

## “The Canadian Policeman”

**Overview:** The following are items relating to research into the service history and fate of aircraft bought using funds collected by the various police forces – including the Royal Canadian Mounted Police - in the 1939-45 war. One aircraft was purchased and dedicated into service with 403 RCAF Squadron at North Weald in 1942 but is known to have been damaged and taken out of service in what was probably an accident within one month. Another aircraft, delivered to 403 the day after the collision, was found to be carrying a similar dedication plate when it crashed fatally later. The plate was sent to Canada and led to official police research into all police dedicated aircraft in Canada.

**The dedication ceremony  
NORTH WEALD AIRFIELD  
8<sup>th</sup> April 1942**

According to contemporary records, the official dedication and presentation of Supermarine Spitfire BL900 “The Canadian Policeman” to No.403 Squadron Officer Commanding Sqdn. Ldr. Ken Campbell, DFC by Air Vice-Marshal Sir Philip Game, GCVO, GBE, KCB, KCMG, DSO Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police took place on April 8<sup>th</sup> 1942.

The aircraft received a fairly standard painted inscription THE CANADIAN POLICEMAN in capitals on the side of the upper fuel tank coaming forward of the pilot’s cockpit. From news coverage it also appears that an inscribed silver plaque was carried by the original aircraft. It was stated to be on the 'bottom' of the aircraft but it is unclear what that term actually meant.

**Fear not, but trust in Providence wherever thou may be**

**Good Luck**

**This Spitfire was purchased under the sponsorship of the Ontario Police Association of Windsor, Ontario. with donations from police departments in all parts of the United States and Canada. A complete list is on file with Sir Phillip Game Commissioner of Scotland Yard.**

Other notables in the copies of the official photographs held by the North Weald Airfield Museum Association [NWAMA] collection include Air Vice Marshall Edwards, F/O Harry Francis and P/O “Timber” Woods. Five

photographs [two possibly unofficial] and two newspaper pictures plus two text cuttings.



According to the NWSOR the morning of the ceremony the weather was reported as 5/10 cumulus cloud at about 8,000 feet and a layer of misty cloud at 18,000 feet. The North Weald Wing was off the ground shortly after dawn to carry out a sweep over France east of Dunkirk with the Debden and Hornchurch Wings. The operation lasted from 0710hrs to 0855hrs and all aircraft returned safely. The document shows no entry for the ceremony nor for the high profile visitors.

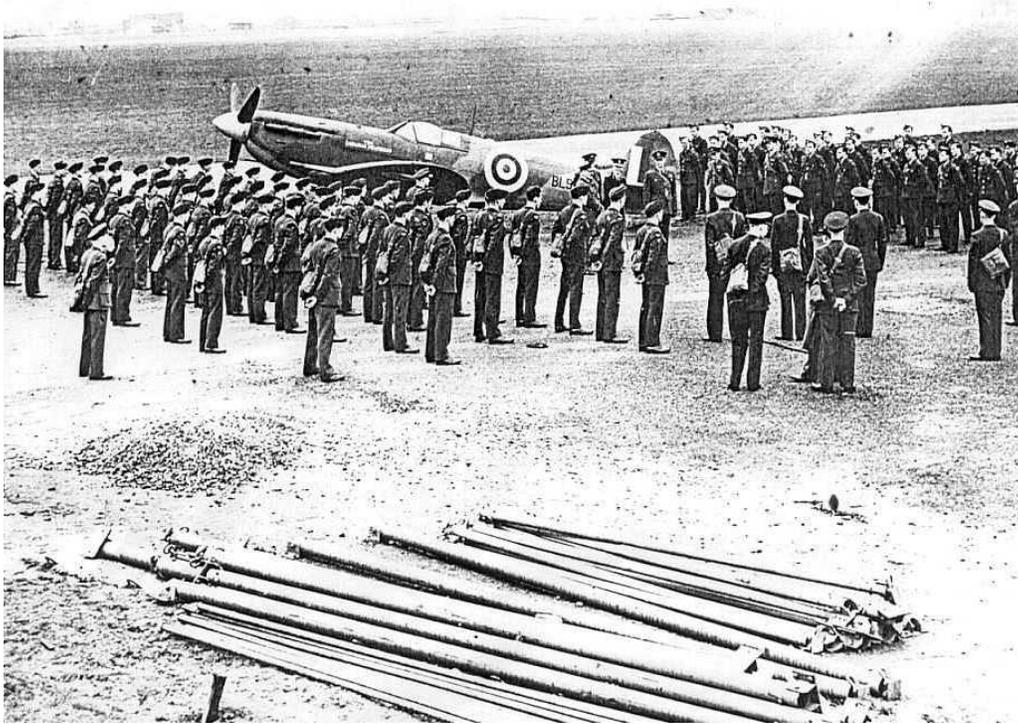


Edited extract of text from a newspaper ...

