



MARCH  
2020

**TAKE OFF**

**429 (Georgina) Wing**  
Royal Canadian Air Force Association

Pefferlaw Lion's Hall  
Pete's Lane  
Pefferlaw, Ontario



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## Chair's Message

..... “ *Off the Cuffe*”



The saying is, March comes in like lion and goes out like a lamb. That really doesn't seem to be the case this year so far. Forecast is for a very nice weekend, a spring teaser.

With the clocks changing this weekend, we will loose an hour's sleep, not gaining it back until the fall. Hoping soon we will see the tulips and daffodils poking the heads through the soil and the forsythia in bloom. Its coming!

Eight of us attended the 659 Air Cadet Spaghetti dinner on the weekend. They did a great job and I am sure they did well financially. They were fundraising for a trip over the March Break, but with the worry of the virus, many schools are curtailing their trips, especially those going over to Europe. I hope the students from Fenelon Falls Secondary School will be able to do their trip in April.

Per ardua ad Astra

Ann



*“Women are made to be loved, not understood.”*

..... *Oscar Wilde*





\*\*\* WING NEWS \*\*\*\*

Good February meeting and pot luck supper. Again those putting on the dinner did a great job. Thank you.

We also had two students and their teacher from Fenelon Falls Secondary School come in and give us a presentation of their trip to Vimy Ridge for the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. They gave us an excellent slide show and spoke of their tours, the soldier each had researched and their preparation ahead of time for this memorable trip. Their teacher also spoke of the work and fundraising that went into making this trip possible and they are now in the throws of getting ready for their venture to Auschwitz in April of this year. The group is known as the FFSS Globetrotters. They have a facebook page and you can follow them on their next trip @FFSStravel. It should be worth following.

**We are going to try to organize a trip to the Air Museum in Mt. Hope on Saturday, March 28<sup>th</sup>. We would try and carpool, meeting at the museum approx..11:00 am for a tour and going over to 447 Wing quarters for lunch following the tour. As it turns out there will be a Speaker at the Museum giving presentation at 1:00 p.m. Roger Gunn “Masters of the Air”. Those interested in participating in this day are to call Vern Conklin at 705-428-3886. Please reply by March 18<sup>th</sup>.**

**There will be NO General Meeting on March 29<sup>th</sup>.**

Winner of the February Lucky Draw - Ernie Mackie



*“May your heart be light and happy, may your smile be big and wide, may your pockets have a coin or two inside.”*

*429 (Georgina) Wing  
RCAFA  
MEMBERS, FAMILY and FRIENDS*

*Anniversary and Awards Dinner  
Sunday, April 26, 2020.*

*Villa Risi Restornte  
16995 Yonge St.  
Newmarket, Ont.*

*Meal - Caesar or Garden Salad  
Penne Vodka  
Prime Rib Potatoes Vegetable  
Dessert  
Coffee Tea Espresso*

*\$60.00 each*

*Cash Bar*

*RSVP - Vern Conklin  
[yoursincoins@hotmail.ca](mailto:yoursincoins@hotmail.ca) or  
705-428-3886*

*Before April 19<sup>th</sup>.*

Over the next few months, I will be publishing pages from a letter compiled by the son of Lt. J.A.Hawtin.

“Dad didn’t talk a lot about this POW experiences, so a lot of the information I learned on our trip was new to us. These notes are meant to fill in some of the facts and stories for our sons, so that they have a more detailed history of those two years of their Grandfather’s life.”

“It was pretty amazing to meet with a gentleman in the Netherlands who witnessed the crash in 1943 and remembers Dad from that time. His memory was fantastic! And to see the crash site is being maintained after all these years. Then at the POW camp site, the Museum Curator spent the day with us, explaining a lot of the facts about camp life. There was only one hut foundation remaining in all the compounds, and it was Dad’s.”

**Background:** Dad enlisted on July 2, 1941. He joined 405 Squadron in July 1942, based in Yorkshire, England.

He was a Navigator on a Halifax 4 engine heavy bomber #JB966

Crew: Lt. Donald Beattie - 21 - Officer Pilot - RCAF

Sgt. Ralph Eric Hart - 21 - Pilot - RCAF

Lt. J.A. Hawtin - 21 - Navigator - RCAF J11941

Sgt. J.D. Gibson - Flight Engineer - RCAF

Sgt. Sydney Buchanan Hawley - 22 - Radiotelegraphic - RAF

Sgt. K.W. Clarke - Bombardier - RAF

Sgt. R. Ferguson - Gunner - RCAF

### **Thursday, May 13, 1943:**

- Departed the airbase at Gransden Lodge Huntingdonshire in East England on May 13<sup>th</sup> at 11:52 p.m. (The Americans bombed during the day; the Allies at night)
- Target was Bochum, Germany - “Battle of the Ruhr”
- Bombing of the Bochum coal producing centre, N/W of Essen, damaged its extensive coke, gas, benzol and iron & steel plants.
- 442 bombers flew on this op; 24 were lost.

### **Friday, May 14, 1943:**

- 3:30 a.m. the plane was hit and it’s right wing and two engines caught fire. The pilot gave the order to bail out. The weather was good. The plne came straight towards Balkbrug from the east, but suddenly it made a turn to the right –

it seemed as though the pilot got the plane under control - and the plane crashed at Den Kaat, just north of Balkbrug, without hitting the town or farms.



