

HISTORY 394 - VETERAN'S ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Training for the Skies

Comparisons of Second World War and Cold War
Aircrew Training

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Narrative accounts of “the knights of the air”¹ of the First and Second World Wars abound in popular culture. These daring and heroic young men are – by and large – the fighter aces whose exploits predominantly over Europe evoke a romance of chivalry and finesse different from the blood and gore and static nature of ground warfare, and individuality different from naval history. Rarely do these popular histories make reference to the early days of pilot training, and even academic histories only touch on training when that is their specific focus. When histories do deal with wartime Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) and Royal Air Force (RAF) training, they are usually official military histories concerned with the political formation of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (BCATP) or short personal accounts within memoirs of individual airmen’s experiences of war. Little attention is given to the psychological and emotional impact of training, a formative time for airmen of all generations, which authors pass over in favour of revealing statistics or heroic narratives. Only through studying oral testimonies from those involved in aircrew training can a full and complete experiential picture be made of what it was like to train for war in the air.

This paper attempts to reconcile the academic and popular literature to the personal realities of aircrew training. Over the last month, I have had the opportunity to interview three aircrew veterans from Canada and Great Britain, two who served in the Second World War and one Cold Warrior. Flight Lieutenant (F/Lt.) Lewis Duddridge served with the RCAF in Bomber Command, piloting Vickers Wellington bombers over France and Germany. Warrant Officer (WO) Peter Lake was a wireless operator/air gunner with the RAF in North Africa for much of the war. Captain (Capt.) David “Badger” Berger-North trained as a pilot with his native RAF in Canada but served more time with the RCAF during the Cold War. Because of this diversity of

¹ Edmund Cosgrove, *Canada’s Fighting Pilots* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Company Ltd., 1965), 9.

pilots' experience, this essay focuses on the wider topic of Allied aircrew training in Canada rather than simply Canadian training experiences. These three interviewees represent three very different experiences, but their personal stories can be compared and contrasted to reveal aspects of training that literature has not covered. Obviously three perspectives cannot represent all Canadian or British aircrew, nor can they unilaterally disprove an author's well-researched and detailed thesis, but they can shed light on what literature might be missing and show how valuable individual oral histories can be. As all three of the veterans interviewed for this project flew as bomber crews, my research has primarily centred on bomber training.

Using oral testimonies in academic histories is important. Donald Schurman suggests that Canadian military history, specifically "the official military history of Canada's participation in World War Two is still in process."² Official histories have already been shown to have "dealt gingerly with the bombing campaign" of the Second World War, and to have phrased Canada's role simply as supporting a British initiative,³ but rarely have the men who conducted the bombings had their chance to tell their story without a larger context of national policy being imposed on them. Because stories of training experiences have received even less attention, recording and analysing oral testimonies is an important part of Canada's understanding of her role in history. Opportunities are now especially rare for recording Second World War experiences, so it is imperative that the stories be recorded and included in our growing understanding of Canada's role in world conflicts.

² Donald M. Schurman, "Writing About War," in *Writing About Canada: A Handbook for Modern Canadian History*, edited by John Schultz, reprinted in UVic Course Pack for History 394, section A01 (Winter 2014), 241.

³ Schurman, "Writing About War," 242.

BCATP history is one centred on growth as the RCAF began the war with only twenty nine modern fighting aircraft.⁴ Instead of enlisting with the fledgling RCAF, many pre-war Canadian recruits had signed on with the RAF with numbers steadily growing above the yearly quota agreed upon by the Canadian and British governments after 1936.⁵ Only in the immediate lead-up to war did the RCAF begin expansion. Therefore, more Canadian pilots served in the RAF than in the RCAF in August 1939.⁶ Other Dominion nations trained their own short-service aircrews under independent ‘schemes’ primarily modeled after the British system but increasingly sent pilots to Canada during the war as part of the BCATP.⁷ Training other nations’ pilots also helped Canada’s political situation by defining her commitment to the Allied war effort as training rather than providing troops, something which might lead to conscription and its divisive results.⁸

Reasons for enlisting as aircrew varied. F/Lt. Duddridge of Hanley, Sask., rode the rails from Hanley to Brandon, MB, in search of work before the war. Securing a job with the Singer Sewing Machine Company meant he was rather well-off before enlisting in Saskatoon on 7 June 1940, but always worried about unemployment. The war provided an “opportunity to go flying and get killed, but also to set yourself up for life.”⁹ WO Lake, aged 20, also enlisted because of economic hardships after seeing the recruiting advertisements for aircrew in September 1940. He had been in and out of school when his mother could afford it, before working as a young man at a poultry farm and rejection for an apprenticeship at Vauxhall because of lack of

⁴ Spencer Dunmore, *Above and Beyond: The Canadians’ War in the Air, 1939-45* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1996), 5.

⁵ The Canadian government had agreed to train fifteen RAF candidates with the RCAF, but by having a larger number of Canadians joining the RAF and limiting her own numbers, Canada was able to keep her own recruiting standards relatively high. F.J. Hatch, *The Aerodrome of Democracy: Canada and the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan, 1939-1945* (Ottawa: Directorate of History, Department of National Defence, 1983), 4-6.

