

Wing Mate

Royal Canadian Air Force Association of Canada
Newsletter 408-437 Wing



February  2025

AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION of CANADA MISSION STATEMENT

The Air Force Association of Canada is a national aerospace and community service organization whose aim is to commemorate the noble achievements of the men and women who have served as members of Canada's Air Force since its inception, advocate for a proficient and well equipped Air Force and, support the Royal Canadian Air Cadets.

2024 Executive

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Immediate Past President.....	Kurt Abels
	416-267-8874
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Secretary/Membership.....	Cécile Thompson
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Fellowship Chair.....	Barbara Newman
	416-223-7840
Air Cadets	
818 Squadron.....	Jackie Johnston
110 Squadron.....	Cécile Thompson



Sick and Visiting

Be sure to advise Barbara Newman, Fellowship Chair, if you are aware of a Wing member who is ill or in distressed circumstances.

Barbara can be reached at 416-223-7840.

Happy Birthday!

Bob McBain...January 13

Cécile Thompson...Feb.5

Curt Abels.....Feb.17

Peter Rebek.....Feb.19



General Meeting

Legion 948 Sheppard Ave.
East of Allan Expressway

Monday, February 10th



President's Report



Happy St Valentine's Day !!! We made it. Hard to believe that a quarter of a century ago now, we were hoping that aeroplanes would not be falling out of the sky at the stroke of midnight and our toasters would still work in the morning, pacemakers would not go crazy; and everything with a microchip would not give up the ghost. On January 1st, 2000 our TV sets turned on as usual, the toaster, coffee maker still worked. The income tax department's computers just yawned and still worked perfectly.

Our next General meeting will take place on February 10th if the weather cooperates, and it will be a movie night as in January.

There was no *Wing Mate* published for January to give our editor Terry a Christmas break. Our Christmas Dinner was held on 09 December. Perhaps judging by the bar bill it was one of the best to date. There were about 35 people in attendance, including members of the Air Crew Association who are always welcome. The Legion went out of its way to provide plenty of Christmas fare and ambiance. At 2130 hrs they practically had to use a broom to sweep us out the door. On behalf of the Wing, Thank you!

You may recall that Friday, the 31st of January was the effective date of Mr. Dean Black's resignation and perhaps some other members of the Ottawa Executive, from our Association. I have not heard anything yet of who our new Executive is or will be going forth nor the status of our Association. To borrow a hopeful phrase from The Holiday Inn: 'No news is good news.'

I understand from one of my members, that we were in similar financial difficulties about fifteen years or so just before I became a member. At that time Dean stepped up and 'saved our bacon'. For that action, Dean, a sincere THANK YOU for your work. Now, again we are in a similar yet different situation simply because our organization has diminished in membership, and we're a year or two older. Let's see what our people in Ottawa will pull out of the hat this time.



Sadly, we lost two members Lloyd Atkinson who actually passed away in July 2024, but we were made aware of this just last month. Lloyd was a long-time member joining the Wing on 1 February 1986.

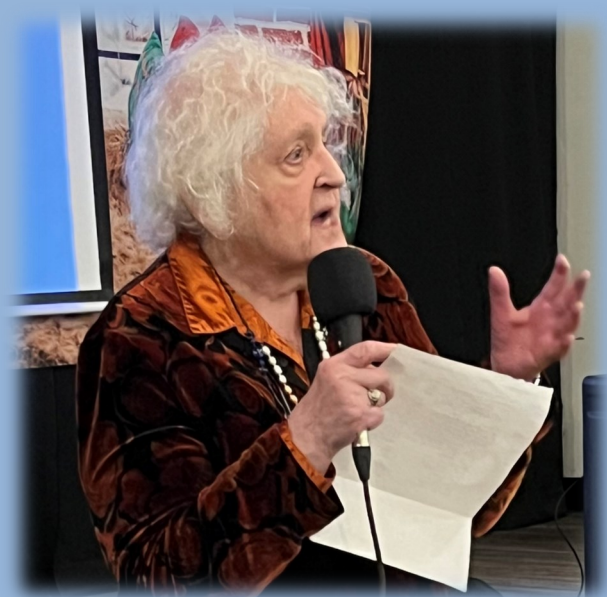
Arthur Mead passed away recently on 20 January 2025. Arthur was originally a member of 444 Wing with Cecile Thompson. When 444 Wing folded he became a member of 408/437 Wing.