### **403 Squadron**

**This squadron has successfully defended its aerodrome against enemy ground attacks ... The Canadian police officers who were responsible for this squadron having a new "Spit" the Canadian Policeman heard all about it the other day when P/O G Hoben broadcast to Canada about his experiences. P/O Hoben a former member of the RCMP has been named as the pilot of the police plane.**

F/Lt Brad Walker of London Ont. And F/O Harry Francis are doing the sights of Edinburgh this week. Both are on leave and spending it in Scotland...



Y, APRIL 7, 1942

### His Victory Roll



Full of exuberance, a pilot of a Canadian squadron demonstrates a new version of the "Victory Roll."

### Leads Flight



F/Lt Bradley Walker, of this city, who commanded a squadron of R. C. A. F. planes in a raid over the coast of Northern France.



According to the North Weald Station Operational Record [NWSOR] Campbell was lost in a collision over enemy territory on April 27. As a result he was replaced with some urgency by A/Ldr. A C "Al" Deere DFC Bar who served through until August 1942. See his book *"Nine Lives"* as it mentions the squadron shut down and his call to command the squadron the day before they transferred to Southend on Sea [Rochford]. They were shut down, and off operations, for about a week, being returned to operations on May 5. There is no trace in this book of the incident at Catterick in which Hobden is said to have died.



According to the NWSOR the move took place on May 2. The squadron remained a detached part of the North Weald Wing and operated with them but there are no entries on 403 related ground accidents for them from this date onward.

On May 4, the date given for the collision in which the first "The Canadian Policeman" was wrecked; the NW Wing was involved in escorting six Boston aircraft over France. In accordance with the information that they were off operations there was no specific mention of the squadron or an instance where BL900 was involved in a collision with aircraft AB865, where BL900 hit the second aircraft while it was parked. We are currently assuming that ex-RCMP officer Gordon Hoben was the pilot.

According to official records, Spitfire V AR345 was issued to the squadron the day after the collision [i.e. May 5] and is not noted as having any name allocated to it. Nonetheless the second wind for "*The Canadian Policeman*" appears vested in this Spitfire V.

When AR345 crashed in a flying accident and suffered Category E damage near Topcliffe, Yorkshire in July 1943 Hoben, the ex-Mountie, was the pilot. The wreckage was found by a local girl who removed the engraved silver dedication plate and sent it back to Windsor as Windsor Ont. was on it as the place of origin. There is no known record of any 403 Squadron operational loss in July, and they were officially classed as "resting", so again it is assumed to be an accidental loss.

It was the engraved plate that led to an enquiry to Scotland Yard, London, which led in turn to the NWAMA at North Weald giving advice to the police. The information gleaned as a result of their subsequent enquiries to the RAF Museum, Hendon, led back again to the NWAMA and its collection of material.

According to records held in Toronto the Police Association of Ontario sponsored two planes both Spitfires. It is currently assumed that it is possible that BL900 was the first and AR345 was the second Spitfire named "*The Canadian Policeman*". The text of the dedication plate was printed in an article in 1942, is held by the enquirer and is stated to be slightly different from that on the plate which was returned to Canada. It is currently unclear whether this is the same as the text - reproduced above - which also came from a media source, possibly UK. If in fact there were two Spitfires sponsored this may be explained – with two Spitfires there may have been two differently worded dedication plates.

NWAMA does not know where its display material came from, but there is a strong link to Flt. Lt. Bradley "Brad" Walker in its content. Al Deere mentions him in his book and describes him as a red-head. Strangely, in among the museum material ascribed to the event there is a 403 Squadron related news cutting dated April 7, 1942 [the day before the dedication ceremony]. The picture is of three flyers – one jumping - and has a caption "His victory roll". Full of exuberance, a pilot of a Canadian squadron demonstrates a new version of the "Victoria Roll". Another cutting is of Flt. Lt. Bradley Walker "of this city" [Toronto] who commanded a squadron of RCAF planes in a raid over the coast of northern France. Possibly Toronto Daily Star 1942 was the source of some or most of the cuttings held.

According to Al Deere's book the unit moved to Martlesham Heath after further very heavy losses and on June 18 they moved to Catterick, replaced in the Wing by the Norwegian 332 Squadron posted at North Weald. From further reading of his book [which is of course about him] there were no further references before he was posted away.

Windsor Police are still looking for a second plane that was also purchased for the war effort in case it bore a different dedication. It is known that the Police Association of Ontario was the sponsor and that the purchase was in 1943 or 1944. A man who was at the ceremony has said that the pilot was one Flt. Lt. (possibly Gordon) Ball and that a General McNaughton was also present. The official permission to raise more funds for the second Spitfire wasn't granted until after AR345 was given to 403.

Although current Canadian enquiries are slavishly following the assumption that this aircraft was a Spitfire, there is no document that proves this. The only definite link would be a police like name. The last known dedication aircraft [probably the fourth] was to be named the *Commissioner Wood RCMP*, but by all accounts this was cancelled at war end.