- The German fighter pilot who shot down Dad's plane was Captain Hauptmann Herbert Lutje
  - Dad's plane was one of 6 allied bombers he shot down that night
  - He shot down 50 in total during the war
- Dad bailed out over Dedemsvaart, Holland, which was 7 km from the crash site. (The Navigator was always the first to bail out). Three others bailed out 10 km away
- Dad landed in a farmer's field - he then rolled up & buried his parachute and life vest (the parachute and life vest were found July 25, 1943, by 4 boys who were looking for their sheep. The parachute was made into a christening gown)
- Waited until morning, when a farmer came to get his cattle at 8:00 a.m.
- The farmer called the police (he had no choice, as a death sentence was possible if he didn't hand Dad over)
- Mayor of Dedemsvaart and a doctor talked to Dad
- Asked if he knew where he was - "I was the Navigator"!
- The Germans brought Dad to the crash site
- As senior officer, Dad had to ID the 3 deceased crew members - "it was very emotional"
- Dad was amazed that the Germans knew quite a bit about his crew & plane

Three crew members did not survive:



- Pilot D. Beattie
- Pilot R.E. Hart
- Radio Operator S.B. Hawley

They are buried in the cemetery at Oud-Avereest

- Dad was held in jail in Balkbrug for one night
- The next morning, he was put in a car (as an officer, vs NCO's who were transported in a truck)
- When getting into the car, a crowd of townfolk had gathered on the side of the road – Dad made a "V" sign with his fingers against his cheek, so that the townfolk could see, but not the Germans
- He was taken to Amsterdam, then to Frankfurt for interrogation, and then to Germany
- He arrived at Stalag Luft III on May 20, 1943

#### **Eyewitness Account - Jan Nijensikkens:**

- He was 10 years old in 1943
- He was awakened by a dogfight. He went up on the roof of his house and watched the plane veer and spiral out of control, and crash
- His father was the first on the scene, as he was a firefighter
- "My mother said to me – "never forget that there are people in there who gave their lives for our freedom."
- The residents of Balkbrug were/are extremely grateful – that the pilot Beattie stayed in the plane and kept some control so that the plane did not crash in the town (landed about a km outside the village) and, he also missed a cluster of farm homes and buildings by about 50m. If he had bailed out, there would no doubt have been civilian casualties



- The current owner (Anna Veenbaas) of the farm is the niece of the man who owned the farm during the war. They are maintaining the crash site / crater "out of respect and in honour of those who died there"
- 6,000 planes were shot down over Holland during the war
- 125,000 Allied Forces were involved in the liberation of Holland; 46,000 died

(Dad and Mom were the guests of Hillie Westerbaan in August 2004. Her farm is 400m from the crash site.)

### Stalag Luft III – Sagan Germany / Zagan Poland

Dad arrived at Stalag Luft III on May 20, 1943 – POW ID# 1329

- Sagan was then a part of Germany, for the previous 500 -600 years. The residents left the town in 1945 due to the Russian advance. It was later repopulated with Polish
- This area had been the site of many POW camps in the past, as it was/is a major army district. Stalag Luft VIIIIC (site of the current museum) was a POW camp during WWI
- WWII: (Luft are camps run by the Luftwaffe, for air force POW's)
  - Stalag I – in Germany – officers
  - Stalag II – in Poland – Soviet POW's
  - Stalag Luft III – Sagan, Germany - 7,000 Americans & 3,000 RAF and Allied POW's
  - Stalag IV, V, VI, VII – NCO POW's
  - Stalag Luft VIIIIC – Sagan -built in 1939. 49,000 POW's (most were sent out to work farms, so that the camp population was around 12,000)
  - 300,000 POW's in all camps.
  - 30 nationalities
  - 6 camps in the Sagan area



"Harry" tunnel  
Dad's hut (#120)

### Stalag Luft III

- 10,000 POW's total in the 5 compounds (2,000 per compound)
- North Compound was built in 1942 for officers of Allied Forces
- Spring 1944 – West and South compounds were built/added
- Compounds: (from the left): West, North (Dad's / Great Escape compound) / South, German staff area (soldiers, censors, etc), Centre, East. (Stalag Luft VIIIc is on the far left of the photo)

#### o Huts:



Hut 120  
Dad's Room



- North compound had 15 huts
- 18 rooms per hut, plus a kitchen, night washroom, and storage room
- Huts measured 45' X 110'
- Rooms measured 13' X 13'
- one room was occupied by NCO's, who did "servant" work
- 6 or 8 officers to a room, but that increased later in the war (to triple bunks vs double). Dad's room was #14 in hut #120, and had 6 occupants
- Small rooms (3) at the end of the huts were for senior officers
- Amazingly, Dad's hut is the only hut where all the foundations remain, and you can visualize the outline of the full hut and the rooms.



## Halifax Bomber

The Handley Page Halifax is a British Royal Air Force four-engine heavy bomber of the Second World War. On October 25, 1939, the Halifax performed its maiden flight and it entered service with the RAF on November 13, 1940.

## ROYAL CANADIAN AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION

### MISSION STATEMENT

**The Royal Canadian Air Force Association is a not-for-profit community service organization composed of aviation minded members, established to remind Canadians of their country's aeronautical tradition and history, to support Canada's Air Force, Royal Canadian Air Cadets and to support and encourage civil aviation.**



### *659 Brock Air Cadet Squadron*

*Meet every Thursday evening 6:30 – 9:00 p.m.  
Pefferlaw Lion's Hall, Pefferlaw, Ont.*

*Commanding Officer – Capt. Larry Umphrey*