Chenier CD

Dear Sir,

I am a WW2 veteran who is insulted by the wording of the plaque at the new War Museum in Ottawa.

The plaque reads as follows:

"Mass bomber raids against Germany resulted in vast destruction and heavy loss of life. The value and morality of the strategic bomber offensive against Germany remains bitterly contested. Bomber Command's aim was to crush civilian morale and force Germany to surrender by destroying its cities and industrial installations. Although Bomber Command and American attacks left 600,000 Germans dead, and more than five million homeless, the raids resulted in only small reductions in German war production until late in the war."

I disagree with the implication that we went specifically to destroy their cities. Our targets were: Marshalling Yards, Harbor Installations, U-Boat harbor Installations, Coastal Batteries, Close Air Army support, Targets in the Ruhr Valley.

Never, were we briefed to indiscriminately bomb a city without being given a specific strategic target.

As a matter of fact on one operation over Bremen, Germany we were briefed to bomb visually and not by H2S (a form of radar). This was a daylight operation and as luck would have it, the target area was overcast, and we couldn't see the target visually. We were instructed to abort and return to base with a full bomb load. To me, the wording in this plaque insinuates that I am a criminal and deliberately went out and bombed German civilians.

Remember that we were at war, defending our country from a demented dictator (Hitler) and that we were fighting for survival.

Young boys and girls in their late teens and early and mid twenties put their lives on hold to go and fight for their country.

I was in London the first night the Germans sent their V1 "Buzz Bombs". To me, this was indiscriminate bombing of civilians. These were pilotless drones (loaded with explosives) that fell anywhere over London, when they ran out of fuel. The same logic applies to the V2's

We left our families and girlfriends behind to fight for our country. When I'm asked by my children: "Dad, why didn't you marry Mom before going overseas?" I facetiously reply: "Because she didn't ask me." Actually, I clarify this statement, (after they've finished laughing,) by telling them what I was truly feeling at that time. I tell them: "I was going to war and felt that I wouldn't be coming back."

My wife and I often go to Ottawa to visit her sister and her family and although I would love to visit the Museum again, I do not plan to do so as long as that plaque is there. I would encourage all WW2 veterans to boycott the museum until this plaque is removed.

It's all very well for today's historians to write about WW2, but they should get their facts straight. When these supposedly "Expert Historians" were contemplating the wording for this plaque, did they consider the indiscriminate bombing of Coventry, London and other cities.

I ask them a simple question: "What would you have done under the same circumstances?"

E.J.Chenier CD - Flight Lieutenant (Ret'd)

I had sent the same letter to Rod Bruinooge my M.P. in Ottawa and had an invite to come and see him to discuss this. I briefed him on the subject and he did send a letter to Bev Oda the minister responsible for the museum.

I sent the following to Bev Oda and also to Greg Thompson Minister of Veterans Affairs.

From: Ed Chenier Date: 04/05/07 11:27:42 Subject: Ottawa War Museum Plaque

From: Outraged and insulted WW2 Veterans

Members of Parliament: The plaque in the Ottawa War Museum reads as follows:

"Mass bomber raids against Germany resulted in vast destruction and heavy loss of life. The value and morality of the strategic bomber offensive against Germany remains bitterly contested. Bomber Command's aim was to crush civilian morale and force Germany to surrender by destroying its cities and industrial installations. Although Bomber Command and American attacks left 600,000 Germans dead, and more than five million homeless, the raids resulted in only small reductions in German war production until late in the war."

This inscription is one sided and doesn't mention the atrocities committed by the Nazi regime. No mention is made of the annihilation of the city of Coventry or the blitzkrieg of London in 1940-41 and throughout the ensuing years.

The unconscionable launching of the V1's (Buzz bombs) followed by the V2's. Many WW2 veterans put their lives on hold from 1939 to 1945 to defend our country from a Dictator (Hitler) who was bent on conquering the world.

This plaque insinuates that the aircrew of Bomber Command who bombed Germany in WW2 should be considered war criminals, but makes no mention of the Luftwaffe in their role of bombing England.

The hindsight expertise of these so-called "Expert" Historians who drafted this plaque is flawed as to their interpretation of the situation at the time. To dishonor these WW2 veterans is a disgrace.

