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WINDSOCK

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"An itch to know more"

How Mark Cote tracked down the story of his dad's wartime service

Over and over, the parents of young Mark Cote instructed him not to go into their bedroom. So, of course, he did.

What he found was a cardboard box of air force memorabilia: certificates, an air gunner's operational wings, log-book and some medals.

Of the medals, Mark's father, Len Cote, modestly said, "Oh, everybody got those!"

Mark thought about this, but didn't ask many questions. Within only a few years, his father was dead. He was only 45.

Still, this ignited in Mark "an itch to know more" about his father's RCAF service.

Raised in the Lampman area of southeast Saskatchewan, Len joined the RCAF in 1941 and went through manning depot in Brandon. Like so many young airmen, he wanted to be a pilot, and was posted to 1 Initial Training School (ITS) in Toronto. He went through part of its course, then was held back and went through a second



Mark Cote

time, with Mark speculating he had academic challenges, but enough potential for supervisors to put him through it.

The academics were tough; he remustered to air gunner and was posted to 9 Bombing & Gunnery School at Mont Joli, Quebec. Fine with him as this meant he got to shoot it out with the enemy!

Next, he was posted to war-

LEN COTE continued on Page 3

President's message

I want to congratulate chapter member Will Chabun for winning the CAHS's C. Don Long award for best article in the *Journal*, for his recent two-part article on the evolution of M&C Aviation into Saskatchewan Government Airways and then into Norcanair. Thanks also to member Mark Cote for his fantastic presentations to our chapter and our national convention. At the convention we learned that his book *That Lucky Old Son* is nominated for an award.

The convention by the way was great; the Calgary committee organizing it did an excellent job and delivered everything you could hope for over 3 1/2 days.

Our next chapter meeting is on June 14, when Roger Beebe speaks on the history of the air maintenance engineer profession in Canada. Join us for supper and a chat at the Eagles Club before his presentation.

**Blue skies,
Gary Williams**

NEXT MEETING

Thursday, July 14
Speaker: Roger Beebe
on the history of air
maintenance engineers
(AMEs)

Main Hall, Eagles Club,
1600 Halifax St.
Supper at 6 p.m.
Meeting at 7:0 p.m.

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■ The future of pilot training at 15 Wing Moose Jaw found its way into the Saskatchewan legislature in early May.

What set it off was an April report on the website of CFRY Radio in Portage-la-Prairie, a city that — like Moose Jaw — is home to a base for contracted military flying training. The article quoted Portage MP Candice Bergen as saying, "there has been word in the past year the DND (Department of National Defence) is going to be looking at ways to make the training more competitive, more efficient. In doing that, they are looking at different solutions. I know I have been working very closely with the folks at Southport just to ensure that when DND makes its decision that they give Southport a fair and transparent opportunity to bid for this work."

The article said an air force directive called the Future Aircrew Training Initiative, or FACT, indicated "one of the solutions being considered would be going to a NFTC program at Moose Jaw has been extended to 2024 and might be extended to 2026 so the Portage and Moose Jaw contracts end at the same time.

Noting this, Saskatchewan NDP MLA Vicki Mowat asked if the government is "engaged on this file."

Trade minister Jeremy Harrison replied this is a federal matter, but noted Moose Jaw's long tradition of training military pilots and added "we're hopeful that'll continue."

He also said he'd spoken with a senior executives for CAE (the new owner of NATO Flying Training in Canada) that same week about "an exciting announcement that they (CAE) had made with regard to an application for a joint venture to continue training pilots here in Saskatchewan. We've put on the record our support for that, and whatever engagement that would be."

Prodding by the opposition got the government to add it was sufficiently concerned to write federal cabinet minister Ralph Goodale two years

LEN COTE continued from Page 1

time Britain, getting more training as a tail gunner at 20 Operational Training Unit (OTU) at Lossiemouth, then 1663 Heavy Conversion Unit. Like a majority of RCAF aircrew members overseas, he served with an RAF unit — specifically 158 Squadron at Lissett.

Mark knew the basics of this unit's history as the squadron's veterans' association had commissioned a unit's history, *In Brave Company*. Len's widow bought copies for Mark and his siblings.

Midwar, 158 Squadron operated the Mark III version of the Handley-Page Halifax, which was overshadowed by the Avro Lancaster. Mark, who has seen several Halifaxes in museums and even squeezed inside the one at the Yorkshire Air Museum, said, "To me -- and I'm biased -- there's no nicer heavy bomber than the Halifax!"

With his first crew, Len logged about a dozen bombing operations before the pilot, Barrington Marshall, was injured in an off-duty accident (apparently falling off a bicycle with beer bottles in his pockets!

While he was recovering, his original crew, including Len, was dispersed.