⁶ Hatch, *Aerodrome of Democracy*, 4-5.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁹ Interview with Lewis Duddridge.

credentials. Lake had no interest in the military before the war, although he applied for the RAF because his father had been a Royal Navy Air Service observer in the First World War. For Lake, another reason for enlisting was the idea of protecting his family against the Germans.¹⁰

For Capt. Berger-North, enlistment in the post-war RAF was the result of compulsory National Service. While his father had been in the First World War (horse artillery), Berger-North and his older brothers were too young for service in the Second World War. Berger-North chose the RAF section of the compulsory cadet system in British schools even though all members of his family had served in the army. Like the other two interviewees, it was an interest in aviation that drove him towards a glider and pilot certification at seventeen. As a young boy, “Badger” remembered watching dogfights over Maidstone, England. Not much had changed in daily life since those days in the early 1940’s, since the war seemed to continue just without the fighting as rationing continued for almost a decade and National Service continued for two decades. Because National Service was compulsory, many chose aircrew for the marginally better pay than other branches of service, and the guaranteed job for three years as compared to two.¹¹

Allan English’s study of Canadian and British medical practices in recruiting Second World War aviators highlights an important military need: the conservation of trained personnel through physical and emotional hardships. The RCAF needed to find a way to maximize the return on their trained airmen.¹² Since the cost of aircrew training for Bomber Command was estimated at £10,000 per recruit, and because of the high casualty rate of airmen throughout the war, ensuring the conservation of personnel was vital. More than half of RCAF deaths occurred

¹⁰ Peter Lake, Interviewed by Benjamin Fast, Victoria, BC, 12 March 2014.

¹¹ David Berger-North, Interviewed by Benjamin Fast, Victoria, BC, 11 March 2014.

¹² Allan D. English, *The Cream of the Crop: Canadian Aircrew, 1939-1945* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996), 4-5.

in Bomber Command, a number that accounted for one fifth of all Canadian Second World War casualties.¹³ This task was doubly important for the RCAF as Canada would play host to the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan “which trained more than 130,000 aircrew of virtually every Allied nationality,”¹⁴ a costly venture that could impact the survival of many nations. This conservation policy began with selection procedures that would properly identify the potential of recruits for service in the air.

In the pre-war years, selection continued along a Canadian Expeditionary Force First World War program: tests were created by early military psychologists that blended physical fitness requirements with the mental prowess required for the Royal Flying Corps Canada and later RCAF. These tests, however, were often based on false assumptions due to a lack of proper understanding of human behaviour and abilities.¹⁵ This focus on intelligence (primarily determined by a recruit’s educational history), medical fitness, and less tangible variables, such as motivation, raised issues – combined with a lack of properly trained medical officers – that meant “the selection process was inadequate early in the war.”¹⁶ Since it would take two to three years in peacetime to properly train aircrew, selection procedures needed to be updated. These issues were reflected in the Battle of Britain as inter-war training regimes were not updated in the RAF until 1941.¹⁷ In October 1941, this educational requirement was replaced by the psychological RCAF Classification Test “which was designed to measure learning ability rather than schooling level” as the desired academics were no longer coming forward in large and sustainable numbers.¹⁸

¹³ English, *Cream of the Crop*, 15.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 17-25.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 28-29.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁸ Hatch, *Aerodrome of Democracy*, 120-121.

The first recruits for the BCATP were chosen on physical and educational grounds. Duddridge viewed himself as lucky for having been chosen for aircrew. “I must have exposed a fairly decent I.Q. because I didn’t have my Grade Twelve” which was one of the requirements for aircrew in 1940, “but they organized evening courses that would give me an equivalency, which I passed.”¹⁹ Duddridge’s lack of education might have actually given him a better chance at flying (after upgrading) because recruits with the highest I.Q. scores – based in part on school marks and Initial Training School (ITS) scores – were moved into the navigator training stream. WO Lake, on the other hand, had been raised in Borneo and was one of about half the RAF trainees who never entered the BCATP. He had not started school until age ten and did not have school credentials, but nonetheless was accepted for aircrew training at Portsmouth with the RAF Voluntary Reserve. Despite his lack of education he was accepted into the pilot/navigation stream in the RAF training program.²⁰

The selection process was strenuous, new recruits faced series of interviews with aircrew selection boards, wrote academic and personality tests, underwent medical examinations and had their backgrounds checked just to get into flight training. This pre-selection screening happened alongside the standard military basic training which occurred at manning depots across the country. After passing this pilot selection, recruits were shuttled into the first of the three training schools: pre-flight instruction. If the recruit passed this first stage he would go on to elementary flight school and hopefully later to service flying training where, if successful, he would receive his wings. The first BCATP graduates finished their training on 4 November 1940. Due to fluctuating demands for aircrew, the training process varied between 22 and 30

¹⁹ Lewis Duddridge, Interviewed by Benjamin Fast, Victoria, BC, 14 March 2014.

