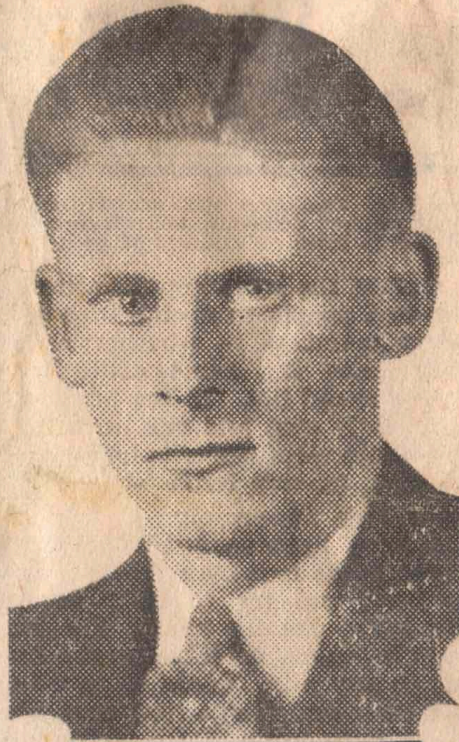


To England



DALE F. JONES

son of Mr. and Mrs. L. E. Jones of Dinsmore has been instructed to report in Ottawa on February 28 for final examination and will sail for England from St. John on March 3. He received his private pilot's license from the Saskatoon Flying Club in 1936 under Instructor L. L. Dunsmore. At a dance held in Dinsmore School on Tuesday Dale was presented with a club bag by Jack Leach from the community.

When war was declared, Canada had few prospects for making an immediate and distinctive contribution to the war effort. Military budgets and the numbers of Canadians in uniform had been allowed to slip in the inter-war years and the country was scarcely war-ready in 1939. Despite this, Canadian military and political leaders had ambitious expectations for Canada's role in the conflict and a strong desire not to be relegated to service as adjuncts to the British armed forces. Maintaining a certain independence of command and a distinctive place in the Allied war effort was seen as crucial to reinforcing Canada's place as an

independent and valued ally.¹ Ships of the Royal Canadian Navy could take on coastal patrol and convoy duties while the navy ramped up its numbers of ships and sailors, but army units needed both training and transport to Europe before they could take any direct role in the conflict. Similarly the Royal Canadian Air Force was short of air and ground crew, not to mention the modern aircraft needed to successfully engage in aerial combat in Europe, and what aircraft and crews the RCAF had were almost all in Canada. As a result the RAF personnel with Canadian connections (sometimes referred to as CAN/RAF personnel) suddenly assumed a greater significance in Canada's political and military considerations.

The RCAF had cooperated closely with the RAF in the 1930s and much of this cooperation was organized through the RCAF Liaison Office in London. The Chief Liaison Officer in 1939 was then Wing Commander, and later Air Vice Marshal, Francis Vernon Heakes, and his notes of meetings and other materials relating to his work in London give direct insight into the discussions between Canadian and British officials that led to the creation of 242 Squadron.

Even before war was declared, Heakes was developing a proposal for how Canada might make a quick and effective contribution to the air war. His solution was to make use of the Canadians already serving in the RAF through the creation a hybrid force in which Canada would provide administration, pay, discipline and reinforcement functions while the RAF handled operations, supply, maintenance, training, medical and other services. He summarized his suggestion as follows: "The plan is this - to organize, voluntarily, the Canadians now in the R.A.F. into a nucleus `Canadian Air Striking Force Command.'"²

There is no further mention of this initial scheme in the Heakes material, but the general idea obviously had some resonance among Canadian military and political officials. British air force commanders were also willing to explore the idea of creating a squadron with a specifically "Canadian" identity. As a result, even before any formal agreement on the matter had been put in place, the formation of such a unit was begun, and Heakes was briefed by senior RAF personnel on the progress of the new squadron. On November 7, 1939 he sent a cypher message to R.C.A.F. headquarters in Ottawa indicating that although there was no final approval for the idea, a new fighter squadron - designated as the 242 Squadron - was being formed at Church Fenton in Yorkshire, and that it was to be made up of Canadian pilots currently serving with the RAF.³

¹ These concerns, at least according to most standard military and general histories, reflect Canadian experiences in World War I. During that conflict, a strong sense arose that Canada's contributions to the war effort were undervalued, even ignored, because Canadians often served under the command of senior officers from other countries, and many Canadians were not even part of distinctively Canadian units.

² Library and Archives Canada: Francis Vernon Heakes Fonds, R2763-0-5-E, formerly MG30 E546, RCAF Liaison Office Notes, Book IV, August-September 1939, entry for August 23, 1939 "Canadian Striking Force Command," pp.31-39.

