

HOMELAND STORIES: The Allure of Canada: War Grooms and PoWs

Character Education

- Analyze the positive things about Canada and Canadians that draw people to this country
- Appreciate the benefits of treating one's adversaries or enemies with respect
- Investigate the breaking of stereotypes for gender and nationality

Facts

- Of the 40,000 German PoWs in Canadian camps, 6,000 requested to return to Canada as immigrants
- By the end of the war, more than 3,750 British, Australian and New Zealand airmen who were in Canada with the Commonwealth Air Training Plan had found Canadian wives—the war grooms
- Canada's 1947 *Citizenship Act* stated that non-Canadians who served in the Canadian Armed Forces outside of Canada qualified for citizenship after one year of such service; those designated enemy aliens had to wait until 1951 to immigrate

Before the Reading

- Immigration is often spurred on by the hope for economic success in Canada. What other reasons might drive immigrants to seek a life in Canada?
- Make a list of those things/places in Canada that would most impress visitors to Canada
- If you were in charge of creating criteria that qualify people new to Canada as citizens, what would be some of your criteria and why?

Reading 1: War Grooms

"I haven't been through what you describe but there was a story on the news (Manitoba, Canada) about a war groom from England who met his wife-to-be in Canada, and several days later he left to go to another country to fight in World War II. They wrote letters all the years of the war and when it was over he came back to Canada to marry her. They have been married something like 50 years. So don't say there is no hope of a relationship."

Talk show comment

HOMELAND MINUTES



Claudio Meunier, Donald "Bunny" McLarty and Spitfire Mk XVI
www.lasegundaguerra.com

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 for-

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"These guys were gorgeous in their uniforms, and most of them were not married, and had interesting accents. And of course boy meets girl, and some of them ended up getting engaged or married, and then the men would go finish their war services and come back. Often the men would fall in love with the country, as well as the girl. After the war, there were more opportunities for jobs in Canada, and Canada benefited from having the young guys joining the work force."

From *Canada's War Grooms and the Girls Who Stole Their Hearts*

by Judy Kozar



Air Armaments School
Mountainview, Ontario
Course No.6 14/1/42
www.bombercrew.com

Through the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (BCTAP) tens of thousands of young men mostly from Australia, New Zealand, the UK, the USA, but also from Norway, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Argentina settled throughout Canada for shorter or longer

stays, depending on their training requirements. Military and civilian trainees took part in local activities, frequented restaurants, dance halls, churches and even local events such as summer fairs and winter carnivals.

Air Force commands welcomed the morale-boosting recreation that came from meeting with local civilians. The bases sometimes put on parades and parties for local kids with ice cream—a treat not widely available off the bases. Local theatres, dance halls and social clubs entertained BCTAP staff and trainees. Station bands provided entertainment for community events. At some BCTAP schools out west, airmen helped with the fall harvest. The training facilities were frequently open for the public to view and participate in sports competitions. Local residents attended wings presentations and graduation ceremonies. Young women were invited to base parties and dances. Small wonder with all these opportunities that romance flourished.

The mingling of residents and BCATP staff and trainees in small communities sometimes permanently altered their demographics. When local women married airmen from Britain, Australia, or New Zealand, the new wives tended to leave their community to move to the husband's country. War grooms, on the other hand, often relocated to Canada bringing with them their different cultures and customs.

The idea of male war brides, men who uprooted themselves to be with the women they loved, tickled the post-war imagination, perhaps because in 1936 the King of

England himself had given up his throne "For the woman he loved". These gender-bending male antics turned up in the 1949 comedy *I Was a Male War Bride*, starring Cary Grant. It based on the true story of a Belgian who married an American nurse. In the final screwball sequence, Grant impersonates a female army nurse to make his getaway—just look what happens when you break the unspoken code of male–female behaviour!!