Recently, the President of the United States along with Members of Congress and of the Senate gathered together to Honour a Fighter Squadron, composed of strictly Black personnel, who had flown as protective escort for the American Air Force on bombing missions over Germany during WW2. They hailed them as heroes and gave them a "Standing Ovation". This is how Americans, treat their Veterans.

Ironically, our Canadian Government is standing by, allowing the Ottawa War Museum to erect a plaque that insinuates that these American veterans, and Canadian veterans who flew on bombing missions over Germany during WW2 are "War Criminals".

ONLY IN CANADA.....PITY

E.J. Chenier CD

Flight Lieutenant (Ret'd)

The following was sent to The Honorable Romeo Dallaire, Member of the Senate.

To: Lt/Gen Romeo Dallaire

From: E.J. Chenier CD Captain (F/L Ret'd)

Sir;

I am addressing this e-mail to you Sir, because you are the only one I believe I can trust to ensure that it will be presented to the Senate subcommittee looking into the Bomber Command plaque fiasco.

You Sir have been through the mill like we veterans who flew in Bomber Command on missions over Germany during WW2. You will agree that what you went through was no picnic as we in Bomber Command felt that it was no picnic. But you Sir did your duty, as we in Bomber Command did our duty, as difficult as it was. Sir, I'm sure at times you had doubts about what you were doing, as we in Bomber Command had doubts about what we were doing. At times I wondered what am I doing risking my life here when I could be back in Canada, as a pacifist.

But pride in our country and knowing that we were fighting against a tyrant who was bent on conquering and suppressing freedom throughout the world as he had done in his own Germany, gave us the strength to carry on.

Let's not kid ourselves, if Hitler had conquered over Britain and the allies, these so called "Expert Historians" who created this plaque, would not have had the freedom to put up a plaque that denigrated the Luftwaffe.

It would only have been a matter of time when the Nazis would have invaded Canada first and then the U.S.A. The Japanese crossed the Pacific Ocean to bomb Pearl Harbor and the Nazis would have crossed the Atlantic via Iceland and Greenland to carry out their plan of world domination. If we had not been there to repulse these efforts, the freedom we've enjoyed since 1945 would not be ours today.

I repeat the words of Winston Churchill in a speech given in the 1940's, Quote: "The gratitude of every home in our island, in our Empire, and indeed throughout the world, except in the abodes of the guilty, goes out to the British airmen who, undaunted by odds, unwearied in their constant challenge and mortal danger, are turning the tide of the World War by their prowess and their devotion. Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few.

The question is, "Who are these so called Expert Historians? Have they been in a position to put their lives on the line for their country? Were they there in WW2 to be qualified to make the statement they are making today? Would they be willing to do what we did and then years from now, be called "War Criminals?"

ONLY IN CANADA.....PITY

The following is a letter I recently sent to various newspapers throughout Canada

Dear Sirs;

As an officer who flew on bombing missions over Germany during WW2, I am insulted and outraged at the wording on a plaque at the Ottawa War Museum, which insinuates that we, both Canadians and Americans who participated, are war criminals.

Recently, the President of the United States along with Members of Congress and of the Senate gathered together to Honour a Fighter Squadron, composed of strictly Black personnel, who had flown as protective escort for the American Air Force on bombing missions over Germany during WW2. They hailed them as heroes and gave them a "Standing Ovation". This is how Americans, treat their Veterans.

Ironically, our Canadian Government is standing by, allowing the Ottawa War Museum to erect a plaque that insinuates that these American veterans, and we Canadian veterans who flew on bombing missions over Germany during WW2 are "War Criminals".

ONLY IN CANADA.....PITY

E.J.Chenier CD

Flight Lieutenant (Ret'd)

To date, nothing has been done about removing the plaque from the War Museum. And I continue sending letters to the Ottawa politicians hoping that something will be done. A Senate Committee has been set up to investigate and come up with their recommendations.

A veteran's special day

Winnipegger witnesses Queen unveiling sculpture honouring Bomber Command / A3



Queen unveils tribute to Second World War flyers

Recognition at long last for Bomber Command

By Katherine Dow

CAPT. Edward Chenier wore his navy blue veteran's blazer when he arrived home in Winnipeg from a special trip to England. He carried his medals in his carry-on with a brand-new one still wrapped in plastic.

