

My First Twenty-Three Years

On This Planet

1923 ~ 1946

Memories of John B. Le May



This book is dedicated to my wife Raymonde
who has been my faithful and loving companion
for the past 64 years, and counting.

Equal dedication goes to our three children

Michel, Claire and Lise

who have given me continuous support for this project.

Introduction

Before I get to the purpose for creating this e-book and CD, I would like to give you a brief outline of my career as an Administrative Clerk/Accountant/Typist/Bugler at funerals etc. From the date of my joining the RCAF on my 18th birthday, on August 25th 1941, until my discharge and back to civvies on March 16, 1946. One week at Valcartier, then two months at the Manning Depot in Quebec City, in the bugle and drum band parading up and down the main drag to show how smart we looked in our brand new government issued uniforms. Then came November and that meant a posting to a Kittyhawk Fighter Squadron in Dartmouth on the East Coast, under the command of Squadron Leader Hartland De M. Molson, who had just returned from fighting in the Battle of Britain as a fighter pilot with the No. 1 Fighter Squadron.

Shortly after my arrival, I was paraded in front of the CO and was offered a promotion to become an air gunner, which I immediately declined. Then came an offer that I could not refuse, to work in the Orderly Room as a typist under the Chief himself. This lasted until August 1942 when I had to decide once again on a choice of posting. Pat Bay, about 3000 miles away from Ottawa or Overseas. I chose the latter which would probably give me a chance to travel all over the British Isles. So, England it was.

I crossed over in October 1942, and arrived at Gorrick in Scotland, parked right next to the Queen Mary, then traveled by train next day right through to Bournemouth. A couple of weeks there and I was eventually posted to the 401 Squadron at Kenley, Surrey. We moved a few times during the next 18 months until the 2nd TAF was formed and the 127 Wing was part of it. We spent a week or so at Salisbury Plains to waterproof the vehicles and wait for D-Day.

On the night of the 5th of June 1944, the sky was filled with a thousand bombers heading for France, and then we realized that the invasion of France was imminent. In fact, when the sun rose a few hours later, it was indeed confirmed by our Commanding Officer and the BBC that the invasion had started. D DAY had arrived. We finally moved out of that muddy hole about a week later and got aboard a large TLC which brought us to the other side of the channel and JUNO beach. There was no mistake about where we were, right in the middle of air attacks by the Luftwaffe which kept us pinned under our trucks loaded with jerry

cans filled with gas)

So, we finally left the beach and traveled a few miles inland to our destination, a landing strip which was named B2 (Brazeville) or Crepon, just a couple of miles from Bayeux and a couple of miles from the front lines. This was to be our home for the next 5 or 6 weeks or until there was a breakthrough at the front, whichever came first. Who can forget the contrast between the daylight hours and the constant rumbling noise coming from the front, and the flares dropped by Jerry during the night over our airfield. Who could also forget the CO's Great Dane roaming around the camp all night long and accompanying anyone who had to use the facilities, a two-seater with canvas around it. On a more serious side, one of the chores I will never forget was loading the casualties arriving from the front on DC3's. This was a daily ritual for a couple of hours after supper. It was heartbreaking to say the least.

As soon as the Allies broke through and captured airfields, we moved. Paris, Brussels, then Holland to an airfield called Grave (Near Ravenstein} not far from the Nimegen Bridge. The name GRAVE was very appropriate, it almost became the resting place for more than a few civilians and also wounded some of our own members, thanks to the regular 4"oclock visit by Jerry's secret weapon, a Jet Fighter called the Me 262. Surprise, Surprise...nothing could reach them, by the time the order was given to the RAF Regiment to fire their Bofors, the jet was already 50 miles away. This situation forced us to leave in a hurry and move back to Brussels where we spent the winter of 1944/1945, incidentally the coldest winter on record. How cold was it you ask, I guess you know the answer involving the brass monkey.

During my stay at Evere (a few miles out of Brussels) I had the privilege of working for W/C Johnny Johnson as a clerk in the Intelligence Section, typing the daily reports on the pilot's previous day's activities. I had the pleasure of having breakfast with the "Air Commodore" when he attended the Fighter Pilot's Association annual reunion here in Ottawa some 25 years ago. He invited my wife and I to his room at the Chateau Laurier. Some members had received special invitations to take part and meet with former pilots and attend certain functions as a barbecue at Andy Mackenzie's residence, that was quite a night to remember.

This CD is dedicated to all airmen , ground crews and air crews who served under the 2nd Tactical Air Force , particularly with the 127 Spitfire Wing. Regrettably, many have died while serving in Europe and many more are no longer with us in this year of 2010, 66 years after D DAY. The photos on the CD are mostly memories of my four and half years in the RCAF, (3 years and 2 months overseas) Many veterans of Normandy will no doubt remember the visit of Winston Churchill a couple of weeks after D Day and some members of the 127 Wing will also remember the unexpected visit of General Eisenhower and Field Marshall Montgomery at our airfield in Germany a couple of weeks before the end of hostilities. The General took time out before his meeting to sign autographs and also walked all the way to the other end of the airfield to meet with American POW's just released from Stalag 11B and personally taking notes while talking to the GI's. Some of them had been wounded in battle and had not received any treatment. Our own Prime Minister, William Lyon Mackenzie King also showed up in Normandy to visit the troops.

There were some good times to talk about The 2 weeks at Goering's Strand Hotel (his personal cottage) on Steinhuder Meer, and who can forget Paris, Brussels, London, Bournemouth, Edinborough, New York City, etc. Other good spots that most servicemen in London will never forget....Covent Gardens , the Opera House turned Dance Hall for the benefit of the troops, the corner pubs , and more importantly the Sally Ann, (Salvation Army) where one could go in at any time and find a warm meal and a place to sleep while on leave. Another name comes to mind, Irving Berlin, that diminutive but giant composer of so many patriotic songs like the one we saw that night at the London Palladium "This is the Army Mr. Jones". While on embarkation leave in 1942 a couple of airmen were invited to lunch at the Waldorf Astoria with Xavier Cugat (I have his autograph somewhere on the menu which was about 18 inches high by 12 inches wide. I only brought back the bottom half with his autograph.

Non-stop music during the working hours was heard on all the military bases with artists like Vera Lynn, George Formby, American Orchestras, Glenn Miller, Guy Lombardo, and many other well known singers of the era. It certainly was a morale booster. We cannot forget listening to Lord Ha Ha from somewhere on the other side of the channel with his nightly broadcasts reading the list of newly-captured aircrews. There were also many sad reminders of the devastation caused

by the daily attacks by the German air force on London and other large cities. The courage demonstrated by the British people during those long war years was an inspiration to all of us.

However, the best moment had arrived, boarding the Queen Elizabeth 1 (along 15,000 others) for the return to Canada, via New York City, Lachine, then my arrival at the Union Station in Ottawa on the night of December the 9th, 1945 with my family waiting for me. The rest is history.

Now, let's talk about those 100 pages called "Wing Tips" which was a sort of an information and newsletter put out by a couple of well-intentioned members of our unit who did their best to print just about anything that was "printable" and when there was enough stuff to fill a couple of sheets, the Gestetner machine would go into action. Some of you might remember what a Gestetner machine looked like, well suffice to say that it was not a Cannon or an Epson. But it did the job.

So, when the war ended in early May, almost unexpectedly, someone suggested that a souvenir issue would be appreciated. Good, let's find someone from each section who will write a summary or a story depicting the activities related to that section. The deadline for the submission of the material was sometime in July but unfortunately or fortunately our Wing was disbanded and ordered back to England ASAP. That was the end of THAT endeavour. However all was not lost. Lo and behold, almost 57 years later, the idea came back to life when I discovered some of that material in a briefcase in "the proverbial attic" and therefore it is now presented in this CD for the benefit of anyone who might know someone who belonged to the 127 Wing It is my sincere hope that it will find its way to many former members.

In closing, I wish to say that what is written here is not "unique" to JB Le May, most servicemen who served overseas can relate to this story and more than likely could add a heck of a lot more. Let's not forget our soldiers who fought and died at Dieppe on the 19th of August 1942 and those brave soldiers who landed on the Normandy beaches on the 6th of June 1944 clearing the way for our safe landing on the 16th of June. Let us also remember those who fought and died during that long conflict.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my friend Marcel Lemay (no relation) for the generous help in setting up this CD. Without his professional know-how I would have found myself in "left field" Thank you Marcel.

On a more personal note, my wife Raymonde and I will mark our 64th wedding anniversary come next November 9th (2010). Life hasn't been that bad, has it? The "Wing Tips on this CD as mentioned above were left in a briefcase for the better part of 57 years which explains the poor quality of the script, however, anyone who is familiar with the 127 Wing would probably have some idea of the content if they read between the lines. In any case it was included for preservation purposes.



Biography of J.B. Le May

August 25th 1923 to March 16th 1946

Although my birth certificate shows my name as Marie Joseph Jean Arthur Bernard Lemay, my name is John B. Le May. Believe you me, had I been consulted on that memorable day I would have made a small but very significant amendment in one of my middle names. You guessed right. This middle name of "Marie" has caused me more embarrassing moments throughout my life, especially while serving in the RCAF. However, let me explain the reason for the name "Marie". In those days it was a well established custom to include that name along other middle names. "Double-Barrel" names were frequent, such as the one above. Even today that custom still lives particularly in the Province of Quebec. I was born in the city of Hull, Province of Quebec, on the 25th day of August 1923. My father Alfred Lemay and my mother Aldea Roy were both born in Ottawa in 1891 and were married at St-Charles Church in Eastview (now Vanier) in 1913.

Death of my father in July of 1928

Until his untimely death in July of 1928, my father had held many different posts or jobs such as: the manager of a bank called "la Banque d'Hochelaga" which eventually merged with the "Banque Nationale du Canada". That action caused him to leave the bank and find another job as a postman, a photographer, a substitute school teacher at "l'Académie de Lasalle" on Sussex Drive, last but not least he was a professional violinist and was also teaching it. My mother was a "stay at home mom" as they are called today and in her own right was an accomplished pianist who had received the Governor General's gold medal for proficiency while attending school at "le Couvent de la rue Rideau" in Centre Town. This school was run by the Grey Nuns of the Cross Congregation where she graduated with a grade 12 education.



Alfred Lemay and Aldea Roy Lemay

Every Sunday my parents attended the High Mass at the Notre-Dame Church in Hull where my father played the violin and mother was the organist. In those days in most Catholic churches the eleven o'clock mass was the most attended mass of the day and was officiated in Latin. Church choirs were in attendance and had an air of a religious "concert". My father died at the age of 37 of an illness that would have been diagnosed very early and would probably have saved his life if it occurred today in 2010.

