

HOMELAND MINUTES



Claudio Meunier, Donald "Bunny" McLarty and Spitfire Mk XVI
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War Groom: Flight Lieutenant Donald William McLarty

On October 6, 1942, three weeks before the Eighth

Army was due to strike in the *Second Battle of El Alamein* in the western desert of

Africa, heavy rains fell. Reconnaissance photos showed the German El Daba airfield under water. In the early morning hours of October 9th after donning his uniform on which was stitched the word "Argentina", Flight Lieutenant Donald William McLarty got into Hurricane Hawker "U" of 33 Squadron; it was parked on Landing Ground 87, a 2000 foot long wadi, or mud flat adjacent to the Alexandria-Cairo Road.

McLarty estimated he needed only two more sorties to make the 250 operational hours needed to earn a well deserved rest. When he joined the 500 aircraft ordered to attack planes on German air strips grounded in the western desert because of the rain, he'd completed 199 missions.

As soon as the 16 Hurricanes of his squadron and the P-40 Kittyhawks of the US Middle Eastern Air Force approached their low level attack over El Daba, McLarty saw the flash of guns. "I was hit immediately by ground fire in the engine and had oil all over my windscreen. All I could do was fly in formation with the guy next to me, and then my tail was blown off."

McLarty crashed-landed, taking out two parked Messerschmitt BF109s before coming to a stop in a pile of empty fuel drums. The shaken 20 year old needed the glass of White Horse whiskey a German officer handed him.

In tough circumstances for a year in PoW camp PG 75, Torre Tresca at Bari and PG 78 at Sulmona, McLarty had time to consider his life. Born May 21, 1922 in Newcastle, England, Donald had attended the Woodville School and St. Albans in Argentina. The family was part of a well-established English community that had carved out a comfortable expatriate life in Argentina. Donald was pursuing studies at the University of Toronto when he volunteered as an

Argentine national for the BCTAP November 28, 1940 in Ottawa. After ITS in Toronto, McLarty went to #9 EFTS in St. Catharines and finally to #2 SFTS in Ottawa.

During his training at the Elementary Flight School in St. Catharines Donald met Hope McSloy, the daughter of Capt. James Ivan and Oswald-Louise McSloy. The McSloys were a prominent St. Catharines family with a three storey 25 room mansion on Church Street. Capt. McSloy, who rose to the rank of Major by the end of WWI, was fond of young air men who he invited to his home. Donald and Hope were quickly smitten. They continued to meet when Donald was at #2 SFTS at Uplands, Ottawa* where Hope's mother Oswald-Louise conveniently had relatives.

On September 12, 1943, as the Allies advanced northward rousting the Germans out of Italy, Donald walked out of the Sulmona PoW camp with Flight Officer Ray Sherk. The Public Records Office Air 2/9229 recommended a citation to the Air Ministry Honours and Awards Committee based on their escape. It stated, "Flying Officer McLarty and his companion then commenced a period extending over a month in trying to evade recapture by the German forces. They were eventually guided through the Italian lines and joined a Canadian division ... Flying Officer McLarty shared with his companions in determination and endurance in order to affect an escape from the enemy, and I recommend that he should be awarded the Military Cross."

April 13, 1948, after what seemed like way too long a courtship, Donald William McLarty married Hope McSloy. The Argentine RAF "Voluntario" who had trained in Canada voluntarily gave his heart to a young Canadian and to Canada. Donald and Hope raised four children in Ottawa. During his long and distinguished career Donald was president of the Canadian Association of Aerial Surveyors, founded and managed D.W. McLarty Consulting, and worked on Spartan Airlines and its offshoots.

Donald McLarty well represents the foreign men who came to Canada to train for war, fought valiantly for the Allied Forces and then returned to Canada to stay, for love.

McLARTY, Donald William; executive; b. Newcastle, Eng. 21 May 1922; s. Donald and Helen (Groundwater) McL.; e. Woodville Sch. and St. Alban's Coll. Argentina; Univ. of Toronto; m. Hope d. Ivan and Oswald McSloy 12 April 1948; children: Judith, Douglas, Susan, Christine; **PRINCIPAL, D.W. MCLARTY CONSULTING** 1988-; Pres., Cdn. Assn. of Aerial Surveyors 1968-88; Pres., Hobrough Ltd. Vancouver; Dir., Sulmac Exploration Services Ltd.; Velocity Services Ltd.; Spartan Air Services, S.A., Argentina; Spartan Air Services (Eastern) Ltd. Kenya; Meridian Airmaps Ltd. UK; Aerotecnica de Mexico, S.A.; Gen. Mgr. Aerofoto, Bogotá, Colombia and Mng. Dir. Photographic Surveys (Western) Ltd. Vancouver 1946-51; Vice-Pres., Genaire Ltd., St. Catharines, Ont. 1951-53; Vice-Pres. Mktg., Spartan Air Services Ltd. Ottawa 1954-66, Pres. & C.E.O. 1966; Vice-Pres., Bristol de Mexico, S.A. Mexico, D.F. 1954-66; recipient, Queen's Silver Jubilee Medal 1977; Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal 2002; served with RCAF 1940-46, Fighter Pilot W. Desert, P.O.W. 1942, escaped 1943; Mentioned in Despatches; mem., Royal Air Forces Escaping Soc. (Pres. 1974-76); Cdn. Inst. Geomatics; Inst. Assn. Exvcs.; languages spoken and written: English, Spanish; clubs: Royal Ottawa Golf; Royal Cdn. Mil. Inst. (Toronto).

Canadian Who's Who 2004, by Elizabeth Lumley

*As an aside: Military background sequences for the 1942 movie with James Cagney *Captain of the Clouds*, were shot at RCAF Air Station Ottawa, Uplands. The "Presentation of Wings Ceremony" was an actual graduation service for 110 RCAF cadets, possibly even Don McLarty's graduation. Over 100 Harvard training aircraft flew overhead in a salute to the graduates. *Captain of the Clouds* received two Academy Award nominations and its title song was adopted as an official song of the Royal Canadian Air Force. Two of the planes that "starred" in the movie are on display at the Alberta Aviation Museum.

19/11/2007 – Launch of the film *Voluntarios* at the Canadian Aviation Museum www.vac-acc.gc.ca/general/sub.cfm?source=department/min-corner/photos/055