

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 -----

Colin Macmillan Manuscript

NOAHC recently received a manuscript from the Marathon and District Historical Society and Museum, written by a Colin Macmillan, who flew as a pilot with the Ontario Provincial Air Service and with the Marathon Paper Company in the 1940s and '50s. It tells the story of what it was like to fly in the north-west at that time. The Marathon Historical Society had planned to publish it, but when it found itself unable to do so, passed the manuscript on to NOAHC along with a generous donation to help with the cost of publication. It is now being edited and being prepared for publication by the Centre, probably later in 2021.

Superior Shores

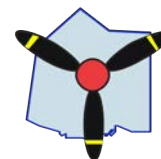
Most of you will know that the Northwestern Ontario Aviation Heritage Centre, like many other charities, is sponsored by the OLG Superior Shores Gaming Association. In "normal" times we have a crew of member volunteers who

work the bingos for us to earn a share of the revenue. Initially when Covid arrived the bingos were shut down and there was no revenue for any of us. Since that time there has been a limited opening of Superior Shores Gaming at 435 Memorial and the limited income is being shared by the charities. There is no requirement for our volunteers to attend because of Covid safety precautions. While bingos are on hold due to Covid capacity limits, online gaming is available and very popular. More machines have been added and the hall is open everyday from 11:00 a.m. until 1:30 a.m. For more information call 807-345-4946 or check out the Superior Shores Facebook page or website. Please share this with friends whom you think may be interested.

NOAHC has certainly benefited from the sponsorship of Superior Shores and looks forward to the time when conditions return to normal.

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They Also Served by W.R. "Bill" McRae



A memoir by a young man from Port Arthur telling the story of his service as a fighter pilot in the RCAF during WWII. Following his training in western Canada, Bill McRae was shipped to Britain where he flew Spitfires in Scotland and then in West Africa. He returned in time to fly air cover for the D-Day landings.

A captivating account of a critical time in our history, this is an ideal book for the historian and aviation enthusiast.

What readers say:-

I would recommend this book to any aviation enthusiast or anyone wishing to get a realistic look into the life of a pilot during this war. (Warren Kerr)

This is a "must read", not only for pilots, but particularly for young people, to understand what our men and women went through, so we can have the freedom we enjoy today. (Brian Wright)

I read every page, nostalgically paused over every photo and enjoyed it all. Bill had a gift. He wrote well and his earnestness, humility and honesty shine through in all of his material. (Lt-Gen Bill Carr (ret) CMM, DFC, OSd, CD)

To purchase **'They Also Served'** contact NOAHC by e-mail at noahc@tbaytel.net or by telephone at **807-623-3522**.

Price: Members \$25.00: Non-members \$30.00

Also available from the **Thunder Bay Museum** at
425 Donald St. E, Thunder Bay

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Arthur Puchalski DFC – Air Gunner: 1920-2015

Local doctor, Ione Puchalski, and her family have donated a memoir written by her father Warrant Officer Arthur Puchalski DFC about his experiences during WWII. She describes it as “the true story of a Canadian lad of Polish descent, who was born and raised in Northwestern Manitoba, and who volunteered to serve in a conflict against aggression and evil.”



The memoir includes Art Puchalski's account of his experiences from the time he volunteered, through his training, relocating to Europe, flying bombing missions in the RCAF, and his return to Canada at the end of WWII. Information that it contains will be incorporated in our military aviation display and a copy of the memoir will be made available for reading in our library. As those who served become fewer and fewer it is important to preserve their stories and NOAHC is very pleased to help.

After training in Canada, Art flew as a mid-upper gunner with 77 Squadron RAF, which was equipped with Handley Page Halifax bombers. In all, he completed 45 missions over enemy territory with an additional 6 during which the squadron delivered gasoline to the Army. Before departing for the customary leave after what was his first tour, he was advised that he would be receiving a commission. However, such commissions were then suspended as the war was ending and he remained a WO2 until his service was complete. In April 1945 Art was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, with the citation noting that he was an alert and skillful air gunner

whose cool courage and devotion to duty, have always been of a high order. The DFC was normally only awarded to officers and Art was one of only two non-commissioned officers, to receive the medal.

Following the war, Art initially returned to Manitoba, but in the early 1950s he re-located to the Lakehead where he lived until he died in 2015 at the age of 95.

