

# 434 Niagara

## BULLETIN



Vol. 24 no 4 Mar-Apr, 2022

### General Meetings

3rd Saturday of each month at

Welland Optimist Club, 38 Patterson Ave., Welland, ON L3B 2C4

until further notice. Due to present Covid restrictions future meeting dates will be advised by email and telephone.

# ***We proudly promote the glorious tradition of the RCAF***

## **434 Wing Board of Directors**

### **2020-2021**

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1 st Vice Chairwoman – Julie Sheppard.....	H - 905-734-6307
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Fonthill	Branch 613	Hall	905-892-6293

**Published by**

**434 (Niagara Peninsula) Wing**

**Email: [434wingrcafa@gmail.com](mailto:434wingrcafa@gmail.com)**

**Royal Canadian Air Force Association of Canada**

# Chairman's Report May 2022

Spring is here and with it brings hope for things to improve.

We managed to hold our first General meeting since last year and it was nice to see those that managed to attend. Our scheduled speaker for that meeting had to cancel due to COVID but we are hopeful to secure him for a future meeting.

Our Big Red Meat fundraiser was a great success, many thanks to those that participated and a special thanks to Julie and also to Jeanette Lee for their work in the arranging of and the picking up of all of the orders.

The date for Ted Barris to give his presentation on the **Battle of the Atlantic** has had to be changed from October 22<sup>nd</sup> with the new date now being October 15<sup>th</sup> start time has not changed and is still 1.00PM the venue is still the same Br 613 RCL Fonthill.

Arrangements have been made to set up our Kit Shop (indoors) at the Dorothy Rungeling Airport here in Welland. This is in conjunction with an event put on by COPA with in excess of 100 aircraft expected with Welland being the first leg. This as I understand it will be a one day event here in Welland scheduled for Thursday June 02

The spring meeting at 447 Wing went ahead on March 26 although attendance was down from previous meetings there was much discussed. Our Part 1 forms were submitted along with award nominations.

Plans are in the works with regards to holding our Awards banquet (it has been 2 years); we will need to have commitments from those that plan to attend to see if numbers make this viable, please contact Secretary George as soon as possible with your yay or nay. The date we have in mind is Friday June 17 with symposium at 5.30 and dinner at 6.00PM Br. 613 RCL Fonthill. This date as you can see is not very far off so your response ASAP is required to allow for planning. Even if you cannot attend please let George know, this prevents him having to do follow-up calls for lack of response. FYI the Golf course where we normally would have been has been sold so we have had to change the venue.

I realize that there are a few items in this report that were also mentioned in the minutes of the Board meeting of April 02 but I feel that they were important enough to bear repeating especially the item on our Banquet.

As always we as your Board are open to recommendations or suggestions that might in some way benefit the Wing, please feel free to bring your ideas forward.

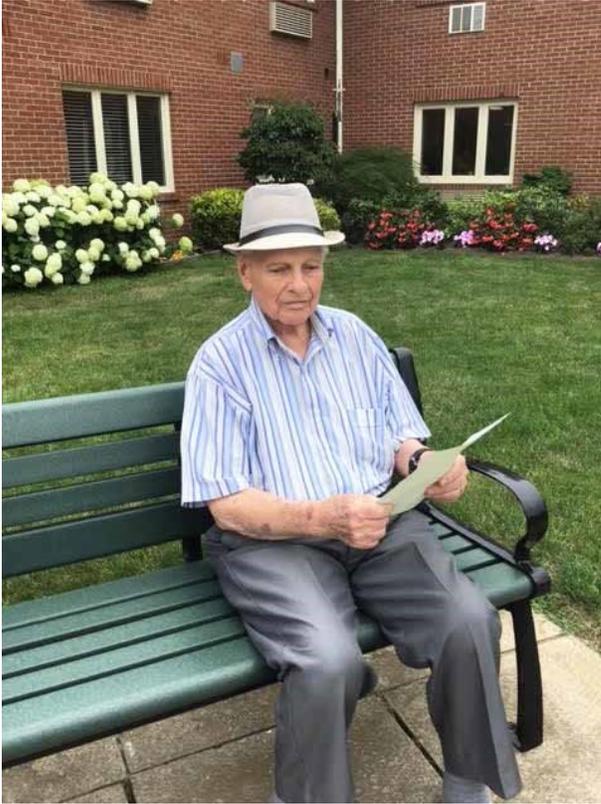
Things are starting to improve let us all continue to do our part so that we can move forward.