Enquiry with:-  
*Staff Sergeant Dave Rossell*  
*Windsor Police Service,*  
*Media Relations,*  
*P.O. Box 60,*  
*Windsor, ON*  
*Canada N9A 6J5*

## **The Canadian Policeman**

This was also the year that James Wilkinson went to the police commission and asked permission to raise funds for the war effort. Originally from Leeds, England, Wilkinson asked not only to raise funds but wanted enough to buy a Spitfire fighter plane. The cost: \$25,000. And the commission "heartily endorsed" his efforts.

This chapter of our history had been forgotten by almost everyone until the daughter of Sergeant George Markham turned in a picture of her father holding a dedication plate and a letter from 1942. The dedication plate read:

The Canadian Policeman

This "Spitfire" was purchased under the sponsorship of the Ontario Police Association, Windsor, Ont. With donations received from police departments in all parts of the United States of America and Canada Complete list on file with Sir Philip Game, Commissioner Scotland Yard  
Fear not but trust in providence  
Wherever thou may be, Good Luck Pilot.

In short, the letter was from a farm girl in Yorkshire, England. According to the letter she had found the Spitfire's wreckage in a field, and its pilot inside dead. She found the dedication plate, removed it and sent it back to Windsor.

This picture would lead to a six-month investigation to determine who the Ontario Police Association was and why was Windsor involved. The entire \$25,000 had been raised by October, 1941. The dedication plate was engraved in Windsor and presented to the commission. According to James Wilkinson's son Gordon, his father received a great deal of help from a chief of detectives in Detroit, who enlisted the aid of entertainers who came to the Fox Theater to perform. He remembers stars such as Red Skelton, Janet Gaynor and Betty Grable to name a few.

Unfortunately, the name on the plate was mixed up. The funds had actually been raised through the Police Association of Ontario, of which Wilkinson was the first president from Windsor. The plane was purchased and a dedication ceremony was held April 8<sup>th</sup>, 1942, in North Weald, England. The pilot was a former RCMP officer named Gordon Hoben.

Hoben had been with the RCMP for five years before enlisting in the air force on June 21<sup>st</sup>, 1940. Ironically, part of his time as an officer was spent in Windsor. After leaving the RCMP Hoben, a trained bomber pilot, had logged 15 flights over Germany and Italy when he was selected to fly "The Canadian Policeman." This was the first time in the history of the RAF or RCAF that a non-military organization was able to name the pilot of a gift of war plane.

Hoben was attached to the 403 squadron whose badge was a wolf's head. Its motto: Stalk and Strike. This squadron consisted entirely of Spitfires. At the

dedication, Sir Philip Game was on hand to represent all the officers who had donated to this noble cause who could not obviously attend. Three flanks of Spitfires were arranged on the parade square with Hoben and his plane, a Spitfire Mk, being the fourth flank. In honour of the occasion, one side of the square was made up entirely of RCMP officers who had joined the RCAF.

Hoben was rightfully proud of his assignment and new fighter. He would write to his parents in Ottawa, "I then went up and met the members of the RCMP and it was grand to see so many whom I knew. There must have been at least 24 of them and I knew about half." He added: "They were most cordial to me and seemed so pleased with the plane and the honour bestowed upon me. It really did my heart good."

By April, 1942, they were flying as bomber escorts and as a fighter squadron and would lose their third commanding officer in a year. On June 2<sup>nd</sup>, they were attacked by a group of about 30 enemy planes and lost six pilots. After this, the squadron was moved north for a much deserved rest. The original plane named the Canadian Policeman had a short life. On May 4<sup>th</sup>, 1942, it was destroyed in a taxiing accident but apparently the name was kept alive when the door and dedication plate were transferred to another plane. Sadly, on July 11<sup>th</sup>, 1942, Hoben's plane crashed near Topcliffe aerodrome and he was killed. Records of this crash are sketchy and it isn't known why the plane went down.

It would so happen that days after the first accident, Wilkinson approached the commission for support in raising funds for a second plane. In all funds for three Spitfires were raised. The last plane was to be named the "Commissioner Wood R.C.M.P." But by the time the funds for the third plane had been raised, the war's end was near. The remaining \$25,000 would then be donated to the Red Cross in 1945.

Gordon Wilkinson remembers being overseas with the Canadian army and having the honour of attending a dedication ceremony for one of the planes his father had helped purchase. He remembers the pilot being a Flight Lieutenant Ball and that the plane had been shot down. This may have been the second plane, but up to this time no information on it can be found.

In June of 1944, the Windsor Police Association complained to the police commission that during the raising of these funds, people thought it was through them and not the PAO. They asked the commission to instruct Wilkinson to ensure his work was done under the name of the Police Association of Ontario.

While the dedication plate said the list of donors was on file with Scotland Yard, they have been unable to find who was involved. The actions of Wilkinson and all others who helped should be a source of pride for all police officers.