So Len became "a spare bod", the air force equivalent of a "free agent", assigned as needed to other aircraft and crews. By the time he joined Doug Robinson's crew, he'd flown with five other pilots.

On one "op", he spotted a German single-engine fighter behind his Halifax. Opening fire at long range, he fired until his guns jammed. But the German fighter had broken off. They were safe.

On the night of Jan. 29, 1944, the Halifax bomber carrying him and his crew was badly damaged by flak. Robinson got it out of Germany and over the Netherlands, then ordered the crew to bail out. One

account holds that one parachute had been shredded by the flak; Robinson, to his credit, declined to bail out and opted to hold the bomber steady while the others exited. In the dark, Robinson then made a wheels-up landing — one so smooth that the aircraft (serial number HX333, NP-J) was basically undamaged save for bent props and flak damage.

Mark is a *Star Trek* aficionado and some years ago was in a

web group on this subject. Another member was a Dutch woman named Jacqueline Cote — no relation, but helpful indeed.

When Mark said he was looking for a Dutch-language book by historian Albert Jansen that contained the stories of 200 Allied aircraft downed over the Netherlands during the Second World War, Jacqueline not only found it in a library, but translated into English the relevant section about Len's aircraft.

Through this, Mark got the names of the other crew members and even bits of information about their postwar work. For example, pilot Robinson became a bank manager in Britain. Robinson, in particular, was delighted to hear from Mark as he'd heard that Len had taken ill and been repatriated — then lost contact. Robinson's mem-

oir called *Life Is a Great Adventure*.

In time, Mark — as was the privilege of children of wartime squadron members — joined the 158 Squadron association and met many more veterans.

The Halifax's navigator, for example, was a high-spirited Calgarian named David Rosenthal, who during the war joked, with the gallows humour of young airmen, that (being Jewish) he'd "become soap" if shot down and captured. Instead, he lived well into his 90s.



LEN COTE continued on Page 6

From the Files

“Quiet startles Regina airman in 2,000-foot parachute jump

Source: Regina Leader-Post, Wednesday, September 14, 1932

R.J. Groome, pilot instructor of the Regina Flying Club, showed the way to his pupils in a new departure at the airport Tuesday evening when he jumped from a height of 2,000 feet with a parachute and made as graceful the landing at a nearby field as his most anxious watchers wished him.

Ted Holmes, one part-time student of Groome's, piloted the Regina club Moth plane from which the jump was made.

Prepares for jump

Below, a tiny group of watchers, including Mrs. Groome and the wives of several other pilots, watched as Groome, a tiny donut, crouched against the side of the plane, prepared to drop off.

A *Leader-Post* reporter watched him from another plane.

The jump was made almost at sunset.

The sky held a blue haze. Half-lying, half-sitting crosswise in the front cockpit, Groome could be seen gradually maneuvering his feet onto the plane's wing.

Then he stood up, poised for the flash of a second, and Holmes pulled the plane slightly off to the opposite side.

Groome leaped. In a moment, his chute billowed wide and he was drift-

ing serenely down. There was little wind.

Chute collapses

He touched ground in a stubble field west of the airport, stumbled once and stood up again, leaning backward until the chute collapsed.

The whole thing took only a few moments from the time he left the plane.

“The big thrill comes just as you leave the ship. Then, gosh, it seems quiet!” That was R.J.'s pronouncement.

“He didn't seem a bit worried. He just yelled ‘I'm



ABOVE: Local aviators (left to right) Roland Groome, Roger “Cap” Delhaye, and student Ted Holmes, all in 1928 as the Regina Flying Club was being created. (Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan) RIGHT: Regina Flying Club Gipsy Moths in 1932. (Via the late Ray Crone)



PARACHUTE JUMP *continued from Page 4*

OK' and was off", declared Holmes.

Following Groome's jump, George McDougal, a member of the flying club, took his turn and made a leap from a height of 1,800 feet.

The jump was a successful one and McDougal landed easily in a stubble field just west of the airport boundaries.

More jumping will likely be done Wednesday evening providing weather conditions, particularly wind, are favorable.

Pilot's impressions

Here's how Mr. Groome described his sensations: "While the pilot slows down the engine, you get out on the slip of the wing, hanging on carefully to struts and wires.

"You get your feet all set, your left hand in the ripcord ring, and gaze down on 2,000 feet of unsubstantial-looking air.

"The plane having reached the point where you must push off, the pilot puts on a little skid to the opposite side, which pushes of the tail out of the way.

"You're all set to go.

The Big Drop

"A moment's hesitation — and you let go.

"You let go your grip on the side of the plane and the rush of air takes you off the machine. "That is the real thrill of the whole jump, leaving the machine. After that, things happen fast.

"As you fall, you instinctively pull your hands for-

ward, bringing with them the ripcord handle. "There is a moment or two of confused sensations, a display of whirling earth and sky, and you feel that you're being shaken up in a big bag.