²⁰ Interview with Peter Lake.

weeks during the course of the war.²¹ Fluctuating curricula was more than just a result of improving training methods and advancing technology, it was also a sign of a disorganized program. Due to the demand for aircrew, some recruits even lived on training on bases with no plumbing or water supplies.²² Nonetheless, Duddridge described how life on the base was an improvement from life at home during the Depression.²³ Lake's training also featured "very good accommodations" at Felixstowe. While he contracted bronchitis from guard duty in the cold North Sea base, the two-story barracks were an improvement on other locations in England and were better than the tents he would stay in while serving in North Africa.²⁴ Capt. Berger-North also positively compared living conditions to quality of life in post-war Britain.²⁵

F/Lt. Duddridge viewed his early training, specifically the upgrading courses, as somewhat disorganized. With the confusion of a growing air force, Duddridge's good academic scores and enlistment as a pilot candidate still resulted in him being sent to a six-month mechanics course in Ontario. It was during this course that Duddridge received his first military rank of Leading Aircraftman (LAC) and a posting to 4 Service Flying Training School (SFTS, the final stage of BCATP training) in Saskatoon as a mechanic working on Cessna Cranes used by BCATP pilot recruits. After Duddridge's training path was corrected, he re-joined an ITS and began training for aircrew in the same unit as his younger brother who had enlisted a year and a half later.²⁶ While knowing that all positions had to be filled, Duddridge described his drive

²¹ Hatch, *Aerodrome of Democracy*, 121, 125.

²² *Ibid.*, 35-36.

²³ Interview with Lewis Duddridge.

²⁴ Interview with Peter Lake.

²⁵ Interview with David Berger-North.

²⁶ Interview with Lewis Duddridge.

specifically for pilot training from his date of enlistment because he “desperately wanted to fly...there was nothing telling me I would be a pilot.”²⁷

Intelligence requirements seemed slightly more relaxed for post-war RAF enlistment. Capt. Berger-North was on track to attend university for architecture before securing a position in flight training, and this education background helped him when attending aircrew pre-selection at Hornchurch. Six hundred applicants every two weeks were selected for officer training at Kirton Lindsey, but only thirty would attend the three-month course. Berger-North blames this cut rate largely on medical issues like colour blindness. Physical fitness, grammar school education and written examinations were the selection process for officer training, and all instruction was given later in Canada. Berger-North was already well-prepared for aircrew training as he had received his pilot licence at the age of seventeen. Every second course graduating from officer school would be sent to Canada for further training, and Berger-North was one of the cycles sent overseas.²⁸ With no intention of remaining in the RAF, and still maintaining hopes of attending university, pilot training was not meant as a career move for Berger-North.

Early BCATP training primarily focused on bomber crews. This training plan was the product of a British strategy at the outset of war that saw a perceived need, within two to three years, for bombers over fighters.²⁹ While many sources, especially Canadian ones, devote considerable time on the history of the BCATP, sources primarily focusing on the RAF tend to focus on fighter pilots first, especially those who took part in the Battle of Britain. While one paragraph in Donne and Fowler’s *Per Ardua Ad Astra* mentions the Empire Air Training Scheme (the British name for the BCATP) and the valuable pilot training it conducted “especially for

²⁷ Interview with Lewis Duddridge.

²⁸ Interview with David Berger-North.

²⁹ Hatch, *Aerodrome of Democracy*, 12.

Bomber Command,” the heroic and Empire-saving exploits of Fighter Command are examined in great detail, focusing on the insurmountable odds and the seemingly impossible aircraft production rates.³⁰ The only further mention of training is the explanation that “Fighter Command had only been able to keep going because of the inflow of young men, many only recently trained,” implying a steady stream of fighter pilots from training units despite the BCATP’s mandate for producing more bomber crews.³¹ The BCATP was only scheduled to begin in April 1940, with full operational status of 20,000 trainees per year by 1942. This meant no BCATP trainees would have reached England before 1941, too late for the Battle of Britain, and meaning the BCATP’s influence only came later in the war.³² Bomber Command’s chapter contradicts the previous focus on fighters by saying the RAF’s primary philosophy was one of attack by bomber and that this plan was the goal from the very start of the war.³³ There is no mention of bomber crew training or how the RAF maintained the growing Bomber Command operations with such heavy losses, an obvious gap in the historiography.

Recruits learned a variety of skills in the three training schools. ITS training, which consisted solely of classroom learning, focused on “aerodynamics, engines, navigation, meteorology, mathematics, and science,”³⁴ something echoed by Duddridge’s testimony.³⁵ The Elementary Flight Training Schools (EFTS) signalled the beginning of in-air instruction, the first solo flights, and vital flight tests which could see a recruit cut from the program.³⁶ For Duddridge, the EFTS provided 65 hours of winter flying in a de Haviland Tiger Moth – the

³⁰ Michael Donne and Cynthia Fowler, *Per Ardua Ad Astra: Seventy Years of the RFC & the RAF* (London: Frederick Muller Ltd., 1982), 83, 85, 87-91, 97.

³¹ Donne and Fowler, *Per Ardua*, 91.

³² Dunmore, *Above and Beyond*, 13.