Widow with 7 children and homeless

At his death my father left my mother with seven children ages ranging from the oldest who was twelve to the youngest who was two. Quebec at that time did not provide for widows pensions. She could not afford the two thousand dollars required to purchase the property we lived in. So, she had to move back to Ottawa and found temporary lodging for the whole family at her father's farm at Rockliffe Annex which is now Manor Park. Mother was such a good pianist that in the 60's she was offered and accepted a job at a music store on Sparks Street called Orme's Music Store. Customers would ask for her because she was so proficient in reading sheet music at first sight. One of those customers was the young Paul Anka who kept her busy at each visit. She really liked him because he was a good singer and appreciated my mother's assistance.



Aldea Roy Lemay

Finding a home for family of eight

When my father died I was about six weeks away from my fifth birthday, unfortunately I have no recollection of my father, my brothers or sisters. However I can remember some of the stories that my mother told us about our stay at my grandfather's home. A couple of months passed without any serious problems with the children but it was time for mother to start looking for more suitable accommodation. She had reached a dead end wherever she went for assistance. Solutions had to be found and decisions had to be made very soon. Coincidentally, my uncle Arthur and his wife Jeanette were visiting from Montreal. Uncle was mother's brother and had no children. Holding an executive job at Ford's he was far from the poor house. There were discussions regarding a possible adoption by my uncle but mother would not agree, so a compromise was reached. I would go to



*Aunt Jeanette - Uncle Arthur
J.B. at five years old*

Montreal for one year then return home to mother. Later I learned that my two older sisters had been placed at St-Joseph's Orphanage in Lindenlea (Ottawa). At the end of my "probation period" in Montreal, I came back home only to join my two sisters Françoise and Marguerite at the Orphanage.

Three more years away from home

Authorities at the Orphanage had very strict rules regarding visits by the parents and even the occasional visit with my sisters who were at the same place. Mother was allowed one or two visits per month and I was granted one day a month to visit my mother and my four brothers. That ruling I was told later was to reduce as much as possible the problems arising from loneliness. On one of those rare visits

in 1930 I remember seeing a large airship flying overhead. It was the British built R100 on its maiden voyage to Canada. Back at the Orphanage, my schooling was appropriate except that I did not learn a single word of English. By the time I left the Orphanage, mother had moved into a district where the language was prominently English and that made my life very difficult. However, I



Dirigible R-100

quickly learned the language at school and from English speaking friends and neighbours. The row house that we lived in was very old and there was no heat except a wooden stove that needed to be fed constantly during the cold season. Mother had to defrost the water pipes with candles and light up a wood stove then add a bit of coal that we had gathered at the rail tracks where the coal cars had stopped. That's how poor we were, but somehow we managed to pull through those hard and difficult depression years.

Life on Stanley Avenue in New Edinburgh, in the 1930's

New Edinburgh, doesn't that sound like an exotic far away place somewhere in Scotland? Well brace yourself; you can clearly see it by looking out your window if you're the prime minister living at 24 Sussex or the Governor General at Rideau Hall. Both residences are adjoining New Edinburgh. I learned to speak English real fast. The school that we attended was located on Springfield road about twenty minutes away and it sure was a cold walk in winter time. Mother made us some baloney sandwiches and we remained in school at lunch time. A couple of years ago St-Charles school was converted into condominiums. My brother Fred

worked at a mica factory just a couple of blocks away and his clothes were shining with numerous pieces of mica. At home mica was everywhere even on our clothing. Not too pleasant.

City maintained sports facilities

We had a standard size rink maintained by the city with the help of the local residents who used the rink for various activities. Hockey practices or games had to be booked in advance. Most of the time, the rink was reserved for skaters. During the summer, the city also maintained the swimming area on the Rideau River; both locations just a three minute walk from our home. There was also a baseball diamond and a well equipped playground for the younger children. The Governor General's grounds were opened every Sunday for anyone wanting to participate in a cricket game. Skiing at Rockcliffe was only a short distance away and there were plenty of hills to suit your particular skill. The availability of all the aforementioned services provided by the city made life a little easier to bear during those depression years.

Pranksters

Between Stanley Avenue where we lived and Crichton Street was a narrow unpaved road called River Lane which was used as any other avenue, principally by the residents of both Stanley and Crichton streets who had a garage at the rear of their property and could exit onto the lane. One evening when the sun had gone down my friend Lionel and I decided to play a prank on another "friend" who lived just around the corner. Lionel's father owned a 1935 Chrysler so we just backed up one car out of its garage and pushed it



1935 Chrysler



Family home of Tertulien Lemay

in our mutual friend's garage then pushed his dad's car in the first garage. A couple of days elapsed before the owners discovered our prank because they only used their car on the week-ends. We were eventually caught and we both ended up in the proverbial dog house, useless to say that pranks were no longer on our minds. The construction of the French Embassy on Sussex Drive near the Rideau Falls attracted many of us at about the same time the iron fence around the Governor General's grounds was being erected. Incidentally, part of the land for the French

Embassy compound belonged to my great grand father Tertulien Lemay. I remember my mother much later in my life talking about a relative of my father's owning property just a few blocks away from the "shack" we lived in on Stanley Ave. Well, that's water under the bridge and it had no influence on our life either way.

Snow removal

During the depression, jobs were very scarce, particularly in wintertime. Snow had to be removed from the streets at least a couple of times. Getting the manpower was not a problem. Men with shovels would fill large wooden containers on sleighs pulled by a team of big and very strong horses. The sleighs were then taken to a nearby location where the sides were raised and the snow would eject. The accumulation of snow created a large hill which we used for sliding. Eventually horses were replaced by small light trucks but still filled by men with shovels. The salary? well, it was about one dollar a day. My salary in 1940 when I started to work for the civil service was thirty-five dollars a month.

Listening to operas on radio

Every Saturday afternoon during the winter months, music lovers were treated with live radio broadcasts from the Metropolitan Opera House in New York. On that day mother gave us a choice. Stay in and be quiet or go out and play. Too cold to play outside so I listened very quietly and eventually got to enjoy the classic operas. My sister Françoise who worked at the German Embassy near home met a girl from the Italian Embassy who was also very interested in opera. She was invited to our home every Saturday afternoon. I also got to learn the names of the famous opera singers of that period and became very familiar with many.



Mother working at the Research Council on Sussex Drive 1934 to 1939

Mother graduated from grade twelve and was offered a job in the civil service. However, with seven children at home who needed a lot of attention she declined the daytime job and decided to accept a job as a char woman cleaning offices at the building mentioned above. She started at five in the morning and finished at eight. It was a twenty minute walk down Stanley Avenue, a left turn on Sussex Drive, cross the Minto Bridge and voila, two more minutes and she was there. With this job she could be back home by eight thirty to take care of the daily chores. With the help of the older children every one had already left for school.

Home entertainment in the 30's

In those days home entertainment was very limited. This is an understatement! We had two choices. The radio which was on all day long provided us with acceptable programming from local stations and occasionally we could listen to overseas broadcasts depending on the weather. Radios were almost as big as a small dresser and contained large tubes inside. Names like Philco and Marconi were the most popular brands. The other piece of entertainment was equally appreciated, the record player or the "victrola" or "phonograph" was made by RCA Victor. I remember that ours had to be cranked constantly to keep it running. By far, the most important piece of furniture for my mother was her piano and we were so happy when she played and sang our favourite songs. Those were very difficult times for everyone and in spite of that, in retrospect I would consider that period growing up without a father figure and living under such harsh circumstances as a positive rather than a negative. It made us appreciate life as we grew older. Those were the best days of our lives, no TV, no telephone, no car, no money, no nothing and yet we managed lived through it. These were real depression days. One consolation was that we were not alone in that predicament. There was one annual event to look forward to, the parade of elephants and clowns getting off the trains and heading to the exhibition grounds. This attracted large crowds lining up the streets, especially kids of all ages, me included. On the exhibition grounds, amongst various rides free concerts were offered. Every day a new band or a well known orchestra would entertain the visitors. Mother made sure not to miss the concert by the brass band of a conductor by the name of Creatore. Mother sat with me hours on end listening to the music. Incidentally Creatore wrote a March called "on the mall" dedicated to the Sparks street mall which was in the planning stage at the time. I wonder if anyone remembers that March or the name "Creatore", I doubt it very much. He must have been a very good conductor because the seats were all occupied and nobody left before the concert was over. Those were really the "good old days" when you did not need to call two days ahead to visit a friend or a family member. Just knock on the door and someone would yell "come on in" the door is open. By the way, front doors were seldom locked at night and there was no need for a burglar alarm. What was there to steal?



Victrola

Grandpa's corn delivery

During the summer my grandfather who had a farm at Rockcliffe Annex (now Manor Park) would load a couple of bags of corn in his wagon along with other vegetables and bring them over to our house. One day while he was inside talking to mother I jumped in the wagon and guess what? The horse bolted and ran down the street. Fortunately, someone was brave enough to stop it at the corner without further incident. This was grandpa's last visit with his horse and buggy. He preferred sending one of my uncles who had a small truck. . In those days the fire alarm was attached to a lamp post and in case of a fire, you had to break the glass and wait there until the fire engines arrived to point out where the fire was. There were many false alarms usually caused by pranksters particularly on Halloween. Very few people had telephones and it was the only way to reach the fire station.

My first job

I was old enough to join the Boy Scouts and when summer arrived I was invited to spend a week at the summer camp without charge to my mother. A whole three dollars and we could not afford it. During one winter I helped deliver milk with a Mr. Lindsay who worked for the Central Dairies and earned twenty-five cents for the day. I still remember

how smart that horse was, so was Mr. Lindsay, he knew when to move to the next customer as soon as we stepped on the sleigh .During the summer vacations I delivered bread with a Mr. Savard who had a bakery not far from where we lived. That year I learned how bread was baked and saw a bread slicer for the



J.B. Le May on a friend's 1935 Chrysler

first time and the use of waxed paper machine for wrapping the bread. Until then, bread was thrown inside the truck without wrapping. (Un-sliced bread of course) The old expression "Best invention since sliced bread" probably derived from that invention.

Move to 141 River Lane

My mother found a more suitable house just one block from our present location. It was a two story duplex with three bedrooms on the second floor. It was heated

with a coal furnace in the basement. That was the year that Hull had a very competitive hockey club called the Hull Volant in the Quebec senior league. Only a few months later I learned that their goalie was my neighbor. His name was Louis St-Denis. That year I was attending the LaSalle Academy in grade 9 and walked to school back and forth using the "black bridge over the Rideau" and in winter time I would walk over the frozen river. It was very scary especially when loud noises were heard caused by the cracking ice. I do not recall riding



141 River Lane, Ottawa

on a street car very often while living in New Edinburgh. There were no buses then and only a handful of people owned an automobile. All government buildings and most major establishments were located in centre town and many people walked to work depending on the distance. The Confederation and the Justice buildings were on Wellington street at Bank, the Parliament Building, the East and West Blocks, the Langevin Block, the National Research on Sussex Drive, the Transportation Building on Rideau street, and most schools and colleges were all located in centre town, which made it possible for many employees and students to walk to and from work. That is probably why many of us "old folks" are still around to talk about "the best yeas of our lives" in spite of the hardships endured during the depression. All that walking kept us in good shape.