Sudden quiet

"Then, suddenly, all is quiet, a quiet that seems supernatural. There is no word, no racket. To one used to flying, it is an eerie sensation to be up there with no wings, no engine, no wind rushing past, no apparent movement.

"You look up and your glance lingers as you admire the flower-like canopy over your head from which you are suspended by gossamer threads.

"You look down again and start to wonder where and how you will alight.

"The chute swings a little and you pull the risers to check the swing.

"You realize that you are getting close to the ground, but it is very difficult to make up your mind just how far away you are.

"There are no lines of perspective to judge from. You wonder how hard you will hit, and you get all set for a healthy bump. Suddenly, the ground seems to rise more rapidly.

"You touch, stumble and roll as the chute falls to one side and pulls you toward it.

"You scramble to your feet and pull on the 'risers' to collapse the chute.

"It is all over and you have a great feeling of confidence and affection for the chute which brought you down safely."

Gipsy Moth aircraft and members of the Regina Flying Club in front of their first home on the site of today's STARS hangar at the Regina airport.



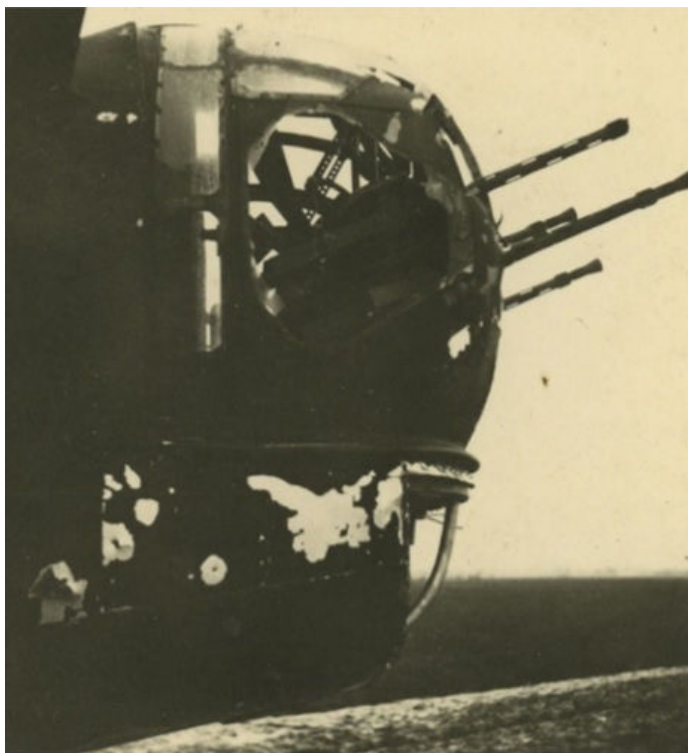
LEN COTE continued from Page 3

Amazingly, Mark's research on the web even turned up a series of photos taken by German forces of the downed Halifax on the ground near the town of Zardeweer. There was some of the badly damaged rear turret that had been occupied by his father. "How he survived, this I have no idea. But survive he did."

After all those years, this was "an absolutely amazing find," Mark said. "Almost other-worldly."

Speaking of the web, Mark has placed plenty of his research material on the web at <http://www.thatluckyoldson.ca>

How Len Cote was repatriated remains unclear. Near as Mark can determine, once the medical determination in favour of repatriation was made in October 1944, he was handed over to Allied personnel in Switzerland, then entered France (by early 1945 mostly in Allied hands) and sailed from Mar-



Found on the web, this remarkable photo shows the rear turret occupied by Mark Cote's father on the night of Jan. 29, 1944, when his Halifax was forced down in the Netherlands. The crew was captured. Mark figures the photo was taken by a German military photographer, preserved, discovered after the war and put onto the web. (Via Mark Cote)



The crest of Len Cote's wartime 158 Squadron features the interwoven links of a chain — the perfect metaphor, says author Mark Cote, for a unit with members from Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.

seilles. Cote family folklore holds that one of Len's relatives saw his image in a newsreel being shown in a Regina theatre — and happily yelled "Hey, I know him!"

After he'd returned to Canada, the RCAF asked Len (who'd no sooner landed in Montreal than he was mugged and robbed!) to brief the families of RCAF PoWs about conditions in the camps.

Incidentally, Douglas Robinson, a good friend to both Len Cote and his son, enthusiastically agreed to proofread Mark's book before he died last November. "At least I know that he read the entire thing before he passed on." said Mark.

- By Will Chabun

AVGAS continued from Page 2

ago to express its support for keeping 15 Wing active.

And that big announcement? We found the website of CAE Defence and Security and found that CAE and KF Aerospace (successor to Kelowna Flightcraft) Pilot Training Program "have aligned to form SkyAlyne Canada Inc., a 50/50 joint venture that will focus on developing and delivering world-class military pilot and aircrew training in Canada."