**Bill Heron (Chairman)**

*Per Ardua Ad Astra*

## We Are Almost There !

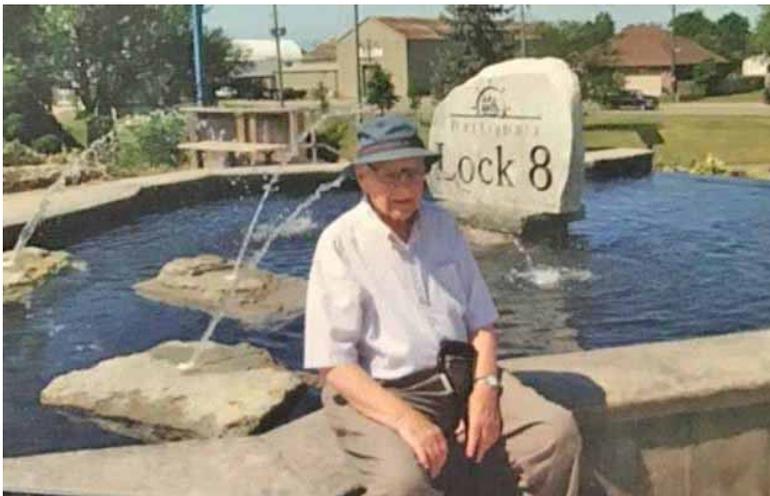
July 2022 will witness the 100th Birthday for Spitfire Pilot and  
434 Niagara Wing Honorary Director  
Tom Vance



Tom reviewing letter from the Dutch Embassy, fall of 2021, thanking him for his part in the Liberation of the Netherlands.



Tom with fellow Veterans, from left to right: Tom, Ed Carter Edwards, Jim Summerside, in back, Dan Rodrigue



From a few years ago, Tom sitting at Lock 8, the Gard Lock, in Port Colborne



Tom by reduced scale Spitfire at Alf Beam's airfield

## Timber Groff March 8, 2022



**Timber**, beloved mascot of 434 Niagara Wing, passed away March 8, 2022.

Timber was a rescue dog. He came to us one night in January of 2021 straight out of surgery to correct dental problems resulting from neglect. He was not even conscious and did not yet know us! It was a slow process of mutual trust as he had been abused all of his life and most assuredly suffered from PTSD. At first, he would not allow you to pet him but eventually he came around to a little at a time but you could never touch his paws or turn him on his back! With great courage and determination, Timber gradually conquered the demons haunting his past until he was fit to face the world and members of the 434 Niagara Wing were honored to have him as their mascot. He attended all outdoor activities of our Wing, greeting each member who would look for him as they arrived. While on his usual walk Timber recently suffered a seizure and passed away shortly thereafter.

As a rescue dog, Timber symbolized the warrior returning home from battle—exhausted and perhaps wounded, but never defeated. He was an inspiration to 434 Niagara members as their mascot.

George and Sue Groff



## First General Meeting of 2022

The first General Meeting for 2022 was held on Saturday, March 19, 2022 at the Welland Optimist Center. The meeting was an opportunity to get caught up on all matters requiring a vote by the general membership and thus featured a full agenda to clear the backlog and comment on plans for going forward.



## The Last Flight



### **Ron Bentley** April 1941—March 2022

Ron leaves behind his wife Judy, his sister Carol, his son Steve and his daughter Karen along with five grandchildren.

