

FLY NORTH

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NEWSLETTER OF THE NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO AVIATION HERITAGE CENTRE

Preserving and celebrating the diverse history of aviation in the northwest, through the collection and preservation of artifacts and stories of the persons and events that made this region unique in aviation history

NOAHC News -----

Lakehead Social History Institute

On February 29, NOAHC President, Liz Wieben gave a presentation at a Lakehead Social History Institute Community Workshop in the Mary J.L. Black Library. The workshop provided four presentations on the theme of 'Making Connections by Land and Water' to which Liz contributed a presentation entitled 'Orville Wieben and Superior Airways: The Opening of Northwestern Ontario after WWII'. The presentation was well received by the 40 or so attendees at the workshop.

NOAHC's first book

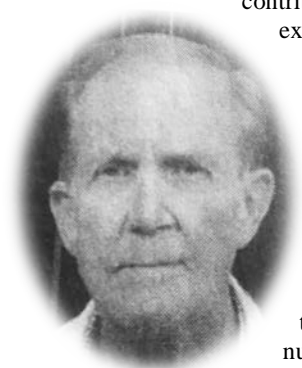


NOAHC has entered a new stage in its development with the publication of its first book. It is entitled 'They also Served' and tells the story of Bill McRae, a young Port Arthur man, who enlisted in the RCAF in 1940. Originally written as a personal memoir for his family the book chronicles the author's experiences as a Canadian fighter pilot during World War II. After initial training in Manitoba and southern Ontario he graduated as a fighter pilot and was posted to Britain, where he was introduced to the Spitfire, a plane he came to love. He served in Britain and West Africa and flew on D-Day, before returning to Canada, where he participated in the aerial survey work that led to the mapping of the north. Bill McRae has written a gripping and sometimes humorous account of his various wartime activities, but it is more than a war story, it is also about what he describes as his "insatiable desire to fly" and as such is a must read for historians and aviation enthusiasts alike.

They also Served will be officially launched in early April at a date to be determined. Watch for the announcement.

Ted Creagh 1940-2019

With the death of Ted Creagh in December 2019, NOAHC lost a good friend, who willingly contributed his time and experience to support the Centre. Not



long after it was formed he played a major role in arranging a visit of Hawk One, a restored Canadair-built F-86 Sabre jet, and the first of a number of successful

vintage aircraft visits sponsored by the Centre. The Sabre was probably Ted's favourite plane, having been involved with it during the time he spent in the Canadian Military. One of his other passions was to fly a flight simulator, not just in simple point-to-point flights, but in combat situations as well. It is no surprise that there is a Sabre included among the range of aircraft in the flight simulator he donated to the Centre. He installed and de-bugged the system and updated the hardware and software, as well as training NOAHC members to operate it. Since it was installed it has become a firm favourite among visitors to the Centre and will continue to be so since Ted's family has provided sufficient components from his collection to allow the simulator to be maintained and even expanded. Ted will be missed by his friends at the Centre and NOAHC extends its condolences to his family.

Being the first newsletter of the new year, it is appropriate to remind readers that 2020 membership fees are now due.

Inside this issue:

2. They also Served - a preview
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**NORTHWESTERN
ONTARIO AVIATION
HERITAGE CENTRE
INC.**

Mailing Address
403-1100 Memorial Ave
Thunder Bay, ON
P7B 4A3

Centre Location
905 Victoria Avenue E
Thunder Bay

Contact NOAHC at
(807) 623-3522
or
noahc@tbaytel.net

Webpage
www.noahc.org

*Excerpts from “They also Served”
by W.R. “Bill” McRae*

Basic Training: Jack Brown was Bill’s first flying instructor. His height and girth created some problems for Bill.