So what does KF Aerospace do? It's the contractor training pilots at Portage on the Grob G120A (for primary and basic training), the C-90B King Air for advanced multi-engine training and the Bell 206 Jet Ranger and Bell 412 CF Outlaw to support advanced rotary wing training.

Thus, the SkyAlyne partnership "focuses on building synergies between the two programs and ensuring the RCAF has access to world-class training to meet current and future needs."

Got all that? Two competing training groups, and now they're joining forces. Stay tuned.

■ At the Regina airport, word arrived in early May that Air Transat is halting service to Regina and Saskatoon. Airport CEO James Bogusz noted that the airline is assessing routes and airport while updating its fleet of aircraft.

"Any air service lost is not ideal. But at the same time, they have to make corporate decisions that work for them and with a fleet change it's not uncommon that airlines will reconsider their operations in some of the smaller cities," he said, adding it's possible Transat will return once its fleet needs are sorted out.

■ West Wind Aviation is back in the air after a licence suspension in the wake of a Dec. 17 forced landing that left a passenger fatally injured.

■ Here's a reminder of the Highway for Heroes event at 15 Wing Moose Jaw on July 15. It's being organized by the 15 Wing Fellowship, which promises music, cars and an air display by the Snowbirds. Tickets? \$15 for adults/teens, \$5 for children 6 to 12.

■ The MilAvia website, says the Snowbirds will perform over the Prairie Thunder music festival at Craven on the same weekend.

■ Meanwhile, Minot AFB is scheduled to hold a Northern Neighbors Day Air Show on August 4, 2018, featuring the U.S. Air Force Thunderbirds.

AVGAS Continued on page 8

Canadian Aviation Moments

QUESTION: What was a routine pastime for the cadets at Camp Borden of the Imperial Royal Flying Corps training plan in Canada during the First World War?

ANSWER: "Chasing trains became a routine pastime for the cadets at Borden.

"One routine was particularly annoying to the passengers and crews of the CPR train running from Toronto to Barrie. The pilot would wait for the train along a section of the line between Baxter and the tiny hamlet of Ivy.

"When the train appeared, the flyer would swoop down from the rear bumping his wheels on the tops of the passenger cars and then, as he came to the coal tender, gunning the plane up and over the steam engine.

"To prevent the train crew from seeing the aircraft's identification numbers, the pilot would drop down in front of the steam engine, until reaching a point where the telegraph poles were spaced wide enough to allow the reckless airman to swing off the tracks and out of sight."

SOURCE: *Dancing In The Sky*, Pages 156-157

QUESTION: What was the comparative number of heavy bombers available, and the "bomb lift", over the months of December 1942, 1943, 1944?

ANSWER: "In 1943, Bomber Command's overall size and ordnance-lifting capability — made possible by a new preponderance of heavy bombers, especially the Lancaster — enabled the Command to carry out widespread industrial area attacks envisaged in 1940.

"The growth rate in both the numbers of bombers available and their carrying capacity was phenomenal.

"In December 1942, there were 262 heavy bombers available over the month; by December 1943, the figure was 776, and a year later the average was 1,381.

"The bomb lift of the force rose even faster: In December 1942, it was a mere 667 tons; a year later 2,930 tons; by the winter of 1944 an average of more than 6,300 tons."

SOURCE: *No Prouder Place*, Page 115

QUESTION: How many personnel graduated from the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (BCATP) and how many lives were lost during the training?

MOMENTS continued on Page 8

MOMENTS continued from Page 7

ANSWER: “In all, the BCATP graduated 131,553 aircrew from the 159,340 who commenced training;

- ◆ 49,808 pilots,
- ◆ 29,963 navigators/observers,
- ◆ 15,673 air bombers,
- ◆ 18,496 wireless operator/air gunners,
- ◆ 14,996 air gunners,
- ◆ 1,913 flight engineers, and
- ◆ 704 naval air gunners.

“The training cost the lives of more than nine hundred students, instructors, and ground staff.”

SOURCE: *Wings For Victory*, Page 346

- compiled by Dennis Casper

AVGAS continued from Page 7

Created in 1953, the USAF Thunderbirds are the third-oldest formal flying aerobatic team in the world. Based out of Nellis AFB, Nevada, the team tours the U.S. performing solo flying and aerobatic formation in specially marked F-16 Fighting Falcons.

The Thunderbirds will be featured with support from many other aerial performances, including attractions on the ground.

As well, Minot Air Force Base will also celebrate the 50-year partnership between the Bomb Wing and Missile Wing and co-location at Minot AFB.

■ Finally, we have heard a rumour that 15 Wing Moose Jaw will host a two-day airshow in the summer of 2019. Details as they become available.

■ - compiled by Will Chabun

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