



A word from our President

The mandate of the Montreal Aviation Museum is to raise the public's appreciation of the contribution made by Canadians in the field of aviation with particular emphasis on Quebec.

Today we are doing just that, paying tribute to Squadron Leader Malcolm Loucks, a Westmounter whose four years overseas contribution to the war effort during WWII earned him the MBE (Member of the British Empire, Military Division).

When individuals are honoured by aviation museums, it is not reserved for only the "fly boys" who receive a lot of the attention and glory. Many more brave men and women played pivotal roles that were essential to the war effort.

Included in every sortie was a team of dedicated servicemen and officers who developed the strategy and execution on a nightly basis to maximize the effort and delivery of the mission. Their commitment and dedication to the war effort seldom receives the recognition they so richly deserve.

Today we honour one such man. Squadron Leader Loucks was the Senior Flying Control Officer at RAF Linton-on-Ouse in Yorkshire, responsible for orchestrating the marshalling and departure of the Lancaster bombers of 426 (Thunderbird) Squadron on their nightly missions, then being there to manage the return of often battle damaged aircraft, while dealing with the weather, the early morning fog (RAF Linton-on-Ouse was not equipped with the F.I.D.O fog dispersal system), the crashes, and the diversions. This was a very stressful assignment, which required great judgment and rapid decision making. There was also the tallying of the returning bombers and the agony of counting those who were not to return, day after day.

We thank Ronald C. Loucks, son of Squadron Leader Loucks, for his commissioning of a magnificent Lancaster diorama built by our "We Build Heritage" team, and the portrait of his Father. The diorama will be incorporated into our Lancaster display and the portrait, alongside that of Flying Officer Peter Holt, a 19 year old Montrealer who did not return from his first mission as a Lancaster pilot, will proudly grace our walls.

Our Museum places the highest priority on capturing the story of those who fought for our freedom in WWII. Those who remain are in their nineties now and are a precious but diminishing breed. On this, the 10th Anniversary of his passing, we gratefully accept Ron's gift memorial in honor of not only his father, Squadron Leader Malcolm Loucks but all those both in the air, at sea, and on the ground who fought so bravely for Canada and our freedom.

John Lawson
President, Montreal Aviation Museum

"Squadron Leader Loucks, OW-L bombing up, Sir!"



Avro Lancaster Mk.II 'OW-L' Helen Back, RAF Linton-on-Ouse, August 17, 1943

Lancaster Mk.II historical background

Of the RAF bombers involved in operations over Germany during the Second World War, the Avro Lancaster must rank as the most famous of them all. Although Merlin engines were the more usual power plant for the Lancaster, not all were produced using them. Due to the demands put on Rolls Royce by the production of Spitfires and Mosquitoes (at the time, trade-off: one Lancaster, two Mosquitoes, or four Spitfires?), there loomed a potential shortage of the vital Merlins and the Mk.II variant was equipped with Bristol Hercules radial engines instead. One prototype and 300 production aircrafts were built at the Armstrong-Whitworth plant; the first production Mk.II was completed in September 1942.

Faster to 18,000ft, these radial engines were also able to soak up more damage than the normally fitted Merlins. However, the service ceiling was lower and with the perceived shortage over by 1944, the Mk.II was phased out of service at the start on 1945. A worthy alternative to the normal variants, the Mk.II proved to be popular with its crews and a capable and more resilient version of the excellent bomber.

Birth of 426 Squadron

No. 426 (Thunderbird) Squadron was formed at Dishforth, Yorkshire, on 15th October 1942 in No. 4 Group. Early in January 1943, it joined No. 6 (RCAF) Group. In June 1943, 426 Squadron moved to Linton-on-Ouse. The bombers of 426 Squadron flew 261 operational missions with the loss of 88 aircraft.



The thunderbird is a mythical bird, the sight of which is supposed to cause havoc and death to those who perceive it. It was the name given by some Indians to the first airplanes they saw. The thunderbird signified disaster to those on the ground

who incurred its displeasure.



'From the mighty river we strike'

RAF Linton-on-Ouse

circa 1943



The station, constructed in 1936 as part of the RAF Expansion Scheme, opened in May 1937

In 1943, at the time of Squadron Leader Malcolm Loucks's arrival, RAF Linton-on-Ouse boasted

- a triangle of runways, which enabled take-off and landing from six different directions
- a perimeter track, which provided taxiways
- 36 “pan” dispersals which enabled aircraft to be parked, serviced, armed and re-fuelled away from the airfield buildings
- a technical and administrative site, which incorporated five “Type C5” hangars, workshops, stores, offices and instructional facilities
- a domestic site, which provided accommodation and facilities for up to 2406 male and 406 female personnel (272 Officers, 2540 Other Ranks)
- a bomb store

The Class A standard heavy bomber "frying pan" type dispersal was 150ft, although they did vary, initially being 125ft diameter. From practical experience of Bomber Command airfields, 150ft was common, although construction and final design varied slightly from contractor to contractor.