“On December 17, Brown installed me in the rear cockpit of Tiger No. 4124 and, with Brown doing the flying, we spent an hour and forty minutes, in two flights, covering the various pre-circuit sequences. It was the next day, when we began doing the take-off and landing sequence, that the full significance of Brown’s size first hit me. I had no forward visibility at all. Years later, when I began instructing myself, I realized this problem could have been at least partially overcome by simply stuffing cushions, books or anything under the parachute in the rear seat. But Brown never suggested this and as a result I had great trouble with take-offs because I could not see ahead to line up on anything. Air work and landings were no problem, but my take-offs were always scimitar shaped. Brown would keep haranguing me “keep straight” and I



With instructor Jack Brown on January 5, 1941 after my first solo

me solo in Tiger No. 4124 on January 5 1941. The fact there was no one in the front seat was forgotten with the realization that at last I could see where I was going! I had no trouble at all with the take-off, and after one circuit I made as smooth a landing as you could ask for.”

D-Day: June 6, 1944

“We had been briefed on the evening of June 5 that the following morning would be “D-Day”. After dark that night we could hear wave after wave of heavy bombers droning over us on the way to France and also the unmistakable sound of Dakotas. This meant paratroops. I was awakened about 4 a.m. by a WAAF bringing me a cup of tea in bed – we never got that service in our tents! Due to the rotation system I was not on the first trip on D-Day but I was on the second patrol of the morning. The sight that greeted me as we crossed the English coast was one never to be forgotten. When viewed from a low level it appeared that one could almost walk from England to France on the lanes of ships that spanned the 120 miles of channel. The air was equally full of aeroplanes of all descriptions. It was surely the greatest armada of all time and it is

incomprehensible that Hitler could have believed this mighty effort was only a feint for the real thing!

My first patrol was in the Le Havre-Caen area, where we cruised back and forth to intercept any enemy aircraft coming from the north-east in an attempt to oppose the landings, but none did. Below I could see columns of black oily smoke rising in numerous places, probably from burning tanks. There was a steady stream of landing craft moving in on the beach, and the navy was busy firing into German positions to the rear... This was certainly a textbook example of a joint services action, army, navy and air force all acting in concert with one another.”

Surveying in the North: Spring and Summer 1945:

Corcoran and Rae were members of the ground survey party that worked to establish surface grid references and provide ground truth for the air photo survey being used to map the north. It was Bill’s job to ferry the surveyors in and out of the sites to take measurements that would allow the locations to be tied to the aerial photography.

“There was one incident I shared with Corcoran and Rae, which could have been disastrous. I had put them into a site on the Kazan River, which offered good identification features for them, but not very good landing and take-off conditions for me. I noted that the river bottom nearing the shore where I landed them was full of big jagged rocks, but when the time came to pick them up I planned to take off down the river rather than across. Unfortunately, when I came back to get them the wind was dead across the river. Still, I was sure I could get up on the step into wind then turn down the length of the river for the take-off run. I loaded them aboard and taxied right across to the far bank of the river, turned into wind and opened up. The Norseman came up on the step alright, but the wind was so strong that my attempt to turn out of wind proved impossible. I had now committed myself so far that I was afraid cutting the power would have settled us down on the rocks. I pushed the throttle through to the firewall and kept going. The last thing I wanted was for it to settle back down on the water, so I eased it off and held it level building speed. I coaxed it ever so slowly into a climb with the rising shoreline not ten feet below the floats, keeping it in ground effect until I had safe speed, and only then did I feel relaxed enough to look at my passengers. They were both admiring the scenery, not in the least concerned. Ignorance is bliss!”



Bill flying his Norseman, en route from Nueltin Lake to Windy Lake

McRae, William, R. (2019) *They also Served: A Spitfire Pilot’s Memoir from Enlistment to Victory* is available from NOAHC at a cost of \$25.00. Members enjoy a 10% discount.

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Lakehead Models
Steve Melnick

262 Bay St.
Thunder Bay, ON
P7B 1R5
Tel.: 807-345-5776
Fax: 807-344-6489
lakeheadmodels@shaw.ca
lakeheadmodels.com



DR TERRY TRUSDALE
CIVIL AVIATION MEDICAL EXAMINER

Medicals done at Aviation Centre of Excellence,
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SJS Susan J. Southcott
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NOAHC continues to host a monthly bingo at the Superior Shores Gaming Association on Memorial Avenue. The returns from these events make an important contribution to the Centre's revenue.