³³ Donne and Fowler, *Per Ardua*, 98.

³⁴ Hatch, *Aerodrome of Democracy*, 125.

³⁵ Interview with Lewis Duddridge.

³⁶ Hatch, *Aerodrome of Democracy*, 127, 129-131.

RAF's basic trainer with an open cockpit – on skis. Flying with skis taught him how to maneuver delicately as there were no brakes on landing. Part of the motivation for not having an accident on the ground was that “one scraping of His Majesty's aircraft and that's a black mark” which could have ended his pilot training. “They didn't mind having a daredevil, but they didn't want a horse's ass” because they guy might become the pilot of a bomber with responsibilities for a crew.³⁷ The possibility of ‘washing out’ was a big pressure for trainees, but Duddridge felt his chances of failing were low because he was reliable and did not fool around. While secondary sources often discuss the financial costs incurred by pilot error, Duddridge says money was rarely a consideration after an accident because most people were more worried about the reliability of the pilot than the cost of the plane. Berger-North's testimony shows that post-war training cut rates were affected by costs. As the stringent 1950's training schemes moved into the 1960's, “it was costing more to train a pilot so they were a little more lenient...in that they would give them extra hours to try and make it.”³⁸

Up to this point in a Canadian pilot's training all instructors were civilians and all pilots were in the same training stream. It was only after graduating from the EFTS that differentiation was made between potential fighter and bomber pilots.³⁹ When recruits made it to the final BCATP training stage, the SFTS, they graduated through more complex aircraft: North American Harvards for the fighter stream, multi-engine Avro Ansons, Cessna Cranes or Airspeed Oxfords for the bomber potentials. At the same time the BCATP increased levels of testing until the pilot was deemed ready to move to UK-based operational training units.⁴⁰ Duddridge described this stage of training as invaluable because these planes had “everything

³⁷ Interview with Lewis Duddridge.

³⁸ Interview with David Berger-North.

³⁹ Hatch, *Aerodrome of Democracy*, 137, 142.

⁴⁰ Hatch, *Aerodrome of Democracy*, 141-148.

you'd run into in the future including flaps, prop pitch...undercarriage failure...it's all there so they can teach you everything."⁴¹ The differentiation between fighter and bomber pilots was based on skill, aptitude and potential, but sometimes it was also just by luck. Duddridge recounted that all pilot trainees wanted to fly the Supermarine Spitfire, but it was a missing thumb that got his brother Len the chance. The missing thumb stopped him from being able to operate the bomber training aircraft and diverted him to the fighter stream while training at the Advanced Flying Unit (AFU) in Banff, Scotland.⁴² These training peculiarities cannot appear in general RCAF or RAF histories because they are such unique, personal stories. It is only through Duddridge's oral testimony and personal experience that official histories can be complemented with such interesting personal information.

The BCATP had modelled their training program after the RAF's three stage system, so WO Lake's experience was very similar to Duddridge's. Lake began his basic training at a receiving wing (like a manning depot in Canada) and then moved up to the Initial Training Wing (same as an ITS) where he learned the course materials for becoming a pilot or navigator. Lake, however, failed this course after three weeks of instruction and was given a final interview by one F/Lt. Wright. This interview kept Lake in the RAF training because he was "enough informed to know something about aircraft" and he volunteered to be an air gunner.⁴³ Wright suggested he attempt the Wireless Operator/Air Gunner course, a step above air gunner, because of Lake's experience on Bolton-Paul Defiants. He trained as a wireless operator at Blackpool with other recruits who had likely failed their flight training and, after two times through the course, passed a Morse Code examination for eight-words per minute.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Interview with Lewis Duddridge.

⁴² Interview with Lewis Duddridge.

⁴³ Interview with Peter Lake.

⁴⁴ Interview with Peter Lake.

WO Lake then moved on to the No. 2 Radio School to train on Marconi wireless sets both on the ground and in the air in de Havilland Dominie aircraft that smelled of air sickness, an experience not mentioned in the literature.⁴⁵ These training flights were short, just enough for four men to have the chance to operate the wireless set before returning to base. An important part of RAF wireless training was teaching aircrews how ground operations worked. Lake and other members of his class were posted to an active outstation at Felixstowe to see what ground-based wireless operators dealt with during operations. This training would help them know how to correctly and efficiently communicate with the ground during combat. The shorter air-gunnery training was conducted later, and Lake believed it was far less comprehensive than Canadian gunnery training.⁴⁶ It was at Turnberry, a converted golf course, that Lake was given the choice of aircraft, choosing the Bristol Beaufort because it was “an aggressive aircraft [where] you hunt for shipping” rather than just bombing people.⁴⁷ Beauforts were well known for their poor safety record and aircrew “were almost condemned to death going on operations.”⁴⁸ It is estimated that two hundred people died at Turnberry, likely most in training accidents on Beauforts.⁴⁹

Training accidents are covered in detail by secondary sources, often showing images of planes on top of planes and wreckage in fields.⁵⁰ While the secondary sources explain in great detail both the statistics of crashes and the common causes of accidents, they do not discuss the impact these events had on other trainees. F/Lt. Duddridge described how “death was frequent,

⁴⁵ Phil Tomaselli, “RAF Yatesbury,” RAF Yatesbury Association, <http://rafyatesbury.webs.com/stationhistory1.htm> (accessed 26 March 2014); Interview with Peter Lake.