The proud veteran of the Second World War had been invited on a trip to London by Veterans Affairs Canada, along with hundreds of other Bomber Command veterans, to witness Queen Elizabeth unveil a tribute to these flyers. The tribute came in the form of a sculpture meant to honour Bomber Command, which flew massive night raids over Nazi-occupied Europe.

The statue is an eight-ton bronze depiction of a four-engine bomber. Each soldier looks to the sky for surviving comrades. The monument is protected by a roof constructed from recovered aluminium of a Canadian Halifax bomber. The monument sits in Green Park across from Buckingham Palace.

Chenier was one of 42 Canadian pilots, navigators, radio operators and gunners invited to attend its unveiling on June 28. Each received a new medal as a token of thanks from the Royal Canadian Air Force.

Chenier said the veterans were accompanied from Ottawa by Veteran Affairs Minister Steven Blaney on the prime minister's plane.

"Flying in style," Chenier joked.

Chenier flew in less opulent surroundings as a wireless operator and air gunner with the RCAF during the Second World War. He was in Squadron 425 and flew 15 operations in a Halifax bomber over Germany.

Chenier, 88, took the momentous trip to England with his wife, Deed. The couple will celebrate their 66th anniversary next week.

"It was such a special trip. The honour was so long overdue. We were treated beyond our expectations," Deed said after the couple arrived home Wednesday evening at Richardson Inter-



DAVID LIPNOWSKI / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

Veteran Ed Chenier and his wife, Deed, arrive at Richardson International Airport Wednesday. Below: The Bomber Command memorial statue.

Richardson International Airport. "Ed got to see four of his squadron mates and we had lunch at Canada House. It really was such a wonderful experience."

After the war ended, Chenier continued serving with the RCAF for 23 years. He says though he tried his hand at other careers, the air force was home.

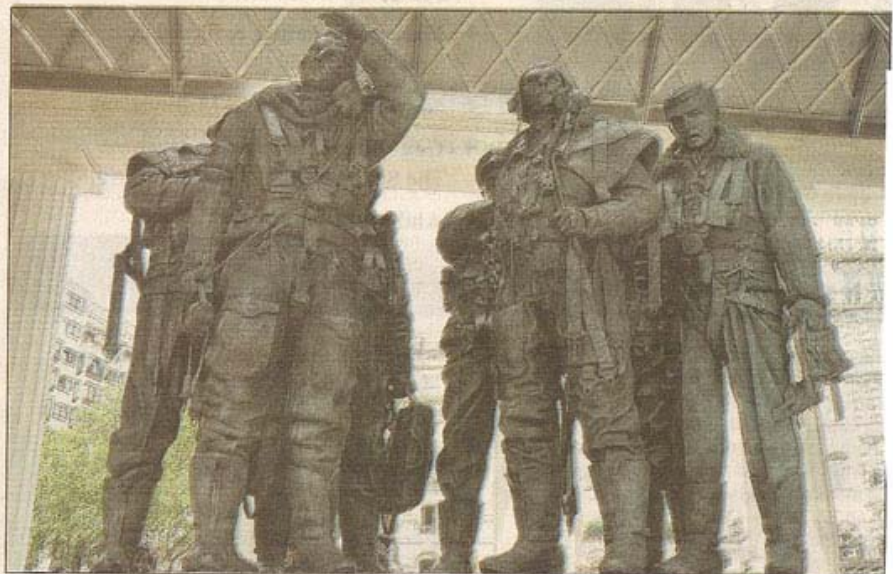
According to Chenier, flyers who served in Bomber Command during the Second World War were never fully recognized for the work they had done, as squadrons bombed German cities during some missions, leading to large numbers of civilian casualties.

Deed said her husband was instrumental in having a plaque changed at the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa that accused Command crews of "indiscriminate bombing."

Deed says that with this new sculpture, the work of the Bomber Command is finally being honoured.

"Honestly, this was such a wonderful honour but it's not enough of a thank you. It took too long to honour them. It can never be enough," Deed said. "They are heroes. He's still my hero."

katherine.dow@freepress.mb.ca



JOHN STILLWELL / THE ASSOCIATED PRESS





So that brings me to the present. I'm sitting here at my computer trying to think how am I going to finish my story.

