

Cornwall Township Historical Society Newsletter

March 2020

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Editor's Note: *The year 2020 marks the 75th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. We are honoured to feature a story from the Standard Freeholder of one of the many local men and women who fought courageously for our freedom in that war. Lloyd W. McPhee was born in Cornwall in 1920 and attended Cornwall Public School and C CVS. After leaving school he was employed by Howard Smith Paper Mill until he enlisted in the R.C.A.F in January 1941. He trained at Brandon Man. and Regina Sk. graduating as an air navigator in August 1942. He arrived in England in October 1942. He had a distinguished career as an air navigator until the war's end.*

After the war his career with the Ontario Ministry of Transportation took him to Ajax Ont. where he and his first wife Monica (née Purcell) raised a family of eight. Later in life, then a widower, he returned to Cornwall to attend a C CVS school reunion. There, he rekindled a relationship with and an old classmate and friend, Audrey Young (née Grant), herself was a widow. In 1992 the two were married and eventually settled in a house in the Riverdale area. In their later years both Lloyd and Audrey continued to be active CTHS members working to preserve local heritage. Lloyd died in 2003, Audrey in 2009. Ed. note: Audrey is the mother of CTHS members Gay Young and Sharon McCullough.

The following article was published in the Standard Freeholder on February 2, 1945. It is an interview with Lloyd who was home in Cornwall on a 30 day leave from the R.C.A.F.

Narrow Escape All In Day's Work For Stocky Cornwall Navigator Home On Leave.

Narrow escapes were common occurrences for Flight Lieutenant Lloyd McPhee, home after two and a half years of overseas service which include 38 trips over enemy territory and one non-operational tour as a navigation instructor. The chunky clean cut airman related some of the highlights of his experiences in an interview with a Standard Freeholder shortly after his arrival in the city yesterday.

Flt. Lt. McPhee was with the famous Alouette squadron in North Africa and took part in operations in aid of the invasions of Sicily and Italy. All of the tour was flown in Wellington bombers—Wimpys as he affectionately called them.

“They are the workhorses of the R.A.F.” said the repatriate. “They are the oldest bomber in bomber command and one of the most reliable”

McPhee got quite a kick out of describing his plane's distinguishing insignia. The plane was called “Y” for Yorker and the insignia painted on the side was a large ice cream cone. After each operational mission an extra drop oozed from the cone.



Flt. Lt. Lloyd McPhee

Slightly odd looking, perhaps although none the worse for his many experiences, the expat told of his close calls without the least sign of nerves.

He related a harrowing experience which the crew went through at Catania during the invasion of Sicily.

“As our Wellington, alone and at low level, came in over the target area, the darkness below was suddenly lit by flares. The Wehrmacht's anti-aircraft batteries were firing at us. Nevertheless, the crew and captain kept right on in the straight bombing run. Our Wimpy went right on through the gauntlet of flack bursts and just as the

bomb aimer shouted—bombs away—a great explosion damaged the bomb bay. A shell had struck us. A few seconds earlier and we and the Wellington would have disintegrated into dust in the blast of that 4,000 pounder”.

McPhee recalled with evident relish that one of the air gunners was making his first trip on that eventful night. After the flight started he also informed us that he was celebrating his birthday. “He got quite a party”, said McPhee with a wry grin. “At least he said afterwards that he was so scared he couldn’t think.”

The bomb aimer on that trip had experienced a bit of good fortune. He had remained behind in the body of the plane after giving the bombs away signal. Had he returned to the front gun turret as was his usual custom, he would have been blown to pieces since succeeding flak bursts had blown four holes from top to bottom of the turret.

“We just about had it in Naples too.” The Jerries coned us with searchlights and brought us down to 1,000 feet before we could shake them. From 5,000 feet down we were susceptible to light flak and they really poured it on. We collected 21 holes in the plane that night.” A further trip had seen them blast German concentrations at Bartia, on the island of Corsica. The Free French had driven the Germans to Napoleon’s birthplace and their aircraft had got a direct hit on a warehouse from which smoke was seen pouring.

“Rome is a beautiful sight on a bright moonlit night”, said McPhee. “The moon is much brighter than in Canada and a full moon lasts 11 nights. In one night, against a beautiful setting of white snow we saw Rome, Florence, Pisa and Leghorn”.