From our Secretary

Contact Cecile Thompson at 416-579-0199 for the following application forms:

- * *Ad Astra stone*: a grey granite stone with your name/relative who served on it to be placed in the Airpark at the museum In Trenton
- * *Veteran plate*: For your car (with a poppy)





Festive Dinner

2024

408-437
Wing

Aircrew Association Ontario











Capt Mort Lightstone and Gen Richard Rohmer when Mort received his medallion for service to the Warriors Day parade as well as his 20th year pin, RCAF Association (Sunnybrook).

Gloster Gladiator

The Gloster Gladiator was the RAF's last biplane

fighter, the prototype (K5200) having first flown in September 1934.

In July 1935 the Gladiator was ordered for the RAF— 23 with a further 186 ordered in September.

Production actually continued until 1940. It was produced in three major versions; Mk.I, Mk.II and the Sea Gladiator which featured a deck-arrester hook and a collapsible dinghy.

Largely replaced in Fighter Command by the outbreak of war, Gladiators served with 607 and 615 Squadrons of the AASF and equipped 247 Squadron in the Battle of Britain charged primarily with the local defence of Devonport Dockyards, Plymouth. Most famous is the Gladiator for its exploits overseas, including operations in Norway, Malta and the Western Desert.

The Gladiator was also one of Britain's biggest export successes before the war, seeing service in many other countries.

Total production was 768, mostly Mk.I and Mk.II fighters. Only 60 Sea Gladiators were built.

The Gladiator was, as the famous test-pilot Captain Eric M. Brown put it, "undoubtedly one of the greatest biplane fighter ever built", but appearing almost simultaneously with the first of the new breed of heavily armed monoplane fighters, it was pitched into a combat era where it was outgunned and outperformed, though never outmaneuvered.



Faith, Hope and Charity: The Gloster Gladiators of Malta

Malta is a tiny archipelago situated between Sicily and Tunisia. Sitting astride the sea lanes between the western and central Mediterranean Sea, it has been strategically important since ancient times. When World War II began in 1939, Malta was a British possession, and an important post linking Gibraltar in the west to Egypt and the Suez Canal in the east. It also could serve as a stepping stone—or a significant barrier—between Sicily and the Italian colony of Libya

in North Africa.

Hoping to keep Italy out of the war, the British government strongly considered handing over Malta to Italian dictator Benito Mussolini as a bribe. Prime Minister Winston Churchill helped quash that idea, and fortunately so, for when Italy entered the war on the side of the Axis on June 10, 1940, just as France was falling to German invasion, Malta immediately became vital to British efforts to hold onto the Suez Canal and the Middle East.

Mussolini's air force—the *Regia Aeronautica*—launched its first assaults on the Maltese islands on June 11. The harbor of Valletta received special attention. Unfortunately for the Maltese people and the small British garrison, nothing seemed available to counter the constant Italian air attacks. What planes were available had been relegated to the defense of Great Britain, or to Egypt.

Scrounging around, however, Air Commodore Foster Maynard discovered a number of packing crates that had been left behind by a visiting aircraft carrier earlier in the war. Inside, disassembled, were some Gloster Gladiator biplanes. With a design dating all the way back to 1934, this single-seater fighter was by 1940 already obsolete. With a maximum speed of only 257 mph, the plane was much slower than the monoplane fighters that dominated most air combat in Europe. Still, the Gladiator was a durable aircraft, and it was maneuverable while also being easy to fly.



Maynard's mechanics eventually were able to assemble six of the Gladiators, but this only allowed them to put three aircraft in the air at any one time, with the other three being used as backups and for spare parts. Still, the British were desperate to be able to put *anything* into the air against the Italians—not just

to interfere with their bombing raids, but to prove to the people of Malta that somebody was fighting to defend them against enemy bombs.

The Italian aircraft soaring over Malta may not have been up to German standards, but they were nevertheless effective and far more modern than the Gladiators. They included the Macchi C.200 monoplane fighter, with a maximum speed of 313mph, and the tri-engine Savoia-Marchetti 79 bomber, which with a maximum speed of 290mph could also outrun or, with a full payload, at least match the speed of the lumbering Gladiators. To do any damage at all to the Italians, the British pilots would have to employ their aircraft creatively, to say the least.



Still, the Gladiators gave all they had. As Maltese civilians gathered to watch the air combat in the clear blue Mediterranean skies, they were delighted to see the biplanes swoop fearlessly to engage the Italians. The biplanes were immediately recognizable because of their shape, and soon seemed to take on personalities of their own to those watching from below. Somewhere along the way they acquired the nicknames of Faith, Hope, and Charity.

