Howard Wright & Eleanor Wood

September 2, 1939

Written by: Nick Corrie

Assisted by: The Wright Children - Carol, Howard, Robert, James

Name: Howard Stanley “Spark” Wright

Born: May 14, 1909, Ingersoll Ont.

Served in: World War Two Global War

Service Details: Chief Flying Instructor at # 3 Elementary Flying Training School transitioning to Royal Air Force Ferry Command as Captain Pilot.

As part of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan, #3 EFTS opened in June 1940. Located at Crumlin, a converted farm just east of London, the BCAPT stretched across Canada building over 200 bases training air crew in all facets of air warfare. Once trained, the recruits travelled to Britain serving alongside of the Royal Air Force in Britain’s fight against Germany.

With the closing of # 3 in 1942, Spark Wright joined the ranks of experienced world class pilots applying to RAF Ferry Command for acceptance in delivering North American built, multi-engine aircraft to various war zones. By December 1944, Wright flying as a Captain Pilot had delivered 35 various aircraft to Britain, the middle-east and Asia. In January 1945, he and his navigator, James Douglas Woodyard, began delivering to Scotland the Canadian built DeHavilland Mosquito, “The Wooden Wonder” fighter bomber. Flying their fifth delivery in June, they followed their usual route from home base in London to Montreal then proceeded to Goose Bay Labrador for fuel. Before reaching their next stop in Greenland, they disappeared. Their names appear on the Commonwealth War Memorial in Ottawa.

The Wright Way - From Bread Man to Trans-Oceanic Pilot:

The Howard Wright Story, 1909 - 1945

Prologue:

This is a story of a boy born in a small rural Ontario town who, as he grew into manhood, developed a passion to fly, to become an aviator. His name was Howard Stanley Wright; later he became simply "Spark" Wright as befitting a true pilot who knew how to fly any plane then in existence.

His story is one of personal achievement, transitioning from bread man to world class flyer. Initially, Wright trained civilians to fly, moving on during the war to work with young men not much older than boys, teaching them to fly, the first step to become WWII pilots. Unlike the Great War of 1914-1918, which was fought in trenches of mud and gore, the new conflict was fought to a much greater extent in the air. The airplane reigned supreme and Howard Wright played a significant role in the air war's success.

As the war progressed, he joined a group of professional aviators who dared to fly across the Atlantic Ocean in planes not designed for such a venture. This flying force of civilians and air force officers became known as – Royal Air Force Ferry Command.

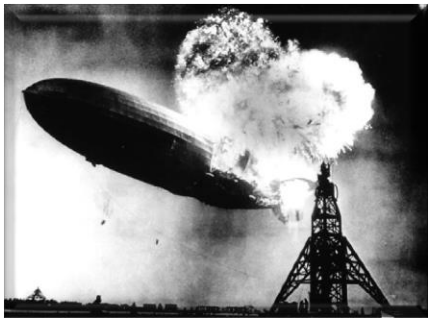
By war's end, Howard "Spark" Wright would fly across both the north and south Atlantic thirty-five times in various types of aircraft. These planes, some of the 16,000 built in Canada, the rest American, were desperately needed in Britain to fend off the German blitzkrieg air attacks devastating the entire British Isles.

The story of Howard Wright serves as a thread through which Canada's war time aviation development is weaved. Serving as a civilian volunteer, he became an integral part of this amazing national achievement, still evident today in the greater world of aviation. His story deserves to be told.

Who amongst the human hoards mingling on the earth today hasn't stared into the sky to watch and marvel at a bird soaring so effortlessly through the clean air? We have in common the same avian attraction we might believe was common with primitive man. To early homo sapiens, the bird would mean freedom from the challenging dirty and dangerous wet earth upon which they were forced to struggle daily for survival.

As religion developed to become an essential part of human culture, man saw God as a heavenly force, up in the air, looking down on all the earth. A human may have mused: "If I could fly, would I become God-like and see everything below?"

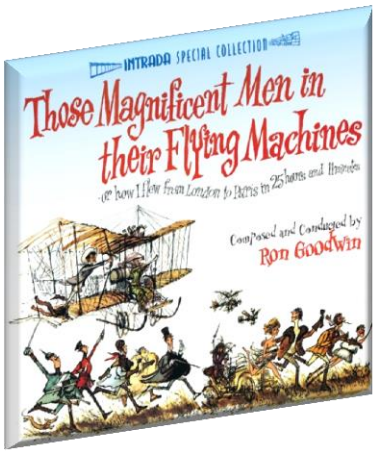
Unlike all other species on earth, human beings are blessed with superior intellect allowing us to invent devices to make life easier and achieve feats above our physical capabilities. We built ships to sail the oceans, we harnessed horses to wagons to ease our earthly travel - but flying? On that score we were stumped, it defied us. Millennia would pass before man's yearning to fly would become a reality. We might call this long period - the **Dreaming Years.**



To get off the ground before the twentieth century even for the briefest moment, the world applauded when man took to the air in balloons filled with inflammable gas or cunningly utilise a burning fire smoldering under a balloon made of paper. Sounds dangerous doesn't it? In time these devices were overtaken by dirigibles: huge hydrogen-filled ridged balloons of explosive proportions capable of transporting people across continents and oceans. Their supremacy in the race for safe sustained flight was dashed in spectacular fiery infernos. Danger, unfortunately, has always been part of flying, but the threat didn't curtail the challenge which more and more, took the form of a winged, propeller powered machine.

In the history of flying, the twentieth century marked the beginning of - the **Technological Years.**

Special reference material: The first stages of flying displayed both the serious side of man's approach to aviation advancements and the silliness. The 1965 movie, ***Those Magnificent Men In Their Flying Machines,*** *is a graphic illustration of how these two components came together and incredibly benefited aircraft design. The film is a spoof on the technological/ daredevil*



ages, but all the ingredients are there on the screen in Technicolor. Men and planes journeyed from around the world hoping to pocket a prize of 10,000 pounds by winning a race across the English Channel from London to Paris. Each nation displays its national sterotypes: from the stuffy, British pluck and insistence of greatness over all others to the German stiff militaristic antics and of course the French skirt-chasing, flippant, devil-may-care-take-all attitude. The Yanks overcome all obstacles and are the heroes in the end, like always, according to Hollywood anyway. The flyers themselves are determined to show their flying acumen against a musical accompaniment which more than adequately highlights the silly, carnival atmosphere side of the competition. The viewer is entertained with lyrics like: Looping the loop and defying the ground, Up, down, flying around in their flying machines and after Going around and around with concentration on not going Down-tee-down-down, upside down, they sometimes managed to land safely without plunging into the nearby sewage lagoon.

The varied plane designs accurately recreated, serve as visual samples of the inventiveness so prevalent in aviation's infancy. The film is great fun but more than the humour, it's a good representation of this era. There is even a woman who becomes a sign of more firsts to come when she constantly pines away for a chance to go up in the air in any plane or time; a perfect example of female determination.

War was always an incentive to invent something in which to kill more enemy quicker than they could kill you. Stone clubs gave way to steel pikes, bow and arrow for the blunderbuss, only to be superseded by rifles and machine guns. And so it was with the aeroplane in WWI.

The army brass hats were slow to see the aeroplane's merits, but once the aeroplane demonstrated its advantages, the race was on – the technological race that is.

At this time and place in WWI, we see an example of parallel thinking between the soldier in the trenches enduring the mud and mire, and his long ago grounded predecessor - the cave man – both wanting to exchange mud for the sky, to fly away into the great blue yonder. Only by 1914 it was possible.

Bishop and Barker

Canada's own WWI top flying ace and Victoria Cross winner from Owen Sound, William "Billy" Bishop, hopped from trench to plane. He was an officer with the First Hussars sitting splendidly astride a horse, but more often than not he wallowed in the mud like all unfortunate soldiers. To escape it all, he forsook both the trenches and equine glories to achieve greatness in the clean air - 72 kills. He wasn't alone - many others did the same thing.

A significant other, mirroring Bishop's path from horse to aeroplane, was another Canadian: William "Billy" Barker, who was also a recipient of the Victoria Cross with the added distinction of becoming the most decorated war hero in the country's history.

All pilots knew what "shot down" meant: the choice was either plunge to your death in a flaming plane or take your chances in a parachute which didn't always open as planned. A third option not often talked about, was to simply shoot yourself to avoid the flames and crash. Filthy mud or clean air? In his own words, Bishop had this to say about the transition from land to air: "…it's clean up there! I'll bet you don't get any mud or horse shit on you up there. If you die, at least it would be a clean death." Both Bills would attest to making the correct choice. Today we would call the decision a "no brainer."

72 Kills Ace Bishop

For youngsters growing up in this world of exciting flying exploits and heroes, men like Bishop and Barker became idols, the stuff from which a boy's dreams are made. Some years after the war, in his own good time, Howard Wright followed the two war heroes by ditching his old bread wagon pulled by dobbin and took to the air.

As the post-war years moved on, the war story influence on young Howard was pushed aside as he was plunged into the great age of flying - the 1920s and '30s. Charles Lindbergh, looking back on this era later in life, paid tribute to it as "a period in aviation which is now gone, but which was probably more interesting than any future will bring."

By war's end, the aeroplane had come a long way. It was faster and certainly more reliable than the world's first recognised powered flight by Orville and Wilbur's flying machine of 1903. The Technological Years are marked significantly by the aeroplane's advancements during the Great War, 1914-1918.

To demonstrate the spectacular improvements of the aeroplane's development in those years, especially in regards to reliability and greater distance, a daring flight took place in 1919 when two Royal Flying Corps veterans, John Alcock and Arthur Brown, set out from Newfoundland, crossing the Atlantic Ocean flying a WWI Vimy Bomber in amazing time. Despite landing nose down in an Irish bog, this feat of unprecedented long-distance flying, without question marks the beginning of the new era we call - the **Daredevil Years.**

"All the News That's Fit to Print."

The New York Times.

THE WEATHER

VOL. LXVIII. NO. 22,433. NEW YORK, MONDAY, JUNE 16, 1919. TWENTY-EIGHT PAGES. TWO CENTS

ALCOCK AND BROWN FLY ACROSS ATLANTIC; MAKE 1,980 MILES IN 16 HOURS, 12 MINUTES; SOMETIMES UPSIDE DOWN IN DENSE, ICY FOG

OUR TROOPS CROSS BORDER TO STOP JUAREZ FIGHTING

Infantry, Cavalry, and Artillery Enter Mexico and Are Rounding Up Villistas.

GUNS ALREADY IN ACTION

General Erwin States That He Purposes Only to Protect City and Plans No Intervention.

SHOTS HIT AMERICANS

President Wilson to Sail for Home About June 24

GERMANS OBJECTED STRONGLY TO TERMS

Reply to Allies Showed They Thought Themselves Equal Negotiators.

PROTESTS AVAILED LITTLE

Final Answer from Council Gives Relief on Only a Few Points.

Captain John Alcock

Lieutenant Arthur W. Brown

Airmen Who Accomplished the First Non-Stop Transatlantic Flight

FOCH OFF TO RHINE;

ZURICH REDS RIOT;

LAND AT CLIFDEN, IRELAND, IN A BOG

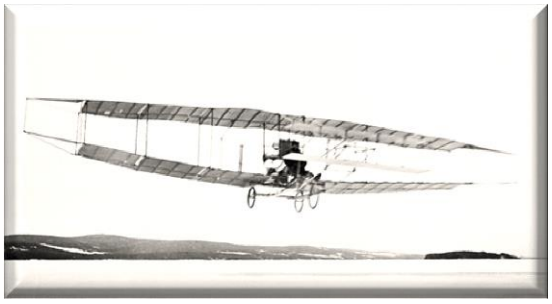
Airmen Moving at an 120-Mile Speed Were Unable to See Sun, Moon, or Stars for Hours Owing to Fog.

THEY LOOPED THE LOOP UNINTENTIONALLY AT TIMES

Fliers Temporarily Dazed and Deafened by Landing—Alcock Expects to Continue Journey to England—London Unprepared for Quick Flight.

Captain Alcock's Own Narrative Of His Flight From Newfoundland to Ireland

Note: Usage of: aeroplane vs airplane. The spelling aeroplane was used initially in all parts of the world including Canada. The United States in the early twentieth century began to spell it airplane, but due to Canada's close tie to Britain, we continued to use aeroplane. At some indeterminable time we Americanised and adopted their spelling. In keeping with that change, the remaining script will use – airplane.



February 23, 1909

Howard Wright was born in 1909. As he grew through all the early stages of life, this placed him as Lindbergh noted above, smack-dab in the most exciting age of flying the world has ever known. For openers, 1909 was the same year the Silver Dart flew off the frozen lake in Baddeck Bay, Nova Scotia. The brain child of Alexander Graham Bell, this was the first powered flight in Canada and the entire British Empire. What a fitting legacy for an

airplane to fly from a frozen lake in a country where ice hockey is the national pastime. For the next twenty years and more, the world around young Howard witnessed people who were determined to fly in airplanes. A steady diet of aviation news was fed to him daily.