Ron comes from a family that has served in the military. His father was in the Royal Navy, his son Steve is a graduate of RMC and served in the Canadian Navy. Ron had a love of aviation; he was an Air Cadet, he volunteered in the construction of the full scale replica of the AVRO Arrow at Downsview. Ron's father had worked at AVRO on the building of the Arrow until it was stopped. Ron spent many years volunteering and teaching at the Canadian Warplane Heritage Museum.

As a member of 434 Niagara Wing Ron served on our Audit Committee for several years and he will be missed by all members.

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### **Board of Directors Meeting April 2, 2022**



# Canada's Remarkable Fighter Pilots

**WW1**—Five of the British Empire's top ten fighter pilots came from Canada. 127 Canadian fighter pilots became aces, accounting for 1,500 victories.

**WW2** 160 Canadian fighter pilots became aces, creating 1,021 kills.

**Korean War** A few Canadian fighter pilots destroyed or damaged 20 Communist MiG jets, without a single loss.

By the end of WW1, Canada with a population of 8 million people, had produced four super aces with 50 or more kills each, Germany had three, France and England had two each and the United States had none.

In WW2, Canada's George Beurling was the most spectacular Allied ace of them all, destroying 28 opponents in 14 flying days after which he went on to accumulate further kills.

## Flight Sergeant George Beurling D.S.O., D.F.C., D.F.M

### Canada's greatest hero of WWII

The "Falcon of Malta," the "Knight of Malta," celebrated as a fighter, a legendary pilot, a hero who won the Distinguished Service Order, the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Distinguished Flying Medal and Bar, all by the time he was twenty-years old.

George Beurling was born in Verdun, Quebec December 6, 1921. Aviation was opening up in the 1920's. It was no longer something just limited to the military. Bush pilots in Canada were flying into the north country, Charles Lindbergh's flight across the Atlantic opened up the possibility of commercial aviation flying across the Atlantic. Pilots were seen as daring, colourful

and brave, capturing the imagination of many youth. As a boy, Beurling built model airplanes, not only from plans but by going to the airport, first the Lasalle Airport and then the Cartierville Airport, behind Mount Royal and studying the actual planes. It was at Cartierville that Beurling met Ted Hogan, a bush pilot and flying instructor who sensed the enthusiasm young Beurling had for flying. Hogan told him he would take him up for a flight if he had his mother's permission. When Beurling asked his parents for

permission, thinking he was kidding, his mother said, "Sure George, you can fly to the moon!" Beurling took his first flight in the summer of 1930, and the die was set. For the next seven years, Beurling worked around the Cartierville hangars, doing odd jobs. By the time he was twelve, Beurling was going up with Hogan who let him take the controls of the plane. Two years later, Hogan allowed him to handle take offs and landings. In 1938, now sixteen, Beurling made his first solo flight in a Curtis Rambler.



**Curtis Rambler**

## **Flight Sergeant George Beurling D.S.O., D.F.C., D.F.M**

Beurling was not a good student and shortly after his solo flight he quit school. He was a quiet youngster, focused solely on flying. School was too boring for him. It would turn out later, in his flying career that he was gifted with a computer-swift mind for solving equations, the complex calculations which made him an almost invincible opponent in wartime dogfights. He left Montreal to take up a co-pilot position in Gravenhurst flying freight to Rouyn, Quebec, a boring job but which built up his flying time. Before long, he left for San Francisco hoping to be recruited to go to China to fly against the invading Japanese. Upon reaching Seattle, Washington, he fell into the hands of US Immigration authorities who charged him with entering the country illegally. He was taken back to the Canadian border and given a one way ticket back to Montreal.

### **Rejected by the RCAF**

Back in Montreal, Beurling immediately applied through the RCAF recruiter. He was sure with his flying hours he would be accepted. The air force turned him down. He would never forgive the RCAF for that initial rejection of him. The few men who were signed on as pilots in the early days were ones who were university trained. In 1940 he learned that the RAF was accepting experienced pilots in Britain. At the Montreal dockyards Beurling found a merchant ship headed for Glasgow who would take him on as a deckhand.

