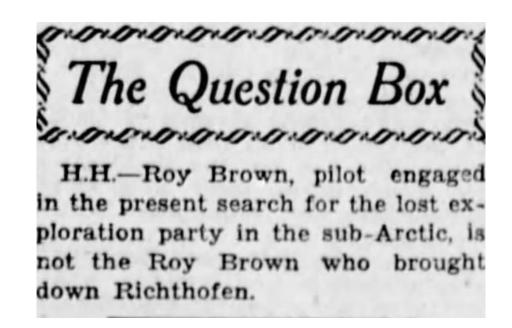
# Mannifrank Brown: A Remarkable Life and Career

Commercial Pilot, R.C.A.F. Instructor (B.C.A.T.P.) and Wing Commander (2<sup>nd</sup> Tactical Air Force)

#### A Famous Surname

- The name "Brown" is well-known in Canadian aviation history.
- This is due largely to what has been described elsewhere as "The Curious Tale of Two Roy Browns" -Arthur Roy Brown of Carleton Place, Ontario, famous for having played a role in the downing of Manfred von Richthofen, and Francis Roy Brown from Stockton, Manitoba, legendary bush and test pilot, as well as member of the Canadian Aviation Hall of Fame.
- Even in the 1920s, the two were often confused.
- However, there is a third Brown with a family connection to this story who deserves to be part of this conversation – F. Roy Brown's younger brother Mannifrank Brown (1908-1959).



#### A Unique Given Name

- Mannifrank Brown was born August 27, 1908, in Winnipeg. His father, Thomas Atkinson Brown, was a streetcar conductor. His mother's maiden name is given as Rachael Rubena Rose. The family residence was at 287 Rosedale Avenue, Winnipeg.
- According to a Certificate of Birth registered April 26, 1918, the boy was given the name "Mannie Frank Brown." At what point Mannie Frank became Mannifrank is unclear.
- It is worth noting as well that "Mannifrank" itself was subject to several different spellings. Whereas a RCAF Certificate of Service in April 1945 identifies him as Mannifrank Brown, his Certificate of Death issued in March 1959 gives the name **Manifrank Brown**.
- A "Notice to Creditors" concerning his estate by the Matlin & Company law firm on behalf on the Executor gave his name as Manniefrank Brown. On other occasions, he is identified as Frank Brown, M. Frank Brown or Frank M. Brown.
- Mannifrank Brown's story comprises two parts an outstanding commercial career followed by distinguished service with the R.C.A.F. during World War II.

Part I
Commercial
Pilot



#### Interest in Aviation

- According to Mannifrank's recollection, it was his older brother who triggered an interest in aviation.
- Roy had flown into Winnipeg from Cranberry Portage. There was an empty seat on the return trip and Mannifrank took it. When they landed back at Cranberry Portage, he remarked: "Now I know what I want to do."
- A graduate of Kelvin High School, Mannifrank Brown started training at the Edmonton and Northern Alberta Aero Club.
- This was Canada's first licenced aviation club which began operations in August 1927.
- "Wop" May was the club's founding president and instructor. In the spring of 1929, he was succeeded as chief instructor by Maurice "Moss" Burbridge.
- Brown's name appears in press clippings about the Edmonton and Northern Alberta Aero Club as early as 1928.
- The name "Frank Brown, Winnipeg" is also on a partial list of ab initio pilots who trained at the club published in 1933.
- This was to mark the club having been in operation for five years.

partial list of ab initio R.F.C. officers who took training at the local club: Alex. Clark. Arthur Rankin, Wm. Rankin, C. C. Agar, W. Thompson, Thompson, Art. Emery, Miss Walker. Chauvin, Miss McLean, R. P. Owen, Reg. Dunn, F. Jacobs, Fort katchewan; Dick Major, Fort katchewan; Capt. S. A. Yorke, Jack lewis, Jack Ross, Enoch Loveseth, D. Thom. Lew Parmenter, Howard Blatchford, Otto J. Thibert, Harry White, Bert McCaw, C. Gordon, Alfred Want, Miss Lilian Chapman, Frank Brown, Winnipeg;

## 9 EDMONTON MEN, PILOTS

Howard Ingram Lauds
Quality of Fliers in
This City

#### Aero Club Planes Visit Red Deer

# Passing Examination By Howard Ingram

- In August 1929, Frank Brown was one nine club students tested by Howard K. Ingram, inspector of civil aviation who arrived from Ottawa. The aspiring pilots were required to complete a flying test and written exams.
- Ingram reported that all nine passed and expressed admiration for the quality of pilots in Edmonton.
- Brown's name subsequently appeared in several newspaper stories about Edmonton and Northern Alberta Flying Club activities.
- An example is from May 26, 1931, four club Moths participated in first anniversary celebrations of the Red Deer airport.
- Two of the planes few back to Edmonton that evening. However, Maurice Burbridge, Frank Brown and McKay Sutherland remained overnight with the other two planes to give passenger rides the next day.

Goodwill Air Tour of Province Starts From Stevenson Field Today

Enthusiastic Welcome Given Goodwill Airmen At Portage la Prairie

Goodwill Air Tour Back On Schedule at Brandon GOODWILL AIR TOURISTS HOP FROM VIRDEN

# Goodwill Air Tour of Western Manitoba

- In July 1931, the Young Men's Section of the Winnipeg Board of Trade sponsored an aviation goodwill tour of Manitoba.
- Taking off from Stevenson Field, eleven airplanes would visit nine towns.
- The purpose of the event was to build public awareness: "Its object is to demonstrate to cities and towns of Manitoba the progress of aviation and show them the benefits which will follow the establishment of airfields throughout Manitoba."
- One of the participant planes was an Avro Avian coowned by Frank Brown and Douglas Lindsay of Winnipeg. Brown was the pilot with Lindsay passenger.
- Flying exhibitions were given at each stop with Frank Brown cited on several occasions as one of the pilots who put on an impressive display.
- The tour concluded at Stevenson Field on July 10, 1931, and was considered a great success.
- Participant flyers were honoured at a banquet given by the aviation board of the Manitoba Board of Trade on July 20, 1931.

# MANITOBA MEN LOSE PLANE IN GROUND BLAZE Barnstorming Trip Ended When Machine Goes Up In Flames

#### Loss of the Avian

- Frank Brown and Doug Lindsay used their Avian to "barnstorm" as commercial pilots and take passengers on "joy rides."
- The airplane was registered G-CANO. Although Lindsay was reported at the time to be a co-owner, contemporary records state the Avian was owned by **R. F. Stephenson and M. Brown** of Winnipeg.
- R. F. Stephenson was a Winnipeg flier who had also been involved in the recently completed Goodwill Air Tour.
- However, on August 20, 1931, the Avian was destroyed by fire in Yorkton, Saskatchewan. Brown and Lindsay were there as part of a tour of western towns.
- Before arriving in Yorkton, they had spent about 10 days in the Dauphin area.
- The fire broke out shortly after midnight at the local flying field. The Yorkton fire brigade attended but was unable to save the airplane.
- Authorities believed that gasoline thieves were responsible as the top of the plane's fuel tank was missing.

#### Ship Is Being Returned Pilot Frank Brown Taking Aeroplane to Swift Current

# TWO AEROPLANES TO HEAD NORTH \*Airportation Limited Has Local Flier as Operations Manager

#### Trip to Northern Alberta for a Curtiss Robin

- On January 4, 1933, Frank Brown (reported in one source as "Browne") took off from Fort McMurray in a Curtiss Robin airplane previously operated by Airportation Limited of Calgary.
- Airportation was formed in April 1932 by Calgary pilot and businessman Harold Turner with two Curtiss Robins. The company was said to be backed by financial interests in Calgary and eastern Canada.
- Turner's plan was to offer exploration, survey and transportation services between Edmonton, Fort McMurray, Great Bear Lake and other northern points.
- However, Harold Turner's sudden death in October 1932 meant the end of Airportation.
- According to one version of the story, Frank Brown was returning the Robin to its original owners – Webster Air Service at Swift Current, Saskatchewan.
- However, Brown's flight turned into an adventure when he was forced down about 90 miles south of Fort McMurray by a broken oil line.

#### Receiving and Giving Assistance

- Brown landed near a trapper's cabin he had spotted from the air. Trapper Charles
   Lindman with his dog team took Brown to the nearest telegraph office at Pelican Rapids
   to wire Fort McMurray for assistance.
- In response, Pilot **Henry "Harry" Hayter** of Independent Airways flew from McMurray with parts. He and Brown repaired the Robin on site.
- Brown continued his flight to Edmonton, landing there on January 9<sup>th</sup> but with a passenger – trapper John Pederson from Pelican Rapids.
- Weakened by an acute case of appendicitis, Pederson was attempting to snowshoe out for help. Fortunately, Brown and Lindman came across Pederson on a trail near Pelican Rapids.
- Interviewed by the Edmonton press, Brown was identified as "a youthful Winnipeg aviator" and brother "of the well-known flier, Captain Roy Brown, superintendent of the western division of Canadian Airways Limited."
- Brown clarified that he had come north to fly the Airportation plane back to Winnipeg. He did not plan to fly next spring in the Great Bear Lake district: "This was my first flight in the country north of here. I have my own aeroplane in Winnipeg and next spring I will have more than enough to keep me busy with flights into the new goldfields 350 miles north of Winnipeg. They are moving tons of freight and passengers up there next season and there will probably be more aeroplanes needed there than in Great Bear Lake."
- Brown departed Edmonton for Winnipeg via Swift Current on the morning of January 10, 1933.