Climate conditions in North Africa were described as exceedingly warm with temperatures averaging around 125 degrees in the summer season. The two hottest days experienced by the airman showed temperatures of 150 degrees in the sun and very little less than that in the shade—if such could be found.

“There wasn’t a tree within miles of the station”, said the stocky navigator “and our tents were so hot you couldn’t even touch the canvas. Wet clothes dried in less than 20 minutes in a wind coming from the desert which felt as if it were coming from a furnace. The food consisted of hard tack, bully beef, grapes and dehydrated potatoes with bread and margarine as infrequent delicacies. However, I couldn’t lose weight on it.”

Flt. Lt. McPhee said people in Canada would find it hard to believe the conditions under which the Arab people exist. There is practically no sanitation in the country and the natives themselves are backward. “Believe it or not”, said McPhee, “You can smell an Arab town from 1,000 feet in an aircraft. Take it from me that Arab cities are not the beauty spots that Technicolor paints them. From my own experience the European settlement of Algiers is the most advanced and cleanest of African cities.”

The repat had high praise for his comrades in the Alouette squadron. The crew was all French Canadian with the exception of himself. Good fellowship and a high standard of maintenance with correspondently low losses were features of the unit. The unit had maintained a high standard of bombing efficiency in spite of the fact planes went to their destinations guided by astral-navigation, their courses plotted by the stars. This is an entirely different technique from that now employed on the modern bombers which use radar to a great extent.

As evidence of the bomber-aimers of the squadron, McPhee related the story of a bombing run over the Salerno beachhead in which the squadron had to bomb within three miles of advancing American troops and had succeeded in doing so without injuring any of the advance elements.

In addition to his operational tour Flt. Lt. McPhee has to his credit 13 months of navigation instruction at a conversion unit. He is on a thirty day leave and has not made up his mind whether he will ask to be posted to the Far East or take an administrative position in Canada.

In Memoriam: CTHS members were saddened with the loss of two of our dedicated long time members. Charles Cameron passed away in November 2019 and his wife Libby passed one month later. Both were in failing health in the past few years and were less active in the organization. Charlie had an extensive collection of antique farm machinery which he was proud to show to everyone. He took special pleasure in showing his collection to younger people who were often aghast at how our forefathers had to work with such primitive machinery. Libby was a well know artist in the local arts community. She painted many pictures through the years. Out of admiration and respect for Libby’s talent, Tracy Lynn Chisholm from the Cline House Art Gallery in Cornwall hosted a reception that displayed Libby’s collected works in the gallery. Both Libby and Charlie will be missed very much.

Heritage Centre Update: South Stormont Council has yet to make a decision on the future of our Heritage Centre. However, since our focus is currently finding a suitable place to store and display our artifacts, at our November meeting a committee was formed to look for possible other locations for the artifacts. One possible location we are currently exploring is to use some of the vacant classrooms at the former Rothwell Osnabruck High School in Ingleside. We have approached the Upper Canada District School Board with our proposal and we'll keep you informed of any developments. Special thanks to Art Buckland for leading this initiative.



Remember: Our next meetings for the upcoming season are as follows:

Tuesday March 24, 7:00 pm at the St. Andrews Fire Hall

Tuesday April 28, 7:00 pm at the St. Andrews Fire Hall

Tuesday May 26 7:00 pm at the St. Andrews Fire Hall

So hope to see you there.

It looks like we may have found a home for the old switchboard which has been stored in the stairway of the Heritage Centre for many years. The Martintown Mill Preservation Society is looking to preserve the legacy of Irene Jacques who was instrumental in saving the village of Martintown that was nearly destroyed by fire in 1951. They intend to create a display with our switchboard along with a mannequin standing in for Miss Jacques who worked as the telephone switchboard operator in Martintown. On the night of the fire Miss Jacques opened up all the telephone lines to arouse the villagers and notify them of impending disaster. Through her actions, the villagers were able to bring the fire under control.

Bernie MacDonald worked for many years at Northern Electric in Montreal where the switchboard was manufactured years ago. He is pleased to see it finally put to good use and on display as a historic artifact.

Below is a story from the *Standard Freeholder* from December 1951 describing the heroics of Miss Jacques.



Roused Villagers During Fire, Operator Hailed As Heroine

If this little village of 300 odd souls 12 miles northeast of Cornwall were to have a mayor, Irene Jacques could run for the office and win in a walk.