GIRL FLIER CROSSES SEA TO WALES

Hoover Considering New Plan of Farm Relief

CURTIS QUIET BUT EFFECTIVE LEADER OF MEN

Coolidge Kept Imprisoned by Rainy Weather

Not Ready to Quit Old Post for Some Time

WOMAN SUCCEEDS IN FLYING ATLANTIC OCEAN

Warnings of New Floods Are Issued

BOSTON GIRL FIRST TO FLY THE ATLANTIC

GIRL AND PILOT

CAN YOU TELL WHICH IS LINDY?

REED BELIEVES HE WILL CHECK SMITH'S DRIVE

MISS EARHART ELATED OVER EPOCHAL TRIP

Aviators Had to "Fly Blind" Over Atlantic

Amelia Earhart, Sixth Woman to Try Sea Flight

The war had produced a bevy of flyers who were determined to keep at it. Was it the love of flying which drove them on or the many cash prizes offered to inspire more flying greatness? (Ref: *Those Magnificent Men*…) Prizes came from all directions. Any one, or fool, some said, was encouraged to be the first at doing something in an airplane - anything really, and the more danger involved – the bigger headlines you would see. Alcock and Brown had flown the Atlantic and now the race was on for many other firsts: fastest times; first passenger; first to any exotic locale, first woman doing anything in the air: passenger, wing walker and pilot. The number of achievements demanded was only limited by one's imagination. Great names of daredevil adventurers were splashed across the headlines: Lindbergh; aviatrix Earhart; Howard Hughes; Canada's own John McCurdy at Baddeck. The public were mesmerized; they couldn't get enough of it.

Wing Walkers

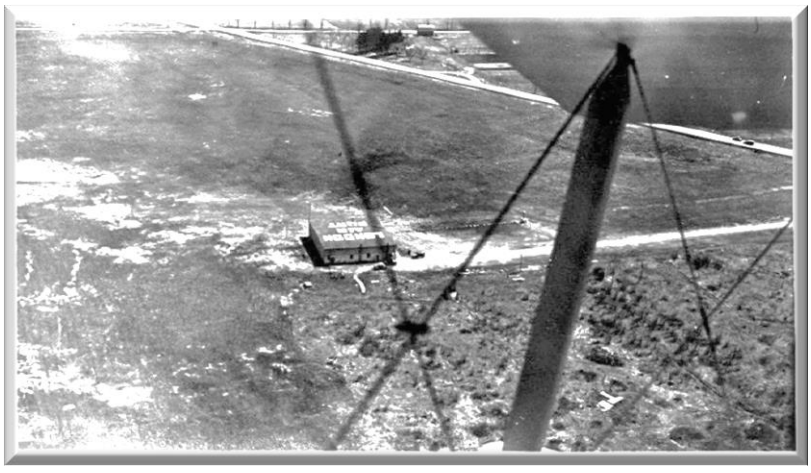
Cashing in on all the big world-class exploits, airplanes began to appear on the local scene. No county fair in the roaring twenties was complete without an airplane act of Barnstormers. They were Flying Circuses, boasting wing walkers, male and female, loop-the-loops, barrel rolls and parachutists. Again, only imagination limited the antics and there to witness it all was young Howard. He was growing up in the midst of all this flying excitement. Did someone or he himself, pony up a few dollars for a plane ride? Could this have been the incident which inspired Howard Wright to become a pilot? He had watched the birds of the air and now he was seeing planes take to the air.

Pilots Tulley and Medcalf stand beside the Sir John Carling plane

In short order, the flying frenzy took hold in the steadfast city of London, Ontario. In 1927, probably inspired by Lindbergh's epic solo flight from New York to Paris, Sir John Carling, the local brewing baron, decided to sponsor a plane which was to fly from the brewery's home town to the old-country city of same name, London, England. This was a fine twist to all of the other exploits underway the world over. A competition was begun to carefully select two pilots for the flight. In the ensuing developments, both the flight - and of course by association - the locally-brewed beer was prominently publicised.

After great fanfare emanating from crowds gathered to see the gaily decorated plane heavily loaded with fuel, fly off from a specially prepared airfield, all hope and excitement was soon dashed when the plane disappeared after leaving Newfoundland. No remains of the two pilots and plane were ever found. It was a portent of what was to come for many, many others who would follow but with a special unfortunate connection to our story.

In a farm field just south of London near Lambeth, a new airport was created in response to the aviation craze. The Lambeth Airport had the distinction of being one of the first privately-operated fields in Canada. Reportedly, it has the distinction of receiving the first air mail delivery in the country, November 25, 1927. There was no building on site at that time, just a grass strip, but it was a big deal anyway, big enough to galvanise greater events to come.



Avro Avian

The biggest of these developments was the creation of the London Flying Club in March 1928. It should be noted that these two flying developments, the Airport and Club, overlapped the Carling flight and its tragic consequences. One might assume that aviation losses had become so common by this time that a sense of indifference had grown a crust over both the public and their civic leaders who promoted all the flying exploits. The importance of aviation transcended everything.

The public had good reason to be indifferent to the losses, if not confused after reading the conflicting headlines which the London Free Press issued after each new development. When the airport opened, the paper put out eight pages under the headline: AIRPORT PLACES CITY AMONG THE MOST MODERN IN CANADA. After the loss of Tully and Medcalf in the Carling plane, the paper showed great concern for the loss, and without explanation for an editorial change of mind, the new headline pleaded: HALT TO SUICIDE FLIGHTS DEMANDED. The paper went on to assume in the same headline, the role of spokesman for the public demeanour with: PUBLIC OPINION IS AROUSED BY LOSSES IN DEATH GAMBLE.


The London Free Press
WESTERN ONTARIO'S FOREMOST NEWSPAPER
Announcing the Formal Opening
OF THE
London Airport
Progressive London Turns to the Air

Meanwhile, the saga of Howard Wright was unfolding to the east in Ingersoll. Howard, perhaps after grade eight or early high school, ditched education for the working class and became a bread man. With horse and wagon he found steady work earning a pay cheque at week's end. He was well placed when the Depression dumped on everyone. The nineteen-thirties, often called "the dirty thirties," were hard years in Canada. To have a job with an income no matter how small was fantastic, many didn't.

Yet despite the Depression-induced financial hardships imposed on Howard, coupled with a full awareness of all the hits and misses associated with early flying, the aspiring pilot pushed it all aside and in 1933, age 24, he decided to learn how to fly.

Special Note: At some time in his life, Howard Wright acquired the nickname "Spark." Family lore is not sure if this happened before his wartime flying or after. Like so many young men then and now, Howard was attracted to any type of conveyance powered with the internal combustion engine, be it autos or motorcycles. Perhaps friends watched him fiddling with spark plugs, pushing them to settle on his new, representative name, and the rest is history.

On the other hand, if war-related, the new handle may have emerged in one of his hazardous flights across the Atlantic Ocean with RAF Ferry Command. Passages below will describe his adventures with this organisation, but suffice for our purposes here, to suggest that he may have saved a plane, his life and that of his crew men. Here's how. The on board wireless sets (radios) had the unhealthy tendency to arc with sparks flying about in a fuselage perilously filled with extra fuel tanks and fumes. To describe such a plane as dangerous isn't wrong - they were flying bombs! Relying on his past motor experience, Howard may have dealt quickly with the cantankerous set, saved everyone and earned his nickname – Spark. Either version is possible.

Today, the second child of Howard and Nellie Wright, a son appropriately named after his father, Howard Stanley, has assumed his father's nick name as well: OPP Detective/Sergeant (Retd), Spark Wright.


London Flying Club Plane Crashes With Two Aboard

MONDAY, AUGUST 24, 1936

Naturally, the first item for consideration in becoming a pilot was to take flying lessons. Fortunately for Howard, it was only 25 miles from his home in Ingersoll to the newly-created Lambeth Airport and London Flying Club. The business of the Flying Club was offering flying lessons to any and all who could afford to pay. To this airstrip Howard was drawn, hitchhiking the distance both ways.

Over the years from 1928 and on, the club boasted a number of different types of aircraft. The first flown, fresh from the de Havilland factory near Toronto, were two Gypsy Moth training planes. By 1933 they had four planes in their inventory: three Avro Avians and a Canadian-designed Reid Rambler (sounds like a car doesn't it?). The Moths had come to a crashing end and were

written off on two separate occasions with no fatalities or serious injuries. To satisfy his quest in reaching for the clouds, Wright was introduced to flying through this assortment of primitive aircraft.

Referring to a well-researched book on local flying history, *London's Flying Pioneers*, written by the London Free Press's flying reporter, Bill Corfield,[1] (are all notable Canadian flyers named Bill?) we find that these planes didn't differ from those flown in France during the war. "They were bi-planes, one wing above the fuselage and one below, held together with struts and wires which had to be "rigged" just right so the plane would fly moderately straight and level…"

Corfield notes that these planes "…were docile, obedient machines." That was only if they were flown by experienced pilots; if not, if flown by a student "…they posed many tricky characteristics. Landing them softly was the mightiest challenge." The trick was to gently put them down without bending the landing gear or twisting the flying bird cage into contortions only a skilled mechanic could put right. In British parlance, this type of disastrous landing is termed "pranging." It is said, "The pilot pranged the plane."

Gypsy Moth

The type and quality of flight instruction Wright received in 1933 was not at all regulated. The instructors, many who were WWI trained pilots, reverted back to their training experience as a guide. The training regimen usually followed a somewhat ad hoc pattern. After some ground school instruction on the theory of flight, i.e. how a plane actually flies - gets airborne - followed by a hands-on examination of the planes' physical characteristics including the engine, they finished up with some cautionary words related to the weather. After this hurried instruction, it was deemed the sprog pilot was ready for flying. Ready enough to be he taken aloft for some dual flying lessons.

As in the film mentioned above, they would both take off in their flying machine, defying the ground and go around and around. After a few trips in the air with more than a few hairy rough landings, if the student was deemed ready, he was invited to go solo. At this point the hope, or prayer, was extended to both the safety of the new pilot and the club's investment in the plane. In short, they wanted to see him come safely *Down-tee-down-down*.

[1] Bill Corfield & Hume Cronyn, *London's Flying Pioneers*, 1997

This was the student's big moment. The insatiable desire to fly was finally realised. The expense of perhaps $150 vindicated. Into the air he or she went alone, and after a successful first flight, the new, grinning pilot could expect a dousing with cold water to solemnise the moment.


1937 The Inger

LOCAL AVIATOR GOES TO LONDON

Howard Wright Will Join Permanent Staff London Airport Next Week

LEAVING INGERSOLL

Howard Wright, Charles street, widely-known Ingersoll scribe, leaves over the coming week-end to take a position with the London Flying club, of which he is a director.

By the 1930s, the Flying Club's bi-planes had become the type used strictly for training since aviation technology had moved onto mono-wings and enclosed cabins. The day of heavy flying suits, leather helmets and goggles were to a great extent becoming passé in civilian flight circles but not totally forgotten in the realm of aviation. With the war clouds rumbling in the not too distant future, the club's retention of bi-planes put them in a good position for training a flood of new pilot recruits who would invade a new airport yet to be built east of London. Wright would play a big part when the time came.

In a 1937 Ingersoll newspaper article, Howard Wright is about to leave the town of his birth and become an employee of the Flying Club. We learn that he has been involved in aviation for four years, since 1933, which places him in a position to witness a parade of aviation technological advancements and meet important aviators who arrive at the quaint Lambeth Airport.

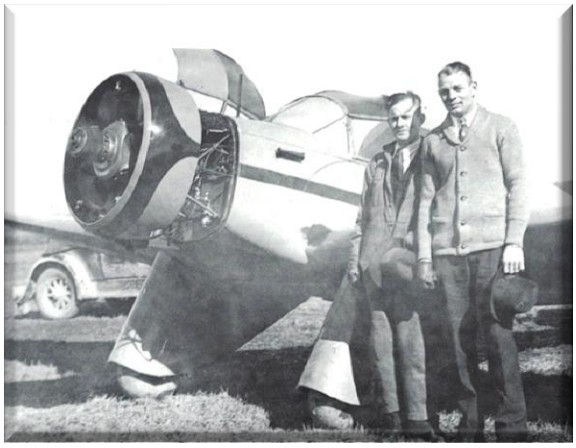
That same 1933, when Howard was just beginning his flying lessons, Wiley Post and his indomitable *Winnie Mae* dropped in to thrill the throngs who came by car, bicycle and horse to see the famous duo. And why not? Man and Lockheed Vega had circumnavigated around the world! In just twenty years since the Kitty Hawk flight of only a few hundred feet, an airplane's capabilities had made unbelievable strides forward.

The next big event occurred on August 14, 1934, when Hugh Herndon and Clyde Pangborn brought to Lambeth their Bellanca Skyrocket, *Miss Veedol*, delighting the same enthusiastic crowds who welcomed Wiley the year before. Why the excitement? Who were these two guys? This pair of adventurers had flown non-stop across the Pacific Ocean in 41 hours and 13 minutes.

Rough Trans-Pacific landing

Pangborn was an old Barnstormer from way back who thrived on aerial adventure. There is an old saying in aviation, as old as flying itself that goes: "There are old pilots and bold pilots but there are no old-bold pilots." Pangborn was the exception. His nick-name was "Upside-down Pang" after he dared to fly an old bi-plane upside-down. His CV (curriculum vitae) reads like a man driven to fly under any circumstances in times of peace and war.