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Jay Caldwell
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309 Hector Dougall Way
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P7E 6M5
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807-475-5249
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Hurricane Restorations

Can-Car-built Hurricanes are once again in the news. Two have recently been restored, a Mk1 in India and a MkXII in Canada. The former, Z7059, left the plant in late 1940 and was shipped to England, where it was used mainly as a training plane and as a result suffered a number of accidents. After repairs it was allocated to Air Command South-East Asia as a training aircraft for Indian Hurricane pilots, who went on to fly at the Battle of Imphal and in Burma. By July 1944, Hurricane Mk1s were obsolete and most were scrapped, to be replaced by Mk IIs and IVs. Z7059, however, survived to continue life as an airframe used to train aircraft mechanics at a trade school. In 1967 it was put on display at the Indian Air Force (IAF) Museum at Palam, New Delhi, painted silver. Recently restored it has been repainted in camouflage with authentic No 1 Squadron IAF markings that represents how it would have looked in the mid-1940s.

Hurricane Z7059 shares space at the IAF Museum with an ex-RCAF Westland Lysander Mk IIIa, which was in the Canadian National Aeronautical Collection at Rockcliffe until 1967, when it was exchanged for a Consolidated Liberator from the IAF Museum. Like the Hurricane it has recently been refurbished to represent one of the Lysanders that flew with the wartime IAF.

Hawker Hurricane 5389 was manufactured as a Mk XII in 1942 at Canadian Car and Foundry, in Fort William, Ontario. It was initially flown to No. 4 Training Command at Calgary, then transferred to No. 133 Squadron in Lethbridge, Alberta to familiarize pilots with the Hurricane. From there it went to Boundary Bay, British Columbia to be used for aerial reconnaissance and coastal drills. In B.C. it also flew in search of Japanese fire balloons that were launched in an attempt to set fire to North American forests. After the war, the plane was considered surplus, and was sold to a farmer in Saskatchewan.

This Hurricane was one of the first aircraft acquired for the Air Museum of Canada, which was disbanded in 1971. The aircraft was then turned over to the City of Calgary and housed at the Planetarium for a number of years until the Aero Space Museum of Canada became the stewards of the City collection. The task of restoring the Hurricane was awarded to the Calgary Mosquito Society, and began in 2012 at Historic Aviation Services Inc. in Wetaskiwin. Restoration, which involved more than 25,000 man-hours of work, was completed in late 2019, with the plane returning to Calgary in early November to be housed at the Hangar Flight Museum.

(For more on 5389 see pictures on page 4)

Hawker Hurricane at the Hangar Flight Museum in Calgary, Alberta



Left

Hawker Hurricane RCAF 5389 on display in the Hangar Flight Museum, Calgary, Alberta following the completion of its restoration in November 2019.

Below

The muzzle openings for the plane's machine guns can be seen in the wing. The metal plate between the exhausts and the cockpit is a glare shield, which helped to preserve the pilot's night vision by blocking the glare from the exhaust flames



Information panel detailing Can-Car's Hurricane production and Elsie McGill's role as "Queen of the Hurricanes"



Although the Can-Car-built Hurricanes, were structurally and mechanically similar to their British counterparts, 5389, like most of the RCAF Hurricanes was powered by a Packard Merlin engine rather than the Rolls Royce version. The former was built under license in the United States, and set up on RCAF Hurricanes to drive a Hamilton Standard propeller with no spinner.



Sitting next to Hurricane 5398 is a North American Harvard IV advanced trainer, which was also built at the Can-Car plant in Fort William. It is one of a batch built in the early 1950s to meet the training needs of the RCAF at the time of the Cold War.

The museum also houses a DH Tiger Moth and an Avro Anson, both of which were flown in the Calgary area as part of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan

← *A Packard Merlin engine similar to the one that powered RCAF 5398*