# Flier Reaches City;; Delayed Almost Week Frank Browne Spent Several Days A: Pelican



#### MOTOR FAILURE AND STORM ARE CRASH CAUSES

One Plane Wrecked on Golf Course; Other at Lac du Bonnet; Pilot Seriously Hurt

# Two Fliers Injured In 'Peg Crackup

# Crash on the Norwood Golf Course

- On the morning of February 25, 1933, a Curtiss Robin piloted by Frank Brown crashed shortly after take-off from Winnipeg's Brandon Avenue river-base. Also aboard was passenger Frank Whitaker.
- It is believed that this is the former Airportation machine that Brown had recently flown to Winnipeg from Fort McMurray.
- The plane's engine failed at an altitude of about 100 feet. Brown made a crash landing on the nearby Norwood Golf Course during which the plane was wrecked.
- He sustained a broken leg, head and facial lacerations, as well as possible internal
  injuries, and was taken to St. Boniface Hospital. Except for being badly shaken and
  minor bruising, Whitaker was uninjured.
- The plane was departing for Gypsumville where Brown had been engaged to freight fish
  on behalf of a local distributor. The story added that he had been "flying for several
  years and has had much experience in winter operations."
- This was one of two crashes that day the other occurring at Lac du Bonnet involving pilot Marlowe Kennedy and mechanic M. W. McLeod of Canadian Airways who escaped with minor injuries.
- After release from hospital, Brown went to Lac du Bonnet to recuperate at the residence of older brother Roy. While there, he met his future wife Edythe Millicent Waters of Lac du Bonnet.

#### Flight to Edmonton

- Recovering from injuries, Frank Brown was soon back in the air.
- According to a May 26, 1933, story in the Edmonton Bulletin, "Frank Brown, former member of the Edmonton and Northern
  Alberta Aero Club, and now a resident of Winnipeg," had landed
  in the city "piloting a Winnipeg Flying Club cabin machine of
  French make, similar to a Puss Moth."
- Brown's passenger was businessman Walter Ostman of Winnipeg.
   The two had made an overnight stop in Provost, Alberta.
- The plane described was likely a **Desoutter** closed-cabin monoplane acquired by the Winnipeg Flying Club in 1930.

# Former City Pilot Flies Cabin 'Plane Here From 'Peg

#### Air Record

Edmonton—Pilot W. Leigh Brintnell, Mackenzie Air Service, landed at 6:15 Thursday from New York with new Fokker. Pilot Frank Brown, Winnipeg Flying club, arrived from Winnipeg at 7:15 a.m., Friday, with Walter Ostman as passenger.

# Starratt Airways and Transportation (S.A.T.)

- In spring 1934, Mannifrank Brown joined the pilot staff of **Starratt Airways and Transportation (S.A.T.)** based at Hudson, Ontario.
- As indicated by the name, owner **Robert "Bob" Starratt** founded a company offering integrated transportation services including airplane, tractor and boat.
- Starratt aimed to serve mining interests in northern Ontario, primarily the Patricia Lake district.
- In addition to Hudson, bases were located at Kenora, Red Lake and Sioux Lookout.
- Starratt's first airplane acquired in 1932 was a DH.60 Moth. The fleet would expand to include Fokkers, Stinson, Norseman, Travelair and Beechcraft equipment.
- According to the Lac du Bonnet Historical Society: "Virtually all of the mining equipment for the Red Lake and Pickle Lake gold zones was hauled from Hudson by plane, boat or tractor train."
- Frank Brown made a number of newsworthy flights on behalf of S.A.T.

#### MINING TRANSPORTATION

MR. MINE MANAGER:

We accept your freighting problems gladly as we are well equipped to give efficiency with the best mediums of Northern transportation, by Aircraft, Tractor and Boat.

#### Starratt Airways and Transportation

LIMITED '

HUDSON, ONT.

"Bob" has a wealth of experience in your kind of transportation problem and his co-ordinated service is your guarantee of satisfaction.

Bases at-HUDSON-KENORA- RED LAKE-SIOUX LOOKOUT

#### Starratt Airways Formed For Red Lake, Patricia

# TWO LIVES ARE SAVED BY CANADIAN PILOTS

# OWES HIS LIFE TO DARING FLIER Pilot Conquers Elements on Mercy Flight to Sioux Lookout

#### A Daring Mercy Flight

- In February 1935, Frank Brown was one of two Canadian pilots who made news across North America for courageous mercy flights.
- Undeterred by a blinding snowstorm, Brown took off from Hudson bound for Lac Seul in the Kenora district where 35-year-old Harry Eaton lay afflicted with a severe case of appendicitis.
- Brown flew Eaton back to Hudson, a round-trip of about 100 miles in the terrible weather.
- According to the story, "planes had been grounded around Sioux Lookout for two days by bad weather, but Brown ignored the conditions." It was said that Harry Eaton "owed his life to pilot Frank Brown of Hudson, Ont."
- In the other case, an unnamed pilot flew two Quebec-city surgeons 160
  miles to a small village on the north shore of the St. Lawrence River to
  operate on a patient with peritonitis.
- The pilot returned the doctors safely to Quebec City where they reported that the operation was a success.

# 50 Hours Stranded in Freezing Weather

- In March 1935, a Starratt Airways plane piloted by Frank Brown "ran into the worst storm that has been seen in these parts for many years and with a load of four passengers was forced to the ground 30 miles from the nearest settlement."
- The aircraft nosed over after landing, damaging the prop and rendering it inoperable. Brown and his passengers had to spend the next 50 hours dealing with sub-zero temperatures while awaiting rescue.
- As the plane's cargo included about 20 pounds of hard tack (dry bread or biscuit), food was not an issue, and the cold was dealt with by maintaining a fire. The situation was also mitigated by the fact that the passengers were a crew from a mine at Albany River and "thus somewhat used to the elements."
- Aware that Brown's flight was overdue, Starratt officials at Savant Lake sent out several search planes as soon as the storm abated and succeeded in locating the downed machine within a few hours.
- After rescue, "Pilot Brown stated that what they felt the worst was lack of sleep." For their part, his passengers (G. Dodds, H. Morrison, and two other unidentified men) "reported that the good humour of Pilot Brown kept them in good spirits and the experience was not nearly as harrowing as it might otherwise been."

#### Five Men Forced to Keep Moving For 50 Hours to Avoid Freezing

## STORMS FORCE DOWN 2 PLANES WITH 7 ABOARD

#### Flying the First Gold Shipment out of Pickle Lake

- On June 4, 1935, Frank Brown landed in Hudson with the first consignment of gold from Pickle Lake – five bars estimated to be worth \$103,000.
- With him as passengers were Jack Hammell,
   A. L. Smith and Ben Budgeon.
- The gold left Hudson via Canadian National Express and was said to be "the largest ever to leave this port."
- Jack Hammell was a name already wellknown in Canadian mining and aviation circles.
- He was instrumental in founding Northern Aerial Mineral Exploration (N.A.M.E) which pioneered use of airplanes in support of northern mining ventures.
- It was a N.A.M.E. prospecting party that discovered the Pickle Lake mine.

#### \$103,000 IN GOLD

#### Five Bricks Are First Consignment From Mine

#### Special to The Star

Hudson, June 5.—Pilot Brown of the Starratt Airways, arrived here from Pickle Lake last night with Jack Hammell, A. L. Smith and Ben Budgeon and the first consignment of gold from the Pickle Crow Gold Mines, five bricks amounting to approximately \$103,000. This clean-up is considerably above the amount expected.

This shipment, which went forward via Canadian National Express was the largest ever to leave this port.

#### Adding a Fairchild 82



- In December 1935, Starratt Airways added to its fleet Fairchild 82 CF-AXL.
- The plane landed at Ramsey Lake near Sudbury from Ottawa where it had received government certification. At the controls was Fairchild test-pilot Alex Schneider.
- This was a stop to install skis on the delivery flight from Montreal to Hudson where it was to be put into service flying passengers and freight to Red Lake and Pickle Crow.
- Frank Brown joined Alex Schneider, Starratt chief pilot A. H. Farrington and ground-freight supervisor **Bob Worden** for the flight from Ottawa to Hudson.
- CF-AXL served with Starratt until 1942 when it was sold to Ontario Central Airlines.
- As later reports confirmed, Frank Brown flew this airplane.

#### Starratt Planes Make Early Start

Three aeroplanes of Starratt Airways and Transportation Co. flew into Pickle Lake Thursday the first planes to land at the by Ken Smith.

mining settlement since break-up of ice this spring. One ton of mail Norduyn Norseman. from Hudson and Sioux Lookout, Ethan Crann, and a Fokker, piloted

#### More Mercy Flights

- On February 29, 1936, Frank Brown was in the news again for another mercy flight.
- On this occasion, a strong tailwind assisted him on a roundtrip of 120 miles to assist a sick Indigenous man at Hay Lake, Ontario.
- On March 25<sup>th</sup>, it was reported that miner E. Graham, struck by a case of appendicitis in a northern location, owed his life to Frank Brown of Starratt Airways.
- The "daring" Brown was undeterred by dense fog that grounded air-mail planes.
- To quote the story: "Graham was put in the plane at the Central Patricia Gold Mines. The Starratt Airways pilot was forced down for two hours on a little lake but, realizing the urgency of getting to hospital, took off again on his flight of mercy. He flew only 200 feet above the fog-shrouded trees and reached Sioux Lookout safely."

#### Wind Boosts Speed 70 M.P.H. Special to The Star Weekly

Sioux Lookout, Ont., Feb. 29.—A strong tail-wind sent Pilot Frank Brown of Starratt Airways through the air at a terrific pace on a recent mercy flight. Brown ventured through stormy weather which kept him dangerously low to the ground to rescue a sick Indian at Hay Lake. The return journey of 60 miles was made in 20 minutes, although the aeroplane's crusing speed is only 110 m.p.h.