War breaks out on September 1, 1939

It was August and there were rumors of war, Hitler made a couple of tough and provocative speeches over the radio to let the world know that he was serious about his intentions. The news got worse towards the end of the month. Then came the dreadful news that everybody expected. On the morning of September 1, 1939 Hitler invaded Poland and Warsaw was bombed. France and Britain declared war on the third of September and Canada followed suit on the tenth. Not the best of times by a long shot. Mother was crying saying "what are we going to do?" Not to worry mother dear, the war will be over by Christmas they said. Yes, but what year we asked. Being in war with Germany meant a lot of changes in our lives. For instance the recruiting centres were jammed, the jobless got jobs, the women

replaced the men who had enlisted and left their jobs. As the war progressed we noticed the sudden disappearance of a few German neighbours. The rumors were that they had decided to return to their homeland or that they were being held for questioning. In any event, they were not seen again in our area.



Hope you understand!

Move to 98 Stewart Street in Sandy Hill

The following spring we moved away from 141 River Lane to a ground apartment at 98 Stewart Street, corner of King Edward and Stewart, it was really nice and clean with a telephone and central heating plus hot water. It was quite a contrast with the previous homes we lived in. My sister Marguerite was living in Montreal, my brother Rodrigue had been married for a couple of years, Alfred was in the Navy, my two younger brothers Hector and Roch were still at school. Françoise was working as a cook at the residence of Princess Juliana of the Netherlands on Hemlock road so everybody was doing something worth while.

That year 1940 the Royal Dutch Family had found refuge from the war in their country, was living on Hemlock road just a mile or so from my grand father's farm. Princess Juliana was looking for a good cook to replace the one who had just left. Mr. Fish who was the only police in the area of Rockliffe was asked by the Princess if he could recommend someone and Françoise was asked to meet Princess Juliana for an interview. She was hired immediately and it was the beginning of a perfect friendship. On many occasions I visited my sister and I was invited to enjoy a good meal while the Princess was in residence. One of the little girls, Princess Beatrix who is presently the Queen of The Netherlands enjoyed taking rides on the seat of my bicycle on the pavement in front of the residence. One day, Françoise realized that she was being used as a baby sitter by the rest of the staff so she decided to leave. The very next day Princess Juliana had her chauffeur drive her to my home at 98 Stewart to convince Françoise to return to her job .She was given additional benefits such as a private bedroom where she slept every night instead of traveling back and forth to her home. My sister remained about 8 months more then got married and left her job. Later in 1962 Princess Juliana replaced her mother Queen Wilhelmina who had just died. When Juliana died in 2004 Princess Beatrix



Princess Juliana

One day, Françoise realized that she was being used as a baby sitter by the rest of the staff so she decided to leave. The very next day Princess Juliana had her chauffeur drive her to my home at 98 Stewart to convince Françoise to return to her job .She was given additional benefits such as a private bedroom where she slept every night instead of traveling back and forth to her home. My sister remained about 8 months more then got married and left her job. Later in 1962 Princess Juliana replaced her mother Queen Wilhelmina who had just died. When Juliana died in 2004 Princess Beatrix

became the Queen of Holland. I met her sister Princess Margreit when she visited Ottawa during the Tulip Festival in 1995 and again on her next visit a few years later.

First job in the Civil Service

In order to help with the rent I left school about one month before the end of the year in grade ten. I was also expecting a call from the Civil Service Commission to work as an Office Boy having passed the test. In the meantime I found temporary employment delivering telegrams for the Canadian National and Canadian Pacific Company on Sparks Street riding a bicycle all day long. It was very tiresome and dangerous because of the heavy traffic downtown. The call from the Government came just at the right time. The first of July was "Dominion Day" as it was called at the time so I reported to the Department of External Affairs office at the corner of Bank and Wellington on the next working day. The United States Government decided that Canadians traveling to the United States had to produce a passport effective immediately. That office was working full time issuing passports. The line up was a couple of blocks along Bank Street. My job was easy; as soon as a passport was ready I would go down the line, check the identity and hand it over to the applicant. The rush lasted a couple of weeks after which came a transfer across the street to the Department of Labour at the Confederation Building.

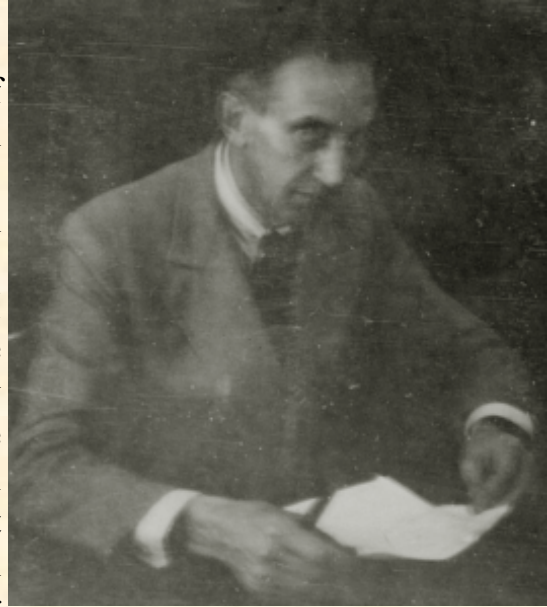


Confederation Building

Department of Labour July 17, 1940

Reported to a Mr. W.J. Rump in the basement supply room and after a short but warm welcome I was assigned my duties as an "Office Boy". I delivered office supplies to various staff offices. I got to know everybody in the department which made the job that more interesting. When Parliament reconvened in the fall, I was assigned very special duties. "John", the boss said, "how would you like to sit in the visitors' gallery in the House of Commons and keep your eyes on the Minister of Labour (Norman McClarty)"? and as soon as he leaves his seat, leave yours and go straight to his office". The answer was a quick "yes I accept with pleasure". When The House reconvened I was there sitting right across from the Prime Minister of the day, The Honorable William Lyon Mackenzie King and the Minister of Labour. Incidentally, that Prime Minister visited the Canadian troops

in Normandy in June 1944 where I was serving. Back to the Minister's office, his secretary would hand me an envelope full of letters that the Minister had signed while in the House listening to speeches and debates. That served a two-fold purpose, it kept him from falling asleep and he answered letters from his constituents. With envelope in hand I would go back to the main office at the Confederation Building, wait for the secretary to prepare the envelopes then walk a couple of blocks on Wellington street and mail them at the corner post office. What a cushy job! At the end of the session I returned to my job in the supply room where I was given other duties. Put the returned books and new issues



My boss W.J. Rump

of the Labour Gazette on the library shelves. I remember reading some of the magazines in the library and I became fascinated and outraged at reading about the slaves in some of the southern states, that year was 1941. Today the United States has a Black American President.

Social Activities while at the Department of Labour

There were several sports activities such as a hockey team and I was the goalie. We organized ball games at Plouffe Park, birthday parties, dances, etc. never a dull moment. Then came my enlistment in the RCAF on August 25th 1941, I had made several friends where I lived on Stewart Street. I played tennis to my heart's content. I was also invited to Jean- Pierre Beaulne's cottage at the cedars near Rockland a couple of times. J.P Beaulne became a well known and respected judge in the City of Ottawa. Those were good memories of my life in Sandy Hill. One person in particular who lived across the street gave me her photo which I kept in my wallet until it disappeared from my tunic pocket while I was on the beach in Bournemouth upon my return from Germany in July of 1945. On the back of that photo were a few autographs including General Dwight Eisenhower which was given to me in Germany, in addition the autograph of Joe DiMaggio which he signed when I attended a game at Yankee Stadium in October of 1942. Also, Babe Ruth's autograph at Dartmouth RCAF Station where I was stationed.

My humble beginning in the military, first as a Saturday night soldier then as a member of the RCAF.....

In March of 1941, I joined the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps (RCASC)

which was designated as a non permanent army unit and became a "Saturday Night Soldier" which meant reporting at the drill hall at Cartier Square on Elgin Street and practiced drilling and other basic training sessions. But, in June 1941, we were asked to report for a full week's training at the Connaught rifle range just outside Ottawa. While there the unit was ordered to "mobilize" meaning only one thing. You are in the army now, like it or not, and the unit could be sent overseas at any time if ordered. "Hold the phone" I told the Commanding Officer, I'm only seventeen and won't be eighteen until August 25th. That's OK with us he said, check the form that you signed a few months ago and it says that you were eighteen on the 25th of August 1940. You will have three choices come the 25th of August, the Army, the Navy or the Air-Force and there is no other way out. My decision was to join the RCAF. On the fourth of August I traveled to Montreal to the RCAF recruiting centre and my friend from Ottawa Jean-Paul Desloges who had been a fighter pilot during the Battle of Britain was the Commanding Officer at that centre. He signed me up and asked me to report on the appointed date (corner of St-Catherine and Bishop Street.) I got up on the 25th, kissed the family goodbye and got on a colonial coach line bus to Montreal. At the recruiting centre I was "inducted" in the Royal Canadian Air Force Hall of Fame and put on a train to Quebec City. Upon our arrival later that evening we were immediately bussed to Valcartier. That night we slept in a tent and woke up next morning on an icy surface, that's how cold it was in Valcartier on the 26th day of August 1941.



J.B. Le May R.C.A.F.

Quebec City Manning Depot (transition depot)

Following a week of medical tests, and formal instructions I was transferred to a Manning Depot in Quebec City. Having played in a bugle and drum band while attending school in Ottawa I volunteered to join the band. Every day we paraded up and down the main streets of Quebec City. Splendid occasion to show off our Government issued uniforms and it was a good way to keep in shape. For the next month we did nothing but that and I enjoyed



every minute of it. After supper I visited the boardwalk near the Chateau Frontenac and other historical locations including the "Plaines d'Abraham" I knew that sooner or later I would be leaving Quebec City for a posting to an Air-Force station, probably on the East Coast. I managed to obtain a week's leave back home before my transfer came through.

R.C.A.F. 118 Fighter Squadron in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia.