⁴⁶ Interview with Peter Lake.

⁴⁷ Interview with Peter Lake.

⁴⁸ Interview with Peter Lake.

⁴⁹ “Flattened Links,” Turnberry at War, <http://www.turnberry.co.uk/history-turnberry-at-war> (accessed 28 March 2014).

⁵⁰ Hatch, *Aerodrome of Democracy*, 150-153.

aircraft destruction was frequent...because you had to come as close to reality in training as was humanly possible.”⁵¹ The frequency and severity of accidents increased as students moved towards Operational Training Units (OTU) in Britain. Witnessing these accidents and deaths didn’t affect him while in training, however, because

you must absolutely accept what’s going on around you. There’s something about youth that covers that. How can you compete with a German ace if you don’t have the same capabilities, and how are you going to get those capabilities? The very first death I saw was [when] a crew going on their first operation [the next day] landed at our base. Later, [when readying for departure] the station engineer would not sign their aircraft out because one engine had too big a mag drop. The engineer on the crew...signed it out to leave, they got into that aircraft...and I watched them...lift off, and just after a shot of black smoke came out of the starboard inner engine. The pilot made a mistake and the damned thing flipped over and they burned to death in a few seconds. We walked out after the fire crews and they were pulling the bodies out with long wire hooks, I saw it happening. It didn’t do me any good, but it didn’t do me as much harm as I would think.⁵²

For Duddridge, there seemed to be a difference between death while pushing for excellence and “stupid deaths.” One of his friends serving in a fighter squadron was killed when a flight leader did not allow enough room near a hill for all four airplanes in formation to pass. Because the formation could not be broken, one pilot crashed into the hill and died.⁵³

Low flying was a common cause of accidents discussed by both the secondary sources and my interviewees.⁵⁴ Due to high demands, each training exercise at Turnberry was run with a different pilot and crew. WO Lake volunteered to go up for a pilot’s first night solo flight. On the first touch-and-go approach the landing gear would not lock and the engine faltered when the pilot attempted to climb away. This was a very dangerous close-call, one of many for Lake, but luckily they avoided a crash into the Turnberry hospital.⁵⁵ For Lake, it was luck that saved him

⁵¹ Interview with Lewis Duddridge.

⁵² Interview with Lewis Duddridge.

⁵³ Interview with Lewis Duddridge.

⁵⁴ Interview with Lewis Duddridge; Hatch, *Aerodrome of Democracy*, 154.

⁵⁵ Interview with Peter Lake.

in his other ‘should-haves’ such as in Benghazi when a crashing plane bounced over his tent, barely missing him.⁵⁶ Luck may have been less important for Duddridge and his brother. Len was shot down during the war, a result, Lewis admitted, of having less experience than the enemy pilot, no matter the prior training he had received. Because his brother was “full of good common sense,” he was able to survive both training and combat and lived to fly again.⁵⁷ Common sense is rarely touched on in the secondary sources, but for F/Lt. Duddridge the common sense his father taught him as a child was the most important trait for his success as a pilot.⁵⁸

Berger-North was witness to many crashes and dangerous incidents as a trainee in Canada, on RAF active service, and as an instructor with the RCAF. While safety records were improving after the Second World War, new technologies and inexperienced pilots often resulted in accidents. Flight training involved large numbers of aircraft in the air at the same time, and Berger-North’s section once experienced three write-offs during one lunch hour. These accidents were the result simple mistakes like the student pilot and instructor both applying the brakes at the same time and flipping the plane, the second pilot running off the runway while watching the first crash, and the third, in the confusion, applying too much brake and tipping onto the nose. Berger-North remembers one RAF colleague flying a Gloster Meteor suddenly explode over an airfield while practicing for a demonstration, one of 494 peacetime Meteor deaths. On active service, while on a low-level flight over Germany, Berger-North’s English Electric Canberra had a bird strike that destroyed an engine. Other incidents occurred after re-enlisting with the RCAF as an air traffic controller at Cold Lake, AB, including when on his first week a Canadair CF-104 Starfighter took off with an open canopy and “while I watched he got

⁵⁶ Interview with Peter Lake.

⁵⁷ Interview with Lewis Duddridge.

⁵⁸ Interview with Lewis Duddridge.

to 300 feet then just went straight into the trees. That was my experience as an air traffic controller to start off with.”⁵⁹ Berger-North was on duty for at least one dozen major accidents during his five years at Cold Lake. Like Duddridge, Berger-North held the attitude that accidents would be inevitable when training at such high levels and all that could be done was to continue flying. Instead of cancelling everything like the “immaturely emotional” Americans, fellow pilots would pay their respect in the bar at the end of the day on the deceased pilot’s tab.⁶⁰ This was the outcome of a perceived difference in training: RAF and RCAF pilots had more freedom but also held more responsibility for their actions.