As the title "Living on Borrowed Time" indicates, if I hadn't experienced airsickness when flying on those early training missions in Calgary in 1943/44.

And if I hadn't gone to the washroom to make myself throw up before flying, at the Gunnery School, in Paulson Manitoba, I would have been on that aircraft that plowed in after take off. Would I have lived through that? Who Knows?

"Living on Borrowed Time" also indicates that, while on operations over Germany flying through all the flak that the German ground forces threw at us on every mission and especially on our trip to Witten when we were attacked by a JU88. He didn't get us on the first attack. But why didn't he get us on the second attack? The Good Lord was looking after us, and answered all my prayers.

E.J Chenier CD



*Ed & Crew after laying the wreath at the Cenotaph in Ottawa
~ Remembrance Day November 11, 2005 ~*

In Retrospect

First of all I want to thank Kathleen Gingras who was the one who started all this. If you hadn't asked me to send you stories about what your Dad did during the war, I wouldn't be sitting here now. Thanks again Kathleen.

I also want to thank Deed for putting up with my neglecting her while I felt I had to keep at it. I know she missed my company in the evenings, and for this I intend to make it up to her by hounding her every night to smooch on the chesterfield.

I also want to thank my kids for being such good and caring kids to Deed and me. What we appreciate is the fact that anytime we talk on the phone, they terminate the conversation by saying "I love you."

And last but not least, I want to thank my crew for being who they are. We worked together through difficult times and supported each other through thick and thin. Thanks guys. You're the BEST.

E.J Chenier CD

Postscript

13 June 2007

The following article appeared in the Ottawa Citizen this morning. I don't know if the Museum will amend the wording of the plaque or place another plaque that would balance the wording of the controversial one. But it is nice to see that the senators on the Senate Subcommittee are agreeing with the veterans and believe the wording on the plaque should tell the story and tell the facts. But, as noted, tell it in a way that you're not offending, unintentionally, a large segment of the Canadian public."

Senators side with angry war vets.

Museum's exhibit on bombings accurate, but should be rewritten, report says.

James Gordon, The Ottawa Citizen

Published: Wednesday, June 13, 2007

A special Senate subcommittee is asking the Canadian War Museum to change part of a controversial display some veterans have claimed makes them look like "war criminals."

At issue is a Second World War exhibit that contains a single panel describing an "Enduring Controversy" and raising moral issues over the role of Canadian bombing squadrons that attacked German cities in an attempt to wipe out the Nazi war machine.

Liberal Senator Joseph Day, chairman of the subcommittee on veterans affairs, suggested the museum has a responsibility to recognize it has offended some people and change the display. There were no suggestions as to how the museum should go about doing that, even as the politicians raised no qualms about the accuracy of the facts and information presented.

"We're not here to be people who set up displays at museums. We don't have that special talent. But they do," Mr. Day said.

"Don't try to change history. We're not into rewriting history. Tell the story and tell the facts, but tell it in a way that you're not offending, unintentionally, a large segment of the Canadian public."

A museum spokeswoman said in a written statement that the facility's president, Victor Rabinovitch, wasn't available yesterday and wouldn't offer any comment until there was time to further review the senators' recommendation.

The display panel, accompanied by photos including one of dead civilians on the street following an Allied bombing, notes the mass raids against Germany resulted in vast destruction and heavy loss of life.

"The value and morality of the strategic bomber offensive against Germany remains bitterly contested. Bomber Command's aim was to crush civilian morale and force Germany to surrender by destroying its cities and industrial installations," it says. "Although Bomber Command and American attacks left 600,000 Germans dead, and more than five million homeless, the raids resulted in only small reductions of German war production until late in the war."

Mr. Day said the subcommittee was troubled by the fact that much of the exhibit was dedicated to the heroic activities of individual airmen and crews, "and then you get in an academic debate on the last panel, which calls into question all of these exploits of the individuals that were highlighted in the rest of the display."

Asked whether he believed a museum was a place for academic debate, Mr. Day agreed it was.

"I think that's all part of the museum's responsibility," he said. "It was just that the juxtaposition of various facts and pictures seemed to confuse the two. I don't think it was intended, but that seems to be the case."