When World War II broke out in Europe in late 1939, Pangborn joined the Royal Air Force (RAF) and assisted in organizing the RAF Ferry Command. For Howard Wright, on the verge of planning a career in the air, Pangborn's future connection to RAF Ferry Command is an incredible coincidence, a most compelling possible connection which might have afforded Wright with an introduction as a civilian pilot to the same RAF service when he applied in 1942. Could it be that it all started with a chance 1934 meeting on a grass landing strip in Lambeth?



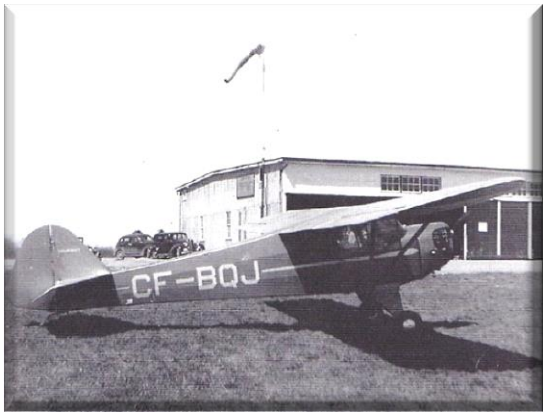
The 1937 Ingersoll newspaper article sited before provides a full accounting of Wright's flying experience since 1933 when he learned to fly. The position he was about to assume was on the permanent staff of the Flying Club, moving from the position of director assumed earlier that year. He still needed 50 more hours to become an instructor, despite having bagged 200 by that time. Enthused about his upcoming direct connection to the aviation world, with pay, he is quoted as saying, "I believe this is a big year in aviation," and yet he was also laying out plans for "…the secretarial and general

business factors of aviation." It's obvious from these few remarks that the London Flying Club was hiring an extremely competent manager. Perhaps looking to the future, he offered his opinion on the profit to be made and good paying prospects for all involved. He ventured: "I think it has a big future and a good-paying future." His wartime service would prove the prediction a valid one.

The paper goes on to observe that Wright was, "Extremely modest and retiring…" and only after some persuasion would he "…talk about himself or permit a picture to be taken." Earlier in his life away from flying, he found quiet recreation in fishing and hunting with friends. In other words, he wasn't a swash-buckler, Errol Flynn type of character. No, he was the very steady type of man sought out to take control of an aircraft when skill and safety were demanded. Aren't all pipe smokers quiet and unassuming?

Wright pays tribute to his baker employer for whom he had been working the past fourteen years. The firm of G. H. Clark & Son gets warm praise for those years he had spent working in various capacities, including delivering bread by horse drawn wagon over a considerable amount of territory, city and rural. A truly trusted and valuable employee the company was losing. Their loss - the Flying Club's gain.

Never openly stated in any public account, one undeniable fact emerges: Wright was a recognised natural flyer, a pilot's pilot. Beginning in 1933 when he learned to fly, to 1937 when he became a director of the club, then moving on to a managerial responsibility, without ever being a "showman," he nevertheless impressed the local flying fraternity in his prowess. In striving to be a professional flyer, he expanded his knowledge of aviation through trips to night school classes at London's H. B. Beal Technical School, a highly recognised teaching facility offering courses to aspiring aviators. Thus, he displayed careful and deliberate tendencies which afforded him a sound grounding in his new-found vocation. Two years after becoming the club's manager, in 1939 he was promoted again to the esteemed position of - Chief Flying Instructor.



Reaching back to 1934, the London Flying Club began to acquire newer plane designs. Mono wings began to appear on the grass strip with enclosed cockpits giving the club a more modern appearance and greater economy. Maintenance was greatly reduced over the old “fliver” bi-planes when the club’s flying inventory expanded with a 37 horsepower Taylor Cub, (see above). The next year a more powerful Porterfield 35-70 was introduced into the training program.

More than a little credit for the success of these acquisitions and introduction into training during these transformation years should be extended to Howard Wright. As he moved through the various stages of promotion, he was one constant contributor for the entire period.

About the same time he was accepting the club’s offer for a rather tame experience managing their business dealings, he revealed a more adventurous side to his flying ambitions. Along with passenger A. J. Kelly, a Woodstock grocer, he flew down to Newark, New Jersey. The reason for going is obscure until one considers the importance of this city’s airport. The Newark Metropolitan Airport opened in 1928 and because of its approximation to New York City, it became the world’s busiest commercial airport. Amelia Earhart in 1935, cut the ribbon on its Art Deco terminal, one of the finest found anywhere. With 61 weekday departures on five airlines, the experience of witnessing all this modern flying hustle and bustle must have been rather intoxicating for these two men emerging from the quaint, grass-field world of Lambeth.

The 1937 article makes it clear that he was approaching his new position “with an open mind” but he went on to declare that: “He has no cut-and-dried policy as to what factor of aviation he may settle into. He only knows that he is interested in them all…” If he was courting a career in commercial aviation at this time, the upcoming war would dash those ambitions and help to gel his focus into more obvious, immediate directions.

As the decade came to an end, only the most obtuse optimist could have discounted the prospect of a new war. Fortunately, despite the unpreparedness of Canada to meet its war obligations, back in 1936 the federal government established the Department of Transport. This development essentially shook up the training program for all private flying clubs in Canada. Earlier in the decade, the flying clubs themselves realising that they functioned in a constantly expanding and modernising aviation world, organised under the

banner: The Canadian Flying Clubs Association. (After the war they became: The Royal Canadian Flying Club Association.)

The world of private flight training was well aware of shortcomings in too many cases where corners were cut to get the student into the air – no more! Set medical standards were administered from approved DoT doctors. The new government regulations imposed standards on airports, trainers, pilots, aircraft maintenance, airworthiness, engineers, traffic control, airways and navigational aids. It was a complete shakeup.

It was Howard Wright's responsibility to put all these new developments into action which he did and not a moment too soon. Everyone knew the next war would be an air war and they had to be ready.

But all this had to wait because, into the evolving life of Howard Stanley Wright, a new, wonderful and attractive change was introduced: on September 2, 1939 – he was married!

His new bride was a charming local girl who he had likely known for some time: Eleanor (Nellie) Agnes Wood, age 23. To see and know someone even casually was an advantage afforded by a small town. How long they courted, none of their four children alive in 2020 are able to say, but they really don't need to know. They can see from the surviving photographs and stories passed down, that it was a happy, loving and rewarding relationship. And aren't they living proof?

Both bride and groom were children of hard-working parents who earned their living employed at local enterprises, toiling in various capacities. They led comfortable lives in a small town atmosphere which didn't encourage too much diversity. Fitting in with the local populace was the thing to do; getting along with your neighbours was expected for a happy existence.

Genealogies:

Howard Stanley Wright, b. May 14, 1909, Ingersoll, Ont., d. June 10, 1945, lost during flight.

- Father: Edward Henry George (Harry) Wright, b. circa 1872, England, d. June 1, 1958, Ingersoll, Ont.
- Mother: Mary Ann Tonks, b. circa 1868, England, d. September 6, 1948, Ingersoll, Ont.
- Parents married August 19, 1893 in Homerton Parish, London, England.

Military family history: Howard had at least one older brother who fought in WWI.

- LCpl. Harry George Wright, Service Number 675529, Eastern Ontario Regiment. b. September 23, 1895 (England or Canada) d. November 9, 1917. Memorialised on

Menin Gate (Ypres), Belgium, one of 55,000 who were lost without trace during the defence of the Ypres Salient. This loss without trace would have a special family significance when Howard disappeared in flight to England in 1945.

Eleanor Agnes Wood, b. November 17, 1915 Ingersoll, Ont., d. March 15, 2001 London, Ont.

- Father: Frederick Wood, d. 1947 Ingersoll, Ont.
- Mother: Ellen b. circa 1876, d. February 1955 London, Ont. Both parents believed born in UK.

Ingersoll's greatest reputation grew on one product – cheese. Town folk today still think of their town as: The Cheese Capital of Canada. (P.B.s French Fries is a newer, rival reputation.)

The wedding arrangements (see articles on accompanying pages) followed the usual pattern of a church service with guests coming from near and far, gathering together within the holy confines of St. James Anglican Church to sing delightful hymns accompanied by organist Mrs. Edward Gilling. Given by her father in marriage, "…the bride wore a white silk lace gown over satin with leg-o'mutton sleeves." One item noted with pride: adorning the bride was a gold watch with a "blue enamelled back, as a locket." It was an heirloom gift, 100 years old.

Following the reception at the home of the bride's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Wood, the new couple left all this idyllic setting behind as they scurried off on their honeymoon with plans to reside in London, to be near Howard's employer, the Flying Club. It's how they left which has left an indelible impression on everyone's memory.

The Ingersoll Daily Sentinel Review (their title is almost as big as the town) waxed on greatly over this story, illustrating the account with two large photographs. And why not? The means of departure chosen by bride and groom wasn't seen every day or perhaps never again.

(One hundred and forty miles away, The Windsor Star picked up the story, printing it along with a wedding photograph.)


INGERSOLL'S FIRST AIRPLANE WEDDING TRIP


The marriage on Saturday of Howard S. Wright, instructor and director of London Flying Club, to Miss Eleanor K. Wood, Ingersoll, solemnized at St. James' Anglican church, was of unusual interest, not only because of the popularity of the young Ingersoll couple, but also because it was Ingersoll's first airplane wedding trip. Following the church service and the reception at the home of the bride's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Frederick T. Wood, Dufferin street, the couple left by plane from a field on the J. C. Harris farm on No. 19 highway. Many relatives and friends escorted them to the field. After the takeoff and the circling of the field, the bride threw her bouquet to her friends. It landed in an adjacent field and was picked up by David Craig MacTye, grandson of Mrs. J. C. Harris. It was then turned over to Mrs. Harry Wright, mother of the bridegroom. The upper S.-R. photo shows the wedding party (left to right): Ernest W[illegible]other of the bridegroom, groomsman; Mr. and Mrs. Howard Wright; Mrs. Alfred Wood, P[illegible]er-in-law of the bride.

Leaving the reception, the couple made their way to the famous estate of cheese baron James Harris, of 7300 pound, wheel-of-cheese fame. The home was and still is, a fine example of Gothic Revival style and parked on a field nearby, was the Flying Club's Taylor Cub airplane, all gassed up ready to whisk the newlyweds away on their honeymoon. Off they went, flying high with delight!

There was one tradition yet to perform. Circling back over the bride's home, she dropped her bouquet to friends below. Not trained as a bomb aimer, the flowers went wide. They were retrieved by young David Craig MacTye and delivered respectively to Mrs. Harry Wright, the groom's mother. We can assume the sky watching wedding crowd were as ecstatic as the energy-charged reporter writing the story, and all went home anxious to share their experience with friends and family.

Both the Lambeth Airport and its significant tenant, the London Flying Club, were the products of prominent men operating in the local sphere. Men like Mayor John Moore, prominent retail merchant Gordon Ingram, senior executive of London Life E.F. Reid, and significant mortgage-holder Charles Lawson proudly displayed their support for the exciting flying endeavours consuming the public's attention. All these men were in addition to the small army of other notables who fostered the Carling flight. Collectively, they were the cream of London society and Howard's employers.

Despite his poor education and working class upbringing, his friendly and open personality overcame any perceived deficiencies, allowing him to confidently enter this exalted upper class world with its stuffy social functions. Of course, entering the high inner sanctum of wealth and prestige with a beautiful wife on his arm wouldn't have gone unnoticed. Nellie would draw favourable attention wherever she went.

Within six years, Howard had managed to acquire an attractive wife and climb the corporate ladder as trainee, director, business manager and then the jackpot – Chief Flying Instructor. Influential people had taken notice of his talents through promotion and social acceptance. The happy, well-dressed couple seen here reflect all that has been deservedly achieved.


The London Free Press

Western Ontario's Foremost Newspaper

LONDON ONTARIO, MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 11 1939—22 PAGES

THREE CENTS

CANADA AT WAR WITH NAZIS; HOUSE ALMOST UNANIMOUS

FRENCH ADVANCE ON WIDE FRONT; GERMANS STRIKE BACK SHARPLY TO STALL DRIVE INTO SAARLAND

POLES REPEL FOE INVADING CAPITAL CITY

STATE OF WAR OFFICIALLY PROCLAIMED AS KING GEORGE GIVES HIS CONSENT; U.S. IMPOSES EMBARGO ON DOMINION

On Prices Board

State of War Serves as Well As Declaration

ALL DEFENCES ARE COMPLETED

WAR BUDGET, SPECIAL TAXES WILL BE CONSIDERED TODAY

USE CAPTURED BLOCKHOUSES TO WARD OFF GERMAN ATTACKS

The day after the nuptials took place, Britain declared war on Germany, September 3, 1939. Canada waited a week and declared on the 10th. The couple sensing the importance of this world shaking development, cut short their honeymoon and returned to London where Howard soon began to train a flood of new pilots on a wartime basis.

The nineteen-thirties was a decade of tumultuous proportions. The industrialised world was immersed in a depression which stopped progress in all forms of production. At the same time, the horrible memories of WWI, The Great War, the "war to end all wars," haunted the populace surviving in all countries which had sent troops. This revulsion, not un-naturally developed into disarmament movements, an attitude conveniently embraced by governments as an excuse to do nothing in the way of defence. This do-away-with-weapons idiocy meshed nicely with the appeasement approach adopted by prime ministers and presidents in dealing with the likes of Hitler and Mussolini. Fortunately, a few men, led by Winston Churchill, countered this head-in-the-sand, carry pacifying umbrella ignorance, and quietly worked away behind the scenes to create schemes which would put Britain on a war footing. One such scheme, appropriately named the Empire Air Training Scheme (EATS), came to Canada.