#### OWES HIS LIFE TO DARING FLIER

Pilot Conquers Elements on Mercy Flight to Sioux Lookout

#### Nominated for the McKee Trophy





- Mannifrank Brown was a candidate for the 1936 McKee Trophy recognizing outstanding achievement in Canadian aviation.
- According to one account, he totaled 1,216 flying hours during the year, a record at that time for the number of hours flown by a Canadian bush pilot in one year.
- In results of the voting announced in March 1937, Brown was runner-up to Matt Berry of Canadian Airways in the Mackenzie district.

### Marriage to Edythe Millicent Waters

- On April 24, 1937, Mannifrank Brown and Edythe Millicent Waters were married at St. John's Anglican Church in Lac du Bonnet "during the worst blizzard in the history of Manitoba for that time of year."
- For reasons not specified in the announcement, the couple left shortly after the wedding on a trip to Kentucky.
- Upon return, they took up residence in Hudson. As
  Edythe remembered: "Life in Northern Ontario was very
  interesting. I was often permitted to fly with Frank and
  thus saw much of the beauty of the north, some so
  breathtaking. I did not land at James Bay but saw the
  vastness of the water from the air. As I recall those 21/2 blissful years there is a nostalgia about bush pilots
  and bush flying."
- Photograph of Edythe courtesy Lac du Bonnet Historical Society.







Edythe and Frank Brown at Osnaburgh House, Ontario. Photograph courtesy of the Lac du Bonnet Historical Society.

# Travel 4,000 Miles To List Voters

Kenora Enumerator Used Airplane, Train, Taxi, Canoe And Trails in Riding.

#### **Enumeration Flight**

- In August 1937, Frank Brown and air-engineer Walter Davidson flew chief enumerating officer **George Carmichael** of Kenora and three other officials on an excursion to mining camps 200-300 miles north of town.
- The purpose was to compile voting lists for an upcoming Ontario provincial election.
- The party of six "lived on hard tack and slept in log cabins during the two nights and three days required for this trip." Stops were made at Berens River, Sachigo Lake, Favorable Lake, and Sandy Lake.
- At Favorable Lake, the travellers stayed overnight in an abandoned trapper's cabin "which was reached from where the 'plane landed by a canoe which they used to paddle across the lake."
- This was part of month-long, 4,000-mile enumeration campaign by George Carmichael which included travel by rail, airplane, taxi, canoe and on foot.

#### Beechcraft 18 CF-BGY

- In 1937, Starratt Airways acquired Beechcraft 18 CF-BGY which it equipped to operate on floats and skis. This was the first Beech 18 sold commercially in Canada.
- The acquisition led Starratt to move its Manitoba base to Lac du Bonnet. Passengers were transferred to and from Winnipeg by a company taxi.
- Mannifrank Brown also flew this airplane.
- A notable flight occurred in June 1938 when he co-piloted CF-BGY to return a nine-week-old baby girl to Red lake after successful surgery at Children's Hospital in Winnipeg. The girl's parents awaited her in Red Lake.
- This was the infant's second solo flight on CF-BGY. She was brought into Winnipeg for treatment aboard the plane two weeks earlier.
- As the story put it, on the flight home, the baby was flown to Red Lake "with only the pilot, H. L. Madden, and co-pilot, Frank Brown, as nurses."



#### 9-Weeks-Old Baby Takes Second Flight

# Qualifying for a Public Transport Licence and a New Career Opportunity



- Also in 1938, Frank Brown was one of 29 pilots who achieved their Public Transport Licence through the Winnipeg Flying Club.
- Other notables included Art Rankin, Art Schade and Michael de Blicquy.
- The report spoke of what had been a "good year" for the W.F.C.
- This despite a fire in March 1938 that destroyed five club airplanes and a hangar at Stevenson Field.
- In June 1939, Brown was interviewed by British Overseas Airways Corporation (B.O.A.C.). In August, he received an offer to join their staff.
- However, the outbreak of World War II changed everything.



Part II R.C.A.F.

# Bush Fliers Signing Up Veterans of Airways in Far North Go to Camp Borden

Canada's Bush Flyers Learn Again With the Air Force

#### Call to Serve

- As part of the **British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (B.C.A.T.P.)**, the federal government requested bush pilots to join the R.C.A.F. at Camp Borden. Mannifrank Brown was among many who answered the call.
- According to his R.C.A.F. Certificate, Brown began service on October 3, 1939, receiving commission that day.
- Edythe Brown packed, rented the home in Hudson, and returned to live with her mother in Lac du Bonnet. The Brown's first child daughter Robin Lou Ann was born on December 27, 1939, and met her father five weeks later in Toronto.
- After completing an instructor course at Borden, Brown was posted to Uplands with the rank of Flight Commander. He was then part of a delegation from Ottawa that traveled across Canada opening Service Flight Training Schools (S.F.T.S.) as the B.C.A.T.P. swung into action.
- It is known that Mannifrank Brown assisted in the opening of S.F.T.S. in Brandon, Yorkton, Hagersville, Aylmer and St. Hubert.
- This meant that the Brown family moved often. Edythe recalled: "From February 1940 to June 1943 I
  moved 17 times across Canada with baby and paraphernalia." Her obituary in September 2008 refers
  to living "in several Canadian cities while Frank provided training for aspiring airmen from Canada
  and England as part of the RCAF."

# Service Flight Training School (S.F.T.S.) No. 13, St. Hubert, Quebec

- On September 20, 1941, the *Montreal Star* published a lengthy article profiling S.F.T.S. No. 13, St. Hubert, Quebec.
- The school had opened September 1<sup>st</sup> and was only one-third occupied. In charge was
  Wing Commander J. G. Kerr who had been one of the principals involved in laying the
  foundations for ten previous S.F.T.S., beginning with Uplands in Ottawa.
- Training was staggered over a 72-day period, one-third of the student pilots being graduated every 24 days. Trainees who had spent 48 days and 24 days at the school were then reinforced by the arrival of a new group.
- Although most were Canadians, there were also trainees from the United States, Australia, and New Zealand. The primary training aircraft was the North American Harvard, a single-engine monoplane being manufactured in Canada at this time.
- The newspaper expressed the view that "[t]here can be little question but what the St. Hubert S.F.T.S. is going to rank amongst the best of its class when it is finally in full operation." This was due not only to the competence and "quiet but sure confidence" of W/C Kerr, but "the splendid band of instructors" on staff.

# OPERATIONS START AT NO. 13 S.F.T.S.

R.C.A.F. Takes Over St.

Hubert Airport to Groom

Men for Air Combat

"School 13"
Gives Final
Instruction
Yanks, Aussies
Among Fliers
Enrolled

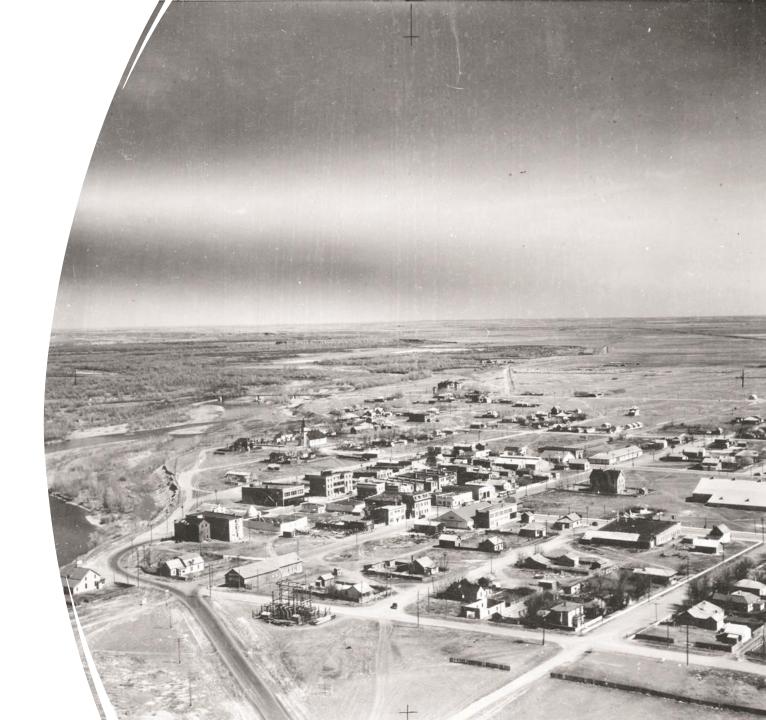
One of Canada's original "bush" pilots—right—now Sqd.-Ldr. M. Brown, O.C. No. 1 Squadron at the S.F.T.S. at St. Hubert. With him is Flt. Lt. Macklin.

# S.F.T.S. No. 13 Instructional Staff

- Chief instructor was Squadron-Leader Ralph Frederick Davenport who oversaw two
  training squadrons commanded by Flight-Lieutenant J. C. Mirabilli and SquadronLeader Mannifrank Brown, described as "one of the original 'bush pilots' with over a
  thousand hours of flying to his credit."
- Beyond this, "Brown reminds one of Drake or Raleigh, men who were not content to follow beaten trails, but had to chart new highways for mankind to follow and who were fearless in the execution of their ideas."
- The article describes the rigorous training provided students who would have come through an Elementary Flight Training School (E.F.T.S.) where they learned to fly "comparatively simple" biplanes such as the Fleet Finch or Tiger Moth and had about 50 hours flying time.
- At St. Hubert, they would be taught to fly "high-powered, high-speed airplanes containing all the controls they will find in their service aircraft they will fly overseas."
- In addition to his instructional duties, Mannifrank Brown was responsible for a flight of lower-ranking pilot instructors and their students.

