

UPDATE - Robert Middlemiss: Barrie loses a legend

Leigh Blenkhorn - Barrie Advance
Photo: Stan Howe



Decorated veteran Robert Middlemiss is being remembered for his dedication to the armed forces and his big smile.

Middlemiss died at Royal Victoria Regional Health Centre on Tuesday, July 30, his 93rd birthday.

Lt.-Col. (Ret'd.) Bill Sergeant, president of the Veterans' Club of Barrie, remembers his friend fondly.

"Wherever Bob went there was always a sense of enjoyment and excitement," Sergeant said. "You very rarely meet people with that strong personality. He was a natural leader. He'd announce he's going to the bar for a scotch and three or four people would jump up right away to join him."

A Spitfire pilot, Middlemiss was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for downing five German aircraft during the siege of the island of Malta. He was shot down and survived a night in a dinghy on the Mediterranean with serious

wounds.

After recovering in an English hospital, he went back for another tour of operations.

He continued his military career and rose to the rank of wing commander and led the first Canadian 104s to be stationed in Europe as commanding officer of 427 Squadron in the mid-1960s.

"Barrie has lost a true Canadian hero and one of the nicest guys you could ever meet," Mayor Jeff Lehman said.

"He will be sorely missed."

Describing him as a true gentleman and someone that everyone, young to old, looked up to, Lehman said, "Bob's wartime heroism and lifetime of service will live on as an inspiration to current and future generations."

MP Patrick Brown said Barrie has lost a "legend."

"Col. Bob Middlemiss was an inspiration for our country and our city. I greatly admired Bob and feel a deep sense of loss with his passing. He symbolized the best Canadian values of courage, valour and bravery. His decorated accomplishments during the Second World War on behalf of the allied forces in the air will never be forgotten," the MP said.

"He was a titan amongst us."

MPP Rod Jackson saw Middlemiss just a few weeks ago at a veterans dinner.

"I met Bob when I was chairperson of the Olympic Torch Run (2009), and he was our community torch bearer to light the cauldron," said Jackson. "We went to elementary schools together doing an Olympic torch tour."

The MPP said he was touched by the way Middlemiss respected and engaged students, and how he connected with others.

"He always had a story – never the same one twice. You loved him the moment you met him," said Jackson.

A member of the Veterans Club of Barrie and the RCAF 441 Huronia Wing, he was also the honorary colonel of 427 Squadron at CFB Petawawa.

Lt.-Col. Travis Morehen, commanding officer of 427, said there has been an outpouring of condolences from the RCAF (Royal Canadian Air Force) and CAF (Canadian Armed Forces).

"Hon.-Col. Middlemiss was an RCAF legend of the highest order ... From destroying four enemy aircraft during WWII aerial combat to ushering in the Mach 2 jet age, Hon.-Col. Middlemiss was a true hero in all respects. It is indeed a sad day for the RCAF and for Canada."

He was also awarded a Queen's Diamond Jubilee medal in 2012.

For Sergeant, the hardest part is knowing his friend wanted to accomplish more.

"I was up in the hospital with him last week and we were sitting there and reminiscing and he said there are so many aces from the RCAF who don't get the recognition they deserved," Sergeant said. "Bob said 'when I get out of here, I am going to write a book about the unsung aces of the RCAF.'"

Middlemiss also told Sergeant he wanted to start an association for ex-honorary colonels.

"Here he is, going on 93 years of age and he's telling me he's got to get out of the hospital and do all these projects. That was just Col. Bob. He's gone to the great squadrons in the sky. He's probably organizing an association up there with all his cronies."

- *with files from Laurie Watt and Janis Ramsay.*

"It is with great sadness that we learned of the passing of our Hon.- Col., Wing Commander (Retired) Bob Middlemiss. His courageous struggle with his illness ended during the early hours of 31 Jul 2013, hours after celebrating his 93rd Birthday. He was the 427 Special Operations Squadron Honourary Colonel since October 2003 and has touched the lives of all past and present Lions. His presence was inspiring to all ranks of the unit, as he reveled in his mentoring role to young RCAF personnel.

"Hon.-Col. Middlemiss was an RCAF legend of the highest order. His amazing career spanned three decades as a Spitfire, CF-86 Hawk and CF-104 Starfighter pilot. From destroying four enemy aircraft during WWII aerial combat to ushering in the Mach 2 jet age, Hon.-Col. Middlemiss was a true hero in all respects. Despite being shot down once and wounded on a second occasion, he rose to command four fighter units. He retired in 1969, maintaining a close relationship with the RCAF and Air Force Veteran groups.

"It is indeed a sad day for the RCAF and for Canada. There has been an outpouring of condolences from the highest echelons of the RCAF and the CAF. His absence will be particularly felt by those closest to him. His family, his second family in 427 Squadron and the military community of 16 Wing and CFB Borden."

- LCol Travis Morehen, current Commanding Officer of 427 SOAS.

"At Canadian Forces Base Borden we are deeply sorrowed by the passing of Hon.-Col. Bob Middlemiss. He was truly a great Canadian, a hero and a true friend to the Base. We wish to pass on our condolences to his family, loved ones and friends. He will be deeply missed by all who have known him throughout the years."

- Brigadier-General Tammy Harris, Base Commander CFB Borden and Canadian Forces Support Training Group

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