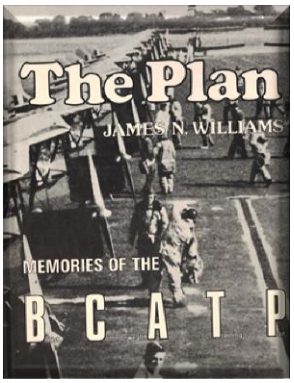
A delegation of British officers from the Royal Air Force (RAF) were dispatched to Canada in the late 1930s to seek out locations for building aerodromes (as they were called then) in which to train air crew. Wide open land and unencumbered air space was the attraction. Uncharacteristically, the British delegations were widely embraced by Mackenzie King and his anti-war government. The thinking, muddled as it was, believed that if Canada trained British crews, then Canadians wouldn't have to go and fight again.

This delusion was quickly dashed for the duration when the Germans drove the British army into the sea at Dunkirk. The phoney war was kaput. Time to man the guns and – the planes.

The London Flying Club and other civilian clubs had all along been cutting their teeth teaching elementary flying in simple types of aircraft, nothing in the way of a sophisticated military design. As it turned out, this type of experience was precisely the type the RAF sought as appropriate to start off a pilot trainee on a sequence of progressive training steps ultimately leading to his becoming a skilled combat airman.

Following WWI, as related above, the world stopped star gazing and switched its attention to planes. A type of craze overtook the populace fuelled by newspaper accounts of greater and greater achievements in the air. The all-knowing, all-seeing governments were not immune to the trend either. Focusing strictly on the merits of civil aviation, the Civil Aviation Branch, Department of National Defence, developed plans to help fledgling flying clubs train pilots. Singling out any club qualifying under specified criteria, they pledged two free aircraft. (The two Tiger Moths donated to the London Flying Club in 1928 were part of this program.) The point here is, despite the civilian focus of private club training, governments were involved from the beginning. With the country at war, the government changed direction to promote military aviation by assuming complete control. Realising the expertise of the flying clubs to train pilots, 26 clubs across Canada were recruited to carry on in a new wartime capacity.

The next years are: the **Daredevil Years Pt 2.** *The war years.*



The Canadian countryside quickly became a beehive of activity. With amazing alacrity, the country shook off the Depression doldrums and turned all construction attention to building aerodromes from coast to coast. In the process, for reasons still unknown but strongly assumed (King hated any reference to Empire), the scheme took on a new designation. EATS became: the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (BCATP). Aka "The Plan"

In February 1939, club President Clare Pocock returned from an Ottawa meeting to inform the gathered assembly that the London Flying Club would most certainly be part of the BCATP, one of the 26 so designated. This announcement was quickly verified in October when the RCAF contracted with the club to provide refresher courses to provisional pilot officers (PPOs) recalled for active service. It was Wright's responsibility to put the air force training syllabus into action. The bulk of these retrained pilots became in due time, which was running short, instructors themselves.

The first class passed the refresher courses in November, retrained on de Havilland Tiger Moths and more importantly for the Club's and Wright's future, on the de Havilland Fleet Finch. From 1940 to July 1942, the Finch became the plane of choice for elementary training at Crumlin.

The only bad news found within the waves of good sweeping over the Lambeth Airport was a killer-diller: the airport with its inadequate grass strip and old hanger - was not included in The Plan. To the east of London bulldozers had for some time been clearing land for a modern airport complete with paved airstrip. Initially this airport, Crumlin, named after a nearby hamlet (Crumlin and London were interchangeable at this time) was to be civilian only, built to accommodate the newly incorporated Trans Canada Airlines (TCA). This plan, like all others not on a war footing, quickly took second place to the incoming RCAF Station Crumlin, part of the BCATP. Its official designation was: #3 Elementary Flying Training School (#3 EFTS).

New recruits in new home

On June 25, 1940, the Honourable C. D Howe, the father of TCA, arrived from Ottawa. A dynamo of all politicians, he was branded years later by Prime Minister Diefenbaker as "the Minister of Everything." This date is regarded as the official opening of both the London Airport and #3 EFTS.

In keeping with the myriad of changes, The London Flying Club in turn created a subsidiary to operate during the hostilities. They became: The London Elementary Flying Training School with Wright retained as the Chief Flying Instructor.

In a quick succession period of just seven years, from 1933 to 1940, Howard Wright had progressed literally, from a land-locked bread man to the elevated, responsible position of training young men to become competent pilots in a wartime emergency. Not bad, not bad at all!

It is said, to instruct new aspiring pilots, to trust your life to shaky untried hands flying hundreds of feet above the ground, is a feat worthy of daredevil status, but this new training episode was different because the county was at war. Howard, acting in his official capacity, carried on but with a new sense of urgency. He was a civilian working for a civilian company but the overseers were the RCAF; they had full control of the entire program. The Air Force stipulated both strict training standards and time frame to follow. Wright, relying on past experience with the PPOs, had no trouble fulfilling their demands. Well, maybe just a few.

Due to a variety of circumstances for some time after Crumlin opened, but mainly due to no paved runway, #3 was forced to utilise the old familiar Lambeth strip. To operate from two locations must have added some complexity to the whole training process, challenging Wright's ability to co-ordinate and retain the RCAF's inflexible schedule. Since Wright had flown for years on frozen ground and muddy, slick grass, the added inconvenience of two fields was overcome and the pilots graduated on time.

First wave of many recruits

Into a new world of high adventure arrived recruits to watch the first of 27 Fleet Finch

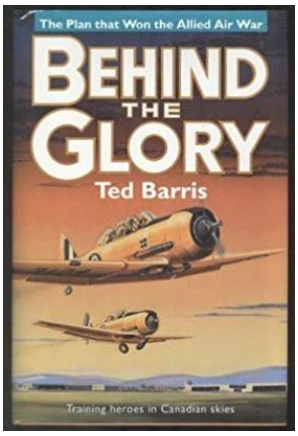
aircraft touch down on the finally paved runway. By the end of August, this initial influx of budding pilots had completed the first phase of necessary courses to eventually graduate as operational pilots, trained to fly in combat overseas.

Special Note on Air Force humour: The white band seen in the recruit's head gear, aka Wedge Cap, denoted their trainee status. Some wags who had been at the station for some time, put it about with the girls in the nearby town that the band meant these men had VD.

No hasty meal here!

The need for trained air crew was so great that, in most cases, men and planes arrived at their assigned aerodrome before it was completed. Mud, cold huts and hasty meals were the order of the day for the first few months. When Howe appropriately arrived in a Stinson aircraft to open the facilities at Crumlin, his plane had to land on the grass in Lambeth because there were no runways completed at the new airport.

The training syllabus involved eight weeks including 180 hours of ground instruction and fifty hours in the air, half dual then half solo. It was said then, and probably is still muttered under trembling lips by flight instructors today, that "God watches over first solos."

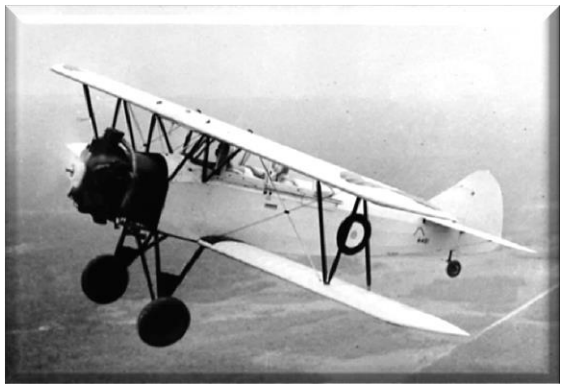


The eight hours of dual instruction was regarded as the most stressful component for instructors in the entire program. In the excellent book on the BCATP, *Behind The Glory*, author Ted Barris,[2] gleaned from his interviews years later with both the instructors themselves, or if at the time married, from their wives, that the long hours could "siphon away his energy." They recalled "…the repetition, the constant shouting into the Gosport tubes over the roar of the aircraft engine, and the need to stay alert, watching for other aircraft in the skies around a training station as well as being on constant guard for a student's unexpected errors – all took their toll." Arriving home after a day of many dual instructions a day, the instructor was in need of some TLC. One instructor's wife related how she would massage his feet because, "His feet were on the rudder pedals all day. The vibration would just drive him crazy."

[2]Ted Barris, *Behind The Glory*, 1992. The number of informative interviews and Plan details in Ted's book, makes it a must read when researching this subject.

While a student pilot error in flight was frightening for pilot and instructor, if they both survived the experience it became a valuable lesson. Sprog pilots had to learn to handle the risks if they were ever going to survive piloting a powerful fighter or heavy bomber against a skilled enemy. It became a valuable survival experience, unexpectedly folded into the learning curriculum. “Trainees had to recognize danger without buckling in the face of it. Only expert instructors and an aircraft like the Fleet Finch could achieve this.” At #3 EFTS, the trainees were treated to both, with Howard Wright overseeing their training. (Above: Spark on right)

This is a Fleet 16B Finch II, presently housed at the Canadian Aviation and Space Museum, Ottawa. It was built in 1940 and first served at #3 EFTS carrying RCAF Reg. # 4510. *This airplane is the only actual artefact in existence today directly related to Howard Wright’s flying career*. Painted bright yellow like all BCATP craft, it becomes something very special to the Wright family.



However, the docile plane wasn’t without a few flaws encountered the hard way - crashes and deaths. The actual number isn’t known, but overall deaths and serious injuries arising in all stages of training in the BCATP total 856. This statistic is balanced out through realising The Plan in total graduated 49,808 pilots with a complete total in all trades: 131,500. Unfortunately, war can’t be fought without the tragedy of death.

Fleet Aircraft of Canada Ltd., located near Fort Erie, Ontario, delivered 335 Finch aircraft to the RCAF. The plane was a valuable, strong asset which could withstand hard landings. It had to.

After a round of “circuits and bumps,” as the daily training was called with some derision, the final landing for the day more often than not in the early training stages, delivered an inevitable jarring as the plane bounced to a welcomed and safe stop - right side up! It was a forgiving biplane, a real workhorse which earned the epitaph “the backbone of the training plan.”

The United States didn’t enter the war until December 7, 1941, when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, a day President Roosevelt declared: “*A date which will live in infamy.”* Before that date, the President expertly balanced the domestic war forces of “hawks and doves” across his 48 states. The large influential numbers of doves, better known as “America Firsters,” kept the USA out until attacked. Still, Roosevelt skilfully ignored the isolationists to look approvingly north to view the successful BCATP in action and then coined a term always applied in any discussion of The Plan. He singled out Canada as: *The Aerodrome of Democracy*.

(In reference to his own country’s output of weapons beyond any scale before imagined, in 1940, he called the United States of America: *The Arsenal of Democracy*. It was their incredible output of aircraft which spurred on the need for Ferry Command to get more planes delivered faster.)

In July 1942, the London Flying Club, overseeing #3 EFTS at Crumlin, received some bad news. Shortly after they opened in June 1940, Leavens Brothers Air Services, a well-known Canadian company with extensive connections in aviation circles, were commission to open at Crumlin a navigational school in December. This became: #4 Air Observer School (#4 AOS). Like so many other undertakings within The Plan, it was a civilian/RCAF arrangement like #3 but was much more sophisticated than elementary training. They used twin engine Avro Anson aircraft with radio communication. The entire combination of men and machines demanded more and bigger hangers, more classrooms, more barracks. In fact, it became an operation needing more of everything. The navigation school was big, much bigger in comparison to the training school - it had to go. The entire program was transferred to #9 St. Catharines and #3 Elementary Flying Training School was no more.

Finding time to take mom flying

This cancellation effectively put the London Flying Club out of business and Howard Wright unemployed. What to do? With Wright's past flying and training experience, he was in a good position for a transfer to #9 or go to more demanding work at a Service Flying School. This is where his previous students went after elementary training to be further trained on bigger aircraft like the Harvard, then graduate with their wings as a fully-trained pilot. He passed on the opportunity.

Reviewing the remarks above made by an instructor who came home each day all used-up and perhaps more than a little bored with the repetition of training men over and over again, Howard may have felt the same way. Even before the war he had trained pilots. At this stage in his life and war, he was ready for something else and definitely – something bigger! In his absence we must speculate.

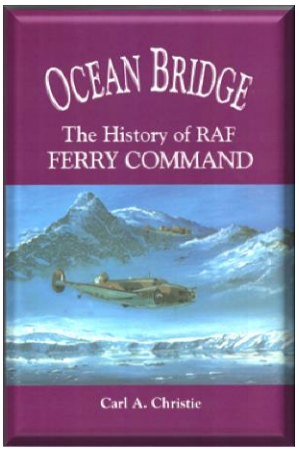
Opened by Amelia Earhart 1935

His tenure at #3 EFTS paid better than $200.00 a month, a goodly sum back then. Once a person has a taste of good income the tendency is to maintain it. In 1937 he flew to Newark to look over the prospects of civil aviation. In the newspaper article he said, "I have been and am interested in aviation and flying because I think it has a big future and a good paying future." Civil aviation paid well, but during the war, prospects as a viable new option were a dead end. However, as one door closes, another opens and for him it opened quickly. There was on call for Wright, who we see at times displaying an adventurous flair, an exciting new flying enterprise: why not fly planes across the Atlantic Ocean and realise that "good paying future" once speculated on in 1937?