Teeside has a few still remaining pans; some are covered over in asphalt, but this one shows the original blocks

The personal domains of Squadron Leader Loucks



The air traffic control tower, RCAF Station Linton, ca. 1944 (DND)



Squadron Leader Loucks, Senior Flying Control Officer, and Sergeant Helen King checking crew lists, fall 1944 (RAF Linton Collection)



The Viscount Alexander of Tunis



426 Thunderbirds



MBE, lower rank military ribbon; Defense Medal, lower rank war ribbon; Canadian Volunteer Service Medal; War Medal

Recollections from Ron

"My father was the Senior Flying Control Officer of 426 (Thunderbird) Squadron, No. 62 "Beaver" Base at Linton-on-Ouse. He earned the handle "Dogbark", as his bellowing but reassuring voice could be heard from the upper deck of his control tower by all returning mission-weary aircrews who sometimes (more often than not) incurred his legendary yet comforting wrath".

(please refer to "Darky from Dogbark" photograph in the following section)



Unidentified Lancaster Mk.II on its dispersal "frying pan", RAF Linton-on-Ouse;
please note this is a staged photograph, as there is no service equipment in the photograph,
and the four propellers are perfectly lined up, a virtual impossibility in real life

"It was only after my mother passed away that my father ever talked to me about his wartime service. I imagine, because like so many other returning servicemen, he had to park the horrors of war behind him in order to return to a normal civilian life. Spending more than 44 months overseas, away from his bride with the only form of communication being highly redacted letters that sometimes took a month or more to be delivered, meant re-starting their marriage and relationship with no looking back on the time spent apart".

My Dad's wartime experience did however intertwine itself into our young family's life through some simple phrases that he used. For example, if my brother or I tumbled whether from a bicycle, a tree or waterskiing at our family cottage on Memphremagog, my Dad's expression was: watch out or you'll "Go For a Burton". I related a "Burton" with an accidental fall. It was only in my 30's that my Dad

explained that if a bomber and crew did not return to base, rather than talk about their fate in definitive terms, their coping mechanism was to say “They went for a Burton”. Burton was the name of a well-known British ale, therefore the empty seats in the mess hall were only so because the airmen “Went for a Burton”.

On a few occasions, my Dad was asked to accompany the flight crews on a sortie, a part of what we call today “Continuing Education Credits”. The return home over enemy territory after the payload had been dropped was a long trip. Although the bay was fully discharged, the crew sometimes dropped empty beer bottles from the aircraft because, although they were relatively innocuous, the whistling sound they made as they fell was very close to the noise of the original payload, a form of “double whammy”.



RAF Station Linton-on-Ouse (Google Earth photo 2010)

Excerpts from "Thunderbirds at War: Diary of a Bomber Squadron"

By Laurence Motiuk, Larmot Associates, 1995



*"Darky from Dogbark,"
RCAF Station Linton
control tower staff,
summer 1944
(RAF Linton
Collection)*



On 26 April, as well as conducting its other business, the Officers' Mess elected Squadron Leader M.D. Loucks, the Senior Flying Control Officer, to the influential position of President of the Mess Committee. On the entertainment scene, the weekly station dance featured music by the Station Orchestra.



"Gulliver and Lilliputians;" ground crew readying Thunderbird Lancaster, spring 1944 (DND, PL28591)



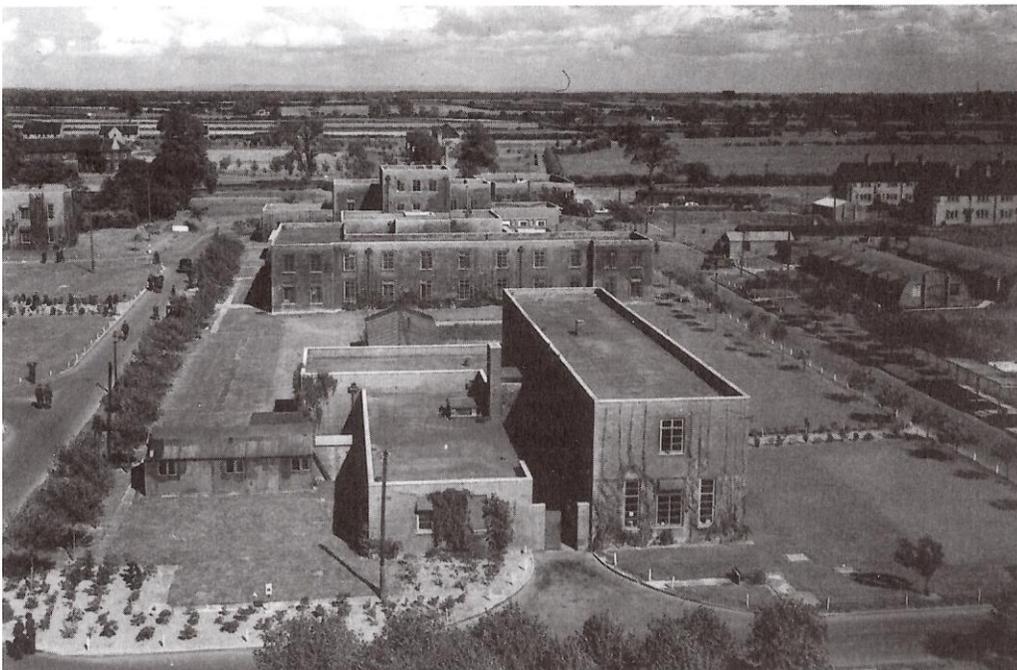
*Lancaster II over England, flying on one engine with three propellers feathered, spring 1944
(Swetman Collection)*