Alongside bomber crews, the BCATP trained ground crews, skilled labourers, and coastal operations personnel, meaning most bases were full of military personnel at various stages of training.⁶¹ In the RAF, aircrew training was primarily conducted at site-specific locations and Lake described how men would meet up with friends in other streams only when on similar courses or in operational units. At Turnberry, Lake first became part of a Beaufort’s four-man crew and was reunited with a friend from training, Fred Marlowe. When an old member of Lake’s first pilot course arrived at Turnberry looking for a crew, Lake was already taken by Marlowe. Another trainee volunteered, the plane took off and “must have had engine trouble again and they just went nose-first into the drink.”⁶² It was thanks to being reunited with his friend Marlowe that Lake survived that incident.

The BCATP organizers faced many challenges including that all personnel would be new to the air force thanks to the RCAF’s diminutive size before the war.⁶³ While the resulting disorganization is mentioned in F/Lt. Duddridge’s testimony, most secondary sources focus on

⁵⁹ Interview with David Berger-North.

⁶⁰ Interview with David Berger-North.

⁶¹ Tom Coughlin, *The Dangerous Sky: Canadian Airmen in World War II* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1968), 194.

⁶² Interview with Peter Lake.

⁶³ Hatch, *Aerodrome of Democracy*, 33-36.

the political situation. The majority of graduating Canadian ground crews would be held back for use in the ever-expanding Plan, meaning that most Canadian pilots would serve overseas with British ground crews. The RCAF was pushing for Canadian squadrons overseas as a justification for growth and status as a future air power, but this caused some political tension which almost ended the BCATP all together. The RAF objected to the use of the term “Canadian” in RAF units when the majority of personnel were British, instead eventually allowing a re-organization of Canadian pilots in RCAF squadrons.⁶⁴

Along with the political challenges the RCAF and the BCATP faced in the early days of the Second World War, the issue of staffing plagued the Plan’s operations. Many of the best civilian pilots came forward at the beginning of the war and were among the first trained by the military. However, like the ground crews, the Canadian military needed these top pilots to remain in Canada to train the next classes of recruits. While all of the original recruits from the observer training schools were sent overseas to bolster the bomber campaigns, half being killed within their first year of service over Europe, only twenty of the original 203 pilot graduates were posted to Great Britain, the majority of those selected being Australians.⁶⁵ Some later pilots who wanted to see combat in Europe purposefully failed instructor courses or performed misdemeanors that would result in demotion and a trip to the front. Aside from affecting a standardized level of training across the BCATP, this also affected new students’ experiences of

⁶⁴ W.A.B. Douglas, *The Official History of the Royal Canadian Air Force*, vol. 2, *The Creation of a National Air Force* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986) , 248-249. F/Lt. Duddridge’s brother Len, flying Spitfires with the RAF in Malta, would eventually be transferred to an RCAF squadron flying over Southern France. Interview with Lewis Duddridge.

⁶⁵ Douglas, *Official History*, 237.

training.⁶⁶ According to Capt. Berger-North, these issues continued well into the Cold War and caused some difficult relationships between pilots and instructors.⁶⁷

In comparison to WO Lake's experience as a non-commissioned member serving with, but not interacting with, officer pilots, Capt. Berger-North was almost exclusively trained alongside commissioned officers from NATO countries as Canada once again played host to an Allied training scheme during the Korean War. First there was an acclimatization period at the Crumlin base in Ontario for "getting used to Coca-Cola and donuts and North American currency" after living through British rationing.⁶⁸ Berger-North's course, designated 5504, began with six weeks of ground school in Penhold, AB before moving up to training flights on Harvards. Everybody wanted to get straight to flying, but ground school had to be completed first. The altitude and heat of Alberta's late summer meant ground school was even more difficult for the recruits, but eventually they made it to the flight line. What had once been the most advanced fighter trainer in the BCATP, the Harvard was now the basic flight training aircraft for Cold War NATO pilots. Basic training included two hundred hours on the Harvard, three times the basic flight training hours as in the BCATP, before moving on to ninety hours on Lockheed T-33 Shooting Star jet trainers at Portage la Prairie, MB.⁶⁹ "Compared to the Harvard, the T-33 was quiet and fast and easy to fly," and the dropout rate declined drastically when the course made it to Portage. It was after jet training that Berger-North and the six remaining students from his course received their wings and were sent back to the UK.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Hatch, *Aerodrome of Democracy*, 115-119.

⁶⁷ Interview with David Berger-North.

⁶⁸ Interview with David Berger-North.

⁶⁹ Lockheed T-33 trainers were license-built in Canada by Canadair as the CT-133 Silver Star. David Berger-North refers to the aircraft with the more commonly used T-33 indicator.

⁷⁰ Interview with David Berger-North.