Whether he recalled the meeting with Clyde Pangborn at Lambeth Airport in 1935 and sought him out, is pure speculation. Why think of Pangborn? This world class flier had been contracted by the Royal Air Force to recruit American pilots to join the newly formed RAF's Ferry Command. They intended to fly aircraft of all descriptions across the Atlantic to Britain which desperately needed more planes to beat to a stand-still the German threat from the air. Pangborn had flown across the entire world's oceans more than once; he was just the man for the job.

History today sometimes colours Ferry Command as a clandestine operation. They may have tried this tactic, but the need for qualified pilots was more important than secrecy. Even without seeing ads appearing in newspapers recruiting pilots (Clayton Knight committee, USA for one) and forgetting a possible connection to Pangborn, Wright was party to the buzz around any airfield at that time as pilots pondered a future with Ferry Command. It became for Howard Stanley Wright, (or is it Spark by now?) - a goal to reach for.

The foremost authority on the RAF Ferry Command story is Professor Carl A. Christie. In 2019, he was visited in Ottawa by a film crew to record verbally details which in 1995 were the subject of his book Ocean *Bridge*.[3] His remarks were filmed in the impressive Canadian Aviation and Space Museum against a backdrop of the famed de Havilland Mosquito, the "Wooden Wonder" Fighter-Bomber. Relying on his vast knowledge on the Ferry subject and World War Two in general, Christie becomes indispensable to this narrative. At the time the book was released, he was a Senior Research Officer with the Directorate of History, National Defence Headquarters. His credentials are impeccable.



The first paragraph of *Ocean Bridge* is a complete synopsis of Ferry Command history and its importance to the war's success. Christie points out that, despite the contribution it made to the Allied air offensive in Great Britain, North Africa, the Battle of the Atlantic, even stretching out to the far east against Japan, scant attention is afforded the service by historians. This despite the fact that over ten thousand aircraft were delivered from Canadian and United States factories. Without these planes delivered quickly by air vs. slow ship's cargo through U-Boat infested dangerous seas, the struggle against the enemy would have been prolonged with more lives lost.

[3] Carl A. Christie, *Ocean Bridge*, 1995. For anyone interested in the fascinating story of RAF Ferry Command, this is the book to read. Howard Wright is mentioned more than once. Only a small part can be found on these pages.

Lockheed Ventura: first RAFFC plane to fly Atlantic, 1940

In Christie's assessment, Ferry Command "…was essential to the development and projection of Allied air power and was one of the most spectacular achievements of the war." As for the men who flew these planes across the Atlantic, planes not designed for those distances and conditions: "Those responsible for the successful delivery of these aircraft not only helped to win the war, but made remarkable advancements in long-range flying." This is the world of aviation which Howard Wright selected and the one in which he flew for the next three years, July 1942 to June 1945.

An observation to help explain Professor Christie's correct assertion that this whole Ferry Command operation is greatly overlooked in military history volumes. Answer - it was centred in Canada! Too often the country's total war contribution is only recognised as an aside. To foreigners, we get folded into the British Empire's forces or we become overshadowed and ignored as the northern neighbour to the all-powerful United States of America. To be ignored has become commonplace. Our politicians take pride in mediating between the great powers, relegating themselves to the back seats. It's the Canadian way. Forever the Bridesmaid but never the Bride. Easily missed - that's us.

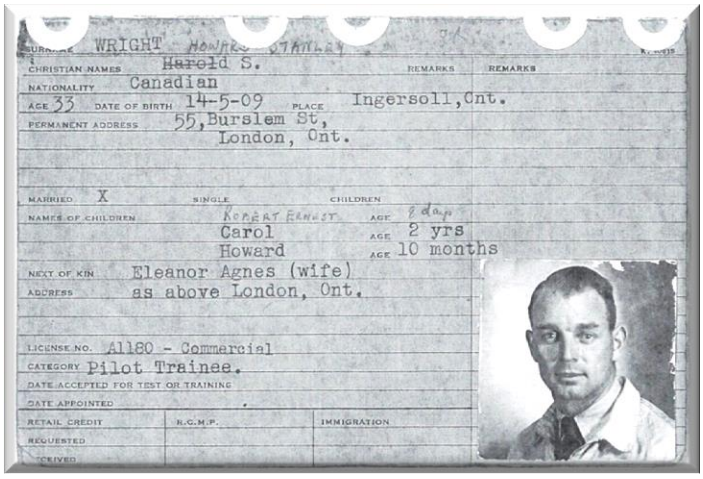
As the children of Howard and Nellie Wright grew older, they naturally took an interest in the father they barely knew and in Jimmie's case, never saw. He was born after his father's loss. One of the obstacles of understanding their father's flying career was not having his flying records from Ferry Command. These records which consist of 4 x 6 inch cards, were the responsibility of Montreal officials to compile, for pay reference if nothing else.

Ferry Command Dorval

Note: Montreal was the centre for Ferry Command because in the beginning, it was the head office for the Canadian Pacific Railway which in 1940 undertook the challenge to organise the delivery of aircraft. Despite the preponderance of planes flown overseas being American, since Montreal enjoys a closer proximity to Britain than any American city and the developed skill level of

everyone working there was excellent, no objection came from any quarter, RAF or American. The Canadian headquarters stayed put. This arrangement persisted despite the emergence of the Royal Air Force sometime later as the ultimate authority.

One stop made while in Ottawa to interview Carl Christie, was to the Directorate of History and Heritage, the new name for Carl's old office. The flight cards are now housed in this facility, under their expert care. With Howard's flight records in hand, they become the basis for analysing his flying experience with the ferry service.


SURNAME WRIGHT HOWARD STANLEY
CHRISTIAN NAMES Harold S. REMARKS REMARKS
NATIONALITY Canadian
AGE 33 DATE OF BIRTH 14-5-09 PLACE Ingersoll,Ont.
PERMANENT ADDRESS 55,Burslem St, London, Ont.
MARRIED X SINGLE CHILDREN
NAMES OF CHILDREN ROBERT ERNEST AGE 8 days
Carol AGE 2 yrs
Howard AGE 10 months
NEXT OF KIN Eleanor Agnes (wife)
ADDRESS as above London, Ont.
LICENSE NO. A1180 - Commercial
CATEGORY Pilot Trainee.
DATE ACCEPTED FOR TEST OR TRAINING
DATE APPOINTED
RETAIL CREDIT R.C.M.P. IMMIGRATION
REQUESTED
RECEIVED

The first two cards provide details on his background and qualifications. Card # 1 records: name, age, wife's name, children (3) and home address. Since this is an application to fly sophisticated airplanes, an important inclusion is: License No. A1180 – Commercial. A commercial license at that time merely indicated that he had fifty hours of solo flying. This notation is followed by his assessed Category: Pilot Trainee. Most, if not all, pilot-intake personnel were so designated until they became fully trained and had a practice flight as a First Officer, the classification given before becoming ultimately a Captain cleared to fly a plane across the Atlantic Ocean.

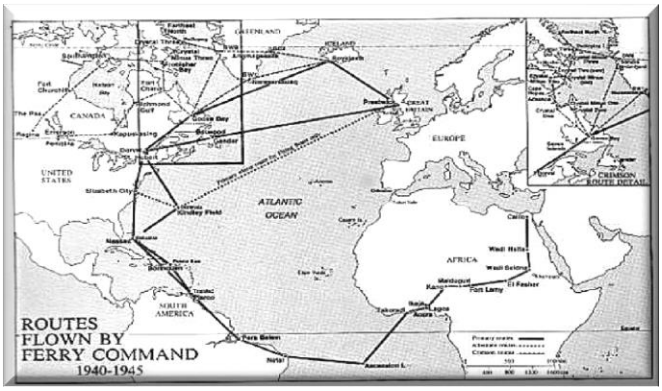
The second card notes that on 27 July 1942, Howard Wright was a lowly Pilot Trainee at Dorval (Quebec airport, picture above), PAID $20.00 per day. ($20 x 30 days = $600.00 per month.) The pay likely made up for the slighting he received when given beginner status, which effectively ignored his record as an accomplished pilot and flying instructor.

Some conjecture here. There is no record on file to support how, or even if, Howard Wright might have acquired some multi-engine flying experience in advance of his application to Ferry Command. The following hypothesis looks at the possibility.

The "Annie"

The aircraft to ferry over were all multi-engine planes. Howard's recorded flying experience at the Flying Club and #3 EFTS was on single-engine planes. Adjacent to # 3 at Crumlin was #4 AOS flying twin engine Ansons. It's not a leap of faith to imagine that Wright took advantage of their proximity and the RCAF's eagerness to train men to fly all types of aircraft, that in turn they allowed the popular Chief Flying Instructor permission to become efficient on the two-engine Anson. Pilots are a fraternity of committed brothers-of-the-air; likely there was no shortage of volunteers to show him the ropes. At no cost for instruction time and fuel, he could have availed himself of this golden opportunity to advance his flying skills. It was in his best interest to make this experience known at the appropriate recruiting time.

While the trainee designation may have wrangled Wright, he would soon learn how little he knew about flying large multi-engine aircraft across vast expanses of open ocean. This was no job for the untrained and the authorities were not about to take any pilot's word for personal experience and competency. Ferry Command was committed to get planes from North America to places on the globe calling out for them. If a pilot couldn't conform to RAF regulations, he was given a pass; many boastful applicants were scratched.



North and South Atlantic routes

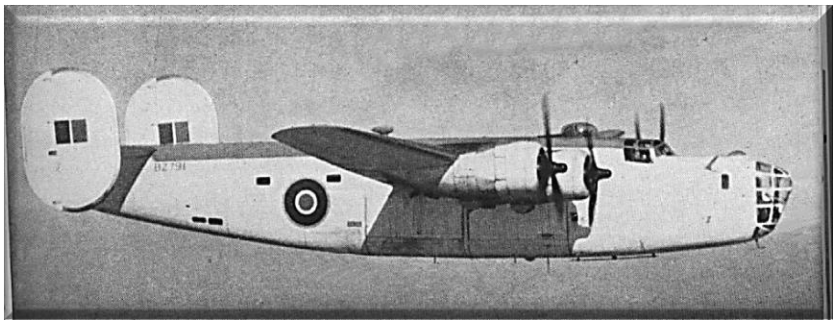
The first two months as a recruit were dedicated to training: on the ground were hours of classroom instruction, then more in the air to test what a student had retained. In his past, Wright had always demonstrated a careful, thorough approach to advancement in his chosen vocation. The promotional record at the London Flying Club serves as proof of his competency, approvingly and duly noted by the officers of the club.

The planes to be ferried overseas were complicated; the bigger they were, naturally the skill-set to man them increased exponentially. The other ingredient in the flying mix was the added

crew. Howard's planes in the past were operated by a lone crew: one pilot = one crew per plane with perhaps a passenger in the front seat. Eventually he was expected to fly as the captain-pilot, along with a co-pilot, radio operator, definitely a navigator so they didn't miss the other side somehow, possibly an engineer, and to round out the happy gathering, a passenger or two. His position as captain put him in charge of everyone on board. This was all new and he needed instruction.

Apparently, he was a quick learner. One month after becoming a Pilot Trainee, the next entry on his Registration Card for 31 August 1942, he became a First Officer paid $800.00 per month. Taken together, it's a good indication that his grades were good and the promotion in order. A First Officer flies second-dickie to the pilot in a learning capacity.

The ideal candidate for piloting aircraft long distances was a calm individual able to sit for hours without losing his concentration. With feet on the rudder pedals and eyes on the dials, an ear tuned to the engines while constantly scanning the sky for impending weather conditions, a suitable pilot astutely watched the hours go by. If in his past life he displayed a mechanical aptitude, able to assess and quickly offer suggestions to rectify problems, he became an esteemed member of Ferry Command, destined for promotion. He might be sitting down but he knew how to think on his feet.



American B-24 Liberator with RAF roundel

His first introduction to learn what is expected of a First Officer was sprung on him 8 October 42. Here we see Spark Wright, a scant two months after the closing of #3 EFTS at Crumlin, assigned to a new adventure in a Fleet Finch far from the idyllic swanning about in the blue skies over South Western Ontario. The entry on his Pay Card or Activity Card (the cards have no headings) records that he went on a learning and testing flight - only it's for real - not a tour around calm Canadian skies. Officer Wright is sent on his first operational flight in a United States made, Consolidated B-24 Liberator Bomber and they're off to the United Kingdom. One might think that they threw Howard into the deep end right off. Earning his $800 wasn't going to be easy.

Refuelling in Gander

From Montreal they flew to Gander, Newfoundland. After a stopover of one day, on 9 October 42, they were off to the UK, arriving there the same day. Stopping off for only three days, he was whisked off back to Montreal as a passenger in another plane. All this trans-oceanic flying seems so commonplace in 2020 until one realises that these B-24s had never flown across the Atlantic Ocean before the Ferry Command service came into being. This was a big deal, but only the start of something bigger for our willing, budding trans-oceanic pilot - Howard "Spark" Wright.