At the end of October, I was leaving for Dartmouth, across the river from Halifax. The RCAF station was about thirty miles from the city of Dartmouth. I was assigned to the 118th Fighter Squadron which was equipped with Kittyhawks. The Commanding Officer was none other than Squadron Leader Hartland DeM. Molson of the famous "Molson Brewery" family. He was a spitfire pilot with the No.1 RCAF Fighter Squadron and had fought the Luftwaffe during the Battle of Britain and returned to Canada to become the Commanding Officer of the 118th. A short time after my arrival, he offered to send me back to Ontario for training as an air gunner because of my size and weight (107 pounds). My

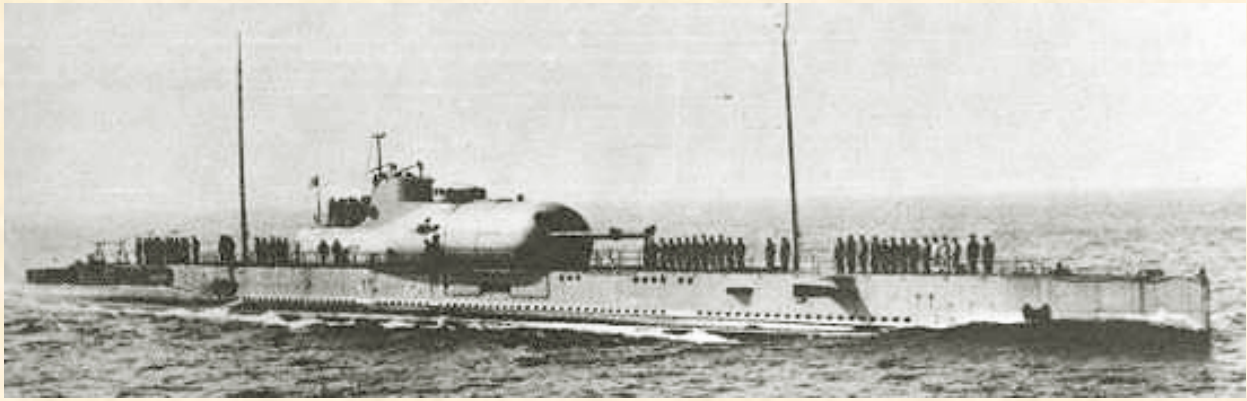


Friends in Dartmouth

answer was an emphatic "No Thanks," I'm too young to die, I'll take my chances whatever comes my way but not as an air gunner. So, back to the original trade training that I had applied for. This involved learning to be an aero engine mechanic which sounded like a good idea at the time. However this idea fizzled out quite abruptly. One day the Sergeant asked me to install the panels on a Kittyhawk in the hangar then sign it out which I did. Then a short while later, while I was eating lunch in the mess hall I was called back at the hanger and who was waiting for me there? Who else but the Sergeant who did not sound or look so happy, for a good reason, the pilot had reported losing the cowlings (side panels) while flying over the Bedford Basin. Fortunately, there was no other damage to the plane or the pilot. I don't remember going back to the mess hall to finish my dinner.

New job

The following morning, Johnny was brought in the orderly room to take over typing duties of the daily routine orders which I accepted with pleasure. That job



Surcouf Submarine (French Navy)

did not need any further training. As for the Sergeant, he was not seen around the station for a while. Dartmouth was a much smaller town than Halifax and much quieter. A ferry was the only way to reach Halifax. Every Sunday the residents of Dartmouth would invite airmen from the station to dinner and gave us theatre tickets. If there is a particular story or an embarrassing moment to remember it's the following. There was a funeral in Halifax for one of the airmen who died in a very unfortunate accident on the Base and they were looking for someone who could play the usual "Taps and Reveille". It was so cold that the bugle would not cooperate and I had to quit half way. They buried the guy anyway. On another occasion I joined a group of airmen to travel to the Halifax Harbour and was given a tour of a large French submarine called the Surcouf. It was considered to be the largest submarine on active service. It was later reported sunk by enemy action. I also remember a little village called Jeddore somewhere in Nova Scotia where I had been invited for a weekend of fishing which helped the morale a great deal. On a sunny morning we received the visit of a very special person who had just arrived at the Trans-Canada hangar next to our station. His name is Babe Ruth and he took time to sign autographs for all who wanted it, including me. That very special autograph was on the same back of a photo of a girl I knew back home in Ottawa. Along with the Babe's autograph was Joe DiMaggio's, Lefty Gomez and of course General Eisenhower's whose autograph he gave me while visiting our unit in Germany in April 1945. Unfortunately, that photo was stolen along with my wallet while I was resting on the Bournemouth beach when I returned from Germany in July 1945. Fortunately the Ottawa Citizen had published an article regarding the autographs.

Good news... Bad news

On the 19th day of August, the same day of the Dieppe incursion into France I was admitted to the Halifax hospital for a possible operation on my tonsils. The next day the doctor released me with a letter for the medical officer at the next posting. Just before leaving the hospital I was notified that I was posted somewhere but was not sure where. The next day I was called into the Adjutant's

office and was given the information. I was given two choices: somewhere near the Aleutian Islands up North of British Columbia or overseas. No hesitation whatsoever. Aleutian Islands! Isn't that where Sarah Palin can see Russia from her bedroom window? No. No stupid, that was Alaska. Seriously I had never heard of that place. Overseas it was to be. I left Dartmouth about the 22nd of August and traveled by train to Montreal and arrived home just in time for my birthday on the 25th. The whole family was at the Union Station to greet me and was given a very nice party at my older brother's home.



My Family at the Union Station

New York City... Embarkation Leave

I packed my suitcase and got on a train to New York City. I had visited that city once before at the age of sixteen with one of my uncles who was going there on business. I can remember going to Coney Island and riding on the roller coaster and the Ferris wheel. We ended our very short stay in New York by visiting the Empire State Building but refused to climb up to the top. Now at nineteen, I was more than anxious to travel to New York City, the Big Apple, the city that doesn't sleep. No exaggeration there, Broadway and 42nd Street, Jack Dempsey's Restaurant, the Waldorf Astoria Hotel and numerous night spots were opened all night long. Wearing a Canadian Air Force uniform was a pass for free entertainment, tickets of your choice at restaurants; strangers would pick up the tab without hesitation. The USO was an American organization which made sure that the visiting servicemen received the best treatment when in



Joe DiMaggio

New York City. They were also giving tickets to Broadway plays, movie theaters, baseball games, etc... I was fortunate enough to get tickets to Yankee stadium. I sat behind the player's bench and got Joe DiMaggio's autograph along with a coke and a hot dog paid by Joe. A couple of days later I was given tickets to the top of the Waldorf Astoria Hotel where Xavier Cugat was playing. I was invited to sit at a reserved table along with a few servicemen and we were later joined by Mr. Cugat himself who was gracious enough to pick up the tab for the night's

entertainment and an excellent meal. The menu with his autograph is shown on the CD .A tour of the famous Radio City Music Hall at the Rockefeller Centre was one of the highlights of my trip. We were told that at a certain point during the tour we would appear on video. Sure enough, we went through a large room with cameras and as we entered the next room, we saw ourselves on a large screen, it was called Television. As we continued our tour we noticed some well known actors and actresses reading their scripts. Well, although there was a multitude of things to see in New York it was time to leave as the date to report to Halifax was approaching. At least I was going back home with a bag of pleasant memories which will last a lifetime. The proof is right here as I am writing this biography in 2010 and it all comes back to me as if it happened yesterday.

The Stage Door Canteen on 54th Street and Broadway

This canteen was for the enjoyment of servicemen of all nationalities. The main attraction was the presence of well known celebrities, actors and actresses who appeared spontaneously to spend some time with the men in uniform. Celebrities would dance with the servicemen, others would look around and choose some poor soul who seemed to be lonely and she would sit with him and cheer him up. Hollywood made a movie which I saw many times, taking me back to those unforgettable days in New York City. Incidentally that movie was called; get ready for this, "Stage Door Canteen" which was in my opinion an excellent portrayal of the real Stage Door Canteen activities when I was there in October of 1942. All good things



Stage Door Canteen - New York

must come to an end and unfortunately it arrived too soon. Reluctantly I packed my suitcase and said goodbye to "The Grand Lady" and promised to see her again soon. But that day will have to be delayed for a couple of years because I had some important business to take care of.

Back to Ottawa before leaving for overseas

I only had a few days left at home to say goodbye to family and friends. The train

left on time from the Ottawa Union Station and the long trip to Halifax via Montreal began. As luck would have it, a former student from my school had joined the RCAF and was also heading to Halifax to report to the same unit. It turned out to be a very pleasant and interesting trip. Upon arrival at the Halifax train station we were bussed directly to the wharf where a couple of large troopships were anchored. We got on board the larger ship and assigned sleeping bunks. We had no sooner finished unloading our kit bags that we were ordered off to be directed to the other smaller ship in the harbour. What a disappointment, that ship was about half the size of the larger one and appeared to be on its last leg. It was a New Zealand cruiser that had been converted to carry troops. The smell from the galley kitchen was enough to make you sick even before leaving. The next morning at dawn we were on our way. The trip across the Atlantic was extremely rocky and scary as the high waves crashed against the ship during the whole eight or nine days. Even if we were well protected from submarines following the convoy at a distance, it was nevertheless a very nervous time especially during the night hours. The food was lousy from day one and I hardly had a square meal. Because of that I was sick all the time. Someone neglected to tell us that to avoid seasickness you must not miss any meal, they were just a bit late with that advice. We didn't see any whales or submarines but there were many porpoises following along the sides.

Arriving at Gourock - Scotland

The day before our arrival I remember someone pointing out the coast of Ireland. We finally docked at night next to the Queen Mary which was in for repairs following a collision with another ship in the North Atlantic. It was eventually reported that over three hundred and thirty five lives were lost on the other ship. The crossing lasted 9 days and we arrived in Scotland on October 12, 1942. We immediately boarded a train and traveled all the way from Gourock Scotland to Bournemouth in the South of England on the shores of the English Channel. I was there only a couple of weeks before moving on to a new location at Kenley in Kent about twenty five miles from



Bournemouth - England

London. The city of Croydon was about half way to London, and Warlingham wick was just half a mile away the base. That's where the train left for London.

The city of Bournemouth was one of the most visited by tourists before the war. There were concerts every day in the city park and the beach was only a few yards from our accommodation. I could have been happy and willing to remain in Bournemouth for the entire duration, unfortunately it was not to be the case.

RCAF Station at Kenley

I was posted to 401 Fighter Squadron and I continued performing the same duties in the orderly room as a clerk typist. It was an operational Fighter Squadron equipped with Spitfires. The station was on a hill overlooking the surrounding landscape and close to a couple of small towns and villages. The closest was about half a mile down the hill to a train station at Warlingham. In less than one hour's ride we arrived at one of the underground stations in the centre of London. Trafalgar square was the favorite stop. No need to go anywhere else, everything was within walking distance.



Vincent Massey - Beaver Club, London

For the next eighteen months I managed to visit London at least once a week and got to know the city quite well. I am sure that I must have visited or seen every important landmark in London. Trafalgar Square and Piccadilly Circus were my favorite subway stops because the Beaver Club at Trafalgar Square was catering to Canadian forces. There were dances, movies; special guests would visit with us, etc. It was not unusual to meet someone from back home and enjoy a really good conversation. Piccadilly Circus was internationally recognized as a "colorful" district and a place to visit, then move on to a more quiet section of London. Of course my favorite "hangout" or my favourite spot was Covent Garden dance hall formerly the famous Covent Gardens Opera House which was converted to a dance hall for the benefit of the armed forces. The rotating stage would allow the men's orchestra to play for a couple of hours then the ladies' orchestra would take over for two hours. A few of my membership cards are shown on the CD. Thanks to the Salvation Army (Sally Ann) there was always room for one more, if not they would do their best to find a vacancy somewhere close by. In my new job at Kenley I was still performing the same duties as a clerk

admin, and liked the job very much. At night one could sit outside, look towards London and watch the fireworks sponsored by the German Air Force. Another pastime was listening to the daily broadcast by a fellow named William Joyce who was obviously on the Nazi payroll as an American traitor. He spent every evening from somewhere on the continent naming recently captured aircrews. Google states that he was broadcasting from Hamburg. He was eventually hanged by the British.