### **Accepted by the RAF**

Beurling was accepted by the RAF who found his qualifications more than acceptable. All he had to do was show proof of his age. Beurling had forgotten to bring his birth certificate. He travelled by ship back to Montreal and then again as a deckhand, returned by ship to Glasgow. He enlisted as an Aircraftman 2nd Class. In December 1940 Beurling was posted to Devon where he studied mathematics, navigation and meteorology. By June 1941 he was posted to No. 8 Service Flying school at Montrose, Scotland. He began his flight training in a Miles Master which duplicated in flight many of the characteristics of the more powerful Hawker Hurricane fighter.

Near the end of his time at Montrose, Beurling progressed to the Hawker Hurricane. He participated in mock dog fights and air to air gunnery practice. Beurling's shooting ability became evident, a skill which would eventually set him apart from his squadron mates. After finishing at Montrose he was sent to Operational Training Unit No. 57 where he flew a Spitfire. In December 1941 his training at OTU was completed and he was to be recommended for a commission, which he refused responding, "I don't feel like an officer." In mid-December, Sergeant-Pilot Beurling was posted to a line Squadron No. 403. This squadron was the first of 35 RCAF squadrons formed overseas.



**Miles Master**

He flew his first combat mission on Christmas day. It was an uneventful flight which he described as "exciting as Toronto on a Sunday." The 403 Squadron became an exclusively Canadian manned unit and since Beurling was Royal Air Force, he was transferred to RAF Squadron No. 41 in Sussex. Before joining his new squadron an offer was made to recommend him for a commission and once again he refused.

## **Flight Sergeant George Beurling D.S.O., D.F.C., D.F.M**

Flying with Squadron 41 was uneventful and when he heard a pilot objecting to an overseas posting, Beurling persuaded his squadron commander to allow him to go as the replacement for the pilot. Three days later Beurling was on a freighter whose hold contained newly crated Spitfires headed for Gibraltar.

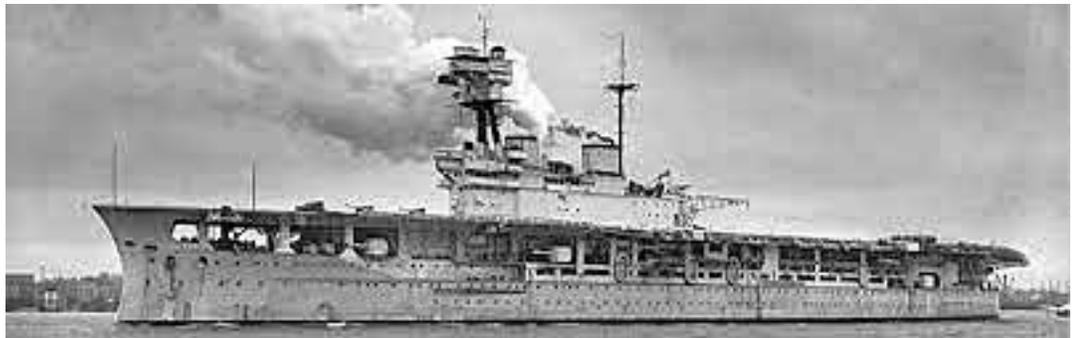
### **North Africa**

In February 1941 a German troopship arrived in the Libyan port of Tripoli. Erwin Rommel had arrived in Africa. His presence in Africa would dominate the Middle East theatre for the entire campaign. Rommel's line of supply was Italian merchant ships carrying arms, food, ammunition and fuel for his Panzers. It would have to be attacked and the Axis convoys sunk as they travelled between Italian ports and North Africa.

### **Malta**

The Maltese islands, which sat in the middle of the Mediterranean, were of strategic importance since they were the only base from which RAF bombers could operate from to attack Rommel's supply ships. Churchill wanted his best aircraft, the Spitfire, to be in Malta to match Germany's new Messerschmitt F109's, however, Malta was beyond the Spitfire's flying range from Gibraltar. The solution was to fly the Spitfires from aircraft carriers which had never been tried before. By October 1942, 385 Spitfires had been flown to Malta from aircraft carriers, with a loss of only 18, four were shot down and 14 disappeared.