³ As part of his research a history of 242 Squadron and on Canadians serving with the RAF, historian F.H. Hitchins compiled a research collection of archival documents from several repositories. These research materials are held by the Department of National Defence, Directorate of History and Heritage, Historical Research Centre, C.P. Stacey Building, Ottawa. See F.H. Hitchins Fonds, 75/514, esp. folder F, F.1 No. 242 Squadron-RAF. This cypher message was copied from the Canadian Liaison Officer, file 47/5.

In keeping with the idea that Canadians wanted to be commanded by other Canadians, Squadron Leader Fowler Morgan Gobeil, an RCAF officer serving on exchange with the RAF, was named to head up the new squadron and was posted to it on November 1, 1939. He was joined on November 3, 1939 by Flight Lieutenants Miller and Sullivan, and then, over the next few days, by the remaining Flying and Pilot Officers required to make up the squadron.⁴



Dale with some of the other Canadians he served with and a squadron Hurricane.

On 24 November 1939 a conference was held in London involving Sir Kingsley Wood, British Secretary of State for Air, T.A. Crerar, a Canadian Cabinet Minister, the Canadian High Commissioner in London, Vincent Massey, Air Commodore Lloyd Samuel Breadner of the RCAF, Senior Air Ministry Staff Officers, Treasury Representatives and the Heakes as the

⁴ A list of the original pilots and the first two replacement pilots with 242 Squadron is found in appendix "C".

Canadian RCAF Liaison Officer. Most of the discussion revolved around plans for what would become the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan, which was the RAF and Britain's real interest in Canada's aviation war effort at the time. The idea of the "all-Canadian" fighter squadron was also broached, and the role that squadron might play in giving Canada a distinctive and immediate role in the air war was discussed in some detail.⁵

As a result, Canadian officials continued to take a close interest in the squadron, its equipment and training, and its personnel. Wing Commander Heakes' notes on the conference discussions show just how seriously the creation of this squadron was taken at senior military and political levels. Unfortunately more consideration seems to have been paid to the political and larger strategic and diplomatic niceties of this policy than the practical realities of creating an "all-Canadian" squadron.

As the squadron history points out, Gobeil was initially led to believe that he was taking over what was really a training squadron.⁶ Hugh Halliday has analyzed the entries in Flight Lieutenants Sullivan and Miller log books and in the first weeks of the squadron's existence the entries are almost exclusively for "dual instruction."⁷ This is not surprising since virtually all of the Pilot Officers assigned to the squadron were as inexperienced as Dale Jones was, and even the Flying Officers were scarcely more experienced. Few had much time flying single-engine monoplane fighters, which were difficult to master, and none had any real combat experience, although that deficiency was rapidly eliminated in April and May of 1940. As Halliday notes, this reflects a general reluctance on the part of the RAF to transfer more experienced fighter pilots - who also happened to be Canadian - out of their existing squadrons and into this new squadron. To be fair, the RAF had relatively few experienced fighter pilots in 1939, and in most cases those who had combat experience or extensive training on single-engine fighters were apparently not considered for 242 Squadron.

The first aircraft assigned to the Squadron further underlines the sense that these were still mostly pilots in training and suggest some confusion about what aircraft the 242 pilots were in training to fly. The squadron began with three Miles Magisters, a Harvard and a Fairey Battle to practice with. In December 1939 the squadron received additional Fairey Battles and Blenheims, a twin-engine aircraft designed as a light or medium bomber but which was also used as a fighter with some changes in armament.⁸ These new aircraft led to

⁵ LAC: Heakes Fonds, Book V, November 1939, Conference notes November 24, 1939, esp. p. 2-4. Both Canadian and British officials realized that making a major effort to get RCAF personnel and aircraft to Britain in late 1939 and early 1940 could be counter-productive as it would likely "cripple the BCATP at its birth" given the limited resources of the RCAF at that time. However, there was a strong belief that Canada needed to be seen as contributing directly to the struggle in western Europe. For example, some thought that deploying Canadian RAF pilots in France might help influence French opinion by showing the resolve of Canada to support the war effort in France. See Hugh A. Halliday, *No. 242 Squadron The Canadian Years the Story of the RAF's "all-Canadian" Fighter Squadron* (Stittsville: Canada's Wings, 1981) pp. 11-12.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.13.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.14-15.

⁸ The Magisters and Harvard were suitable for training pilots who would go on to fly single engine fighters. The Fairey Battle, however, was originally designed as a light bomber and carried a crew of three. It was already obsolete by 1939. The Bristol Blenheim was originally designed as a bomber as well, but was also used early in the war as a fighter. It too was badly outclassed by German fighters and suffered heavy losses in this role. Later versions were more successful when adapted for use as

speculation that the squadron would be asked to fly twin-engine fighters, but this was not what the members of the squadron – or it appears the Canadian government - wanted.