The theme of Canadian women falling in love with BCATP trainees got a serious treatment in the 1992 movie *For the Moment* with Russell Crowe. The film shot at Brandon's BCATP Museum depicted the dilemmas of an Australian pilot trainee and his American flight instructor who fell in love with a pair of Canadian women whose husbands had already gone overseas. Clearly there were problems when potential war grooms scouted out Canadian women.



A commemorative scroll depicting the 14 Argentine airmen who died in service to Canada and are written into the Books of Remembrance is unveiled by Michael Welsh, Ricardo Moreno, Minister Thompson, His Excellency Bothamley, Juan Myles and Donald McLarty / Claudio Meunier

The documentary "Voluntarios" about the Argentine volunteers who flew with the RAF and RCAF premiered at Canada's Aviation Museum in November 2007. One of the men featured in the film, Argentine Flight Lieutenant Donald McLarty was a war groom. He moved to Canada after the war to marry the woman with whom he had fallen in love.

McLarty's is one of the few known stories of Canada's nearly 4,000 war grooms. Judy Kozar's 2007 book *Canada's War Grooms and the Girls Who Stole their Hearts* featured 40 war grooms. Finding the stories of more of Canada's war grooms provides a wonderful research opportunity for young people. Who were these dashing men who pursued love to Canada?

iii 400 Argentine volunteers were accepted as pilots in the RAF or RCAF while another 400 served as gunners, bomb aimers and wireless operators; 14 Argentines died while serving with the RCAF. The majority of the "Voluntarios" did their basic training in Canada which became their home after the war

mation 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; Aerotech-nica de Mexico, S.A.; Gen. Mgr. Aerofoto, Bogotá, Colombia and Mng. Dir. Photographic Surveys (Western) Ltd. Vancouver 1946-51; Vice-Pres., Gensire 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. Extves.; 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

Reading 2: PoWs Come Back to Canada

"I shall always appreciate the ever so correct and considerate attitude of the Government of Canada, and the Military Authorities towards P.O.W.s. I honestly believe that many a former P.O.W. will agree with me, if I say, that your country has done a lot to show Germans in Canadian custody the value of democratic life."

*Letter written to Colonel E.D.B. Kippen, Camp Commandant,
March 26, 1947*

While nearly 4,000 war grooms ended up in Canada as a result of the BCATP, 6,000 German-speaking men who were former inmates in Canadian Prisoner of War Camps also requested to return. Some like Frederick Jaffe were refugees from Hitler's Germany who were mistakenly sent to Canada and who wanted to stay because of the educational opportunities. Others like Austrian Hans Krakhofer, captured while serving with the German Navy, fell in love with Canada's northland while in the Monteith PoW Camp. Ed Billet, who was about to train some of Rommel's forces in the use of anti-tank guns when he was captured at a desert fortress south of Bengasi, found his Canadian dream amid the worst Nazi zealots in the PoW Camp at Gravenhurst. It was Canada's democratic ideals that lured Ed back.

These three represent the sentiment of PoWs that Canada's treatment of its enemies demonstrated the nation's strength. Whereas Nazi Germany imprisoned and murdered its enemies in an atmosphere of fear and intimidation, Canadians provided their enemies with recreation and even education.



Dr. Frederick A. Jaffe
www.ontariopathologists.org

Frankfurt-born Frederick Albert Jaffe (1920–2009) had been in medical studies at Cambridge University when he was interned as a German citizen and sent to Camp Farnham in southern Quebec. There an enterprising academic internee, William Sebastian Heckscher (1904–1999), set up a high school matriculation school in a crowded mess hall with classes given by volunteer teachers to volunteer students. Frederick Jaffe was one of the young enthusiastic students who went to classes after a full day of work in the fields.