#### S.F.T.S. No. 7 Fort Macleod

- Mannifrank Brown's last posting in Canada was to No. 7 S.F.T.S. Fort
  Macleod, Alberta, serving first as Squadron Leader, then Chief Flying
  Instructor, and finally Station Commander with the rank of Wing
  Commander.
- S.F.T.S. No. 7 was part of R.C.A.F. Training Command No. 4. The base began operation in December 1940 and functioned until November 1944. Typical of most B.C.A.T.P. flight schools, Fort MacLeod had six runways overlain in a triangular pattern.
- After World War II, it converted to No. 1 Repair Equipment and Maintenance Unit (REMU) responsible for storing and maintaining R.C.A..F aircraft.
- Today, the former S.F.T.S. site is the Fort MacLeod Airport.
- S.F.T.S. No. 7 aerial photograph taken in 1942 from an Avro Anson by B.C.A.T.P. trainee Eddie Frisk of St. Albert, Alberta. Supplied courtesy of the Fort Macleod Gazette.



#### **Assuming Command**

### New Commanding Officer of No.7 Station Started as "Bush" Flier



Veteran Bush Flier Heads Macleod School

- Mannifrank Brown was named base commander on January 12, 1943.
- Commenting on his appointment, the *Winnipeg Tribune* noted that Brown had accumulated 6,000 flying hours prior to joining the R.C.A..F and another 1,000 hours since.
- The Calgary Herald recalled Brown having flown the first shipment of gold out of Pickle Lake as well as many "mercy flights."
- The Lethbridge Herald described W/C Brown as "an important cog in the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan."



Wing Commander
Mannifrank Brown, C/O
S.F.T.S. No. 7, Fort Macleod.
Photograph courtesy of the
Lac du Bonnet Historical
Society.

# Presentation of Wings

# South Albertans Graduate At Colorful Wings Parade, No. 7 Station, Macleod

At No. 7. S.F.T.S., R.C.A.F., Canadian and Australian students will receive their wings from Wing Commander M. Brown, at 8 p.m., January 21.

- One of W/C Brown's most important ceremonial duties was the presentation of wings to pilot graduates.
- He presided over a number of these events where he addressed assembled audiences.
- The first took place on January 22, 1943.

#### Sgt. Brownell Gets Wings

Sgt. Kenneth Norman Brownell, son of FO. J. H. Brownell. at present with the RAF overseas, and Mrs. Brownell of Vancouver, formerly of Pointe du Bois, Man., received his wings at Macleod, Alta., on March 18. Presentation of the wings was made by Wing Commander M. Frank Brown. Mrs. Brownell and son, Roy, attended the ceremony.

#### Alberta Airmen Presented Wings At Macleod School

#### Macleod Graduation On February 18

Airmen from Canada, Great Britain, the United States, and Australia will graduate from No. 7 S.F.T.S., at Macleod, at 8 p.m., February 18.

Civilian friends and relatives will be permitted to witness presentation of wings by Wing Commander M. Brown, commanding officer of the school.

#### Hundreds Thrilled At Downtown Wings Parade Of No. 7 At Macleod

# Present Pennants To Macleod Flying School

Station Purchases Average \$90 Per Man

IBy Herald Correspondent!

MACLEOD, May 14—A notable event here Wednesday at the presentation of wings to Course 73 of No. 7 S.F.T.S. by Major G. Rider Davis was the presentation of three Victory Loan pennants to Wing Commander M. Brown, commanding officer of the station, by Dan Boyle, chairman of the local unit, in recognition of the contribution by the personnel of No. 7 to the local campaign.

The average of the school was \$90 with a total of \$85,000, and an expectation of reaching \$100,-000.

#### R.C.A.F. GROUP GIVES \$1,400,000

Books for Victory Loan Being Closed at No. 4 Command

With contributions exceeding \$1,400,000, No. 4 Training Command, R.C.A.F., is preparing to close its books in the Fourth Victory Loan. A few returns have still to come from units, including No. 7 S.F.T.S., Macleod, commanded by Wing Commander Frank Brown, which topped all others with its more than \$100,000 subscription.

#### Victory Loan Campaign

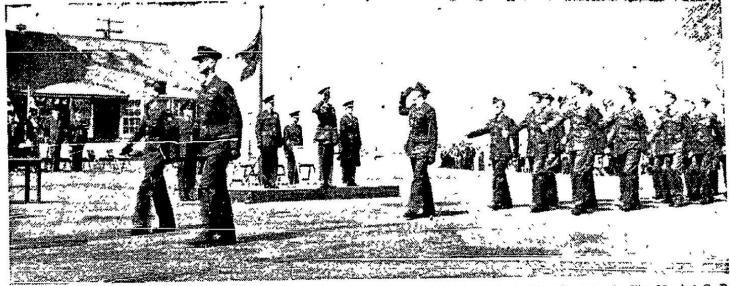
- During the Fourth Victory Loan campaign of 1942-1943,
   S.F.T.S. No. 7 was the highest contributor of all Alberta
   B.C.A.T.P. schools with a total of more than \$100,000.
- For this achievement, W/C Brown accepted three Victory Loan pennants as part of a wings parade through the streets of Fort Macleod in May 1943.
- This was the first time the presentation of wings took place off-base. A large crowd gathered to watch and applaud.
- Brown spoke and expressed pride that the personnel of S.F.T.S. No.7 had succeeded in raising such a large amount.

#### Vice Regal Visit

- In May 1943, Governor-General Earl of Athlone and Princess Alice made a tour of B.C.A.T.P. facilities in Alberta.
- This included a stop at Fort Macleod where they were met by base officials including Wing Commander Brown and wife Edythe.
- Together with the Vice-Regal couple and Air Vice-Marshal G. Howsam, Commanding Officer No. 4 Air Training Command, Brown took the salute of parading cadets.
- Brown was described as having been
   "in charge of the parade."

#### Earl Of Athlone Welcomed At Historic Macleod, Chats With Members Air Cadets

Princess Alice Opens No. 7 Hostess House



This picture is from the No. 7 S.F.T.S., Macleod, showing the March Past which featured the ceremonies connected with the viceregal visit Tuesday afternoon. His Excellency the Earl of Athlone is taking the salute and, as he stands facing the column of airmen,

Princess Alice is shown on his left, and Air Vice Marshal G. R. Howsam, M.C., on his right, while Wing Commander M. Brown, commanding officer of No. 7, stands to right of the Air Vice Marshal.

—R.C.A.F., photo; Lethbridge Herald Engraving.

#### Airmen of Allied Countries Meet Here



#### **Cadet Inspection And Presentation** Of Ensign At Blairmore Ceremony



ceremony before visiting Air Force Commander M.

is unfurled at Blairmore | Commander W. Bowman, Calgary (CENTRE), Major J. Dover, Calgary (RIGHT).

#### **Additional Duties**

- While in command at S.F.T.S. Fort Macleod, Mannifrank Brown's duties sometimes extended beyond the base.
- Records show that in February 1943, he was part of a Court Martial Panel against a student of No. 8 Bombing and Gunnery School, Lethbridge.
- Just ten miles east of Fort MacLeod was located another B.C.A.T.P. station at Pearce, Alberta, which functioned from March to August 1942 as No. 36 Elementary Flying Training School (E.F.T.S.). Between September 1942 and June 1943, the facility was used as R.C.A.F. No. 3 **Observer School.**
- The April 1943 daily log of No. 3 Observer School refers to a graduation parade for Course 66 navigators held at Macleod presided over by "Wing Commander Brown, commanding officer Number 7 Service Flying Training School" who presented wings and addressed the graduates.
- According to this account, the parade attracted about 300 visitors from Fort Macleod and neighbouring towns "and was unusual in that a class of pilots also graduated on the same occasion."
- That same month, W/C Brown took part in a meeting with American airmen who flew into No. 8 Bombing and Gunnery School, Lethbridge, in a Super Fortress bomber.
- In May 1943, Mannifrank Brown was part of a R.C.A.F. party that inspected No. 157 Turtle Mountain Air Cadet Squadron at Blairmore, Alberta. Brown commended the squadron for being "one of the best" he had seen and presented it with the Air Cadet ensign.

#### **Transfer Overseas**

- W/C Brown relinquished command of S.F.T.S. No. 7 on June 2, 1943, to Group Captain P. R. Hampton from No. 4 Air Training Command headquarters at Calgary.
- A newspaper notice provided no insight into Brown's new responsibilities, stating simply that he would "proceed overseas for a special course."
- On the evening of June 4<sup>th</sup>, a ceremonial dinner was given in his honour by the local Board of Trade and held in the aerodrome dining room. Mayor Davis of Fort Macleod expressed his thanks for the "splendid spirit of co-operation that had existed between the station under Wing Commander Brown and the town and stressed the fact that the school had given fine support to the Red Cross and Victory Loan campaign, No. 7 Station having attained the highest record of any in the Victory Loan campaign. The mayor wished the departing wing commander every success in his new sphere of work and God-speed."
- For his part, Mannifrank Brown offered his appreciation for "the pleasant associations and cooperation between the citizens and assured them that Mrs. Brown and himself would have kind and pleasant memories of their stay here." He was presented by the Mayor with a travel bag bearing his initials.
- Brown's Certificate of Service states that he was transferred overseas on June 29, 1943.
- By Edythe's account, he ferried a bomber from Montreal to Prestwick, Scotland. At this time, she and her daughter returned to Lac du Bonnet.

#### District Notes-Group Captain P. R. Hampton of No. 4 Air Training Command headquarters has taken command of No. 7 S.F.T.S. at Macleod, and Wing Commander M. Brown, commanding officer since January, will proceed overseas for a special course.