Moving closer to the English Channel

Rumors and more rumors were floating around the station regarding our unit moving closer to the coast. These rumors finally materialized very rapidly and the order came to pack our bags once again. These moves added speculation that very important developments were happening, and we could expect some official announcements very shortly. Of course, with the obvious increase in military transport, tanks, troops and the increase in air activity, it was no secret to anyone in the south of England that something big was about to happen. The date for the forthcoming invasion had been set by General Eisenhower and his High Command.

Preparing for "That Day"

We arrived at a new location called Salisbury plains towards the end of May, a couple of weeks before "D" Day (next door to Stonehenge). This stop allowed the waterproofing of all vehicles as we would be exiting the landing craft in a couple of feet of water. We did not wait very long. Late one evening on the 5th of June we witnessed quite an unforgettable sight. At least a thousand bombers escorted by night fighters were seen with green and red wing lights flashing intermittently heading in the direction of the Coast. It did not take much imagination to guess what the news would announce next morning on the BBC. Sure enough, early on the morning of June 6, 1944, the Commanding Officer gathered the troops in the mud to announce in a loud clear voice. "The show is on. Get your engines ready and pack your kit bags, we will be leaving soon". Not too many cheers were heard as we all realized what was ahead of



Stonehenge

us from the moment we left the landing craft and set foot on the beach. Every day following "D" Day was a day of anticipation and waiting for the order to move on. The tension was unbearable and almost to the point of 'cracking'. Sleeping in

tents and walking in the mud for a couple of weeks did not help our morale. In retrospect it was a heck of a lot safer than those brave soldiers who hit the Normandy beaches on "D" Day.

Boarding the landing craft heading across the Channel

Fortunately, we did not leave until the 16th of June because our airfield landing strip was not quite ready. We boarded the large landing craft and I was asked to drive a three ton Bedford onto the raft, which I did albeit a bit nervous. Eventually we left for France as part of a convoy protected by Spitfires from above during our six or eight hour cruise. During the trip the Chaplain invited all who wished to join him in a group confession. Then within a few minutes all our sins were forgiven. It was a good feeling but not too reassuring. The Chaplain must have had some premonition of what kind of reception was reserved for us on the other side. We



presumed he meant on the beach not the other "other side". The closer we got to the shores of France the more apprehensive and worried we felt. We had reached the point of no return so might as well make the best of it, after all we were Canucks. Canadians that is, brave young men who never backed away from a dangerous job. That's what I believed from the bottom of my heart and that was enough to calm my nerves and made me ready to face all that the Luftwaffe was about to throw at us. As soon as we reached our destination at dusk it was time to disembark. However, that was delayed a while because Jerry had organized a reception committee made up of their best fighter aircrafts, Being on a craft manned by an American crew, orders were given over the speakers to run for cover inside the closest available space then the crew locked all exits making it impossible to leave. A message was relayed over the Tannoy (speakers) for all who were assigned to trucks to get ready to disembark. Because the crew would not open the doors until they were ready. Someone else drove my truck off the craft. I found myself having to hitch a ride on the back of a vehicle loaded with Jerry cans full of gas, it certainly did not help much to calm my already strained nerves. "What if?" kept circling through my mind. What if?

Landing on Normandy Beach June 16, 1944

Sitting in the back of a truck loaded with jerry cans full of gas, I was more than anxious to jump out as soon as we reached firma terra, but forced to take cover

wherever shelter was available because Jerry was still over our heads. The closest protection in such a short notice was under the same truck that I had left minutes before. My first night on the sands of Normandy was the most uncomfortable sleeping experienced so far and the scariest. I managed to get some shut-eye at some point but was brutally awakened by loud gunfire and explosions around us. I tried to get up to see what was going on but forgot that I was still under the truck. I bumped my head quite hard which required some patching as soon as we reached our destination early that morning some 4 or 5 miles inland.



Landing on Juno Beach

Our first location in Normandy, B-2 Crepon

Early that morning we finally arrived at the landing strip called B2 or Crepon near Brazzaville and our first job was to dig four trenches to serve as our sleeping quarters. A tent was erected over those four corner trenches to protect us from the rain, nothing else. We managed to find pieces of lumber to cover the top of our trench.

We believed that this might give us at least some protection against shrapnel if attacked from the air during the night. Our toilet facilities were the primitive type, nothing very fancy as you can imagine. During the night German aircraft would fly over our area and drop flares which lit up the whole area like daylight. However, I was more worried of meeting the C.O.'s large dog (Great Dane) who was loose on the grounds. In addition,



Our "sleeping quarters" - B-2 Crepon

the Bofors (anti-aircraft guns) installed just a few yards away from our tents made us jump out of our makeshift bed every time a shot was fired. Adding to our discomfort the constant rumbling of the heavy guns at the front lines just a few miles away reminded me of the heavy thunderstorms back home but this "thunderstorm" went on day and night. Well, that's what we were told to expect as

soon as we hit the shores of France because that's where the fighting was happening. Nevertheless it was nerve wrecking to say the least. We were lucky if we slept a couple of hours every night but we eventually got used to it.

B2 was the nearest airstrip to the front lines and was used to transport wounded soldiers back to England. Every day the ambulances arrived at the landing strip and lined up next to the row of high hedges to await the arrival of DC3 (Dakotas) for seven days in a row at 5 o'clock I would assist in loading the wounded from the ambulances to the aircraft. This job was part of our daily routine. My turn came up twice (2 weeks) until we moved on to the next airfield. It was really a pitiful and heartbreaking experience, but it had to be done.

City of Caen destroyed from the air

The daily routine on the station was getting very monotonous and boring. The news from the front lines was the same as yesterday's news or for that matter the same as last week's simply because the progress by the allies was slow and almost stalled. Caen was still firmly under control of the German army and something had to be done soon to liberate it. The bombardments were heard loud and clear day and night but there were hardly any significant gains to announce. The air strikes by our spitfires were as fierce as

usual since day 1, destroying enemy transport and enemy concentration of troops at the front lines. Then came a day in July when hundreds of bombers and fighters were seen heading towards the City of Caen, just a few miles from our airfield. It became obvious that Caen was the target and was being heavily bombed and destroyed. Dog fights were observed at a distance and bomber crews were seen bailing out of their burning aircraft. What a sight, never to be



forgotten as long as I live. The attack by the allied air forces inflicted tremendous damage to every building and large number of civilians were killed and thousands wounded. The Germans were finally defeated and forced to abandon the city. I remember that day as I was standing next to a farm house watching the raid and a couple of fifty mm blasts were aimed at the house and missed me by "that much". As we moved out of B2 to our next location we drove through the destroyed City of Caen and saw for ourselves what the attack had accomplished. Complete devastation and piles of rubble, dead animals, burned out tanks, etc. That was just

a sample of what the allied air forces could achieve with their combined strength.

On to Paris, Belgium, Holland and finally Germany

Following the fall of Caen the allies continued their advance towards Paris by inflicting serious casualties on the disorganized and demoralized German army and taking tens of thousands of prisoners. Consequently, the 127 airfield was on the move and frequently closer to the front lines to give air support to the troops.

By the middle of August it was only a matter of days for Paris to be liberated. In fact on the 24th of August General Leclerc of the French Army entered the outskirts of Paris while there were still some isolated bursts of machine gun fire coming from snipers hiding on rooftops and inside buildings. These snipers were soon located and exterminated. On the next day the 25th, Paris was officially declared free, liberated, what a Birthday present for J.B. Le May. What a coincidence, I remember when we arrived in



Allied troops entering Paris

Normandy I made a poster which I wrote in big block letters "Paris liberated on august 25th". We had a hunch and a strong hope that the capture of Paris might hasten the surrender of the German army, and hopefully speed up our return home for Christmas...not so fast Buster, not so fast. Wake up from dreamland and get ready for the next move.

Visit to Paris after its liberation

Our new location was only a few miles from Paris so we were granted a couple of days off. We found ourselves on the most famous avenues in Paris, Champs-Elysées and La Place de la Concorde. Needless to say that being a Canadian was a tremendous asset, especially a French speaking Canadian. The people of Paris knew for sure that we would be back to liberate them and the rest of Europe. We were treated as the principal liberator. During my 2 day visit I did not see as much as I wished because I was too busy visiting the souvenir shops in the centre of Paris. But subsequent visits took care of that. The following week we were given a three-day pass, so back to Paris I went before moving on.

Wherever we went we did not need much money because everything was "on the house", restaurants, bars, museums, etc., taxis excepted. I remember visiting the Palais de Versailles and various other well known places too numerous to

mention. It would have taken at least a full month without sleep to take in all the most beautiful sights of that great "City of Lights". A three-day pass is certainly not sufficient to enjoy a visit to Paris, except for some minor damage to a few buildings; major damage was nowhere to be found. Like Rome, Paris had been declared an "Open City" which protected it from major damage. I still have a couple of scars on my right knee cap resulting from a fall off the motorcycle I was riding as a rear seat passenger. Some of the Paris pavement was made of bricks and on a rainy day it felt like riding or driving on ice. That fall happened at "La Place de la Concorde". Au revoir Paris, thank you Parisians for your courage and tenacity, and for your help in defeating the enemy. Our stay at the nearby airfield was extended and this allowed us to visit Paris a few more times before moving out.



Entering Belgium

On the 22nd of September our unit entered Belgium in a large convoy of trucks, jeeps and motorcycles and arrived at a place called Beauvechain known as B-68. Remember, we started at Crepon or B-2 way back on June 16. I can still remember a very boisterous and emotional welcome from the thousands cheering us as we drove

through Brussels on our way to the next airfield. That is all I can remember from Belgium on that first short visit. But wait, our unit was back in Brussels a few weeks later for a two month stay at Evere, a few



miles from Brussels. Evere was Brussels's municipal airport before the Germans took over.