On Sunday, June 7, 1942, Beurling boarded H.M.S. Eagle in Gibraltar, headed for Malta, along with 32 Spitfires. He located his assigned aircraft, a new Spitfire Mk VC powered by the Merlin engine.



**H.M.S. Eagle, which transported Beurling and his Spitfire to Malta**

After a successful takeoff from Eagle, Beurling flew his Spitfire to Malta where he was stationed at Takali, an airstrip in the middle of the island. He joined 249 Squadron. Two attributes of Beurling became apparent to those flying with him. One was his incredible eyesight. In combat he always spotted enemy planes in the air before anyone else. Beurling did exercises to sharpen his vision, it was not an inherent ability. His shooting skill was his greatest mark of distinction and again he practiced shooting at moving targets even on the ground.

### **Shooting Angles in Combat Flying**

There are three possible angles to fire at an enemy aircraft: (1) Fly at an enemy head on; (2) fly at the same altitude as the enemy and directly behind them; (3) deflection shooting, i.e. shooting at an angle. Beurling became the best in the world at this kind of shooting. To make a deflection shot the pilot must determine the speed of the enemy aircraft. He must then determine the point ahead of the enemy where his own bullets will meet the enemy plane. Estimating the angle of attack and the speed of the enemy fighter required an enormous range of calculations all to be made in microseconds, that many pilots could never master. The complication as Beurling described it was that you are never just lining up and firing at something going straight ahead. You are going into rolls, dives and spins. The trick is to know which of the guns in which wing was aimed at what you wanted to hit.

## **Flight Sergeant George Beurling D.S.O., D.F.C., D.F.M**

As the RAF bomber squadrons on Malta would seek out merchant ships bound for Africa, German air forces operating from Sicily would attempt to bomb RAF bases on Malta. Malta Spitfire squadrons would attempt to intercept the enemy planes before they could reach the island. On July 6, 1942 Beurling was in one of eight Spitfires scrambled to meet three Italian Cant bombers and 30 Macchi 202's. Later the same day, he was in the air to confront two German JU88's and 20 Messerschmitt 109F's. His total for the day was four, one 109F, 2 Macchi fighters and one Cant bomber damaged. By July 27, Beurling's score had climbed to 21, but the strain of battle was taking its toll as he had lost weight



**Macchi 202, Italy's top line fighter**

and was in a weakened condition, needing rest. At this point a message from London ordered him to accept an officer's commission. Too weak to protest, he finally accepted the honour. By October, Beurling was showing signs of battle fatigue. In five months, he had gone from 175 pounds to 125 pounds. On October 14 he took to the air as part of two squadrons of Spitfires, to attack 50 fighters and eight bombers headed towards Malta. In the ensuing battle Beurling shot down two 109F's and one JU88. In a careless move, he left himself open to attack and his plane was hit by canon fire and shrapnel. Beurling was able to bail out and parachute into the sea where he was rescued and taken to hospital. Beurling's kills since he arrived in Malta were now 27. Along with two prior kills in Europe his total was now 29 kills. He was now being sent home to Canada.



**Takali Airfield in Malta**

### **Home to Canada**

On November 1, 1942 while still recovering from his wounds, Beurling was carried on to a Liberator to be flown to Gibraltar. The plane carried a crew of six along with 18 passengers. Upon reaching Gibraltar the Liberator pilot faced a raging storm. Attempting to land in poor visibility, the pilot realized he was overshooting the runway and attempted to pull up. The Liberator climbed about 40 feet and then stalled and fell like a rock.