In fact, when Squadron Leader Gobeil heard rumours that the squadron would be equipped with Bristol Blenheims, he wrote to Wing Commander Heakes for assistance in opposing the plan. He put the issue with twin-engine fighters clearly, and his concern was not so much technical as political.

To equip this squadron with Blenheim Fighters would be to forego all the traditions built up by Canadian pilots in the last war, which came from their spirit and eminently successful work on single-seater fighters.

There is nothing about the Blenheim which leads [*sic*] itself to the problem of catching the public imagination. It is not, and never was intended to be, a fighter. It carries a pilot and an air gunner. By that fact alone, if we are to be equipped with the Blenheim, we would fail completely to capture public attention and arouse pride in our service across Canada. Again I stress the past reputation of Canadian pilots, who are renowned for their quick action, spirit and immediate seizing of every opportunity in the air. To exploit fully these abilities, which I know the present pilots of my squadron possess to an equal degree, we should have the best single-seater fighters available. I refer, of course, to the Spitfire.⁹

Squadron Leader Gobeil and others were pressing for the squadron to assume a day-fighter role, and in late December the issue was resolved.¹⁰ The influence of Heakes and other Canadian officials is never mentioned specifically, but it seems to have carried considerable weight with the RAF. The squadron was equipped with Hurricanes, not Spitfires, but most importantly for Gobeil and his pilots not Blenheims either.

night fighters. This oddly matched collection of aircraft suggests that the role of 242 Squadron was still being determined in these early months.

⁹ See Squadron Leader Gobeil to Wing Commander Heakes, 23 November 1939, in Hitchins Fonds, folder f, file F.1. In a cypher message to RCAF Headquarters, dated 30 November 1939, Heakes reported that the initial intention to outfit the squadron with Spitfires was seemingly changed and that the RAF was leaning towards equipping 242 Squadron with twin-engine Blenheims. He too opposed the idea, based in large part upon Gobeil's letter, and suggested that some official pressure might be brought to bear from Ottawa on the RAF. *Ibid.*, Canadian Liaison Officer, file 47/8. On 15 November 1939 Air Vice Marshal Saul visited the Squadron and asked each of the pilots what aircraft they wanted to fly. An entry in the Operations Record Book noted that "all answered Spitfires" to Saul's amusement. See National Archives, Great Britain, Air/27/1471/1, 242 Squadron Operations Record Book, October 1939-March 1940, 15 November 1939 entry. Another indication of official Canadian interest in the squadron can be found in the progress report and other information on squadron training and personnel sent to Wing Commander Heakes by Squadron Leader Gobeil, and the other records of the squadron collected by the RCAF and found in the Hitchins Fonds. For example, Gobeil provided Heakes with a detailed progress report on the squadron on 18 November 1939.

¹⁰ On 27 December 1939, word was received that the Squadron would be re-equipped with Hurricanes, and shortly afterwards the Blenheims were re-assigned to other squadrons. National Archives, Great Britain, Air/27/1471/1, 242 Squadron Operations Record Book, October 1939-March 1940, 27 December 1939 entry.



Dale took this photograph of his Hurricane which he described as his Sky Chariot

At this point squadron activity began to pick up appreciably as plans to deploy the squadron to France were discussed and the squadron began to train hard in order to be declared operational.¹¹ On March 23, 1940 it was cleared for day fighter operations and the squadron flew its first recorded mission – a convoy patrol – on March 25.¹² Clearance for taking on a night operations role was slower to come, but by May 11, 1940 the squadron was assigned night fighter operations as well.¹³

¹¹ For example the squadron's progress report for the week ending 10 March 1940 shows Pilot Officer Jones completed 6.25 hours of solo flying during which he also practiced R/T communications. Unlike some of his fellow pilots formation or cloud flying and he spent no time on the Link trainer. He did spend about 4.5 hours practicing fighter attacks however, and he attended lectures on Fighter Attacks, Formation, and Anti-Aircraft Guns and he visited the Leeds Anti-Aircraft defences and the Leeds Observer Corps Centre. See Hichins Fonds, Folder F, file F.1, Weekly Progress Report –No. 242 Squadron. Week Ending – 10 March, 1940.

¹² See National Archives, Great Britain, Air/27/1471/1, 242 Squadron Operations Record Book, October 1939-March 1940, 23 and 25 March, 1940 entries.