Complaints from veterans about the tone of the panel first surfaced in 2005, soon after the museum opened. Following threats of boycott from a coalition of veterans' groups, the facility undertook what it called the "exceptional step" of seeking input from external, expert historians.

Four of them filed reports the museum said agreed with the contention that the display in its entirety presented an accurate view of the air war in Europe. Two raised concerns about the "tone" and "balance" of the one panel. The museum said in March that it would not change the panel, adding its decision was final.

Editor's Note: *The newspaper articles above and below, and the letters my uncle wrote to those newspapers, have not been altered or edited in any way. I felt it more important to have them read as they were written, than to be representative of proper use of the English language. This story came from the heart of a man, who was a true prince. If more men and women like my uncle Ed and aunt Deed existed, the planet would surely be a better and kinder place. November 30, 2020. Covid-19 rages on. Millions are dead from it. Aunt Deed is fighting it hoping to survive. Yet, like petulant children, too many do not care enough about the lives of others, even their own, to do what it will take to bring it under control. So, many more will die!*

Senators side with angry war vets

Museum's exhibit on bombings accurate, but should be rewritten, report says.

James Gordon, The Ottawa Citizen

Published: Wednesday, June 13, 2007

Veterans' groups renewed their call for a boycott and asked the Senate to intervene, resulting in yesterday's report. It said that in addition to complaints from war veterans, senators received volumes of letters from the public suggesting the panel text is open to misinterpretation. Mr. Day expressed confidence that the museum would reconsider its previous stance on not making any adjustments.

"We brought them before the chamber of sober second thought and we thought that's a little contagious," he said. The subcommittee's deputy chair, Conservative Norman Atkins, said the report was in no way meant to reflect badly on the war museum or the way it is run.

"I want to make it clear that in all our hearings, we expressed our complete admiration for the development of the (Canadian) War Museum," he said. "Canadians can be very proud of the facility, and it should be recommended that everybody ... who arrives in Ottawa has an opportunity to go and visit it."

A spokesperson for the Royal Canadian Legion could not be reached for comment yesterday evening.

Sometime in late August or early September, the War Museum capitulated and agreed to change the wording of the plaque to something more acceptable to us Veterans of Bomber Command. This would be done in the next few months and apparently they would consult with a veterans committee to ensure that the wording is acceptable to everyone. Now I can hold my head up and know that I am no longer considered a War Criminal

The following article appeared in the Ottawa Citizen this date, vindicating we Veterans who put our lives on the line every time we flew over Germany on bombing missions. I feel better now that I'm no longer considered a War Criminal.

Ed Chenier CD

New text 'a happy consensus,' director says

Veterans groups helped create the wording for panel that is to be installed in December

Paul Gessell, The Ottawa Citizen

Published: Thursday, October 11, 2007

The Canadian War Museum has produced new wording for a controversial text panel in a Second World War exhibit that is designed to allow veterans of Bomber Command to see themselves as war heroes rather than "war criminals."

The new text was described yesterday by the acting museum director, Mark O'Neill as "a happy consensus" between the federal institution and the veterans' organizations that helped create the new wording, which is to be installed by December.

This consensus describes the "great courage" and sacrifices of the airmen who extensively bombed German cities, killing 600,000 people, mainly civilians, and leaving five million people homeless, in an attempt to crush German morale and the country's industrial capability.

This new text will add considerable context so visitors realize the bombing was in retaliation for German attacks on civilians in Britain, helped cripple the German war machine and "enjoyed wide public and political support" at home. There will also now be recognition of the 10,000 Canadian airmen who died in the campaign.

The initial, more curt text panel provided less context and, in the eyes of some veterans, turned the airmen of Bomber Command into "war criminals" engaged in an amoral massacre of veterans groups threatened to boycott the war museum. Even the Senate got involved, when the subcommittee on veterans affairs released a report urging the museum to present its facts in a way that would not offend veterans, even unintentionally.

The abrupt and unexplained departure in June of the museum director, Joe Geurts, also appears to have been related to the controversy.

Mr. Geurts and his staff had publicly opposed a revision of the text panel up to that point. However, the museum's board believed changes were necessary and when it became publicly known that changes would be made, various historians and museologists accused the war museum of pandering to special-interest groups rather than being concerned with objectively presenting history.