### R.C.A.F. No. 127 Wing







- R.C.A.F. No. 127 Wing was formed in July 1943, based at **R.A.F. Kenley**, near Kent, Surrey, England. W/C Mannifrank Brown was appointed Commanding Officer.
- No. 127 Wing comprised three Canadian Spitfire squadrons: 403, 416 and 421.
- Within No. 127 Wing, Johnson occupied the position of **Wing Commander Flying** or **Wingco Flying**. Officers in this role were highly-experienced fighter pilots who usually had served during the Battle of Britain, with most having achieved "ace" status.
- The structure was such that while overall administrative, logistical, and command responsibilities rested with W/C Mannifrank Brown, Johnson was responsible for the Wing's performance in the air the **Operational Commander**.
- At the same time, R.C.A.F. No. 126 Wing was established at nearby RAF Redhill, Surrey, led by Wing Commander James Elsmlie "Jimmy" Walker (DFC).
- Under the command of Group Captain William Ross "Bill" MacBrien, the two Wings constituted R.C.A..F Section No. 17, 2<sup>nd</sup> Tactical Air Force (2TAF), No. 83 Group.
- In charge of No. 83 Group was Air-Vice Marshal Harry Broadhurst who reported to 2TAF Officer in Command Air Marshal Sir Arthur Coningham.

Famous British ace "Johnnie" Johnson was the first R.C.A.F. No. 127 Wing Commander Flying (Wingco Flying).





# **Early Operations**

- Between March and August 1943, "Johnnie" Johnson led No. 127 Wing on more than 140 missions over Northwest Europe. Most of these were attacks against German ground targets and escort missions alongside Allied bombers. Mixed in were lower level "sweeps" in search of targets of opportunity including German truck convoys, staff cars, and trains.
- It was also hoped to entice the Luftwaffe into a war of attrition that would bear fruit come D-Day. However, airborne engagements were infrequent. Nonetheless, during this period No. 127 Wing still managed to achieve over 100 German aircraft destroyed.
- Several Canadians distinguished themselves in Johnson's eyes, among them No. 416 Squadron Leader Walter "Wally" Conrad, No. 421 Squadron Leader Robert Wendell "Buck" McNair, and No. 403 Squadron C/O Hugh Constant Godefroy (left), to whom Johnson entrusted leadership of the Wing when he took leave.
- No. 127 Wing's formative experience was captured in art. During July 1943, Canadian War Artist and Group of Seven member **Edwin Holgate** lived on-station at R.A.F. Kenley.
- While there, he created several sketch portraits and paintings depicting base facilities, operations, aircraft, and Wing personnel that are today part of the Canadian War Museum Collection.
- Holgate would later write to Hugh Godefroy that "my memories of Kenley are the warmest and most vivid of my experiences on any of the stations I visited."



"The Disperal Hut" (403 Squadron), R.C.A.F No. 127 Wing, R.A.F. Kenley, July 1943, by Edwin Holgate. Image courtesy of the Canadian War Museum, Beaverbrook Collection of War Art, CWM 19710261-3163.

### "Going Under Canvas"

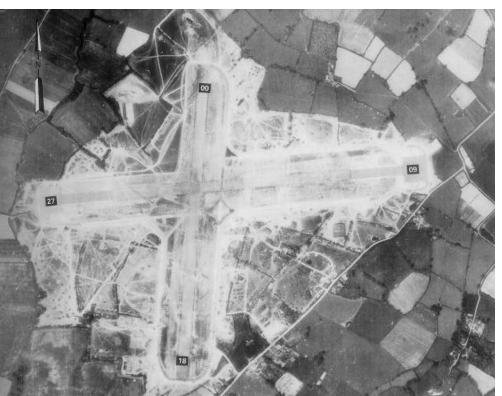
- After D-Day, the primary task for the Canadian Spitfires of 2TAF would be close air support of Allied ground forces in France. However, even with extra fuel tanks, the Spitfire had limited range and endurance.
- Thus, the plan was for Nos. 126 and 127 Wings to relocate from England to temporary bases in Normandy as soon as possible after the invasion. These airstrips were designated Advanced Landing Grounds (ALG).
- As ground forces advanced east out of the Normandy beachhead, the ALGs would move with them to maintain close support.
- During the summer and fall of 1943, Canadian Spitfire wings executed several practice moves in preparation for the mobility that would be required on the Continent.
- This entailed relocating to ALGs that had been built by Royal Engineers in south-east England. With runways of pre-fabricated mesh steel known as **Sommerfeld Tracking**, these airfields were designed for use by fighter aircraft (Spitfires and Hurricanes) or light bombers (Mosquitos) only.
- As the ALGs were temporary, no other infrastructure was built so that those working at the strips were expected to live in tents.
- Pilots and ground-crew referred to this as "going under canvas."

### IN BRITISH "BACKWOODS"

### Tactical Air Force Ready In Tent Town For "Big Push"

# Tactical Air Force Is Geared To Operate on Advanced Fields





# R.A.F. Lashenden/ Headcorn

- In early August 1943, No. 126 Wing moved from its relatively comfortable surroundings at Redhill to "rough-hewn facilities" at R.A.F. Staplehurst ALG, Kent.
- While at Staplehurst, a change of command took place. As W/C "Jimmy" Walker's tour had expired, Wing Commander Keith Hodson, a former commander of the "Canadian wing" at Kenley, was appointed C/O No. 126 Wing.
- Also in August, Mannifrank Brown's No. 127 Wing moved from Kenley to an ALG located at R.A.F. Lashenden, Kent (upper left). The strip was just inland from the Cliffs of Dover and had been carved out of an estate by the Royal Engineers' earth-moving contingents.
- As "Johnnie" Johnson recalled: "At Lashenden we lived under canvas. Our food was prepared in field kitchens and all our workshops and equipment were housed in specially built trucks so that we could break camp at short notice and move to another airfield."
- Due to the SMT runway at Lashenden requiring repairs, the Wing relocated to nearby R.A.F. Headcorn ALG (lower left) on August 20<sup>th</sup>.
- While at Headcorn, Section Commander G/C Bill MacBrien decided that "Johnnie" Johnson was overdue leave. Johnson was succeeded as No. 127 Wingco Flying by Hugh Godefroy.

### September 1943 – Mannifrank Brown Looks to the Future

- On September 23, 1943, the Winnipeg Tribune published a story about W/C Mannifrank Brown in command of an R.C.A.F. station "in the United Kingdom."
- Brown offered a forward-looking prediction for post-war development of commercial aviation: "I think the day of the bush pilot as a man who carried his eiderdown sleeping bag in his plane with him, ready to sleep out in the open or in some trapper's shack or at a trading post, will disappear in the stupendous aviation development which is foreseen for Canada, the Empire and other parts of the world."

# Former Bush Pilot Sees Vast Air Development

### By A. C. CUMMINGS

[From The Tribune London Bureau-Copyright by The Southam Co., Ltd.]

L ONDON, Sept. 23.—That the day of the bush pilot, famous in colorful stories and films, will probably be ended by the great civil aviation development of the postwar years, is the opinion of a former bush pilot, Wing Commander Mannifrank Brown, of Wipnipeg, who at 35 is officer commanding a Royal Canadian Air Force station in the United Kingdom. He is one of the group of bush pilots who were appointed as instructors to the Royal Canadian Air Force in the first months of the war.

For years before the war, Canada led the world in the amount of



WING CMDR. M. "FRANK" BROWN

In this newspaper photograph from September 12, 1943, W/C Mannifrank Brown (right) and Wingco Flying Hugh Godefroy (left) are shown the workings of a Sherman tank.



A GENERAL SHERMAN tank gets the once-over from Canadian fighter pilots. The tank officer is explaining it to Wing Commanders Hugh Godefroy, Toronto, left, and Mannifrank Brown, Winnipeg. Behind them are Flight-Lieuts. Robert Phillip, Toronto, and Leighton Exel, Royston, B.C.

# "Buzz" Beurling Joins No. 127 Wing (Briefly)

- In September 1943, Flying Officer George "Buzz" Beurling joined No. 403 Squadron. Beurling was Canada's most famous combat ace, having made a name for himself during the Malta campaign.
- While on leave in Canada recovering from injuries after having been shot down in October 1942, Beurling applied to the R.C.A.F. to return to combat.
- Due to his outstanding fighter pilot skills, "Johnnie" Johnson agreed to take on Beurling. He was made wing Gunnery Officer on the understanding that if he performed well in that position, he could lead his own squadron within a year.
- In mid-October 1943, No. 127 Wing moved from Headcorn back to comfortable quarters at Kenley.
- On "duff" weather days, Beurling took to performing aerobatics over the airfield in a Moth. He was
  cautioned against this by Wingco Flying Hugh Godefroy. However, the next day Beurling buzzed the
  aerodrome while W/C Mannifrank Brown was warning pilots against low flying.
- A November 13, 1943, dispatch to Ottawa by AVM W. A. Curtis explains: "Flight Lieutenant Beurling indulged in low flying and was rebuked by his C/O. The following day a lecture was being given by Wing Commander Brown to all pilots pointing out that low flying was a court martial offence. That 8 of those so dealt with were cashiered [dishonourably discharged], 1 sentenced to imprisonment and 7 to detention. During this lecture, two pilots were up flying Tiger Moths and Flight Lieutenant Beurling beat up the aerodrome and the dispersal huts"
- Hugh Godefroy proceeded to bounce Beurling from No. 127 Wing. He was moved to No. 126 Wing where he soon exhausted the patience of Wingco Flying "Buck" McNair.
- This was effectively the end of Beurling's operational career. He was posted back to Canada in April 1944 and resigned from the R.C.A.F. in June.
- Screenshot of "Buzz" Beurling from Wasp Wings (National Film Board of Canada, 1945).





