

A young man in a military uniform stands next to a Hawker Hurricane fighter-bomber in a museum. The man is wearing a tan flight jacket, a dark tie, and a dark beret. He is looking towards the camera. The aircraft is a single-engine, high-wing fighter with a propeller. The background shows other aircraft and museum displays.

# High Jinks & High Flying

By Wallace S. Davis

*Editor's note: Wallace Davis served as an air force officer in W.W.II. He was born in London, Ont. and moved to Georgetown in the late 1950s where he lived until his death in 2005. This is an excerpt from his memoirs.*

The chance of going to a university prior to the war was very limited. The cost to go to McGill was \$60 to \$70 tuition and about \$40 for books. I was fortunate enough to get an Ontario Scholarship which paid a hundred dollars at the time, which paid for my tuition fee and school books, but I had to find a job in Montreal for room and board, so I got a job at Eaton's for \$13.20 a week. While I was working there one of the Eaton

Young Wallace Davis in uniform; Hawker Hurricane Mark XIII3, a fighter-bomber flown in 1940 during the Battle of Britain.

PHOTO TAKEN BY MIKE DAVIS AT CANADIAN WARPLANE HERITAGE MUSEUM IN MOUNT HOPE.

## High Jinks & High Flying

boys suggested I come down to St. Hubert, to the air force station. The Air Force had a program, the Officer's Training Core. They paid me two days a week to fly. I am 16 years of age and getting \$6.70 a day. The first \$6.70 went to pay my room and board and the balance was to buy food and streetcar fare. The other pilots were old, 21 and 22. I was the youngest.

I felt I had an obligation to go to war. They had mobilized, and I stayed in school until I graduated. I was on a plane the next day. It took almost 48 hours to fly overseas. You had to go from Montreal to Newfoundland, Newfoundland to Greenland, Greenland to Scotland, and Scotland to England. It was the only place you could fly



Wallace Davis, second row, 3rd from left.

across the ocean at that time.

Waiting for me was a Hurricane, with my name already printed right on the wing. So, here, I'm the only other officer on the station, all the others were sergeants or corporal pilots. So they looked at me as, you know, superior. The commanding officer was an old guy, about 24, and we had an adjutant with one arm; he was a First World War veteran.

When I showed up I was made the engineer of the squadron. I

asked where all the other guys were. "Oh, we left them in Europe and they're prisoners of war," the two men replied. There were two men, retired workmen from a Hawker assembly plant, and myself. We had to maintain these aircraft, about 12, supposed to be 20. And they said, since you're the commissioned officer, you're going to have to be in charge of all flying operations and the security of the station. They said, by the way, you're going to be looking after Pod 3.

### Aerial Attacks

The station was settled in four pods in a field, all facing different directions. That was in case of a ground attack; the idea was that everyone would take off at the same time, so it was quite interesting right at the centre of that field, dodging aircraft, coming this way and that. But the aircraft were set like that, four pods. So that completely confused an attack force. So I was made in charge of one of those pods. It didn't take me long



to decide that an odd number was out of the question. I remember disabling an aircraft so one of our members wouldn't fly, so there'd always be four, because the odd man out always got shot down. He wouldn't have a back up. With pairs, you always watched out for him, he watched out for you.

We were always at a disadvantage. We had about 30 to 40 knot-speed differential, so they could engage or disengage at their pleasure. Always to their advantage. This is the Battle of Britain we're talking about. It was not unusual for five of us to go up against 100 aircraft. Didn't have time for heart attacks. There was always the advantage though, that the Germans were very, very similar to the Americans in their approach. They decided it would be



Rear side view of a replica Hawker Hurricane at Canadian Warplane Heritage Museum.

Wallace Davis at age 83 visiting the Canadian Heritage Museum.

PHOTO BY THE HUIBERS FAMILY.

nice to have them below. The attacking mode in those days was to come in from the rear. Of course, you'd have at least five aircraft, or maybe 20 aircraft shooting at you from the tailguns, on the upper perch while you're trying to attack, and then you'd have all these swarms of Messerschmitts and you were almost guaranteed to be shot down maybe the second or third time.

I guess I was shot down a couple of times, and then I decided that that was for the birds. I had every intention of living through this war, so I devised a method of frontal attack. I was always shot down over the area we were fighting in, over Great Britain. We never went overseas. We were forbidden to, but I did do it. Very early in the morning, I headed out to attempt to destroy their barracks and get back before they could get after me. About every three weeks we'd lose all our men and aircraft,

so we'd have to go back and get new men and train them to get shot down.

### High Jinks

This was at the commanding officer's father's place. He was an Earl. The property that he owned would be about the size of Halton County, with the Credit River embedded, including Oakville and Milton. And he owned every building in the township. Everything was rented. In those days freeholds in Great Britain weren't allowed. They had to come to Canada to own property. Anyway, at this place, it was not a bad spot, he had us living down at the stables and that's where I used to get into my high jinks.

I can always remember the one time in October when I had the fishing rod to catch salmon, and the gameskeeper came out and said "What are you doing?" I said "Testing out some flies. I want to see what the reaction of the artificial fly is to the natural fly." He said "No, you're not!" I said "You want to come down to see?" So I had some flies, just the flies with no hook, so I was flicking them out there and he was watching me, and saw that apparently I wasn't doing anything wrong. When I would actually catch the salmon, I hid them along the bank, and got them at night.

I also shot two deer, and told the cook to hide them in with the ewes. Only a trained eye could tell the difference. When the gameskeeper came by accusing me, I told him I couldn't let him into the freezer because it was RAF territory. The AOC was coming by that day, and was supposed to dine with the lord, but instead he insisted on "eating with his men" because somehow he'd found out we were having venison! So he and the lord ate at the mess, and the lord said that it was the best prepared mutton he'd ever had! ■

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