On our way to Holland (The Netherlands)

On the 1st of October 1944 we left B68 for Holland at an airfield called Grave near the little town of Ravenstein. In the vicinity of Eindhoven our convoy had to halt until the all clear was passed along by the army who had to clear the area of German troops. We eventually arrived without further incident at our new

location. It was a large airport and seemed to be in good condition, except for the steady rain which did not do very much for our morale. Lots of rain and it got very muddy. The amount of rainfall caused the holes on the runway to fill making it impossible for the pilots to determine the depth. It was declared a safety hazard so a decision was taken to leave and return to Belgium at Evere. To make matters worse, Jerry had developed a jet fighter called Messerschmitt Me-262. Every day at four o'clock these jets would visit us and drop anti-personnel bombs which added in no small measure to our already shattered nerves. Today when watching the TV series M*A*S*H, there's one episode where a North Korean Lone Ranger(5 o'clock Charlie) appears at exactly five o'clock and drops a small 10 pound bomb over the compound which usually landed on the outhouse, it reminds me of those days at Grave. Well, these guys were flying Me-262 jet fighter aircraft and they strafed us for a few minutes every day. They inflicted numerous casualties by dropping anti personnel bombs and caused a lot of damage to the buildings and left plenty of really scared people on the ground. One Me-262 was still in a crate apparently being readied for action. I noticed that my kit bag had been pierced by some shrapnel from the recent attack. . In view of all those problems we were ordered to leave as soon as possible. No one objected to that decision.



Grave airfield - 1944

o'clock Charlie) appears at exactly five o'clock and drops a small 10 pound bomb over the compound which usually landed on the outhouse, it reminds me of those days at Grave. Well, these guys were flying Me-262 jet fighter aircraft and they strafed us for a few minutes every day. They inflicted numerous casualties by dropping anti personnel bombs and caused a lot of damage to the buildings and left plenty of really scared people on the ground. One Me-262 was still in a crate apparently being readied for action. I noticed that my kit bag had been pierced by some shrapnel from the recent attack. . In view of all those problems we were ordered to leave as soon as possible. No one objected to that decision.

Grave was not too far from Nijmegen whose famous bridge was the subject of a Hollywood movie called "A Bridge Too Far". A short distance away from Grave was a small village called Ravenstein. One other airman and I went to visit a

family who would be considered well to do and a notch above middle class because the father was a doctor.

We were well received and in return we brought them some good food items which were not available in Holland. About 25 years ago Ottawa was twinned with The Hague, the capital of the Netherlands (Holland) I had the opportunity of talking with the mayor regarding the Ravenstein family which I had met in Holland. A letter came back from the mayor of The Hague informing me that he had spoken to members of the family, that their father the doctor had passed away but the rest of the family were doing well. They



Doctor's family in Ravenstein

remembered me and are sending their best regards. On the accompanying CD are a couple of photos showing the whole family some 60 years ago.

Leaving Grave for Brussels

On the morning of October 23rd we were on our way back to Belgium and we arrived late at night at Evere. There was no accommodation for all the 800 members of the unit. So, we were advised to find our own sleeping arrangements for the night. Being just a few miles from Brussels I got on a street car...yes they had running street cars ...which took us downtown Brussels and I managed to find a place to get a few hours sleep. Brussels was a beautiful city and being bilingual, I was quite at ease conversing with the local population.

Watching V-1's (Pilotless Airplanes. or "Buzz Bombs") over Brussels

Having driven a large 3 ton Bedford truck from Grave (Holland) to Brussels my mind was bent on finding a place to sleep. As I was walking down a well-lit street I suddenly heard a familiar noise which turned out to be a "V-1" (Pilotless Airplane) these "Buzz Bombs" could be seen very clearly in daytime but at night only the flames coming out at the rear were visible. Some were chased by fighters and shot down. Others would crash and cause indescribable damage. We thought that once the V-1 had passed over our heads we were out of danger, not so. That rocket would suddenly make a u-turn and crash on the way back. My shelter on

that particular night was the doorway to the entrance to Brussels's Opera House Standing next to me and observing the "flight of the bumble bee" was the manager of that Opera House. A conversation ensued and he was genuinely surprised to hear me speak in French. I was invited to tour the Opera House and served me coffee and cake.



Buzz Bomb

When I told him that I was familiar with a few of the most popular operas I had listened to with my mother from the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City he offered me a season pass which I gratefully accepted. Our stay in Brussels lasted a better part of 2 months of the coldest winter in fifty years so I managed to attend quite a few performances such as Carmen, Faust, La Traviata, The Barber of Seville and other well known operas. I must have taken advantage of that special gift at least 20 times. The pass was also valid for other concerts which I attended. Being bilingual was a definite asset because many of the operas and concerts were sung or acted in French. Back at the station, a bilingual typist was required in the Intelligence Section so, being a fairly good typist I got the assignment which proved to be very interesting in view of the nature of the secret reports to be typed.

My duties consisted of typing the activities reports submitted by the Wing pilots reporting on the previous day's sorties over the enemy lines. We were three clerks in that small trailer connected to a canvass cover joining our office trailer to an aircrew briefing area and the Wing Commander's office, the one and only Johnny Johnson who was to become the spitfire pilot with the most kills during World War 2.

Wing Commander Appreciation Week

In wartime it is an old established custom which allows certain authorized persons to requisition or "borrow" anything that is deemed useful or necessary. It was decided that "The Boss" (no, not Springsteen) should drive around with a more comfortable and more modern mode of transportation such as a 1939 Oldsmobile or a Buick. "The Boys" managed to present him with such a vehicle which was a lot more comfortable than a jeep without heat, especially during the winter months.



1939 Oldsmobile

Well, one early and very cold morning the Wing Commander asked me to drive his car to Brussels to find a garage and arrange for a complete check up. On the

way back, the car stalled and it took a while before it could be boosted. Who do you think was standing straight in the doorway of his trailer holding a telephone in his right hand? You guessed it...the Right Honourable Wing Commander Johnny Johnson who did not hesitate a single moment to aim and throw his telephone out, but he missed me "by that much". My explanation for the delay was immediately accepted and so was an apology by the boss. My wife and I had breakfast in his hotel room when he attended the Fighter Pilots' Association convention held at the Chateau Laurier in Ottawa way back in 1978 or 79, not too sure about the exact date. He gave me his address on an envelope and invited me to write him occasionally. It had been a tremendous privilege to meet with this WW2 Hero who was my boss during those few months in Belgium.

Night life in Brussels

One advantage about Evere is the fact that street cars were running and turning around a short distance from the main entrance to the station. Brussels like London became a place to visit as often as time would allow. Our shift was from 8 to 5 and we were free till next morning. I took advantage of my season pass to attend as many presentations at the Opera House as well as other fine places of interest during my stay in Brussels. There were also excellent restaurants, movie houses and night clubs. I will never forget one evening at a night club where the band's drummer had not shown up so a call to the patrons inviting anyone who could play the drums to step to the stage and start playing. My experience as a drummer was limited to playing in a bugle and drum band at school.



Brussels 1944

Very limited is an understatement. Fortunately that evening, just when I was going to be asked to get off the stage, the band drummer arrived. That signaled my time to leave the premises and back to the station I went. That was one more stupid thing to remember about my visits to Brussels.

Friendly family outside the station gates

A family living just a short distance from the station invited me for dinner almost every Sunday. The best meal I had eaten in a long time, it tasted like chicken and

the wine made it even tastier. I was told that the chicken was actually a rabbit...better than chicken. On a number of occasions I surprised them with something that I had received from home. In one package my family had included a large sealed can of butter which to them was like winning the lottery. I could see the house from the station but it took almost 30 minutes to get there because of the detour around the perimeter of the station. Fortunately I managed to talk the guard into letting me out at the nearest exit and that saved me a 30 minute walk. At this point I would like to mention that when I returned home to Canada I received a letter from that family who told me that while they were visiting relatives in Antwerp they saw me sitting at the back of an open transport heading for the wharf.



Battle of the Bulge

Just a few days before Christmas the German forces began an offensive in the area of Bastogne. This development presented a serious setback to the allies. Our relations with the Belgians cooled down a bit. One must remember that Belgium was under the German occupation for the better part of 5 years and their loyalties were divided. We were even advised not to walk the streets alone and be careful who you meet and talk to. Unfortunately one of our members was accused of selling a full gasoline bowser (tank) to the Belgians who in turn sold it to the Germans who greatly appreciated the transaction. Fuel was urgently needed to carry out their offensive. So things got complicated for the allies and we felt the pressure at our station. Our fighter squadrons were busier than ever, particularly in view of the latest developments. The city of Bastogne suffered the most damage during that campaign and thousands of American troops were either killed or captured. The movie "the Battle of the Bulge" came out of Hollywood and proved to be an excellent recreation of that very costly battle.



U.S. Soldiers in Bastogne

Christmas 1944

Because of the situation at Bastogne the Christmas season was not so merry and the relations with the Belgians were noticeably strained. One reason for that

perception was that the German occupation of their country for such a long time had created a certain "whose side are you on" type of feeling. Following the statements made by some officials regarding the growing evidence of changing loyalties towards the allies in Belgium. This was clearly manifested since the beginning of the German offensive a couple of days before Christmas. After all, the fighting was taking place only some 60 miles away and the Germans seemed to have the advantage, albeit temporarily. New Year's Eve in Brussels, in spite of the current situation here bore no evidence of unfriendly relations and certainly no visible signs of violence or disturbances. I decided to remain in Brussels for the night at the Salvation Army Hostel.



1944 Christmas Card

January 1st 1945 Attack on Allied Airfields by the Luftwaffe.

It came the morning of New Year's Day 1945, everything seemed normal and streetcars were running in spite of the extreme cold. I got off the streetcar at the end of the loop just a short distance from the main gate. My eyes immediately aimed above and noticed a whole squadron of fighter aircraft swooping down on the airfield strafing everything in sight. At first I thought to myself our pilots sure had a great New Year's Eve party. It only took a couple of



seconds to realize what was happening. We were under attack by the German Luftwaffe and being strafed. I had just enough time to reach one of the buildings in front of me and headed straight for the basement for shelter. I heard exploding bombs and fifty caliber bullets hitting the building. The attack lasted about twelve minutes causing death, destruction of spitfires and injuries among the ground staff. One of our pilots was killed while trying to take off. (Incidentally the report concerning the attack was typed by myself and is shown on the CD).

It was revealed that most allied airfields had been attacked simultaneously. Suffice to mention that the German air force suffered more severe losses compared to ours. I remember coming out of that "safe house" an extremely shaken but lucky guy to be alive. This New Year's Day 1945 will be remembered as long as I live and even today 65 years later I can see myself at that location on that day. Since landing in Normandy we were subjected to numerous "close calls", but this one was too close for comfort. I guess I can say with certainty that it was the closest that I have come to leaving this planet in all my 86 years on it.

If "D" Day was "The Longest Day" as portrayed in the Hollywood movie, these 12 minutes at Evere on January 1, 1945 felt like 12 hours. My recollection of New Year's Day is a visit to my grandfather's farm at Rockcliffe Annex where the whole family met and a small orchestra was soon put together with a piano, couple of violins, guitars, even "spoons". That was New Year's Day before the war.

One of our members was a regular contributor to the "wing tips" newsletter "the poet's corner" and on the January 1st attack by the Luftwaffe, he wrote the following poem.