# More Practice Moves and Glider Pilot/Tow-Pilot Training

- In February 1944, elements of No. 127 Wing made two more short-duration practice moves. The first was for gunnery training at **R.A.F. Hutton Cranswick**, **Yorkshire**, between February 23<sup>rd</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>. This was followed by a move to **Holmbush Forest, West Sussex**, and back to Kenley.
- Through February and March 1944, the pilots of Nos. 126 and 127 Wings underwent glider-pilot and glider-tow-pilot training.
- Invasion planners had proposed that in the event transport aircraft were not available, fighter squadrons could haul their ground crew, spare pilots, and other supplies to France using Spitfires to pull Hotspur gliders.
- To convert the Spitfire into a glider-tug, a specially designed hitch that attached
  to the tail-wheel to receive the tow-rope was developed. Although these
  exercises demonstrated that, in theory, the Spitfire Wings could be moved in this
  way, one day the gliders were gone and nothing more was heard of the plan.
- Photograph of the specially-designed hitch courtesy of Vintage Wings.
- Consideration was also given to the idea of basing the Wings on aircraft carriers in the English Channel should ALGs in France not become operational as quickly as required.
- Although some training was done using painted white lines on a runway to simulate arrestor cables, this plan was also quietly shelved.

## Dispatch From Kenley

- A special report from Kenley published in Canadian newspapers on March 14, 1944, noted that in command of the station was "Wing Commander Frank Brown whose parents Mr. and Mrs. T. A. Brown live at 287 Rosedale Avenue, Winnipeg."
- Recalling that one of W/C Brown's first jobs had been as a Free Press carrier, the
  writer notes how he had since "moved into wider circles of usefulness and his
  present job involves looking after every aspect of the lives of Canadian fighter
  squadrons which, when the cross-channel move takes place, will be so potent a
  factor in the essential air cover."
- During a luncheon, the reporter also met with **R.C.A.F. No. 143 Wing C/O Group Captain Paul Y. Davoud** in command of Typhoon squadrons (438, 439, 440) based at Kenley, and **"whose record as a bush pilot is as well-known as Frank Brown's."**
- From 1935-1938, Paul Davoud was a commercial pilot for James Richardson's Canadian Airways flying in western Canada and the north. In 1938, Davoud joined the Hudson's Bay Company in Winnipeg to establish an aerial service within the Fur Trade department.
- It was in Winnipeg that Davoud joined the R.C.A.F. in June 1940. One of his pilots, Flying Officer Lyle was recognized by the reporter as a familiar face from the reception desk at the Royal Alexandra Hotel.
- The article also advised readers on gifts they could send to help relieve boredom among Canadian aircrew. These included candy, pickles, poker chips, newspapers and magazines.

# BATTLING BOREDOM Gifts Canadians Welcome



### "Johnnie" Johnson Returns – The Creation of RCAF No. 144 Wing

- After a six-month break, "Johnnie" Johnson was ready to return to flying operations. On March 2, 1944, he was appointed Wing Commander Flying for the newly created R.C.A.F. No. 144 Wing comprised of Squadron Nos. 441, 442, 443.
- Under the command of W/C James "Jimmy" Walker, who had also returned from leave, No. 144 Wing was based at Digby, Lincolnshire (left).
- Training flights had begun on February 23<sup>rd</sup>, shortly after which the Wing moved south to Holmsley, Hampshire, to live and work "under canvas."
- According to one account: "Camp kits became the order of the day as the squadrons practiced mobility and slit trench digging for future use."
- As W/C Johnson later wrote, this was "an opportunity to rehearse the operational procedure for the move of a tactical wing," something Wing Nos. 126 and 127 had already done several times.

# R.A.F. Westhampnett (Tangmere)

- By April 1944, all three R.C.A.F. Spitfire Wings were located at R.A.F. Westhampnett, a satellite base to R.A.F. Tangmere, Chichester, West Sussex (right).
- No. 127 Wing aerial operations were now led by Wing Commander Flying Lloyd V. "Chad" Chadburn, a former C/O No. 402 "City of Winnipeg" Squadron, who succeeded W/C Hugh Godefroy just before the move to Tangmere.
- Godefroy was transferred to R.C.A.F. Overseas Headquarters as Advisor for Tactics and Flying Personnel to No. 83 Group Commander AVM Harry Broadhurst. As such, Godefroy would make many flights into Normandy after D-Day.
- Apart from stepped-up dive-bombing attacks against German rocket-launching sites, operations continued as before: sweeps against ground targets in France together with bomber escort missions into France and The Netherlands.
- On April 21<sup>st</sup>, Allied Supreme Commander General Dwight D. Eisenhower made a visit to Tangmere, accompanied by Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory, head of the Allied Expeditionary Air Force, and No. 83 Group Commander AVM Broadhurst.
- The next day, No. 144 Wing moved from Westhampnett to an ALG at Funtington, Chichester.
- However, on April 25 W/C Jimmy Walker was killed in a flying accident. He was replaced as C/O No. 144 Wing by Wing Commander Arthur Deane Nesbitt.
- Three weeks later, No. 144 Wing relocated to R.A.F. Ford near Littlehampton on the Sussex coast, a major staging ground for the invasion. It was from here that the Wing would conduct its operations once D-day began.
- Nos. 126 & 127 Wings would fly from Tangmere.





# Wasp Wings

- In 1945, the National Film Board of Canada released a documentary entitled *Wasp Wings*.
- This narrated film tells the story of R.C.A.F. Wing Nos. 126, 127 and 144.
- It covers the period from summer 1943 when the wings went "under canvas" in southern England, through D-Day, the building of ALGs, and later moves east supporting the Allied advance.
- Although primarily focused on No. 126 Wing, it is an outstanding account showing all aspects of mobile Spitfire wing operations.
- Many personnel mentioned in this presentation appear and are identified including Bill MacBrien, Keith Hodson, "Buck" McNair, "Buzz" Beurling, Lloyd Chadburn and Hugh Godefroy.
- Most importantly, although he is not identified, at about 19:00, W/C Mannifrank Brown is seen escorting a party of high-ranking officers inspecting personnel on parade at Tangmere in the spring of 1944.
- Screenshot from early moments of *Wasp Wings* (National Film Board of Canada, 1945).



Screenshots of W/C Mannifrank Brown (left) from *Wasp Wings* (National Film Board of Canada, 1945)

## Nos. 126 & 127 Wings Begin the Move to Normandy

- Early on the morning of June 7, 1944, W/C Mannifrank Brown led an advance party of No. 127 Wing as part of an Allied convoy across the English Channel to Normandy. A No. 126 Wing advance party led by W/C Keith Hodson was in the same convoy.
- This was a massive undertaking involving the transfer of hundreds of vehicles, other equipment, advance ground crew and nearly 1,000 personnel. Prior to sailing, the two R.C.A.F. wings had marshalled near Druxford, Hampshire.
- The Spitfire pilots and their planes would follow once the Normandy bases were secured and serviceable. In the meantime, they flew sorties from England.
- During crossing, the convoy was attacked by German E-boats with torpedoes. Several
  vessels were lost including a No. 127 Wing landing craft carrying advance ground crew
  and communications equipment.
- Upon landing, the No. 126 Wing group headed to **Ste. Croix-sur-Mer** where the graders and bulldozers of the Royal Engineers 24<sup>th</sup> **Airfield Construction Group** had already broken ground on an ALG designated **B-3**.
- A newsreel film entitled Making Airfield After D-Day Landings available through British
  Pathé shows how B-3 was built and contains excellent footage of W/C Hodson, pilots,
  ground-crew and aircraft.
- After completing B-3, Hodson's team moved to ALG B-4 near Beny-sur-Mer. Construction
  of this field by the Royal Engineers 25<sup>th</sup> ACS began on June 10<sup>th</sup>, and it was operational by
  June 13<sup>th</sup>.
- Led by W/C Brown, the No. 127 Wing advance party made its way to supervise the construction of ALG B-2 between the villages of Crepon, Bazenville and Villiers-le-sec.



Graders of the Royal Engineers in the early stages of building an ALG in Normandy. Screenshot from Making Airfield After D-Day Landings (British Pathé).



### ALG B-2 Bazenville/Crepon



- When W/C Brown and his party arrived at B-2, the British Royal Engineers 16<sup>th</sup> Airfield
   Construction Group was already at work on the airstrip, having begun just after
   midnight on D-Day.
- The first task was to backfill a large portion of one end of the field to make it level after which a 1700 x 40m (5000' x 120') **Steel Mesh Track (SMT)** runway oriented 07/25 was built.
- A Wing headquarters caravan as well as trucks and tents of R.A.F. Servicing Commandos
  were located northwest of the airstrip. Due north was a maintenance area while fuel
  and ammunition dumps were located to the south.
- Communications, intelligence, operations, medical and flying control caravans were located in the centre of the field just north of the runway.
- Aircraft dispersal was positioned all around the field with slit trenches dug nearby and at other strategic locations deep enough to stand in while offering protection against attack.
- In an adjacent orchard to the south-east, rows of tents served as housing for air and ground crew and was where the men took cover as best possible in sleeping bags for the night.
- B-2 very shortly had VIP visitors when on July 8<sup>th</sup> British Air Minister Sir Archibald Sinclair, accompanied by Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir Charles Portal, arrived to thank Canadian fighter pilots for their outstanding service.
- In the RCAF dispatch it is noted that one of the airmen with whom Sinclair chatted "was W/C Frank Brown, of Winnipeg, the airfield commander."