According to Capt. Berger-North, who also served as an instructor after joining the RCAF, training in Canada was superior to the training offered in the UK because “we were given more flexibility. The only difference we had was that the weather was so great over here you do a lot of flying whereas the weather in the UK was so bloody awful you’d naturally become an instrument oriented pilot.”⁷¹ This flexibility allowed student pilots to develop greater self-confidence and self-reliance. Whereas BCATP pilots began training on light-weight Tiger Moths, “the Harvard was quite a formidable airplane to start on, quite powerful.” Since Berger-North had already learned to fly as a cadet, he was well suited for the pilot courses and survived a cease-training cut rate that saw only one out of every one hundred recruits receive his wings.⁷²

There is some controversy among secondary sources concerning aircrew’s lives outside of training in the BCATP. Peter Conrad’s *Training for Victory* states that the BCATP schools became focal points in their local communities, allowing men the chance to interact with locals and have fun off the base. The RCAF organized morale-boosting activities for the recruits – such as dances with local young women – and the towns benefited from trainees replacing community members who had enlisted in positions like local orchestras.⁷³ Conrad also points out that some recruits faced anti-BCATP sentiment and even violence at the hands of the locals.⁷⁴ Hatch, on the other hand, points out that the training courses kept the recruits “fully occupied,” and quotes a British pilot training at No. 10 Elementary Flight Training School (Hamilton, ON) who said most men did not regularly take advantage of weekend leave opportunities.⁷⁵ These are exceptions, however, as most BCATP sources do not focus on a

⁷¹ Interview with David Berger-North.

⁷² Interview with David Berger-North.

⁷³ Peter C. Conrad, *Training for Victory: The British Commonwealth Air Training Plan in the West* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1989), 49, 54.

⁷⁴ Conrad, *Training for Victory*, 68-72.

⁷⁵ Hatch, *Aerodrome of Democracy*, 131.

recruit's life outside of training – perhaps because there wasn't much of one – and instead focus on the military training structure and the adjustment foreign nationals (and Canadians) had to make to be successful in the BCATP.⁷⁶ Compared to the literature, the oral history testimonies provide more detailed examples of life outside of training, primarily of romantic encounters.

F/Lt. Duddridge exemplified the difference between Conrad's and Hatch's version of events outside of training in an anecdote about him and his brother. While his brother Len, serving in a fighter squadron, refused to "get serious" with a woman because of the perceived likelihood of death, Lewis Duddridge did find a romantic interest and got married during the war. The discipline on base also kept the men from "going into town any night and goof[ing] around," even though there was much more freedom than life at home with strict British parents.⁷⁷ Duddridge remembers the most common interaction with the outside world being dances put on by women's organizations "which was absolutely excellent, and had to be."⁷⁸ He also remembers that people treated all recruits well, a contrast with Conrad's anti-BCATP anecdote. "There was a war on, you could be proud," especially before the Americans entered the war.⁷⁹ WO Lake's experience of life outside training was very different from the Canadian pilot. In one trip to London he nearly lost his life in a German bombing raid as an incendiary bomb landed in a room near his, recounting "that's when I first realized the effects of the war. That's my first 'should-have.'"⁸⁰ While allowed to leave camp, Lake did not have as much money as the commissioned pilots. Eating was the highlight, especially as long leaves were not available during training, so most of non-training time was spent in the local pubs.⁸¹

⁷⁶ Douglas, *Official History*, 237; Conrad, *Training for Victory*, 27.

⁷⁷ Interview with Lewis Duddridge.

⁷⁸ Interview with Lewis Duddridge.

⁷⁹ Interview with Lewis Duddridge.

⁸⁰ Interview with Peter Lake.

⁸¹ Interview with Peter Lake.

Sports were a big part of social life for BCATP trainees in Canada and pilots in Britain. Baseball and hockey were big interests, cricket when overseas, and all equipment was provided by the military. Church was “not a big factor” for Duddridge⁸² but was how Capt. Berger-North met his future wife a decade later.⁸³ Church was not a regular activity for Berger-North, but one night a friend came back from Red Deer and said “‘there’s girls in the church downtown!’ So the next Sunday all the back pews were filled with Danes and Norwegians and Brits.”⁸⁴ He routinely made the trip from Penhold to Red Deer for activities in the town such as attending the cinema and eating the rich foods at the local restaurant.⁸⁵ Duddridge did not experience boredom as a pilot trainee, although he believes there might have been some boredom for recruits in other streams or other branches of service. Conversations were always full of talk of aircraft, “and women” Duddridge added later.⁸⁶

After completing BCATP training in Canada, RCAF, RAF and pilots and aircrew of other nationalities selected for service overseas would be sent to the United Kingdom for additional training with an Operational Training Unit or with an Advanced Flying Unit. These units signalled a final stage of training conducted as close to combat conditions as possible, sometimes flying in airspace frequented by *Luftwaffe* airplanes. When deemed ready for a tour of combat, a pilot would join a different unit somewhere else in Britain or overseas and fly missions into enemy territory. What happened at this point in a pilot’s wartime experience is covered extensively in official histories, squadron histories, academic studies, memoirs, popular histories and novels. The effectiveness of training, however, and how early experiences in the military shaped combat experience are rarely touched on except as passing mentions.

⁸² Interview with Lewis Duddridge.

⁸³ Interview with David Berger-North.