Mr. O'Neill, the temporary replacement for Mr. Geurts, said the new wording was reached through talks among museum staff, outside experts and some veterans organizations, including the Royal Canadian Legion and the Mayday Committee. The latter is an ad hoc organization of air force veterans formed more than a year ago to lobby the museum for changes to the Bomber Command exhibit.

So, is the new wording better than the old?

"I would hesitate to use the word 'better'," Mr. O'Neill said. "I would say, in my opinion, it provides additional information that is important."

New text 'a happy consensus,' director says

Veterans groups helped create the wording for panel that is to be installed in December

Paul Gessell, The Ottawa Citizen

Published: Thursday, October 11, 2007

In a statement released yesterday, The National Council of Veteran Associations said it is satisfied with the new wording for the panel. Association chairman Cliff Chadderton said, "We are not in a position to make further comment, except to say that we have expressed our appreciation to Duane Daly, dominion secretary of the Royal Canadian Legion."

The museum's decision to change the wording will not end the controversy, even if veterans groups all approve of the alterations. There will still be those academics and historians who are critical of the museum for caving in to the demands of a lobby group.

Editors Note: *That's it! That is my Uncle Ed Chenier's story. As tears well up in my eyes, I am not entirely sure where I should go from here! My uncle Ed (now deceased) was a great guy, decent to a fault, and without a 'bad bone' in his body.*

I heard a lot of this story directly from him as a kid growing up, and later as a young man. There is no measure of how proud I was to answer his call, when asked to take his raw words, and craft them into this report. I feel truly blessed and honoured, and hope to have lived up to his expectations in delivering this reckoning, having done so.

One thing I didn't know was how much they drank! Perhaps as a means to numb the pain felt, as veterans of that war. Losing so many friends. Escaping death, when so many others did not. As I approach my 70th birthday I've lost many friends as well, and know that hurt. Gone suddenly. No chance for a proper goodbye. Perhaps 'the drink' was to both celebrate the continuance of their own lives. And to toast those who were not as fortunate.

Anyone who knows my aunt Deed, the prim and proper lady that she is, would be equally surprised at the level she imbibed. Likely for the same reason, to numb the pain she felt as an Air Force Wife. Thousands of miles apart from her love, for weeks and months at a time, as Ed fought for our freedom. And after they wed and began a family. Perhaps feeling that she was doing it all alone, as one assignment after another kept them apart.

But they elevated themselves above all that, the two of them. Married, dedicated and faithful to each other for more decades than most people live. Raising a family of good decent people like themselves, during the most challenging times imaginable.

My aunt Deed is now in her late 90's. Living in a Long Term Care Facility. Her health failing. With the most contagious virus in a hundred years (Covid19) continuing to plague the planet. Ed is gone. Their oldest son Glen is gone. And so the rest of us closest to these men and women, 'The Greatest Generation'⁵⁶ will also soon be gone.

These men and women though passed, must not be forgotten.

In the absence of the contributions and sacrifices made, of men and women like my uncle Ed and aunt Deed. The survivors. Lacking the efforts of those like them who fought and died, so that others might live freely, you and I may not have ever existed. And the world would be a much different and darker place than it is in 'our today'. Think about it. As bad as things may be in 'your today' when you first read this, without their willingness to risk death to fight the evil of 'their time', life for all in 'our time' (and yours) would surely be much worse!

So, to all reading this tale, years or decades from now, who are unfamiliar with these (our) current times, and the battles for freedom we are now fighting, I ask one simple thing.

Virtually go back in time and learn of 'our today'. And further back to learn of theirs!

Case in point; as of this day in October 2024 things have indeed gotten much worse!

⁵⁶ **The Greatest Generation** - also known as the G.I. Generation and the World War II generation, is the demographic cohort following the Lost Generation and preceding the Silent Generation. The generation is generally defined as people born from 1901 to 1927. They were shaped by the Great Depression and were the primary participants in World War II. The term The Greatest Generation was popularized by the title of a 1998 book by American journalist Tom Brokaw. In the book, Brokaw profiled American members of this generation who came of age during the Great Depression and went on to fight in World War II, as well as those who contributed to the war effort on the home front. Brokaw wrote that these men and women fought not for fame or recognition, but because it was the "right thing to do."