# ALGs Become Operational

- The first ALG to enter service was B-3 on June 10, 1944, when "Johnnie" Johnson's R.C.A.F No. 144 Wing landed to refuel and rearm ("R&R") during a sortie over Normandy.
- Located only 4 miles from the Normandy beaches and just 5 miles from the front line, B-2 would have been the first functional ALG on June 9<sup>th</sup>, but a B-24 Liberator crash-landed at the field that morning and ripped up a significant amount of SMT runway.
- Nonetheless, Hugh Godefroy and AVM Broadhurst flew Spitfires into B-2 that same day where they met Wing Commander Brown. As Godefroy recounts in his memoirs, "[t]he Canadian Air Field Commander, 'Father' Brown was there to welcome us."
- B-2 became operational on June 11<sup>th</sup>. According to the recollections of a R.A.F. Servicing Commando, the first aircraft to land was an Avro Anson bringing medical supplies for the Army.
- No. 127 Wing Spitfires were serviced at the ALG for the first time that same day.
- Between June 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>, No. 83 Group Spitfire mixed patrols over Normandy were operated by three squadrons with pilots making use of B-2 as a "R&R" strip before returning to Tangmere at night.





# The Loss of W/C Lloyd Chadburn

- Weather conditions during these early days were generally poor with low cloud and reduced visibility.
- This undoubtedly contributed to the first tragedy to strike No. 127 Wing after D-Day.
- On June 13, 1944, Wing Commander Flying Lloyd Chadburn was killed in a mid-air collision with a Spitfire flown by **Flight-Lieutenant Frank J. Clark, No. 421 Squadron** who also died.
- Robert "Buck" Buckham, a native of British Columbia who had most recently been C/O No. 403 Squadron, was appointed new Wingco Flying.
- In 2006, Frank Clark's younger brother, David W. Clark, published a book based on correspondence Frank had written to his best friend.
- Entitled *Joe's Letters*, the books offers great insight into the operations of R.C.A.F. mobile Spitfire wings.
- It also contains several references to W/C Mannifrank Brown as base commander at B-2.
- Screenshot of Lloyd Chadburn from Wasp Wings (National Film Board of Canada, 1945)

### "Bush to Beachhead"

- Although the name and location of the airstrip was not disclosed, the "official opening" of B-2 was the subject of a June 14<sup>th</sup> dispatch by a Canadian Press reporter who noted that the field was "commanded by Wing Cmdr. Frank Brown, of Winnipeg and Hudson, Ont., one of Canada's well-known pre-war 'bush pilots'."
- As a flight of Spitfires departed, W/C Brown was quoted: "But even with squadrons here all the time traffic couldn't be much heavier than it has been so far this morning ... We've had five squadrons down in the last three hours"
- The next day, No. 127 Wing relocated its operations from Tangmere to B-2.
  Ground crew who had remained at Tangmere to perform maintenance
  made the trip either in Dakota transport planes escorted by Spitfires or by
  sea with trucks and equipment.
- With the wing stationed in France, "the days in Normandy were long with non-stop 'right now' activity." Each squadron typically operated a dozen planes departing in rotation on ground support missions during the day.
- Added to this would be arrivals of other Allied aircraft landing to "R&R" or due to combat damage.
- During the later part of June, R.A.F. Hawker Typhoons were also briefly based at B-2.

### Bush To Beachhead

### Former North Country Flier Commands Normandy Airstrip

WITH THE R.C.A.F. IN FRANCE, June 14.—(CP Cable).—Another chapter in the bright history of the R.C.A.F. was begun today when somewhere in Normandy a second airstrip opened officially as a base. It is commanded by Wing Cmdr. Frank Brown, of Winnipeg and Hudson, Ont., one of Canada's well-known pre-war "bush pilots."





A No. 127
Wing Spitfire
taxis past
French
farmers at B2, June
1944.

Ground crew work on a Spitfire of No. 403 Squadron at B-2, June 1944.



No. 127 Wing Flying Control Officers during the early days at B-2.



# Other Comings and Goings

- However, this was not yet the full extent of activity at B-2.
- Supply flights, including specially configured Hawker Hurricanes of R.A.F. No. 1697 Air Dispatch Delivery Squadron carrying mail to and from the UK, arrived and departed B-2 daily.
- One of the most important functions of the base was as transit point for sending wounded Allied soldiers by air to England.
- These flights were operated by specially marked and outfitted Dakota transport aircraft of R.A.F. No. 46 Group Transport Command whose crews included W.A.A.F. orderlies.
- According to their accounts, the Dakotas were loaded with ammunition and other supplies on the way over – stretchers on the way back.
- The first five Dakotas landed at B-2 on June 13<sup>th</sup> and aboard were the first W.A.A.F. orderlies to arrive in France on air-ambulance duties.
- B-2 would remain the centre for air ambulance evacuations until ALG B-14 located at Amblie became operational on August 7<sup>th</sup>.





# The First W.A.A.F. Orderlies to Arrive in France

On June 13, 1944, the first W.A.A.F.
 Orderlies to arrive in France landed
 at B-2 aboard a No. 46 Group
 Transport Command Dakota. Left to
 right: Leading Aircraftwoman Myra
 Roberts, Corporal Lydia Alford,
 Leading Aircraftwoman Edna
 Birbeck.

### "Somewhere in Normandy"

- Another Canadian Press report on June 23, 1944, was accompanied by a photograph of W/C Mannifrank Brown at B-2.
- He was described as a "well-known bush pilot before the war" now commanding the second airbase to be opened "somewhere in Normandy."
- A copy of this photograph is in the Tangmere
   Military Aviation Museum collection.

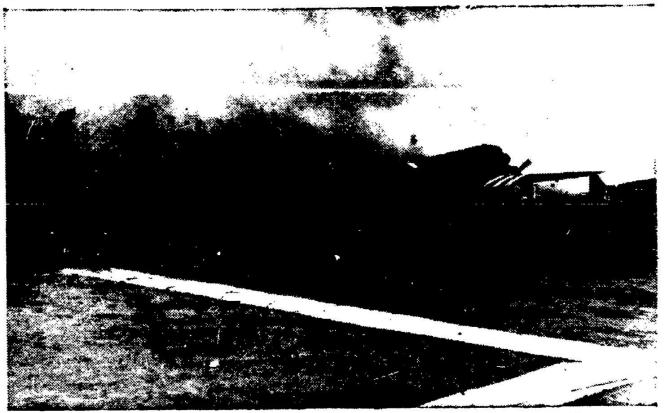


IN NORMANDY: Well-known bush-pilot before the war, W/C Frank Brown, of Winnipeg and Hudson, Ont., commands the second air strip opened officially as a base somewhere in Normandy.—(R.C.A.F. Photo.)



A copy of the original photograph courtesy of the Tangmere Military Aviation Museum.

Another example of press reporting from June 1944 identifying W/C M. Brown of Winnipeg in command of a Normandy air base



R.C.A.F. IN FRANCE: Servicing ground personnel for the first Canadian fighter unit to move into an airstrip in France were flown in by Dakota aircraft of the Transport Command, manned by mixed Royal Canadian. Air Force and R.A.F. crews. Spitfires escorted the flight from England, across the channel to an airstrip in Normandy from which R.C.A.F. fighter squadrons have been operating since June 10. This fully operational unit is under the command of Wing Commander M. Brown of Winnipeg. The fighter squadrons are the Wolf squadron, the City of Oshawa squadron and the Red Indian squadron. A giant Dakota of the Transport Command carrying ground personnel to man the new Canadian airfields in France churns up the dust on a hastily constructed landing strip, somewhere in Normandy. The dust is worse than the desert, dangerous for flying and choking to the lungs.

-Photo by FO. Cecil Southward, R.C.A.F. Public Relations Photographer in France.

## "Dirty Darts" and "The Days of Ack-Ack"



- When No. 127 Wing relocated operations to B-2, the situation on the ground in Normandy remained precarious. More than a week after D-Day, the planned Allied breakout from the beachhead which had foreseen taking the regional centre of Caen within 48 hours had not materialized. Among newly arrived R.C.A.F. personnel, "tension was great for fear of a military reverse, although the army always appeared confident."
- As W/C Brown noted, there were occasional daylight attacks by German fighters "dirty darts" as he called them. The daily journal of a R.A.F. Servicing Commando records a "hedge-hopping" attack against B-2 by three Focke-Wulf 190s on June 16<sup>th</sup>.
- On June 20<sup>th</sup>, Servicing Commando records report a late-afternoon strafing attack by six FW-190s and the crash near the strip of a Junkers Ju-88 shot down while still carrying its bombload which resulted in huge explosion. Over the next two weeks, several more low-level attacks involving FW-190s and Messerschmitt Me-109s were noted.
- While daylight attacks were sporadic, the Luftwaffe regularly attacked the area after dark.
   One of these was experienced by Hugh Godefroy when he flew into B-2 on the evening of June 17<sup>th</sup>. Godefroy recounted how he and W/C Brown sheltered in slit trenches wearing their tin hats.
- These intrusions were met by intense Allied anti-aircraft fire both from ground positions including **Bofors light AA guns** operated by R.A.F. regiment members on base and ships offshore which, in addition to being extremely loud, posed a real risk of falling shrapnel.
- Stories in the Wing newsletter referred to these early days at B-2 as "the days of ack-ack," and recorded instances of personnel being struck by falling pieces of "flak." As was noted, tent canvas provided little protection. Fortunately, though, injuries were minor.



### "Normandy Dust Bowl"

- As W/C Brown later stated, the "biggest difficulty was combatting dust. The turnings of thousands of aircraft propellers changed it into a desert."
- This problem arose from the fact that construction of ALGs necessitated the clearing of crops and all other forms of ground cover leaving nothing but bare earth.
- The dust kicked up by airplanes was compounded by hundreds of ground vehicles and personnel required to support wing operations.
- One member of No. 126 Wing (stationed at B-4) who had served in the desert remarked that the dust encountered in France was worse.
- A member of the No. 127 Wing Catering Service referred to B-2 as "the land of sand."