William Heckscher
University of Western Ontario
<http://publish.uwo.ca/~brooks/Heckscher.html>

Heckscher persuaded Camp Commandant E. D. B. Kippen, a graduate of McGill University, to assign a special hut for classes and after hours study. Then through the intervention of the renowned educator Dr. Henry Marshall Tory (who had already founded Khaki University during WWI, the University of British Columbia and the University of Alberta), and T.H. Mathews the McGill Registrar, Kippen arranged that Heckscher's school acquire an official curriculum, books and became an extramural matriculation exam centre of McGill University. Heckscher's passion for education and supportive manner so inspired Frederick and 13 other young men that they wrote their exams and graduated within seven months. Frederick went on to study medicine at McGill and had a distinguished career as a hospital and forensic pathologist in Ontario.



The Art of Hans Krakhofer | German Prisoners of War in Northwestern Ontario
Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society | www.thunderbaymuseum.com/krak.htm

Hans Krakhofer (1918–1997) so loved the rough terrain around the PoW camp near Timmins that he often painted it in watercolours. He took university courses in navigation and mathematics at Camp Monteith and honed his artistic skills until a volunteer opportunity came up to cut timber for the Minnesota-Ontario Paper Company at a camp at Red Cliff Bay on Lake of the Woods.

Krakhofer was paid 50 cents a day or 50 cents per cord cut and stacked. In his free time he continued to sketch and paint creating a wonderful record of the logging industry. Repatriated to Austria in 1946, Hans dreamed of returning to Canada's woodlands. In 1953 he went to work for the Abitibi Power and Paper Company as a cutter and skidder. His fine drafting talents soon took him to the Great Lakes Paper Company where he had a long career as a draughtsman, illustrator and map maker.



Ed Billet
CBC's Digital Archives / Front
Page Challenge / 09/27/1981

Ed Billet (1916–2006) found himself in a totally different type of PoW camp filled mostly with Germans who had been designated “black” in the categorization of “white/light”, “grey/medium” and “black/heavy” allegiances to Nazi principles. Ed longed to escape the atmosphere of intimidation created by the “black” fanatics who ran the PoW camp at Gravenhurst. They

represented all he had come to despise about Germany.

After a respite working for the Minnesota and Ontario Pulp and Paper Co., for the same lumber camp for which Krakhofer had worked, Billet was returned to the oppressive conditions in Camp 20. “Here the spirits of Nazism and Prussian militarism still dominated the Camp. SS officers and ordinary ranks taken prisoner during the last stages of the war had formed the core of Nazi fanatics that tried to keep Hitler’s spirit alive. More than ever, I recognized the evil that had dominated our lives and had brought terror, destruction and death to millions!”

Billet went on to describe how he and a few others had to be separated and placed in protective custody by the Veterans Guard because they would not submit to intimidation. After repatriation Billet worked as an interpreter in Germany longing for the type of democratic freedoms he knew Canada had.

In 1951, following up with the Minnesota and Ontario Pulp and Paper Co., Billet was offered a job. He was grateful to the day he died that he achieved his dream to return to Canada. “Canada gave me fulfillment; I was able to achieve what I strove for and I still see unlimited opportunities for those who set goals and persevere. It also means security. But these gifts are worthless without an environment in which one can cultivate friendship, harmony, and goodwill and thus, find peace and happiness. Canada gave me access to all these when it became my homeland.”

After the Reading

- List ALL the things that lured at least 10,000 men back to Canada as a homeland after their experiences here in WWII
- Look up the locations in these readings. They are in Africa, Canada, Europe and South America
- How are these readings WWII “Homeland” stories?

Extensions

- Research Dr. Henry Tory Marshall and the Khaki University. Present a report on the roles of reading and education during war
- Dig into your local history to find stories of war grooms or returned PoWs and document them for your local history society
- The PoW art work of Hans Krakhofer’s is in the Thunder Bay Historical Museum and that of George Hoegel in the Thunder Bay Military Museum. Create a report about how Krakhofer and Hoegel saw Canada contrasting their art with PoW art from Germany or other Axis countries

Sources

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Audio Visual Clips

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