From his first trip in October, to 4 January 1943, First Officer Wright had flown to the United Kingdom five times in three different types of aircraft: B-24 Liberator; B-17 Mitchell; B-37 Ventura. Learning on the job in Ferry Command was not for the faint-at-heart or laid-back slacker. Good physical condition goes without saying. Wright in 1943 was age 34.

Our man Howard liked to fly airplanes and RAF Ferry Command liked men who were willing to do just that very thing – fly! But their approach showed no mercy. Day after day and weeks on end, Wright was in the air flying somewhere in some type of aircraft. The Pay Cards for the first part of 1943 may be missing but no matter, the remaining record provides all the evidence needed to understand the demands made on Spark and the ensuing stress placed upon him. Any regret which may have creeped in was assuaged when he learned of a promotion: on 23 March 1943, he became Captain Howard Stanley Wright. His pay increase no doubt chased away any blues: $1000 per month.

One little secret, or pilot prerogative call it, on the QT was the insertion as cargo - gifts by "air mail" for people overseas. Not likely would anyone look for these packages because in the bigger planes, they substituted cargo for bombs; what would it matter to slip in a few more pounds?

Claude and Spark beside Finch

Spark's best pal was nephew, Claude Wright, son of Howard's older brother, Bill. Claude was somewhat younger than Spark but the age difference never interfered with their solid friendship. Instead of following Spark's lead into the air, he opted for the safety of the ground by joining the army. His plan failed in battle, though, receiving in March 1945, a wound despite hugging the ground for protection.

Claude's wife, Ann, prevailed upon Spark to deliver items to her recovering husband: socks, underwear, scarves, maybe a cake or two, and the best of all when the complication is pondered - eggs. All were carefully squared away in the fuselage and delivered to hubby and best friend.

A famous poster with a famous message to lure recruits to the service, originated with the United States Navy: ***Join the Navy and See the World.*** This seagoing message alluding to extensive travel, could easily apply to Wright's record flying with Ferry Command, in the air above the sea.

Reykjavik airport today on edge of ocean

In the first few months with FC, much of Wright's time became routine flying between Canada and the UK with stop-overs in Reykjavik, Iceland. Flying across the North Atlantic in winter was and still is at their low altitudes, dangerous business. Ice build-up could be catastrophic for planes with poor or no de-icing capabilities. Deadly ice nearly finished Alcock and Brown as did solo flyer Lindy. Spark needn't have worried about it for long.

The air war in the UK and Europe was the original inspiration which started the whole Ferry Command process in the first place, but it wasn't the only theatre of war in the early 1940s. In early 1943, Spark got a welcomed reprieve from the frigid and hazardous north – he went south.

Running simultaneously with the Blitz in Britain, battles on land, sea and air were raging along the Mediterranean into North Africa, followed by the invasion of Italy. Next came the war

against Japan, creating new and desperate demands for aircraft in the Far East. The same need for quick deliveries of aircraft which inspired the northern route, now prompted a new one across the South Atlantic. According to an entry on 10 January 1943, the happy lad from frozen Canada had traded his heavy flying suit and warm silk gloves for tropical kit in Nassau, Bahamas. For the next few quarters, entries are posted for: Belem, Brazil; Georgetown, British Guiana (South America); Accra, Gold Coast; Morocco; Algeria; Tripoli; Cairo, Egypt.

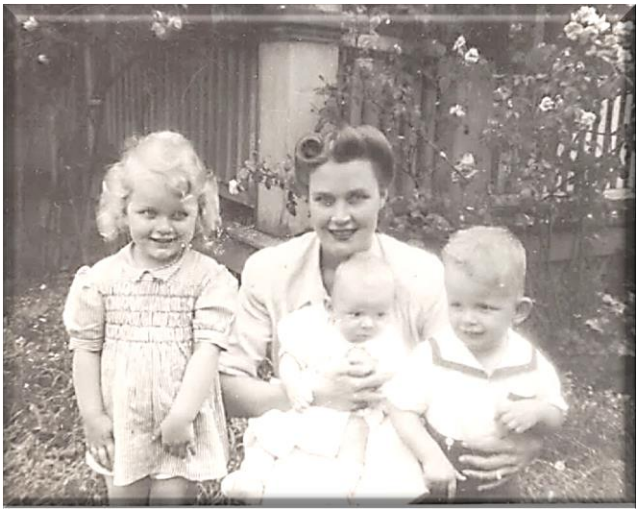
Servicing RAF Wellington bomber Lagens, 1944

Some flights required a fuel stop-over at Lagens, Azores. That's an island located half way across the ocean between Gander and North Africa. Such a long trip called for a damn good navigator remembering that *close only counts in horse shoes*. In the Ottawa interview with Carl Christie, he emphasised the deficiencies with Canadian and American pilots who were not trained in navigation. From the BCATP, a school like #4 AOS at Crumlin was turning out trained navigators Ferry Command recruited to fill the badly needed roles to avoid "embarrassing" misses on these increasingly longer trips to smaller island destinations. Amelia Earhart's disappearance was a case of a missed island destination.

Identifying more than once on Spark's cards as his North American, return airport, is the high living, fun loving, sun-drenched Miami, USA. This resort becomes one more glamorous hot-spot which helps Wright's itinerary to beat hollow the navy's boast for world adventure. And when the Ferry crews landed into the exotic locales - Christie reminded us on film about how these well-paid civilian crews had no trouble mixing in with the upper crust to enjoy some high-life. Money – Shmoney!

Was it a birthday present for a man about to turn age 35, on 14 May 1944, or just a coincidence? In early 1942, Hollywood, the city where dreams are made and lost, released a movie that has become one of the most renowned, highly rated movies of all time, a real classic – Casablanca. On 7 May 44, coming in to land at this famous, perhaps overly romanticised city, was Howard Wright. Was he expecting to see Bogie and

Ingrid Bergman sipping punch at Rick's, the best bar in town? One connection they had with the movie was their Liberator. In the film, an airliner played a big part, serving as the only escape for every deserving, stranded citizen, seeking an exit visa allowing them to board the daily flight for Lisbon, courtesy of French Captain Renault, played by Claude Rains.



Spark's Lib, flown for the Air Transport Command, (ATC) a wing of the USAAF, wasn't romantic but it did fly and without an exit visa. The flight began in Biskra, Algeria, and after leaving Casablanca, it deposited Howard in New York where he caught a train to Montreal on May 9th. The Command authorities granted him six days leave before sending him out again in another Lib to Bermuda, the Azores, North Africa and on to more destinations. We can assume much of his down time was spent with his wife Nellie and by then three children: daughter Carol, son Howard and the still wobbly-on-his-young-pins – baby, Robert Ernest.

Reviewing the Pay Cards isn't always easy; they are old and difficult to interpret. The short forms used for destinations become a challenge when tracing a route taken. There is one trip, however, which is not only decipherable but representative of the extraordinary amount of time and energy expended by pilot and crew to make a successful and timely delivery over long and dangerous distances.

The date of departure from Montreal is 1 October 1944, in the popular Liberator, possibly the best long-range airplane of its day. They had a one day stopover at Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, and arrived in Bermuda on the 2nd. On the 3rd they stopped in the Azores, no doubt for fuel, but didn't linger long; they made Rabat, Morocco on the same day. Leaving the next day, found them in Cairo on the 5th. (My God, these boys were in a hurry.) They again left without delay, and finally on 6 October 1944, they touched down at their destination, Karachi, Pakistan.

Flyer "pilots" a camel

In summary, they racked up a score all in the sixes: the flight took six days, they made six stops and flew over six thousand miles. (Actual distance as the crow flies, 6976 miles but somewhat longer tracing their

route.) No doubt worn out, they relaxed. Then after a mere three days, it was off home again, destination New York by ATC. The Karachi to New York trip according to the records, was accomplished in just two days (probably a bookkeeping error). The last entry for this whirlwind trip has him on an airliner headed for Montreal and a much earned ten-day stopover at home in London.

19,000 Miles In One Week

Howard Wright, former chief instructor at No. 3 Elementary Flying Training School, Crumlin, who recently flew 19,000 miles in one week as a Ferry Command pilot. A well-known Londoner, Wright was in charge of flying operations at the London Flying Club before the war.

(One undated newspaper clipping notes: "Howard Wright, former Chief Instructor at no. 3 Elementary Flying Training School, Crumlin…recently flew 19,000 miles in one week as a Ferry Command Pilot.") (Note that Wright parts his hair on the right.)

As he settled in comfortably on a commercial airliner in New York, waiting to fly home, did he pause to recall his visit of enquiry to nearby Newark in 1937, when the thought of flying one of these passenger planes seemed so intriguing? Looking back on those years might have prompted more memories, for there was a great deal to recall.

Beginning as a mere bread man, he started taking flying lessons at the primitive Lambeth Airport, lessons given by the London Flying Club, a club he eventually dominated as their Chief Flying Instructor. He had spent two years with the BCATP, teaching young men flying skills they will eventually use to fly planes of war. Yup, lots of good times to recall at Crumlin, working with other instructors and novice pilots.

His next move up in the aviation world would spring to mind as the most memorable. What excitement he must have felt when he moved on from Crumlin to RAF Ferry Command, his biggest career move and war contribution by far. The job demanded spending long dangerous hours flying greater and greater distances in ever more sophisticated planes to exotic parts of the world. He had persevered and won. He was now a world-class aviator.

If he sat there, somewhat worn out and perhaps in a bit of a daze, he could relax on a plane flown by someone else and quietly turn his attention to the present, finding solace in his destination that day - back home to his wife and children. Flying was his passion but what's a life without love? His family in London were the lights of his life. It's not a stretch to imagine that after so many long

absences, all of his homecomings were a blissful display of hugs and kisses for everyone. Pure joy and relief.

Life for the Wright couple, in the beginning, was rather uneventful if one considers the birth of children as simply an inevitable part of a happy marriage. With the hurried honeymoon cut short by the declaration of war, the newlyweds moved into their first home - call it their honeymoon cottage. The house or apartment (records a bit sketchy here) was on Baseline Road west of Wharncliffe. This was a handy abode located a mile or two from the Lambeth Airport and perhaps Howard's home since he moved to London in 1937. The arrangement lasted only for a short time.

When #3 EFTS opened in the summer of 1940, Howard moved with it to Crumlin, leaving the Base Line home a long drive back across town. With a good income and the need for a move closer to work, the couple, like so many others in wartime Canada, found moving necessary and relocated to a nice but older home at 55 Burslem Street, not far from the new airport. (During the war there was no such thing as a new house. Even older homes to buy or rent were in short supply. To find a decent house was a lucky find. Same applied to cars.)

In his adult life, people must have been struck by how much Howard looked like Lindbergh. How could anyone miss the similarity when comparing the two men, from both a facial similarity - notice chin dimples - and their love of flying? One wonders if Howard wasn't aware himself? Lindy and Spark!

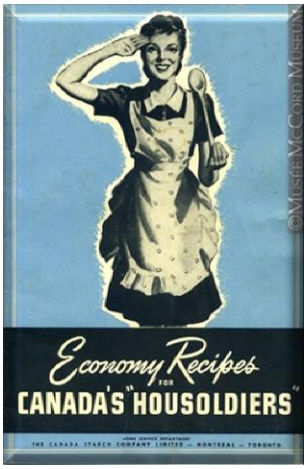
Many men involved in essential war work had to move away from home to wherever they were needed – not so for Howard Wright. For the first three years of marriage, while working at the Flying Club then at #3 Crumlin, his nearby civilian teaching positions had the advantage of providing him normal, work-day routines. Up in the morning, breakfast with wife and children, then off to the Airport (Lambeth first months, then Crumlin) returning in the evening for supper.

A house needs attention and an old house demands it, as does an old car which we see him fixing while grinning at the camera. A good marriage shares the load; it calls for team work. During this time, until his departure in July 1942, Howard was able to shoulder his manly responsibilities as husband and father. When he left for Montreal, Nellie had to carry the load by herself.

Canadian "Rosie" with Bren Gun and fag

From the outset of war, Canadian women were not ignored - the government recognised them as essential to the war's success! Perhaps "Rosie the Riveter" receives the most recognition: a woman in coveralls, sleeves rolled, bandana tied around head, toiling away at a job which before the war was the exclusive purview of men. But they had gone off to fight, so women were recruited for factory work. Many others were actively recruited by one of the three military services. Women in uniform were only slightly less novel than the factory woman.

But what of the lowly housewife? How did she cope with daily chores while contributing to the war effort? For Nellie and other stay-at-home wives, there was no shortage of suggestions helping them and their families to maintain a healthy, happy home while actively helping to win the war.



Consider these patriotic messages aimed at housewives:

- Slogan to help the apple market now cut off from Europe. *"Serve apples daily and serve your country too."*

- Or how about imposing some guilt if the housewife wasn't diligent. *"Canada's faulty diet is Hitler's ally."*
- She was encouraged to save fat used to make explosives. *"Become a munitions maker right in your own kitchen."*

Much of the copious advice produced by the government, while necessary in a time of shortages, was also geared to keep the whole country on a war footing. Europe and Japan were a long way off, complete fantasy-land to most Canadians who had never been further than Port Stanley, or if lucky, a big city like Toronto. The trick was to do everything with less - less sugar, tea, coffee, butter, meat - the list was almost endless. To ensure compliance and force reductions, rationing was imposed.