⁸⁴ Interview with David Berger-North.

⁸⁵ Interview with David Berger-North.

⁸⁶ Interview with Lewis Duddridge.

Capt. Berger-North did not know what life would be like after training. The assumption was that the new pilots would return to the RAF and fly one of the first-generation production jets, but there was no bomber or fighter stream like in the BCATP. Berger-North first flew de Havilland Vampire and Meteor day fighters and was selected for service on the new delta-wing Gloster Javelin, but the dangerous nature of that aircraft meant first-tour pilots were diverted to other roles. Berger-North disappointingly wound up converting to the Canberra, the RAF's first jet bomber, instead of the exciting jet fighters. Serving with a crew on the Canberra, however, wound up being among the best parts of his career. Training in Canada prepared Berger-North for active service on the Canberra because it was "much more stringent, and I think the fact I had that training initially in Canada with the Harvard prepared me better for general flying ability than had I stayed in Britain."⁸⁷ While the Second World War was over, Berger-North and his crew were always ready to deploy overseas as part of the continuous conflicts that occurred in the 1950's and 1960's. They were also prepared to leave at a moment's notice in case of revenge attacks on the Soviet Union for potential nuclear strikes. Britain remained on "continuous wartime footing" and there was no doubt in Berger-North's mind that he would experience war.⁸⁸ Berger-North resigned from a good career in the RAF because the living conditions were not suitable for a newly married couple and, after moving to Canada, he re-enlisted with the RCAF and continued flying in various roles such as instructor, air traffic controller and search and rescue. Berger-North also continued his passion for art while in the military and designed the original Snowbirds' logo still in use today.⁸⁹

F/Lt. Duddridge's ideal of service after training was living the romance of flying against the Red Baron from the First World War. He wanted to be a fighter pilot, but he "knew that you

⁸⁷ Interview with David Berger-North.

⁸⁸ Interview with David Berger-North.

⁸⁹ Interview with David Berger-North.

had little or no chance of going except the way the cards fell.”⁹⁰ According to Duddridge, the BCATP prepared students well for the practical and technical side of flying in combat but reality was not what he had imagined “because [he] didn’t know enough about what lay ahead to be able to make sense of plans or decisions” in training.⁹¹ WO Lake, on the other hand, does not believe his training adequately prepared him for life as an air gunner. He believes that had he gone through bomber command his training would have been more intensive and complete.⁹²

Life after the military varied for my interviewees. F/Lt. Duddridge returned to Hanley and waited for his Welsh war bride to join him a year later, but his military flying days were not over. He remained a member of the RCAF Reserves and was offered the chance to train NATO aircrews during the Korean War,⁹³ flying for sixty-eight years without any accidents.⁹⁴ Re-joining the air force meant more training for Duddridge as technology had advanced into the jet age, but the same basic principles of flight taught in the BCATP still applied.⁹⁵ WO Lake remains affected by his ‘should-haves’ from the war, specifically loud noises which he attributes to Handley Page Halifax engines revving up above his tent when a plane almost undershot a landing.⁹⁶ Capt. Berger-North remained in active service until grounded for hearing loss, retiring from the RCAF in 1985.⁹⁷

Many of the fellow aircrew my interviewees met while training became “lifelong friends.”⁹⁸ Berger-North maintains close friendships with people from his original RAF training in Canada (both British and Norwegian trainees) as well as many people he trained and served

⁹⁰ Interview with Lewis Duddridge.

⁹¹ Interview with Lewis Duddridge.

⁹² Interview with Peter Lake.

⁹³ Lew Duddridge, *The Flying Duddridges of Hanley* (Bloomington: Trafford Publishing, 2011), 209-211.

⁹⁴ Interview with Lewis Duddridge.

⁹⁵ Interview with Lewis Duddridge.

⁹⁶ Interview with Peter Lake.

⁹⁷ Interview with David Berger-North.

⁹⁸ Interview with Lewis Duddridge.

with when part of the RCAF.⁹⁹ Aircrew are “a very tight-knit group”¹⁰⁰ and all the interviewees remain connected through aircrew associations and veterans organizations. The Second World War veterans are in their mid-nineties now and Capt. Berger-North is approaching seventy-eight. Recording the oral testimonies of aircrew and veterans in general such as these is important and timely. While most maintain vivid memories of their time in the military, there are inherent problems with relying solely on oral histories because of bias or memory loss. F/Lt. Duddridge told me “I would have done a way better job five years ago because just in the last three or four years my mind has started slipping. It makes me mad.”¹⁰¹ Nonetheless, the stories recounted to me as part of the Veteran’s Oral History Project are valuable additions to the understanding of Canada’s military history, whether they contradict the literature or bolster their arguments. While this paper focused solely on training, the stories told by F/Lt. Duddridge, WO Lake and Capt. Berger-North provided me with a better understanding of both training and combat than I had from just reading academic sources. It is my view that I received a more complete view of history by combining both the literature and the oral testimonies.

⁹⁹ Interview with David Berger-North.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with David Berger-North.

¹⁰¹ Interview with Lewis Duddridge.

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