Memories of a 'Not So Happy' New Year's Day

Who of us will ever forget

That memorable New Year's Day

The ominous hum as bullets spun

And pierced the hidings where we lay?

It all began so strangely

As round our drone they came

Across the sky we watched them fly

Then heard the shells & bullets rain.

'Twas poor old Melsbroek got it first

Then altitude they quickly gained.

Around they spun for they weren't done,

No longer was their target feigned.

*Across they came the first attack
In hordes, in droves, they strafed;
Our minds were rant while theirs hell bent
"to kill, to kill" they laughed*

*They laughed, they laughed, I know they did
For sitting ducks we were.
Some sixty they fell on their prey
And shot us up for fair.*

*They climbed & dove with chattering guns
We lay there stiff with fear
There in our lairs we said our prayers
On the first day of this year*

*Five spits of ours roared from the deck
And strove to drive them off
Shot down six Huns with blaring guns
Through odds extremely rough*

*One spit while scarcely off the deck
Before his wheels were up,
He got his Hun-but in the fun
Was shot down by a Nazi pup*

*The minutes dragged like hours,
And there were sure twenty five
The bullets spat while I lay flat
Well frightened, unhurt, alive.*

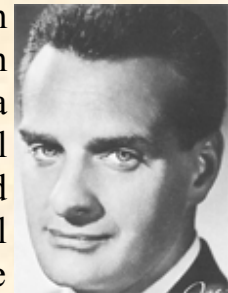
*Old lady luck had been with me
I'd thought my life was over,
A grimy mess, I must confess
As I gazed out through the door.*

*Yet some lady luck had not been
Bullets found them hiding there.
The fiendish hun had got our Bob
We lost a pal both fair and square.*

*The New Year came in with a bang
As you can plainly see,
And you can bet we'll ne'er forget
That gruesome day, that Nazi spree.
Don Robb, maintenance 127 wing*

Rest period in London

Around the middle of March 1945 I was given eight days' leave in London for a rest. The last nine months on the continent had been very hard on the nervous system and a change of scenery was a godsend and a necessary cure. While in London I received a call from the BBC asking me if I would be willing to be interviewed by a French Canadian war correspondent. His name was Paul Dupuis who turned actor at the end of the war. I agreed and the text of the interview can be read on the included CD.



Paul Dupuis

Crossing the Rhine into Germany

On our travels through Northern Europe as city after city was liberated, we witnessed the widespread and thorough devastation inflicted on the population. But crossing the Rhine into Germany was indeed a "war zone", bridges were down everywhere. In one location along the road were huts filled with hundreds of women peering out the small windows...probably waiting to be sent to

concentration camps, but now that they have been freed their future is much brighter. As we moved along towards our next station, there were signs of recent bombings and fierce encounters. German prisoners by the hundreds were being transported by trucks going "the other way". We eventually reached our destination at Reinslein, an airport located half way between Hamburg and Hannover.

Visit by General Dwight D. Eisenhower and Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery of Alamein

On or about April 16th. our airfield received two very special visitors. General Eisenhower and Field Marshal Montgomery chose our airfield for a very important meeting most likely concerning the imminent surrender of the German army. The general took time to sign numerous autographs while the Field Marshal stood waiting in front of his airplane. I approached him hoping to get his autograph but he promptly declined saying that he had no time to spare. I went back to the General who was still engaged in conversations with the airmen and still signing autographs. I managed to let him know that at the other end of the runway or at the far end of the field there was a large number of GI's gathered on the ground waiting for transport. They were captured during the Battle of the Bulge and had just been released from Stalag 11-B. During the morning I had spoken to a few of them and it was obvious that many wounded had not received any medical attention since their capture. Without hesitation he jumped into a jeep and drove directly to that location. Meanwhile, back at the Field Marshal, he stood impatiently in front of his airplane, not talking to anyone. Good old Monty. Some say! It was a well known fact that there was no love lost between Eisenhower and Montgomery. This was confirmed over and over again during the war and by historians in documentaries and movies since the end of WW 2.



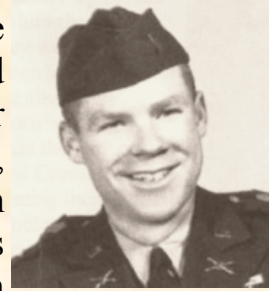
Montgomery

Eisenhower

My good American Friend - Mutt Mc Cord Prisoner of War (Bastogne)

I cannot write about my experiences in WW 2 without mentioning the camaraderie which I acquired with an American Hero who was captured during the Battle of the Bulge in January 1945. I have not met this Veteran. He lives in Alabama and we have corresponded on a steady basis by e-mail over the last ten years. This is how we met... Since the end of the war I have been fascinated by the visit of General Eisenhower and his meeting the American prisoners of war at

the far end of our station in Germany. The name "Stalag 11-B" stuck in my mind ever since because these American soldiers had just been released from that P.O.W. camp the day before and were awaiting transport to Brussels. I Google searched until I found the information I was looking for about the prisoners of war camps in Northern Germany and came across Stalag 11-B, what a coincidence. I picked a name of a veteran now living in Alabama, U.S.A. who was writing about his experiences following his capture by the Germans in January 1945. I got in touch with him and the rest is history. The part that makes it almost incredible is the fact that he was part of the group at our station in Reinselein who was waiting for transport. He also remembers General Eisenhower coming over in a jeep to talk to them. I was the one who pointed out to the General, the Americans sitting at the end of the field. Mutt Mc Cord was one of them.



Mutt Mc Cord

One Week to Victory in Europe

One persistent sign that hostilities were coming to an end, none too soon, was the increasing number of German pilots who landed on our airfield to surrender. On one occasion a German pilot parachuted on the airfield after deliberately crashing his plane. I managed to bring back home a large section of his silk parachute which was later used to make my wife's wedding accessories. One evening on the 4th of May while I was resting very comfortably, writing a letter to my family, I heard a loud voice screaming at the top of his head "**The war is over...the war is over**". Since my tent was next door to the signals office where the town crier was working I grabbed the signal that he had just received on the teletype machine. Sure enough it came from the top brass at 21 Army Group (the original documents shown on the CD.) For the next hour the camp turned into a very dangerous place to be as shots were fired in all



directions. Lying down as close to the ground as possible was the safest place to be. The question was on everyone's lips...when are we going home? Not so fast...remember the latest rumors making the rounds? The war in the Pacific was still on and persistent "rumors", about some squadrons moving to Alaska or the Aleutian islands to help the American Air Force fighting the Japanese.

In any event it was the moment that we had been expecting for such a long time. In my own case from the 16th of June in Normandy until this long anticipated announcement, our unit, the 127 Wing along with other Wings of the 2nd Tactical Air Force had been following the advancing allied armies as they conquered territories through France, Belgium, Holland and subsequently Germany. This was the day that we could all pride ourselves of having accomplished the job that we had been assigned. I remember when I was at school studying geography, reading about the various countries of Europe and listening to the radio broadcasts about the invasion of Poland on the 1st day of September 1939. When we crossed the Rhine in April of 1945 I couldn't help thinking about those school days. There I was living some sort of a dream, not exactly under the best of conditions, nevertheless it was reality and it was something to "write home about", if only the censures would allow.

Official end to the war in Europe

The following morning May 5th, the effective date of the cessation of hostilities we were assembled in our respective place of work and given temporary instructions regarding our daily activities until further notice. Eventually, new instructions were issued regarding our daily routine. There were all kinds of rumors concerning the possibility that our unit would soon be returning to England in preparation for our eventual move to Alaska to support the Americans with their war with Japan. Then came the best news of all, that repatriation to our homeland would begin soon and depending on the number of years served overseas would determine the lucky day when we would say "Aurevoir".

German prisoner's observations on his treatment while a prisoner of war

The three page document on the attached CD is worth reading. You will be surprised and fascinated by this story. Those 3 pages were typed by me as a clerk in the intelligence section of my unit, the 127 Wing, 2nd TAF. Incidentally, it was not easy to type with an old Underwood typewriter, correcting the typing errors, (and they were frequent) was time consuming and incredibly frustrating.

Visit to Hamburg, Hannover and Kiel

In the meantime while waiting for that long-awaited day we were permitted to leave the camp for a day at a time. A friend and I decided to borrow a jeep from

the car pool and we traveled to Hamburg on our way to Kiel. At one point we had to use the Autobahn but it was closed to traffic except for military vehicles. Along with the military convoy we noticed thousands of German prisoners of war walking in the same direction as the convoy. It was indeed a pitiful sight, old men, young men, some could hardly stand up. Many had no boots. We learned that those prisoners were heading in that direction so they could surrender to the British rather than the Russians. It was a well known fact that the Russians had no pity for the German prisoners of war. With Stalingrad in mind, how could they offer any sign of kindness towards them? Their fate was already decided. The Russians having lost approximately 20 million civilians and military during the war and the destruction of their country by the German army were in no mood to take over the responsibility of looking after them feeding them and build prisoners of war camps. The solution was the obvious shoot them all on sight or starved them to death, which they were reported to have done.



127 tour bus in Hannover

Gates of Belsen Concentration Camp

Belsen concentration camp was not too far from our airfield so we decided to drive there. We kept on driving until we arrived at the entrance to the Belsen Concentration Camp. We were allowed to come in for a few minutes only to be turned back by the Military Police. We caught a few glimpses of the front part of the camp before being asked very politely to leave. We had seen enough already and we were glad to go. We then continued towards Kiel Estuary but were directed on another road which took us through Hamburg. The city had been devastated and was almost destroyed by the RAF a couple of years before and thousands of civilians were burned by phosphorous bombs. I can still to this day remember seeing a man dressed in a black business suit carrying a briefcase as if going to work or at a meeting. We stopped to ask for directions in our best German which was not necessary because that gentleman spoke perfect English. All he said was that the streets were all dead ends and we could not go any further. However we proceeded in a different direction and eventually found an exit .on the way back we encountered a lone German army soldier who was very scared and lost. After a thorough check for weapons he was handcuffed at the back of the jeep and a few miles down the road he was delivered to a Canadian army unit. On the way back to the airbase we stopped at the local police station and inside one of the rooms we saw several tables filled with firearms, revolvers,

Lugers, shotguns, hunting rifles and naval ceremonial daggers of all descriptions. The German population had been ordered by the allied authorities to surrender any and all arms to the nearest city or town hall. I could have filled a jeep without any questions asked but I only took what I thought was not too cumbersome to fit in my kit bag. The most valuable item was a naval officer's ceremonial dagger which I managed to bring back home. Officers were allowed to pack anything they cared to bring back in a wooden case without any problem.