Every woman's purse would be stuffed with the ubiquitous ration book. There was no escaping it. Where she went the book went too. Long lines of homemakers wound around the block when a certain fundamental item, temporarily out of stock, suddenly reappeared. A girl had to be quick, get to the head of the line before the supply ran out or go home without. These were daily occurrences seen throughout the war. Mothers never stopped worrying about their children's wellbeing. Were they being fed a proper diet at a critical stage in their growing lives?

Every kid likes a toy but even they felt the pinch. What was made of metal before the war was turned out in a big, clunky wooden form, such as a boy's tricycle. A girl's playhouse was still available but in beautifully configured paper and cardboard. No Barbie Dolls yet or Kens.

One poor kid living on Emery Street during the war desperately wanted a peddle car like the smart-ass kid up the street had. It was made of metal bought before the war so the "poor kid" never did get his car until much later when he was seventeen.

One cut-back would certainly have gained attention at the Wright household: home delivery of bread and milk was chopped to three times weekly, bringing on an adjustment for Howard's old Clark Bakery in Ingersoll. One good benefit though – it meant more rest time for the horse.

Howard and Nellie, ages 30 and 24, were past the juvenile stage when married as young adults in 1939. Nevertheless, their nuptials helped fuel the onset of a peculiar statistical increase of war related marriages – the marriage rate almost doubled.

The feminist of today would cringe at the accepted pre-war notion placing young women in the mould of wife and mother without question. A popular woman's magazine of the times was *Chatelaine*. Their opinions expressed in issue after issue were firm as to the future prospects for a young woman – she was expected to wed. It was the thing to do for a girl.

Reasons for the uptick in marriages when war was declared are varied. There was the federal government's dependant's allowance if one looks for financial reasons but others are more compelling. The proper motive for marriage is love, a fact which coming at the time of war and all its dangers, brings with it a gift of emotional comfort coffered by the bride to her spouse who is going off to war. Through her marriage vows, the bride supports her husband who needs all the help he can get.

Chatelaine recognised the man's needs by quoting historian Joshua S. Goldstein's observation: "The moral support of family and friends, and most importantly a connection with wives or girlfriends, helps keep soldiers going." In a real sense, a soldier's wife became part of the nation's defences by staying home as housekeeper, wife and mother, creating stability so invaluable to directly helping the war effort. In our story, for all the right reasons stated above, Nellie Wright became indispensable to Howard's war contribution and aviation ambitions.

Physically running a house in today's world so often directs one's attention toward the luxuries we accumulate. Everything is electronic and when devices fail we are forced to spend long hours on the phone with Bell or Rogers or some repair company seeking a remedy. Overall, the modern household can be a frustrating experience; the 1940s household was much more straight forward and demanding.

Most homes and buildings were heated with coal. In fact, if a house had gas before the war there appeared in the mail box an official order to convert to coal. The house may or may not, more nots than yeses, have enjoyed the luxury of a hot water heater. If there was one, the

prevailing practice was to only fire it up when needed. At all other times, cold water issued forth from all taps. Many families simply heated water on the stove to be dumped with the cold on bath night. Adults first, kids last.

The housewife by this time probably had a washing machine but it didn't operate automatically at the flick of a switch. Wash day would find the good woman of the house toiling away, feeding cold sudsy wet clothes through a wringer into tubs of more cold water which in turn passed through the wringers again ready for the line. Maintaining clean diapers, ready for reuse, became an odious chore in a house of young children. No disposables back then.

Every house had a clothes line outside; the longer it was, the more people who lived there. That was the summer routine. In winter, clothes brought in from the line could be stood up like frozen slabs of ice. Interiors back then frequently sported clothes, sheets and diapers draped over any chair or table. Clothes lines in kitchens were not uncommon, basements too.

At 55 Burslem Street, the Wright family had the good fortune to have inside running water and toilet - two well appreciated assets. In the summer time, with a lawn of some description, there was grass to cut. Winter brought on different responsibilities. Snow to shovel outside, while inside, down in the basement, that giant octopus-like monster dominating the space, was a demanding beast requiring constant attention. The trick was to shovel in coal then later keep it stoked so it doesn't go out. Brrrr! This daily routine became complicated during the war because of a coal shortage. "Fill your bin now," government warnings proclaimed, if you didn't want to freeze solid some night or day.

The above description of home life was not exclusive to Nellie; only the idle rich escaped these daily chores. For the most part, the living conditions of the average man and woman existing before the war persisted during it with rationing thrown in to complicate life's burdens.

Without any first hand testimony to help describe Nellie's reaction after July 1942 when she found herself living alone, from that time to 1945 as the sole care-giver for children and manager of the home, perhaps the following short passage can be applied to her life and cares. In a book of reminiscences gathered from letters, newspaper clippings etc., written by Jean Bruce,[4] she includes the recollections of a war bride from Winnipeg who found herself suddenly living alone after her husband went off to war. Quoting from this passage entitled, *Being Alone*: "This was my first experience of being alone, and I saw my house in a completely different way. Areas which had been completely male, like the furnace room, like hot water tank, like the garage, all became my domain, my responsibility." After mentioning the absence of any family support of any consequence, she closed her recall with: "And I had never carried on the day-to-day financing, paying the coal bills, the electric bills, the taxes." These were new challenges to cope with which Nellie or any woman left alone couldn't avoid.

To this scribbler, Eleanor Agnes Wright, nee Wood, shouldered her responsibilities, providing in turn the same added wartime value which her husband Howard achieved. He contributed as a pilot - she as a mother and homemaker. And - they started out together in 1939 as a team to do just that which by any estimate, they accomplished together.

While Nellie was coping on the home front, her husband continued to ferry aircraft to far off destinations, but by the end of 1944, his flights had acquired an almost exclusive southern exposure. The Bahamas, Azores and North Africa became familiar, comfortable destinations. The plane variations didn't challenge him much either; he had flown them before: Liberators, Dakotas (DC-3) and Venturas became standard fair.

The Pay Cards are the primary source of all pertinent information available to access Spark's flying record. For some inexplicable reason, headquarters stopped using this method for all crews and the substitutes, whatever they became, have disappeared. From 2 December 1944 onward, all his flying becomes largely a point of conjecture. Family lore believes he flew made-in-Canada Lancaster bombers to the UK to become part of the great bombing offensive waged on Germany; that maybe so, but with no record,who can say for sure now?

[4] Jean Bruce, *Back the Attack*, 1985

The last chapter of his flying career is however, known: one of the planes he flew to the UK was the de Havilland Mosquito, the "Wooden Wonder."

Professor Carl Christie in *Ocean Bridge,* devotes one whole chapter to this remarkable aircraft.[5] Made almost entirety of wood (double birch plywood skin over balsa and spruce frame) with top speed over 400 mph, it became the most versatile and fastest propeller equipped plane of the war - for either side. Canada produced over 1000 of the 7781 mostly made-in-the-UK total. While half the production was retained at home for training, over 500 were ferried to the UK where the plane became renowned. (Possibly the Canadian inventory was forming against the expected deployment in the Pacific war?)

Powered by two powerful Packard made, Rolls-Royce engines, their thirst for gas sucked up copious gallons. Extra fuel tanks were installed in the bomb bay to extend its flying distance, stretching out the total distance to 2430 miles, but still short of the distance for a hop over the Atlantic directly to Prestwick, the UK destination. To get there, after leaving either Gander or Gosse Bay in Newfoundland/Labrador on the northern route, stopover points in Greenland and Iceland provided fuel and any maintenance needed to complete the transfer.

In a 2019 interview with the daughter of RCAF Leading Aircraftmen (LAC) Wilfred Linder, a man who spent much of WWII stationed at Goose Bay, she remembered in any story her father passed on about his service there, the key word was – noise! His ground crew duties included refuelling, checking tires, moving aircraft, and in general, performing all the incidental jobs necessary for an efficiently running airport. All these tasks were conducted outside in all weathers: rain or shine, snow and cold – and there's lots of cold in the far north of Labrador. "Planes of all kinds," he recalled, shaking his head, "came in and out 24 hours a day without stoppage, there was no let-up." Since he was never far from a plane with engines running, the noise became deafening, creating a lasting wartime memory. In air force histories, the men who kept the planes serviced and flying are too often overlooked

[5] Christie, Mosquito Chapter pages 217 to 244.

Any honest ferry pilot would be the first to admit "…that most of their experiences lacked the hardships and dangers that airmen had to endure during the war." This declaration was tempered somewhat by fears expressed from many pilots who were tapped to fly the "Mossie." Some men absolutely refused to fly it. Its reputation as a "temperamental bitch" had made the rounds, the word was out. They knew how flying it could get them killed. While opinions varied as loss statistics began to mount, the consensus was that the Mosquito "was no piece of cake."

Contained in Christie's Mosquito chapter, are comments from Don McVicar who, like Spark, was a civilian pilot with RAFFC. His early flying history mirrored Howard's by taking flying lessons from a flying club in 1936. From this humble beginning, he progressed many stages later to literally land in at Dorval Airport as an instructor, hired to check out prospective pilots on various aircraft. He earned this position as an accomplished captain of thirty deliveries but only one with the Mossie. His personal account and opinions on the plane help illustrate the Mosquito pilot's experience.

McVicar became a prolific writer after the war, relating a plethora of exciting aviation stories, none more thrilling than those on the Mossie. It was a tricky plane on take-off, he wrote, with a strong tendency to pull to the left. He and all pilots learned giving more power to the left Merlin and a strong kick on the right rudder, put it right, pushing man and plane straight ahead down the runway in a more than unusual high speed lift off.

The proper expression for fast take-offs and landings is - "hot." This twin Merlin, wood airplane, flew hot on both take-off and landing but the touchdown was the hardest and scariest to manage successfully without mishap. The most noticeable speed reduction came with the wheels extended. McVicar on his first landing "… found the high-speed landing a little hairy and was happy to call it a day." He even fought off the "…silly urge to kiss the ground."

Don McVicar's next comments, despite the plane's scary tendencies, one suspects became the compelling reason so many pilots were determined to ferry the plane anywhere Ferry Command deemed it necessary, over 500 times from Canada. Christie observes: "Like

many pilots, McVicar found the Mosquito great fun to fly. It took him back to his aviation roots." The Mossie was also a delight to fly, a real thrill: "This was the first aerobatic aircraft I'd flown since another de Havilland product, the Moth, many years before." But without question he noticed the difference and instantly, "The Mossie roared smoothly as I pushed the taps forward to an indicated 380." Why do that? What did he want to do? "Up and over we went, the horizon spinning. It was exhilarating and I felt like a young fighter pilot." (He was 29.) He finished his first flight with a few barrel rolls, roll off the top, then came the successful hot landing. Down and safe.

Don McVicar had before his first flight in a Mosquito, flown many plane variations and would continue to fly more after the war, eventually founding his own air transport company. He knew planes, which is why his caution is so important. Despite the positive first flight, he wrote later, "…the plane deserved respect…it would always be a tough taskmaster…"

Just when the Mosquito began to experience mechanical troubles is hard to pinpoint. Enquiries only began because the total reports of crashed and missing planes on route trickled in slowly, finally demanding the attention of RAF personnel in Montreal. Once prompted, an investigation was begun along the northern route stops in order to determine if the Canadian made variations were faulty and unsafe. The after-report disclosed that adjustments and repairs were commonplace during the flights, but without any centralisation of record keeping, the problems escaped the attention of headquarters.

The first suspicion advanced, targeted the cold weather along the subarctic flight path to Prestwick. A switch to the southern route solved nothing when the problems persisted. A complete halt to transfers was called on 19 December 1944.

A long list of probabilities was drawn up, bringing about some minor changes. The biggest one of special interest to Howard Wright's story, was the creation of a new detachment at Victory Aircraft, located adjacent to good old Crumlin Airport. The group was suitably named: The Mosquito Preparation and Despatching Unit.

On 10 January 1945, five officers, four crewmen, six civilians plus eight, permanent aircrew, took on the job of pre-flight inspections at Crumlin.

Assembling wooden fuselage at Crumlin

With the day of the open cockpit, fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants type of "fliver" bi-plane gone, the 1940s planes were a totally different animal, growing ever more complicated as the war progressed. The Mossie was no different. Discussions to correct chronic problems ran parallel to new rounds of extensive inspections, followed by longer test flights before turning over the craft for its flight across the Atlantic. The first Mosquito to leave Crumlin for the southern route was on 23 January; first of February on the northern.

Marking the first crash for one of these carefully inspected planes, occurred on 4 February 1945 at Amherst, NS. Another followed February 11th lost between Greenland and Iceland. The term "lost" has significance to this biography. Four men dead, two never found – lost.

A special note is necessary here. Of the 1032 Mosquitos built during the war in Toronto (Downsview) and two more after, only slightly more than 500 were ferried to the UK. Over there, by war's end, they were actually putting them in storage. Only 357 of the number delivered ever became operational. Pilots arriving at Prestwick reported planes previously delivered were still sitting on the tarmac where they had left them weeks before, unused, unneeded.