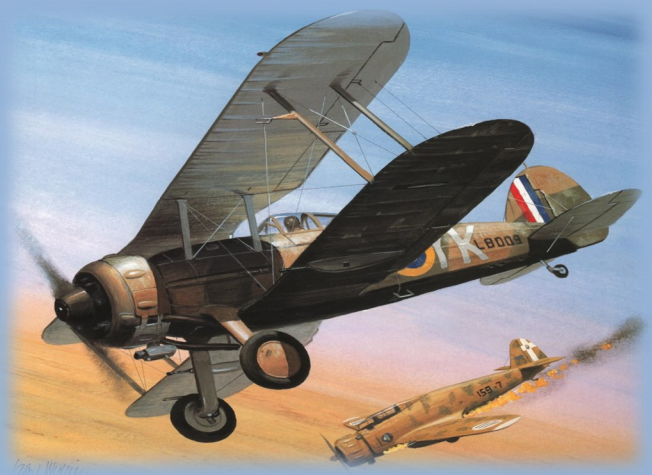
Over the 10 days from June 11-21, 1940, these three Gladiators (really six aircraft used interchangeably) and their dedicated volunteer pilots formed Malta's only defense against enemy bombing raids. "You would take off in a Gladiator with some of the few Hurricanes we had on the island and head up towards the Italians," Flight Lieutenant James Pickering remembered many years later. "Sometimes there would be a hundred plus—clouds of bombers and fighters swarming above. And then, in a moment, you would be on your own—everything else had overtaken you."

Incredibly, the Gladiators managed to shoot down

several Italian aircraft against the loss of only one British plane shot down at the end of July. The in-



trepid British pilots managed to disrupt the Italian raiders, forcing them to emphasize self-protection rather than accuracy, and sometimes to drop their bombs off-target. The Gladiators' most important role, however, was in bolstering the confidence of the people of Malta and their small, ragged crew of British defenders. They would need that confidence in the



years ahead, as the German *Luftwaffe* joined in the bombing to the point that by 1942 Valletta became the single most heavily bombed place on earth. In April of that year, King George VI awarded the George Cross to the entire island "to bear witness to a heroism and devotion that will long be famous in history."

Source: WW II Museum, New Orleans, Aug 2020





Clifford "Black Mike" McKay McEwan

Air Vice Marshal MC, DFC & Bar

Clifford McEwan was born at Griswold, Manitoba in 1896, and raised in Moose Jaw. After receiving his education at the University of Saskatchewan, he enlisted in the 196th Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force in 1916. Becoming an officer shortly after arriving in England, McEwan was assigned to Britain's Royal Flying Corps, where he learned to fly. As a member of No. 28 Squadron, RFC, in Italy during 1918, he was credited with shooting down 22 enemy aircraft, making him an "Ace." For his wartime service, McEwan was awarded the Military Cross, the Distinguished Flying Cross with Bar, and the Italian Bronze Medal for Valour. During the interwar years, McEwan was a flying instructor; in 1930 he attended the Royal Air Force Staff College at Cranwell, Lincolnshire. At the outbreak of World War II in 1939, he was a Group Captain stationed at Trenton, Ontario. In 1941, McEwan was promoted to Air Commodore and given command of the Royal Canadian Air Force's No. 1 Group at St. John's, Newfoundland, which was then waging a vital war against German U-boats in the North Atlantic. Promoted to Air Vice-Marshal, he was appointed Air Officer Commanding No. 6 (Bomber) Group in Yorkshire, England on February 28, 1944. This was a critical point in the strategic air offensive against Germany, and McEwan quickly established a rigorous training program, resulting in increased combat efficiency and reduced casu-



alty rates. When the European war ended, he was designated commander of the Canadian bomber group to be sent to the Pacific Theatre to fight against the Japanese, but with the collapse of Japan in August 1945 the plan was scrapped.

McEwan retired from the Royal Canadian Air Force in 1946 and became a private consultant to aircraft manufacturers. For two years he was a director of Trans-Canada Air Lines, the predecessor of Air Canada. McEwan died in 1967, aged 71;

he is buried in Fund's Field of Honour, Pointe Claire, Quebec. On June 17, 2003, 15 Wing Moose Jaw was renamed Air Vice Marshal C.M. McEwan Airfield, the first Canadian Forces airfield to be named in honour of a Canadian military aviation legend. **By Jeff R. Noel, Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan**



McEwan served in Italy as a Sopwith Camel pilot, scoring twenty-seven victories, four of which are believed to have been whilst flying 8239D.



McEwan's Sopwith Camel, Italy