### **Crash at Gibraltar**

Beurling had sensed the plane was about to stall and forced open the emergency exit door and jumped into the sea before the crash. Beurling along with another fighter pilot and a passenger were the only survivors of the crash. Beurling was taken to the Military Hospital in Gibraltar and then transferred to a hospital in England. By now Beurling was a hero in both England and Canada. He was surrounded by reporters and every word he spoke was printed. On November 9th, Beurling boarded another Liberator in Prestwick, Scotland and after a 21 hour flight, he arrived at Dorval Airport in Montreal where he was greeted by his family. The exhausted Beurling and his family were quickly loaded on another plane for a flight to Ottawa to be welcomed by Prime Minister Mackenzie King. The Government of Canada had made a request to the RAF for Beurling to return to Canada to help sell war bonds and encourage enlistment.

# Flight Sergeant George Beurling D.S.O., D.F.C., D.F.M

## Back to Britain

By the end of the war bond tour, Beurling was anxious to return to combat. He returned to England and the RAF. Upon his arrival in London he attended Buckingham Palace where King George VI bestowed upon him the awards he had won in Malta. With celebrity fame now, the RAF did not want to post him in an operational squadron where he might be shot down. He was posted to its gunnery station in Sutton Bridge as an instructor. This did not suit Beurling and when he asked to be posted to an operational squadron, the RAF turned him down. He applied to the RCAF who quickly accepted him this time. Finding him to difficult to deal with, the RCAF returned him to Canada where he was granted an honourable discharge. Still looking for adventure, Beurling planned to join the Israeli Air Force in 1948.

The passenger plane he was flying in headed for Israel, crashed on takeoff and burned at the Rome Airport. Sabotage was suspected but never proven. Beurling was a skillful pilot and his 32 confirmed victories made him one fo the top scoring Allied Aces of the war. No one could match his score of 28 kills in 14 days over Malta. Like his predecessor in WW1, Billy Bishop, he was a maverick. Both heroes would not submit to excessive rules and regulations and both had trouble coping with peace.

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By Canadian Press

## **New poll suggests most Canadians think the government is spending enough on defence**

*Apr 14, 2022 | 2:08 AM*

OTTAWA — A new poll suggests most Canadians think the federal government is already spending enough on the military, despite the push for a massive hike in defence funding.

It's been a contentious issue in recent weeks, with the war in Ukraine leading to renewed calls for Canada and other NATO allies to increase spending to two per cent of GDP. The Liberals' five-year plan, released in last week's federal budget, will come short of that at 1.5 per cent, even with more than \$8 billion in new military spending.

According to a survey conducted by Leger last weekend, that's enough for many Canadians.

Just shy of half of the people polled said the government is spending the right amount and another 18 percent said it should spend less. The remaining 34 per cent said they want more money in the defence budget.

Christian Bourque, executive vice-president of Leger, said those numbers were surprising given the public conversation about NATO spending targets.

"There is something about changing that equation in Canada that doesn't sit right, apparently, with the majority of Canadians," he said.

Leger surveyed 1,538 Canadians between April 8 and 10. A margin of error cannot be assigned because online polls are not considered truly random samples.

Bourque contrasted responses on defence to those on the housing budget or measures to curb inflation, where the majority of people polled said the government isn't spending enough.

Continued

## New poll suggests most Canadians think the government is spending enough on defence

The polling firm has never asked a question about overall defence spending before, though it has sought opinions on specific contracts like the purchase of fighter jets, for example.

Those most likely to want more military funding live in Atlantic Canada and Alberta. About half of those in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec and B.C. said defence spending is just right.

Bourque said the government needs to consider how it communicates the plans to spend more, not only on NATO, but also on Arctic sovereignty.

“Men fight for liberty and win it with hard knocks. Their children, brought up easy, let it slip away again, poor fools. And their grandchildren are once more slaves.”

— D.H. LAWRENCE



The RCAF suffered massive cutbacks during the Diefenbaker and Pearson years. Expansion in the 1950's after the Korean War were reactive and crisis driven rather than being forward looking. Commitment to air power for Canada's defence was transitory. Politics, particularly Canadian civil-military relations and the economics of defence budgeting, the evolution of military strategy as part of Canada's defence alliances and rapidly changing military technology and its impact on the political and military strategy all play a part in defence spending. This recent survey suggests Canadians do not share a willingness to support a large air force at this time nor see it as necessary for the defence of the Canadian nation.