Wing Commander Black, the Squadron Commander, was out on the airfield watching the take-offs; his first reaction on hearing of the crashes was that the German intruders of the previous night were back, picking off the bombers as they emerged from the cloud. Therefore, when Squadron Leader M. Loucks called the Squadron Commander on the field telephone to ask whether the take-offs should be stopped, Black's response was to get the aircraft into the air as soon as possible — lined up as they were, waiting to leave, the Halifaxes of both squadrons were sitting ducks. So the departures continued, and the Thunderbird detail was augmented with Pilot Officer R.A. Reith and his crew in the spare aircraft.



Departure on ops, spring 1944 (Coulombe Collection)

On 9 March, both Linton squadrons were alerted for a raid on Hagen; when preparations were well under way, the effort was scrubbed. Signals Section set up a special VHF installation in No 3 Hangar to train pilots to use the new VHF sets being installed in the Halifaxes. On 10 March, No 426 Squadron laid on an extensive flying training program with nine aircraft, and Flight Lieutenant J.R. Barr and Flight Lieutenant G.S. McMonnies and their crews reported in. At the Officers' Mess meeting that day, Squadron Leader M. Loucks was elected President of the Mess Committee and, in the evening, 200 people attended an informal dance at the YMCA lounge.



Administration buildings and barracks, RCAF Station Linton, ca. 1944 (DND)



During the thirty-one months that No 426 Squadron functioned as a bomber squadron, it launched 3,240 sorties on 268 missions. It completed 2,870 bombing and mining sorties, including ten sorties in which the aircraft crashed on return to base. The task was abandoned on 270 sorties, of which 110 were aborted on the instructions from the Master Bomber or the Operations Centre. Twenty sorties were devoted to sea searches. Seventy sorties were never completed because the aircraft failed to return from operations. Twenty Wellingtons, thirty-three Lancasters and thirty-eight Halifaxes — ninety-one aircraft in all — were lost to enemy action, crashes and accidents.

Between November 1942 and April 1945, the Thunderbirds sustained 579 aircrew casualties (Appendix E). This total includes 426 who died (419 killed, three prisoners of war who died in captivity, two evaders who were executed and two who died of injuries); 104 who were captured; twenty-three who were shot down and evaded capture; eighteen who were injured; seven who were interned in Sweden; and two who were rescued after their aircraft ditched, one of whom was later taken prisoner and is also included in that total.

One hundred and ninety-one members of the squadron received 198 decorations while serving with the unit. These decorations included two Distinguished Service Orders, two Bars to the Distinguished Flying Cross, 131 Distinguished Flying Crosses, one Conspicuous Gallantry Medal, twenty-five Distinguished Flying Medals, three British Empire Medals and twenty-two Mentions in Despatches. In addition, seven squadron members received the Belgian Croix de Guerre with Palm posthumously; three received the French Croix de Guerre with Silver Star; one the American Distinguished Flying Cross; and one the Norwegian Commemorative Medal.



The NAAFI tea van serving ground crews, including Tiny Fraser (leaning on the van) and Earl Forbes (wearing toque), fall 1944 (McGinnis Collection)

October 04, 2015

Ron: "What brand of cigarette is he smoking?"
June: "Should he really be smoking there at all?"



Photograph: Lt Col. (ret) John Lawson

Guest pianist: Elitsa Dimitrova

Our guest pianist was Elitsa Dimitrova. A resident of Lachine and a member of the Information Technology team of John Abbott College, Elitsa started playing classical piano at the age of four in her native Bulgaria when her first music teacher discovered Elitsa was born with a perfect pitch ear ("a curse sometimes"). She graduated from the National School of the Arts "Dobri Hristov" in Varna and went on to university in the capital of Bulgaria - Sofia. She completed her second year of studies at the National Academy of Music "Pancho Vladigerov" in Sofia and then immigrated to Canada. She started composing her own music in 2009 and has been doing so ever since. During the Celebration of S/L Loucks, she performed a medley of some of her compositions and piano music from the classical repertoire.