¹³ Ibid., pp.30-1. McKnight discusses the “hair-raising” process of becoming operational as a night fighter squadron. Black out regulations meant airfields were poorly marked and aircraft were not allowed to fly with navigation lights. As a result, pilots had to judge their landings by following the exhaust flames of the plane in front of them. As he put it, “Most of us have grown half a head of gray hair since we started and hope we never have to do it again once we’ve got it ‘buttoned up.’”



A mess dinner at 242 Squadron at Church Fenton in the happier times before the Battles of France and Britain.

The timing of this push to bring the squadron up to operational capacity coincides with the end of the so-called "Phoney War" of late 1939 and early 1940 in western Europe and the launch of the long-expected German offensive against France, Belgium and the Netherlands on May 10, 1940. Although the full squadron was not committed to the combat, three pilot officers and six airmen had been deployed briefly to northern France on April 9, 1940 with a general deployment of the entire squadron expected to follow. These plans were quickly rescinded and the advance party returned to Church Fenton, but in early May a small detachment of pilots from the squadron were sent to fly with other RAF squadrons in

McKnight Fonds, McKnight to Mike Pegler, 25 February 1940. National Archives, Great Britain, Air/27/1471/6, 242 Squadron Operations Record Book, May 1940, 11 May 1940 entry: "Squadron became Sector Night operational squadron on night 11-12th. replacing No. 219 Squadron."

northern France.¹⁴ The situation in northern France was rapidly disintegrating, however, and Allied troops were soon falling back on the Dunkirk area in the face of a rapid German advance. By May 21, 1940 – just 11 days after the German invasion began – it was clear that the British Expeditionary Force, and portions of the Belgian and French armies were cut off and trapped against the coast of northern France. Allied commanders then began planning a desperate attempt to rescue as many of their forces as possible by evacuation. This evacuation from Dunkirk, also known as Operation Dynamo, officially began on 27 May 1940 and was over by June 4, 1940. Over these 9 days more than 338,000 soldiers were successfully evacuated, although losses were enormous.

Flight Lieutenant Sullivan had been killed in action in northern France on May 14, 1940 and on May 18, 1940 Pilot Officers Brown and Wiens and Flying Officer Chambers were forced to bail out of their Hurricanes or crashed after combat. All were wounded. Brown and Wiens got back to Britain while Chambers was captured and became a prisoner of war. The remaining pilots from 242 Squadron were sent back to Britain to rejoin the rest of the Squadron, which had been redeployed from Church Fenton to Biggin Hill, near London, on 21 May 1940. From Biggin Hill the squadron was expected to assist with providing air cover for Operation Dynamo.

The next few weeks were, as Dale Jones put it, a “terrible & terrifying business.” The squadron pilots flew frequent operations – up to three or four a day on almost no sleep according to some reminiscences. They faced much larger numbers of German aircraft in most air battles and quickly discovered that the planes and pilots they faced were extremely capable. Squadron losses began to rise alarmingly. Two pilots were killed and one wounded on May 23 and two more died on May 24. Dale was killed on May 28 and the unlucky Pilot Officer Gordon McKenzie Stewart, of Stratford, Ontario, who was one of the first two reinforcements sent to 242 Squadron during the Battle of France, arrived at the squadron on May 28 and was killed May 31. There were also several accidents in this period that further reduced the squadron’s numbers. Out of the 24 Canadian pilots assigned to 242 Squadron prior to May 1940, 8 were killed either in combat or accidents, 5 were wounded in action or accidents, and 3 became prisoners of war. Thereafter losses slowed, but in the end only 6 of Dale’s initial squadron colleagues survived long enough to be posted out of the squadron, joining those who became prisoners of war in a very short list of the “all-Canadian” squadron’s pilots who survived the experience.¹⁵

¹⁴ The initial plans to send the Squadron to France are detailed in National Archives, Great Britain, Air/27/1741/3, 242 Squadron Air Operations Book, entries for 9-13 April 1940. The full plan for the deployment is found in National Archives, Great Britain, Air/27/1473, 242 Squadron Air Operations Appendices, April 1940-July 1943, “Movement Order No. 1 -1940,” pp.3-8. See also Halliday, *242 Squadron*, pp.30-1.”

¹⁵ McKnight wrote to his friend in July 1940 not long after the Dunkirk battles and as the Battle of Britain losses were starting to be felt. His calculations of the squadron’s losses were based on the 22 original pilots posted to the squadron. “We’ve only got five of the original twenty-two pilots in the squadron left now and those of us who are left aren’t quite the same blokes as before. Its peculiar but war seems to make you older and quieter and changes your views a lot on life – you also find out who are the blokes worth knowing and who aren’t and I haven’t met one yet who wasn’t worth knowing.” McKnight Fonds, McKnight to Pegler, 18 July 1940.