The excerpt below from Art's memoir describes a perilous return trip from a bombing mission over Germany during his operational tour.

“On the evening of August 13th, 1944, after bombing their target of Brunswick, they were on the return trip, when the bombers were caught between two huge search light belts. Art suggested that ‘G George’ alter course 4 or 5 degrees to starboard and go around the searchlight belts. The crew agreed. Just as they got directly opposite the outer searchlight belt, ‘G George’ was attacked from starboard bow down (below the aircraft's height). Art felt a sharp sting in back of his left knee, as their plane was raked with cannon fire. His left foot also hung free, because the foot support had been shot off. ‘G George’ went into a corkscrew for evasive action, but the gunners could not see any enemy planes. Continuing along, now a long distance from the rest of their bomber stream, ‘G George’ struck out for home. Checking his leg, Art noticed that his wound was not bleeding too badly, so he thought it best to man the turret. He could get the leg dressed later. Unfortunately, while still miles out from the North Sea, a single searchlight locked onto them. Nothing that Doug Morison their pilot, could do would shake the light off. He tried diving and rolling the plane, but nothing worked. Once searchlights blinded an aircraft like this, the fighters liked to then nip in for the kill. Fortunately, this time there couldn't have been any other fighters in the vicinity because after a long time, the searchlight turned off. ‘G George’ was out too far for enemy ‘ack ack’ guns, so they continued back to base.

As soon as ‘G George’ landed back at the station, the ground crew came aboard to assess the damage. The attack had come from starboard bow down and fortunately the only gas tank punctured was an empty one. The bullet that had wounded Art was close in size to a point five-inch. It was found on the floor of the aircraft, mixed with all the empty casings that had come from the dislodged empty cartridge receptacle. The bullet had come through the wing, the tank, and the fuselage and then after hitting Art, it had severed the brace support for his footrest. As soon as the debriefing was over, Art was taken to the hospital and had the wound dressed. The medical officer wanted to have the wound x-rayed, but Art told him that was not necessary because he had the bullet in his pocket. He was keeping it for a souvenir. “



Handley Page Halifax bomber



Art receiving his DFC from WWI ace, Billy Bishop

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SUPERIOR SHORES GAMING ASSOCIATION



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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Elsie MacGill



Historica Canada has created a new Heritage Minute video honouring Elsie MacGill, Canada's first practicing women aeronautical engineer. It highlights her role as Chief Engineer at Can-Car in Fort William during the early 1940s when her efficient management of the Hawker Hurricane fighter production line led to her being named "Queen of the Hurricanes". While at Can-Car she also designed a training aircraft, the Maple Leaf 2 and started up the Curtiss Helldiver production line, but left Fort William before the latter order was complete. Her contribution to the war effort is well known in the local community, but this video will introduce her to a wider audience and encourage those who watch it to find out more about her other achievements, which included being the first woman to be Technical Adviser of the International Civil Aviation Authority (ICAO). She also became widely respected as an advocate for the rights of women and children.

Ecole Elsie MacGill Public School

In 2019 the Lakehead District Public School Board named its newest Elementary School after Elsie MacGill. When the name was announced, Ellen Chambers, Chair of the Lakehead District School Board, noted that "Not only is Elsie MacGill a significant and important part of the history of our community, her story will also provide inspiration for our students today and into the future." The school will meet the needs of students from JK to Grade 8 and includes a dual-track French Immersion Program. It was built on the site of the former Sir Winston Churchill Collegiate and Vocational Institute, planned as a state-of-the-art unit purposely designed to meet the needs of 21st century learners. It can accommodate 745 students, the first of whom enrolled in September 2020. Appropriately, the name chosen for the school teams was the *Elsie MacGill Hurricanes*.

Fort William Airport - 1962

*Allan Peden was a Meteorological Technician at Fort William Airport in the early 1960s at which time he took a series of photographs showing activities at the airport. His son Hugh Peden has sent these pictures to NOAHC and a selection is printed here. Look out for more to come in future issues of ***FlyNorth****



Tiger Moth CF-FUG outside the Kearney Hangar

**Allan Peden
and the
Paterson
Spifire**



Allan Peden releasing a weather balloon at the Airport



Spartan Air Services Aerial Survey Mosquito



The Paterson Spifire in its WWII camouflage



RCAF Golden Hawks Display Team, predecessors of the Snowbirds