Prestwick Scotland

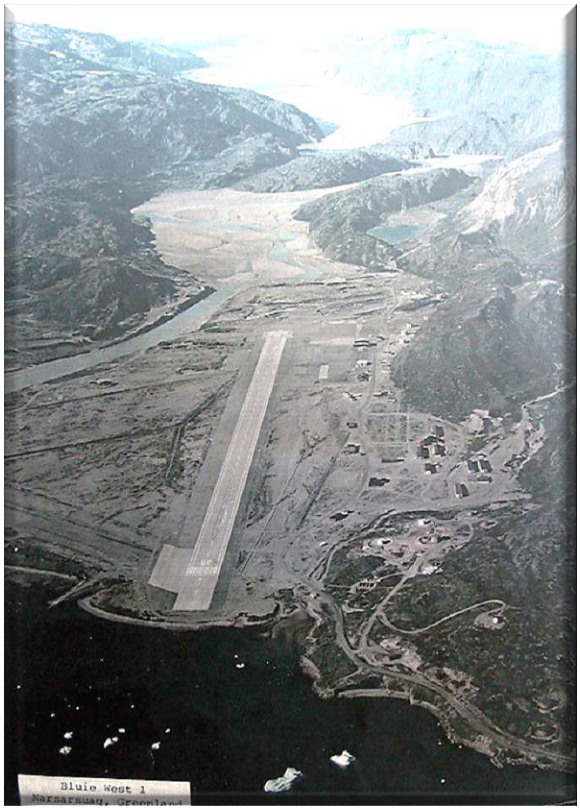
The situation begs the question: given the number of lives lost flying an untrustworthy, faulty airplane to a destination not in need and especially in some cases, Howard's is one, when the war was over – why did the ferrying continue?

Of the thirty-five trans-oceanic flights Howard undertook, five were in the Mosquito. Since Howard's cards show no Mosquito transfer before the end of 1944, (last recorded flight December 1944) we must assume that all of these planes originated from Crumlin after an inspection by the Preparation and Inspection Unit.

In Appendix B of *Ocean Bridge*, devoted to recording plane losses with loss of life, there are twenty Mosquito entries beginning with the first on 8 May 1944, lost between Greenland and Reykjavik, Iceland. The last - number twenty - occurred on 1 July 1945 southwest of Mont Joli airfield; two men killed. Obviously, sighting this crash on Canadian soil, it wasn't necessary to make it past the coast to incur danger in the problematic Mosquito.

This last Mossie given the July date, must have left Crumlin after a thorough inspection. Eleven other Mosquito Fighter/Bombers including the fifth lost in the Appendix flown by Spark, supposedly had benefited from the same attention.

In the first part of June 1945, perhaps June 4th, Howard and his Canadian civilian navigator, James Douglas Woodyard, were crewed to fly Howard's fifth Mosquito, # KA237, to Prestwick via the northern route. They left Crumlin in good order, stopping off in all probability at Dorval, (there are no records for this flight) leaving there for Goose Bay, Labrador, the jumping off point for the next stop - BW1 on the southwest coast of Greenland.



This Greenland stopover airport was extremely unpopular with ferry crews. The designation BW1 stood for, Bluie West 1, described by Don McVicar, that intrepid aviator who had flown all the routes more than once, as a menacing fiord surrounded by "black forbidding cliffs." Coming in "hot" to land there in his one and only hop over in a Mossie, he related that, "…as the end of the runway flashed below, I chopped the power…beside the runway were wrecks of air craft that had not been able to stay on the concrete."

This winding, narrow fiord was prone to bad weather and fog. Many pilots sought out other routes to avoid the place. Apparently Howard and James did not. On 10 June 1945, their plane was reported missing.

The details of the search which followed are recorded on a standard Search and Rescue report from BW1 dated June 10. The document reads: *K237 disappeared over BW1 on a delivery flight from Goose Bay. An intensive search instituted by A.S.R. unit at BW1 together with the R.A.F. ASR Canso FT999, emplaned by F/L Forbes, failed to sight any trace of the missing aircraft and crew.*

In 1945, the Wright children, Carol, Howard and Robert (Jimmy still unborn) were too young to form lasting memories. They were just typical kids who didn't pay much attention to what transpired around them. Isn't a mother supposed to cook and clean and offer motherly advice to a growing child? How can anyone expect such mundane chores seen daily to create a lasting memory? What's more, looking at the outside world from a child's perspective, their innocence becomes a protective shield against any and all bad news generated in life around them.

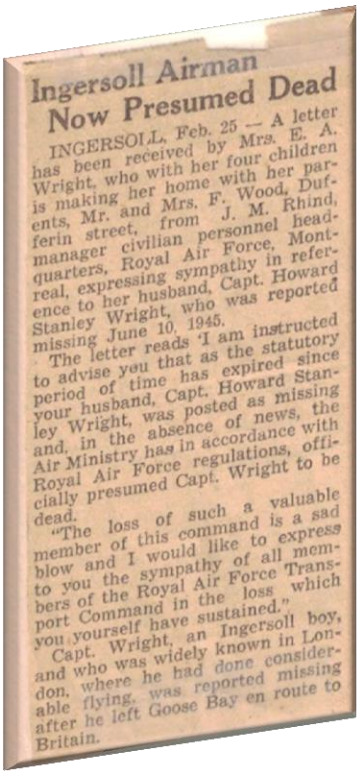
Living near Crumlin Airport, listening to and watching all those yellow planes swarming about overhead, filled with young men training for an air war, they weren't much more noticeable than an automobile going by to the child playing below. Perhaps a huffing-puffing steam engine grabbed some attention, but everything else became an everyday sight and sound to a wartime child. And so we come to the adult Wright children today. With no past stories springing to mind from inside the home or out, it leaves us with only one incident to relate but it comes from a very important moment in their lives.

Not long after Howard was reported missing, a letter sent by special post arrived at the Wright home addressed to Eleanor. It was an official letter of condolence from Mr. J. M. Rhind, Manager Civilian Personnel at the Royal Air Force Headquarters in Montreal. Letters of this kind are impersonal, they follow the same pattern of similar letters sent out in sympathy to hundreds of grieving families. Following the standard protocols, initially the two men had been posted as missing, but after sufficient time had passed, it was Rhind's sombre duty to inform her, "…officially it is presumed Capt. Wright to be dead."

It was extremely hot for a day in June, when Eleanor Agnes Wright received Rhind's letter officially notifying her that her husband was dead. No doubt the news didn't come as a complete surprise, but the finality it brought developed for the new widow a state of sadness and remorse mixed with some fear for the unknown future. The children had to be told but she just couldn't do it, not right then. Perhaps if she first told Carol as the oldest, she could tell her younger brothers?

Carol recalls entering the house on Burslem Street to find the drapes drawn and the room in hot, semi-darkness. Sitting on the sofa in the gloom clutching the dreaded letter, was her pregnant mother. Overwhelmed with the news and probably in tears, with some hesitation she asked her daughter to find the boys and give them the news she was struggling with but couldn't adequately relay.

Carol dutifully found her young brothers playing in the yard and after quietly gathering Howard and Robert together, through her own sobs she murmured - - - - - - "Our Daddy is never coming home again."



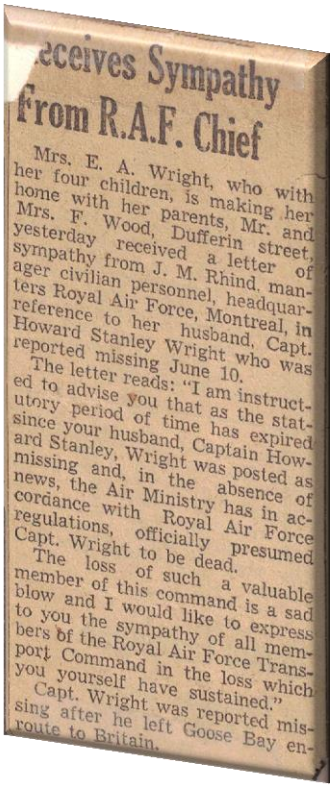
Ingersoll Airman Now Presumed Dead

INGERSOLL, Feb. 25 — A letter has been received by Mrs. E. A. Wright, who with her four children is making her home with her parents, Mr. and Mrs. F. Wood, Dufferin street, from J. M. Rhind, manager civilian personnel headquarters, Royal Air Force, Montreal, expressing sympathy in reference to her husband, Capt. Howard Stanley Wright, who was reported missing June 10, 1945.

The letter reads 'I am instructed to advise you that as the statutory period of time has expired since your husband, Capt. Howard Stanley Wright, was posted as missing and, in the absence of news, the Air Ministry has in accordance with Royal Air Force regulations, officially presumed Capt. Wright to be dead.

"The loss of such a valuable member of this command is a sad blow and I would like to express to you the sympathy of all members of the Royal Air Force Transport Command in the loss which you yourself have sustained."

Capt. Wright, an Ingersoll boy, and who was widely known in London, where he had done considerable flying, was reported missing after he left Goose Bay en route to Britain.



ceives Sympathy From R.A.F. Chief

Mrs. E. A. Wright, who with her four children, is making her home with her parents, Mr. and Mrs. F. Wood, Dufferin street, yesterday received a letter of sympathy from J. M. Rhind, manager civilian personnel, headquarters Royal Air Force, Montreal, in reference to her husband, Capt. Howard Stanley Wright who was reported missing June 10.

The letter reads: "I am instructed to advise you that as the statutory period of time has expired since your husband, Captain Howard Stanley, Wright was posted as missing and, in the absence of news, the Air Ministry has in accordance with Royal Air Force regulations, officially presumed Capt. Wright to be dead.

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Capt. Wright was reported missing after he left Goose Bay en-route to Britain.

Addendum: Howard Wright's Lasting Legacy

Whatever their initial motivation was and over above their day-by-day experiences to deliver airplanes anywhere in the world, the pilots and crewmen of the Royal Air Force Ferry Command, couldn't have possibly known how much all this flying was creating a lasting legacy. Some lived to witness it, others didn't.

What type of man flew with Ferry Command? Based on his extensive research in all aspects of Ferry Command including an insight as to the type of men who responded to join, in his 2019 interview, Christie opined that through possible strong family connections to the "Old Country," (Howard's parents came from England) a belief in democracy, the revulsion to Nazi atrocities seen in newsreels and calling on a Christian sense of decency, these basic influences combined to help draw recruits to the service. Of course, their desire to fly goes without saying.

While the above reasons are certainly valid and applicable in many cases including those influencing Howard Wright, one other factor can be mentioned here. It may seem crass to include this additional thought alongside the unquestionably honourable reasons noted above, but a simple practical fact emerges which at the time in the Wright household, was an important, rewarding motivation – money. Relying on the monthly amounts Howard earned, times the months and years paid out to him, a good estimate from 1940 to 1945, comes to over $35,000. In present day 2020 values, this amounts to an excess of $500,000.

Statistics for the Royal Air Force Ferry Command are not complete because no determined attempt was ever exercised to provide one for post-war analysis. In approximation, more than 10,000 planes were delivered across the ocean with an unverifiable loss of more than 500 killed and lost. The total Atlantic crossings flying both ways, was about 15,000. The total miles flown over half the globe are just as inestimable but realistically – they are in the millions!

Back in 1940 when Lord Beaverbrook, (aka, Max Aitken, a Canadian from New Brunswick who became a press magnate in England and a war time production driver of airplane construction in the UK, a friend of Churchill and a man influential in overall war matters) decided along with RAF officials, that with the need for planes being so great, if planes were flown over the Atlantic providing faster delivery results, they were prepared to accept a loss rate in men and materials of 50%. Using the total estimated loss of about 500 air crew, a number which figures at less than half of one percent, the final tally comes in far less than the predicted estimate.

While the service men that flew planes on operations with the RCAF get top recognition for the tremendous effort they put out to win the war, some 17,000 killed, this number often detracts attention away from the significant contribution made by the more obscure Ferry Command. Their unsung record deserves equal recognition not only for their service during the war, but for the aviation legacy still in force today which *both* services helped to create.

This legacy, outlined in both *Behind The Glory* and *Ocean Bridge,* heaps praise upon all that was achieved during BCATP training in Canada and the world-over flying service provided by RAFFC, two organisations personally associated with Howard Wright's war record.

Observing the aircrew training in Canada during the Plan, Barris writes of their legacy: "Their combined experience enhanced the efficacy and safety of Canada's air mail, cargo, and passenger carriers." Professor Christie expands on Barris's assessment by noting that before the war and Ferry Command, "Long-distance flying, particularly across oceans, was in its infancy [and that] the North Atlantic had not been flown in the fall or winter."

Following on from his first contribution through pilot training at #3 EFTS, Wright after joining Ferry Command in October 1942, began to build his second lasting legacy. From that date on as a pilot, he flew the first of many trans-oceanic flights across the northern route to the UK. These icy-cold transfers lasted the best part of the 1942-43 winter. Wright wasn't the first to do it, but his extensive risk taking record delivering desperately needed aircraft under harsh conditions, speaks for itself.

The last paragraph in the last chapter of *Ocean Bridge*, appropriately entitled, *Lasting Legacy,* can't be improved upon when attempting to give credit to men like Howard Wright who risked their lives on each trip flying into the unknown. In part, Professor Christie writes:

> "…the routes flown to deliver planes and materiel, and the meteorological, communications, and control procedures established in the process, formed the basis of the international grid of civil air routes throughout the world…*We not only owe the veterans of Ferry Command our thanks for the part they played in winning the war, but also for helping to lay the foundations of today's worldwide aviation network."*