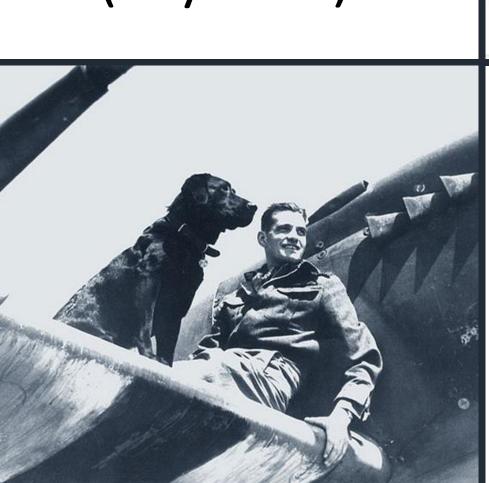


R.A.F. Servicing Commandos at B-2 equipped with gas goggles as a protection against the dust



"Normandy Dust Bowl" - Spitfires taking off at an ALG, July 1944, by Robert Hyndman, pilot with R.C.A.F. No. 126 Wing. Image courtesy of the Canadian War Museum, Beaverbrook Collection of War Art CWM 19710261-3228.

# Command Reorganization (July 1944)









- In mid-July 1944, 2TAF command decided on a reorganization of the Canadian Spitfire Wings.
- As part of this, "Johnnie" Johnson's No. 144 Wing was disbanded. Johnson once again became Wingco Flying with No. 127 Wing. No. 443 Squadron also joined the Wing giving it four squadrons.
- The reorganization also involved a change of command. Henceforth, a Group Captain would be in charge of a wing of three or more squadrons with a Wing Commander Flying supervising air operations.
- Keith Hodson was replaced as C/O No. 126 Wing by Group Captain Gordon R. "Gordie" McGregor, while Mannifrank Brown was succeeded as No. 127 Wing C/O by Group Captain Bill MacBrien.
- Whereas Hodson soon returned to Canada, Brown's Certificate of Service states that he remained n France until September 9, 1944.



## R.C.A.F. Overseas Headquarters in London

- From September 9, 1944, to November 26, 1944, W/C Brown was Senior Operations Officer and Deputy Director of Air Staff at R.C.A.F. Headquarters in London.
- While there, Brown was the subject of a sketch portrait by Canadian
   War Artist Flying Officer Moses Martin "Moe" Reinblatt of Montreal.
- When Reinblatt returned to Canada, more than sixty of his paintings and drawings were deposited to the Canadian War Records Collections

   his portrait of W/C Brown being one.
- "Wing Commander M. Brown" by Moses Reinblatt courtesy of Canadian War Museum, Beaverbrook Collection of War Art, CWM 19710261-4931.
- W/C Brown's Certificate of Service indicates that he returned to Canada on November 27, 1944. An article in the Winnipeg Free Press of December 12, 1944, referred to him being home "on a short leave."
- The document further states that Brown remained in the R.C.A.F. reserve until April 26, 1945.

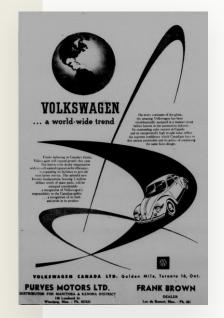


### French Croix de Guerre

- In September 1945, Mannifrank Brown was one of seven Manitobans decorated with the French Croix de Guerre with Silver Star.
- As the official notification read, through his command of "the first British aerodrome located at Bazenville, Normandy," Wing Commander Brown made a substantial contribution to the success of the Normandy campaign.
- A photograph of the group appeared in the *Winnipeg Tribune* on September 24<sup>th</sup> in which Brown stands on the far left.
- Mannifrank Brown's other decorations included: Order of the British Empire, Pilot's Flying Badge and Canadian Volunteer Service Medal (CVSM) with clasp. He was also mentioned in dispatches several times.









#### Life in Lac du Bonnet

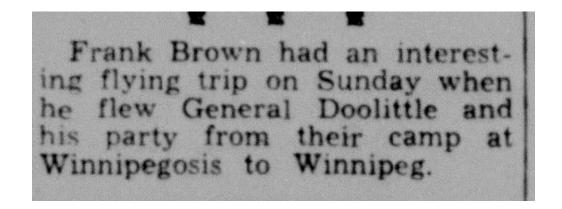
- Mannifrank Brown settled into family life in Lac du Bonnet with wife Edythe, daughter Robin and son Hart.
- In 1945, Brown purchased the local "Red and White Store" which he extensively renovated and expanded to include new lines of merchandise.
- In 1948, the business was renamed "Brown's Red and White Store." Brown also acquired the Lac du Bonnet taxi service which he operated out of the store.
- He later became local authorized agent for the MacLeod's retail chain as well as a Volkswagen dealer.
- Mannifrank Brown was a leading member of the Lac du Bonnet Board of Trade, including a term as President.
- He served on Lac du Bonnet's first municipal council after it was incorporated as a village in May 1947.
- In December 1952, Edythe Brown made history when she became Manitoba's first woman mayor.
- In 1957, Mannifrank made an unsuccessful attempt to enter provincial politics as a candidate for the CCF. Older brother Roy was already the Liberal MLA for Rupert's Land
- Although it didn't come to pass, newspapers noted that this created potential for the Brown brothers to become rivals in the Manitoba Legislature.
- Mannifrank and Edythe Brown had many other social and civic commitments –
  including as charter members of Lac du Bonnet Royal Canadian Legion No. 164.
- Edythe once referred to the two of them as a "cog in the community."



Paving Lac du Bonnet's Park Avenue in front of the Red & White Store, 1957. Photograph courtesy of the Lac du Bonnet Historical Society.

### **Continued Interest in Aviation**

- The Lac du Bonnet to which Mannifrank Brown returned was a hub of aerial activity.
- It was the base for two companies with expanding operations: Manitoba Government Air Services (M.G.A.S.) and Central Northern Airways (C.N.A), which later merged with Arctic Wings to form Transair. Older brother Roy was operations manager for Central Northern.
- As Edythe later wrote, amid the dynamism of the Lac du Bonnet post-war aviation environment, "Frank kept up his flying and never lost the art of 'greasing' a landing on the water." A number of these flights were noted in the local press.
- In September 1952, Brown took town baker Andy Usackis on a flight to Red Lake. To quote
  the Springfield Leader: "We hear of flying saucers, flying nurses and what have you, but
  we have a flying baker. Andy Usackis is most enthusiastic over his flying experience and
  gives graphic accounts of his latest flight with Frank Brown where he had an excellent
  view of Manitoba's harvest activities and abundant wildlife."
- As she had during his bush pilot days, Edythe sometimes flew with Mannifrank. In July 1953, the Browns together with Mr. and Mrs. W. Powell, "made a weekend flying trip to Victoria Beach, Kenora, and Louis Narrows."
- Mannifrank Brown also flew a number of fishing and hunting parties out of Lac du Bonnet.
   On one occasion, this was reported to have been a chartered C.N.A. plane.
- Perhaps Brown's most interesting post-war piloting experience was in September 1955 when he flew the party of famous American pilot General James "Jimmy" Doolittle from Winnipegosis to Winnipeg.
- However, an aviation mishap may have been a factor in his tragic death at the young age of 50.



### **Untimely Death**

# Crash And Fall Blamed In Death



of Lac du Bonnet, commander of a Spitfire fighter wing in the Second World War, who died Tuesday, will be buried Friday. Mr. Brown learned to fiy in Winnipeg and became a bush pilot in northern Manitoba and Ontario. Funeral service will be at 2:30 p.m. Friday in the Anglican church at Lac du Bonnet, Rev. W. O. Straw officiating. Burial will be in Riveryiew cemetery.

## Frank Brown Dies At 50

Frank Brown, 50, of Lac du Bonnet, Man., who gained fame as a bush pilot and wartime flying hero, died Tuesday morning in Winnipeg General hospital from injuries received from a fall on some ice last Wednesday in Winnipeg.

- On Monday February 23, 1959, Mannifrank Brown was among guests at a dinner at the Fort Garry Hotel in Winnipeg to commemorate the Golden Anniversary of flight in Canada. The evening was sponsored by the Winnipeg Flying Club.
- About 230 were in attendance including such notables as older brother Roy Brown, J. C. Uhlman and M. W. Torrance of M.G.A.S., Herb Seagrim (T.C.A. Vice-President of Operations), and Konnie Johannesson.
- Shortly after this event, Brown took a heavy fall on an icy sidewalk, striking his head. He was assisted to Winnipeg General Hospital by a passerby.
- However, Brown soon lapsed into a coma and never regained consciousness. He died on March 3<sup>rd</sup>.
- Funeral services were held in Lac du Bonnet on March 6<sup>th</sup>. Interment followed in **Riverland Cemetery** a few kilometres north of town.
- On March 10<sup>th</sup>, a coroner's jury in Winnipeg ruled that Mannifrank Brown's death was accidental due to head injuries – both past and present.
- The inquest was told that Brown had been involved in an air-crash about three miles west of Elma, Manitoba, on January 9<sup>th</sup>. He sustained facial cuts and bruises as well as a broken nose.
- The jury found that liver disease may have also been a contributing factor.

### Acknowledgements

- © David Riach (2024)
- The author is responsible for any errors, omissions or oversights.
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- Other photographs from the Imperial War Museum and Picryl.com.
- High-resolution copies of artwork obtained and licenced through the Canadian War Museum.
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- Complete bibliographical information accompanies a text version of the story upon which this slide show is based.