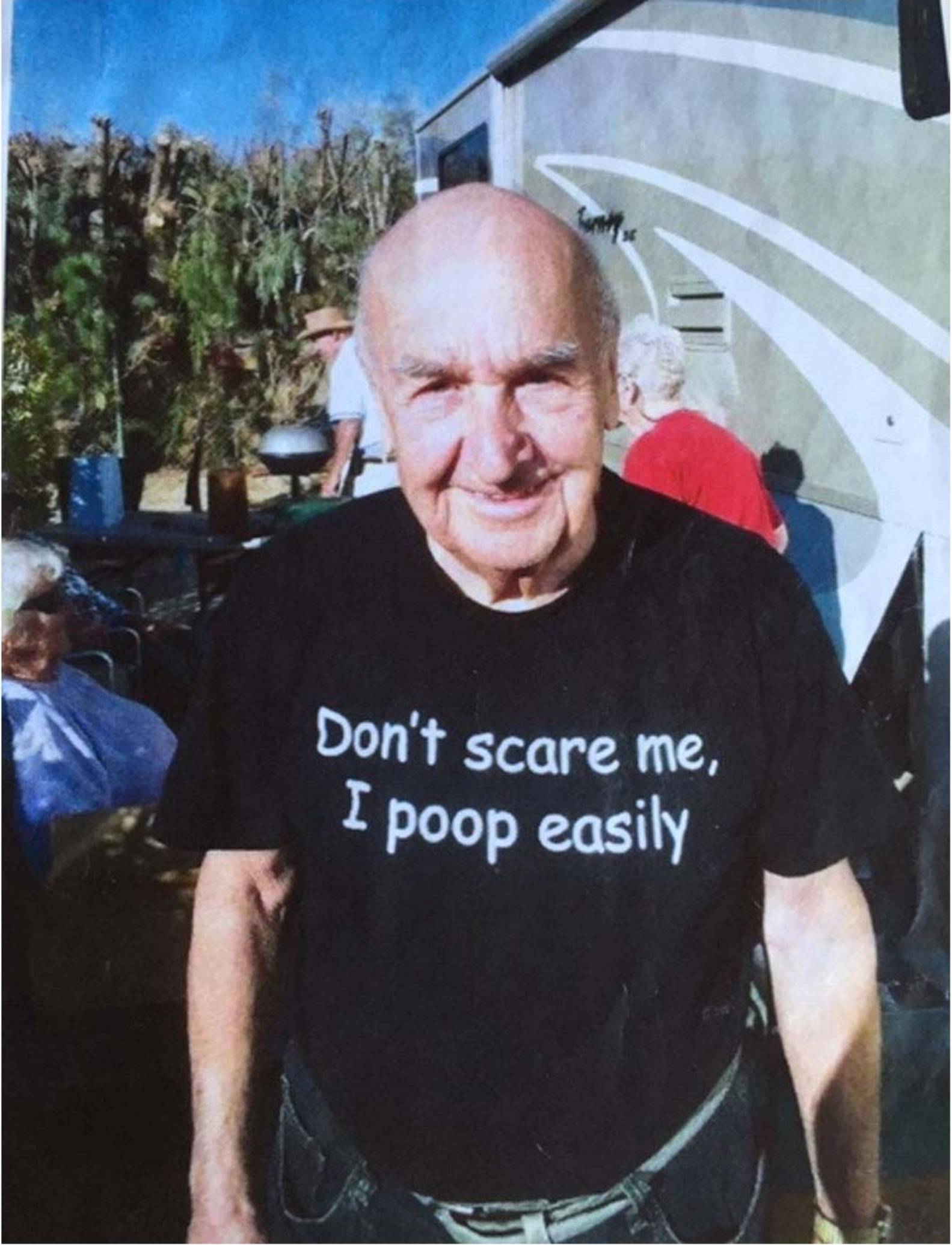
*When you arise in the morning
think of what a privilege it is to be alive
to think, to enjoy, to love ...*

Marcus Aurelius
The Last Great Emperor of Rome



*Before you cross the street, take my hand.
Life is what happens to you
while you're busy making other plans.*

John Lennon
Beautiful Boy (Darling Boy) 1980



Don't scare me,
I poop easily