Miss Jacques, who works a regular eight-hour shift at the tiny switchboard in the post office building, has a foot disability which makes walking difficult. So she sleeps on a cot beside the switchboard and doubles as night operator, too.

About 2 a.m. Saturday, she was informed the village hockey stick factory was on fire. Situated almost directly across the street in the centre of the village, the fire could pose a threat to the whole community if it got out of control. The night was cold, five below zero, and the winter's worst blizzard was howling down from the northeast.

Fire Alarm

Grey-haired Irene Jacques went to work on the rural "fire alarm." She opened all the keys on her circuit and sounded the long ring which can mean only one thing. Barely had she got started when her power failed.

Nothing daunted, Miss Jacques turned all the energy in her 275 pound frame loose on the hand generator kept for emergency use and continued her task, speaking all the while into the open circuit and directing residents to the fire.

Within a few minutes, some 200 of the residents of the village and surrounding community were at the scene. Even then she did not stop. Sensing the peril to the village, she summoned aid from the nearby communities of Williamsburg and Alexandria.

The volunteers from Martintown laboured mightily with their little ARP pumper, pouring water on the blaze from the Raisin River 500 feet away. Aided by the heavy snow which nullified flying embers, they kept the blaze from spreading. The arrival of added equipment from the other villages put the finishing touches to the fire which had consumed the factory and a barn and threatened the rest of the village before being controlled.

Reeve There

Among those at the scene was John McLennan, reeve of Charlottenburgh Township, "I heard the alarm and knowing Irene, I knew she wasn't fooling," he said. "She deserves a lot of credit."

A.A. Edgar, proprietor of the telephone system, said this was nothing new for Miss Jacques, who had done the same job dozens of times before in her 22 years as operator.

"She sure is a buster when it comes to a fire." He said. "She'd call Chicago if she thought it would bring help. I thought the firemen did a wonderful job, too. It looked as if the whole side of the village was going. If the Masonic Lodge had gone it would have finished everything."

Most of the buildings in the community are wooden and built close to each other.

Gerald Desjardins, co-owner of the factory, estimated the loss at \$20,000, partly covered by insurance. He and his partner plan to rebuild in the spring. A \$4,000 stock of new sticks ready for shipment went up in the blaze.

"The firemen did everything they could with the equipment at their disposal," he said.

This morning word came from Martintown that the co-owners of the ruined factory will set up temporary shop in a former restaurant and will be ready to resume limited operation in about 10 days.

Fought Blaze

Lloyd Flaro, the partner in the concern whose house adjoining the factory was saved, paid tribute to John Tyo, the night watchman who was working his first night at the plant. He had attempted to quench the blaze, which started over the boiler, with a small hose before it got out of control.

Mr. Flaro, clothed only in a pair of pants, ran barefoot out into the snow, but the fire had gained too much headway. He managed to drive out his partner's car.

"It was wonderful the way Miss Jacques got help and it was wonderful the way the men worked when they got here," he said.

Mr. Flaro also had a word of praise for villagers who supplied baskets of sandwiches and gallons of scalding coffee for the chilled firefighters.

Percy Keir, a restaurant proprietor who looks after the pumper, drew his share of praise from residents. He was on the job for five hours tending the pumper at the river's edge and then had the cold job of rolling up the hose. Mr. Keir disclosed that attempts to organize a regular brigade had failed, but "this might do it."

Saved Family

Flaro, was among those wakened. Glenn Lafave, a neighbour, was awakened by the "fire alarm". He was asleep, along with his wife and six daughters ranging from 13 years to four months.

"We can thank her (Miss Jacques) we got out alive," he said. "The house was so full of smoke we could have suffocated very shortly."

Lafave's eldest daughter ran into the street clad only in a nightgown and dressing gown and a pair of shoes. She walked this way to a friend's place half a mile away.

Yes, these tributes are "old stuff", for Irene Jacques. Last year, she saved four of her sister's children from an upstairs bedroom when the house caught fire. She knows what fire in the country can mean and acts accordingly.



We are pleased to announce the completion of the Simon Fraser grave site that now identifies Simon's wife by means of a pillow marker as Catherine MacDonnell. Many of us in our organization feel this was a lingering injustice because the inscription on Simon's 1921 headstone identifies her only as his "wife." Recall that Catherine died one day after Simon and they are both buried in the same plot in the pioneer cemetery.



"And may you find your own pot of gold"