## Birthdays

### June

James Allan

George Groff

Norm Sonnenberg



### July

Tom Vance

Mike Mascitelli

# 434 Niagara Wing Forthcoming Events

**Friday, June 17, 2022**

## **Banquet and Awards Dinner**

Royal Canadian Legion Branch 613  
141 Hwy 20E, Fonthill, ON L0S 1E0

Symposium at 5:30 pm, Dinner at 6:00 pm

Tickets: \$35.00 per person



**Friday, July 29 through Monday August 1, 2022**

## **Canal Days Marine Heritage Festival, Port Colborne**

The 42nd annual Festival will take place in Port Colborne. In addition to the visits of Tall Ships, typically there are close to 100 vendors, serving food and a mix of retail, artisans and non-profit groups. Concert groups will perform at the H.H. Knoll Lakeview Park for all four days.



**434 Niagara Wing** will be there with our tent set up, offering plenty of exciting air force material for sale. We will be located at the **Royal Canadian Legion Branch 56, 67 Clarence St.**, located in beautiful down town **Port Colborne**, near to the heart of the celebrations.

**Saturday, October 15, 2022**

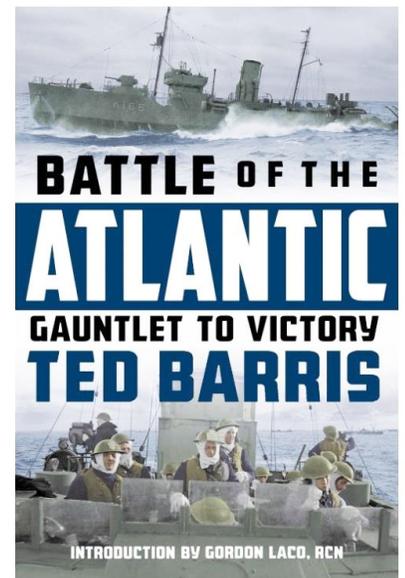
## **Ted Barris, Battle of the Atlantic**

**Saturday, October 15, 2022 at 1:00 pm**

Royal Canadian Legion  
Branch 613 Fonthill, ON,  
141 Hwy 20E, Fonthill, ON L0S 1E0

Tickets \$10:00 per person

Ted Barris is the author of 19 best selling non-fiction books including a series on wartime Canada which outline Canada's role in WW1, WW2 and the Korean War. We owe it to ourselves as Canadians to read Ted Barris' books



He will present his new publication along with the role Canada played in this battle which took 2,074 days to determine the outcome. The battle for supremacy in the North Atlantic proved to be the turning point in WW2. Please be sure to obtain your tickets early for this event as we had a near sellout crowd for his last exciting presentation to us by Ted Barris.

**The replica of the original Silver Dart was built in the Niagara Peninsula through the efforts of volunteers including members from the 434 Niagara Wing**

## **Bjarni Tryggvason**



The passing of Bjarni Tryggvason is a tremendous loss for the Canadian aviation community.

Bjarni was part of the Canadian Space Agency. Born in Reykjavík, Iceland he grew up in Vancouver.

Joining the Canadian Space Program in 1983, he flew in the Space Shuttle Discovery in 1997 a 12 day mission circling the Earth 189 times; this would be his only time in space.

Retiring from the Space Program in 2008, he decided to return to teaching at Western University

In 2009, he flew a replica of the Silver Dart, the first heavier-than-air machine to fly in Canada. The original Silver Dart was the first powered flight in the Commonwealth

**Above information excerpt from The Canadian Press**

## **Bjarni Tryggvason & The Silver Dart**



February 6/2009 Tryggvason successfully took a modern day version of the famed Silver Dart airborne. The replica is modelled after the original Silver Dart that flew at Cape Breton over 100 years ago.

During this flight at Hamilton Airport, Bjarni managed to get the aircraft airborne just a few metres off the ground for a few brief flights.

**Above information and pictures excerpt from The Canadian Press**

**RIP Bjarni**

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