New issue of uniforms thanks to the Russians

Out of a clear blue sky came the order to discard temporarily our air force blue tunic in exchange for khaki tunics. Reports of airmen traveling away from the station had encountered Russian army personnel who arrested and detained them. Because of the close resemblance of the air force uniforms to the German uniforms the decision was taken on the orders of General Eisenhower himself following his visit to our airfield in April. Some Russian Army units were operating close by and they were having difficulty differentiate between the colors of the German uniforms and ours. To their eyes we were all Germans. The problem was easily solved, we were issued khaki tunics. In addition we were all given two pieces of silk with the inscription "I am British" or in Russian "ya anglichahnin" (I am an Anglican). Just joking...it is a serious matter. We were told to place that in our left pocket and if approached by Russian soldiers, raise your hands above your shoulder and try to convince them that you are not German. Fortunately, I had no encounter with the third kind. At least we learned a few Russian words.

Back to Reinsehlen Airfield

The waiting game was getting on our nerves so a group of ambitious young men got together and organized a couple of classrooms to interest anyone in furthering their knowledge on specified subjects. I volunteered to take part in the program and it was better than doing nothing all day. My contribution was a few hours a day helping half a dozen participants to learn a few words in French. That endeavour lasted a couple of weeks and the interest in the project was abandoned. My next outing away from the camp was a visit through Hannover which resembled Hamburg with rubble piled twenty feet high. How can you not feel sorry for all those unfortunate residents?



Steinhuder Meer

We heard through the grapevine that they were planning to send us for a couple of weeks to a beautiful lake called Steinhuder Meer. I was lucky enough to be chosen. That Hotel located on the lakeside happened to be Hermann Goering's personal summer residence. In the piano bench I found one of his photos, the sheet music to "Lilly Marlene" and a few other mementos of the Great Hermann. (Photos are shown on this page) this Hotel was now managed by the Canadian Legion. All good things must come to an end so back to the camp we went. The well deserved rest was a sample of things we dreamed of and will certainly happen shortly after our return home, and it won't be a dream.

Waiting to return to England from Germany

The last few weeks in Reinsehlen were very boring and monotonous. We had movies almost every night with fairly recent films supplied by the Canadian Legion, card games were going on every night in many locations. Just as we were about to leave Germany the restrictions concerning fraternization were lifted, although there was one city within reach...Celle, but it was too late to find out what was so fascinating about that place. It was now irrelevant now that we were leaving Germany within a few days.

Leaving Germany for England July 13, 1945

With our bags and belongings all packed up, we drove through Germany, Holland and arrived at the port of Antwerp in Belgium. We boarded a large transport and arrived at Dover during the night. Next morning we found ourselves traveling back to Bournemouth where I arrived from Gourock in October 1942.



V-J DAY August 15, 1945

Following a couple of weeks rest in Bournemouth I was posted to Catterick in Yorkshire for a month then back to Bournemouth on

special clerical assignments . I remember being on a station near London when the war with Japan ended in august 1945 following the atom bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Actually, there was not much to do except wait till my number (64) came up. Priority was given to the army personnel and soldiers who had fought the war on the continent, rightly so.

Going Home on the Queen Elizabeth 1

At the end of November my name was called and I was put on a train to Southampton and boarded the "Luxury Liner" Queen Elizabeth 1 turned troopship for the duration along with fifteen thousand troops. Standing room only but who cares, I'm going home. The ship was so crowded that even standing room only was at a premium. No place to sleep, no place to eat, so what? I'm going home. I was not seasick until a couple of days before the end of the trip. How can anyone complain especially when the Statue of Liberty is staring at you in the bright sunset of Manhattan? We arrived on the 7th of December and what a happy day it was. We passed through customs then on a train to Montreal and Lachine where I spent the night. Next day following dinner



Going Home in Style on the QE1

and document check up I was put on a train to Ottawa arriving at the Union Station on the 9th of December where my whole family was waiting for me. Mother was the first to greet me with a dozen hugs and kisses. We all ended up at Rodrigue's house on Osgoode Street where a reception was held. The end of a long trail had finally arrived.

One Month of Disembarkation Leave

As a returning Veteran I was given a whole month on leave and was to report to work at the Rockliffe Air Station (Ottawa) on the eight of January 1946. I was promoted to the rank of corporal before leaving England and my duties at the station continued to be clerical. Until one day in March, while eating lunch in the mess hall, a message was relayed over the speakers to report to the orderly room first thing in the morning. I was offered a promotion to the rank of Sergeant if I accepted a posting out West in replacement for the NCO in charge, with the condition that I sign in for 3 more years. The offer was rejected immediately stating that I had been away from home for over four and half years and I had no

intention of going anywhere any time soon. Furthermore I was promised by the station adjutant that I would remain in Ottawa as long as I wished. I was asked to reconsider my decision and report within two weeks. In less than a minute my final decision was made. The date for my discharge was scheduled for the 16th of March and on that date I reverted to civilian life, with no regret with the sincere conviction that I had done my share for my Country.

Leaving the RCAF

My decision to leave the RCAF was taken the day that I arrived back home in December 1945 however what made it official was the following. On December 31, New Year's Eve as I was heading to the Union Station to pick up some luggage, I "ran into" someone whom I had met way back in 1940 or 1941, in winter time because I remember ice skating with her on a number of occasions. It was at the Cathcart Street rink. She was not aware that I had been away all this time in the Air Force. We became very close and eventually married on November 9th 1946 on her 21st birthday. The posting was to Portage La Prairie in Manitoba, I was given a couple of weeks to think it over, I did not need a day, let alone two weeks. My answer was an emphatic and affirmative "no thanks" I did not want to leave my future wife and my family. So, I asked to be discharged immediately. That day happened on the 16th day of March 1946. After all, I had been away almost four and half years from home and I wanted back to civvies. I was 22 years old and I was looking forward to a long and happy life ahead with a large house in the country, 12 children, a steady job, a Cadillac and winning the lottery. Good Luck Johnny.

Hollywood's version of WW2

Hollywood who is well versed in the dramatization of just about every significant event happening on this planet has to its credit several spectacular productions of the major battles of World War Two. i.e. Bridge on The River Kwai, Saving Private Ryan, Bridge Too Far (Nijmegen Bridge) which was only a few miles from our location in Germany. In most WW2 documentaries and in most war movies there are frequent scenes showing the principal military leaders: Eisenhower, Montgomery, Patton, Rommel, etc. I get goose-bumps whenever I see a couple of them that I was privileged to meet while serving in Germany. As mentioned in my previous paragraph I also am proud to have met Joe DiMaggio, Babe Ruth, Xavier Cugat at the Waldorf Astoria and a few more during my visit to New York City before leaving for overseas in 1942. Those have been the best and most exciting years of my life, filled with unforgettable load of experiences that will last me a lifetime.

Time to return to my Civil Service job

That was easy because all returning Veterans were promised a job upon their return from Overseas. Another decision to ponder, my repatriation to Canada was based on a number of points associated with the length of time served Overseas. My number 64 was considered fairly low and I should have gone home by August. I would then have been discharged immediately and probably been hired with a higher classification while the vacancies existed. By the time I came back, only CR 2 positions were available. Well, at least it was a steady job which I kept until my retirement in November of 1977 at the age of 54. My Public Service career began on the 1st of July 1940 and lasted until November 17, 1977 including my four and half years in the RCAF. I had been preparing for this date for the past year and I was entirely and completely ready to tackle a second career. The sequence to this e-book will be written in due time. Stay tuned. JBL



B 3....Back row...Cole, Beckett, W/O Annany, F/L Doucet, Cpl McQueen, Dave Duncan, Muir, Ted Mazurkiewicz (Kitchener)

FRONT ROW. Sgt. Sharpe, Coscrove, ?, John Le May



The "Strand Hotel" shown here was taken over by none other than Herr Marshall Hermann Goering, Hitler's Chief of the German Air Force. Located on the largest inland piece of water in Germany...Steinhuder Meer

I was there for a couple of weeks. One of my souvenirs was the sheet music for Lili Marlene which happened to be in the piano bench.....along with Goering's photo .



Sure wasn't the Rolling Stones....this lady must have been the conductor's wife . The orchestra was Moxey Whitney best known in England.

This location was Bournemouth on the southern coast.

Outre-mer



L'aviateur-chef JEAN-BERNARD LEMAY, fils de Mme veuve Alfred LeMay, de 98 rue Stewart, a envoyé un câblogramme à sa mère, pour lui dire qu'il était arrivé outre-mer, sain et sauf. L'aviateur LeMay est un ancien de l'Académie de La-Salle et il compte de nombreux amis dans la capitale.

(Photo Denault)

AMERICANS TOLD: 'SEE BOMB-SITE'



AN American soldier and a Canadian airman find a torn school-book and a broken satchel at the school in which more than 40 children were killed by the Luftwaffe.

Every U.S. soldier in London was advised yesterday in The Stars and Stripes—daily newspaper of the U.S. armed forces in the European theatre of operations—to see these ruins.

"We believe," said an editorial, "that every American should visit this area before the horrible mess has been removed, for no man can view this deliberate destruction without fully realising how beastly the Germans have become.

"That human beings could sink so low seems unbelievable."

THE MAN WHO DID IT

CAPTAIN SCHUMANN TELLS GERMANY: 'OUR BOMBS FELL EXACTLY WHERE WE WANTED THEM.'—See Germany Speaking, Page Two.

This is the Daily Express photo on the right pertaining to that bombed school in London. The photo on the left appeared in the Citizen announcing my safe arrival Overseas.



Announcement of V-J-Day "End of war with Japan. August 15, 1945 - 3 o'clock in the morning





Irving Berlin



Xavier Cugat

Painting of Johnny Johnson in action with his Spitfire JEJ





Raymonde's classroom in 1946



Nazi Naval Ceremonial Dagger

Epilog

Now that I have reached the ripe old age of eighty six, soon to be eighty seven (August 25th) I consider myself a very lucky person to be able to type from memory while watching a movie and answering my wife's questions. Of course, having been a typist all my life, it was the easiest and fastest way to tackle this long-envisaged project, with the assistance of some documents, photos and mostly relying on what's left of my memory. So far it has not failed me. After all, I'm trying to put together memories of my childhood going as far back to the 1930's.

PS/ Upon my return to England from Germany on the 16th of July 1945 I made the regrettable mistake of leaving my jacket on a lounge chair on the Bournemouth Beach. In the side pocket of that tunic was my wallet. In the wallet, in addition to very important documents was a photo of "the girl next door" which I carried with me during 4 and half years in the RCAF including my service Overseas . On the back of the photo were the autographs of General Dwight D. Eisenhower (Germany 1945), Babe Ruth (Dartmouth, NS 1942) Joe DiMaggio and Lefty Gomez at Yankee Stadium in October 1942, and a few more . Every time I hear the name of Bournemouth or see a photo of that city I keep wondering where that photo might be, who has it and what it might be worth today if it was still in it's original condition. Personally, I'm almost certain that the content of the wallet was thrown away and only the money was kept. I doubt very much if the photo meant anything to the pickpocket. That was 65 years ago. JBL