



HARVARD HISTORICAL AVIATION SOCIETY

presents,

Harvard Flyer December 2021 Edition



Our society has taken responsibility for preserving the history of the two pilot training bases that operated in Central Alberta during WWII as part of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan. They are: No. 32 Elementary Flying Training School near Bowden (now the Bowden Institution) and No. 36 Service Flying Training School at Springbrook, both were Royal Air Force bases during WWII. The aerodrome within the community of Springbrook (formally named Mynarski Park) closed at the end of October 1944 the aerodrome at Bowden closed in September 1944. The base in Springbrook was reactivated in 1952 as RCAF Station Penhold. In 1955 the Bowden facility became a medium security provincial jail for adult men as well as a facility for male juvenile offenders.



This remembrance day, at our largest ceremony in HHAS history, we remembered the last men to die while training at No. 36 Service Flying Training School, Penhold and No. 32 Elementary Training School, Bowden. They are Sgt/Pilot Gordon Bennett and his student Leading Aircraftman Charles De Wever at Bowden and Flying Officer David Merry and his student Leading Aircraftman George Conway here at Penhold.

Gordon Bennett age 22, from England and Charles De Wever age 22, from Belgium died on August 26, 1944 when one of the wings of the Cornell Mk.II they were flying fell off. Witnesses saw the wing fall off and the plane falling vertically at full throttle. The wing fell off due to a flaw in the construction of the spar that supported the wings.

Charles De Wever lived in German occupied Belgium during the early years of the war. He left his home in August, 1942 and made his way across France and Spain to Gibraltar with a goal of joining the Royal Air Force. The journey took him ten months. He joined the RAF in September 1943.

David Merry age 21 and George Conway age 19 died when their plane crashed near here on May 5, 1944. David Merry, a senior instructor at Penhold, was from Trinidad where he had excelled in cricket. George Conway was from Bluff, New Zealand. They took off from the Penhold Aerodrome just before midnight on May 4, 1944 for a night navigation exercise to Bashaw and back. Shortly after they took off the area was engulfed from the north by a dense cloud of smoke obscuring the aerodrome in a matter of minutes. In what may have been an attempt to return to the aerodrome their aircraft, flying low in very low visibility, crashed into the ground about 1.5 miles SW of here, near RR 282. The plane was flying wings level in a slow descent under considerable power when it hit a stand of poplar trees. In the following disintegration of the aircraft George Conway was thrown clear of the cockpit while still attached to the left pilot seat. David Merry most likely died on impact and remained with the wreckage in the subsequent fire. George Conway, while severely injured including a fractured neck, was able to crawl a few hundred feet from the crash site where he ultimately succumbed to his injuries. We remember them.

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HHAS road Trip to the Saskatchewan Aviation Museum

Tony Lindhout, Secretary, HHAS

On Saturday, November 6 three members of the Harvard Historical Aviation Society, Tyler Soderberg, Shane Cockrill and Tony Lindhout (and their spouses) drove out to Saskatoon to visit the Saskatchewan Aviation Museum. The primary purpose of the trip was to gain insight into details regarding their completed Tiger Moth. Related to this was exploration of any extra Tiger Moth parts and/or recommendations that they might have to help us with our Tiger Moth project. We met with Steve Molinelli, the museum's Operations Manager, who toured us around their museum facility and spent considerable time explaining the history and purpose of their flyable Tiger Moth which serves as their primary revenue source by offering flights to the general public (\$250/flight x 300 flights in 2021). Steve also explained their journey to becoming a viable, dynamic and diverse museum, providing significant "food for thought", lessons learned and inspiration for us to consider in our museum journey. In that context, he offered to meet with our Board and volunteers to have a mutual conversation regarding museum growth strategies, etc.

In conclusion, the trip was very beneficial gaining insights into some of the issues we are having with our Tiger Moth restoration project and potential museum initiatives.



Volunteer Spotlight: Jodi Smith

As one of the founders of the organization, and the current president, Jodi continues to drive the Harvard Historical Aviation Society to preserve the history of CFB Penhold. Jodi and her husband met while she worked on the base, as a lifeguard at the pool. Dan (another one of the organizations amazing volunteers), was a member of the RCAF. Their first home together was located right in Mynarski Park, and after relocated to many other bases, that same community (now called Springbrook) was where they chose to settle down and raise their children. A grandma to three, mother to two, and friend to many, Jodi continues to volunteer countless hours ensuring the fundraising efforts continue and our end goal of a full museum are never lost. Jodi's dedication to this organization and it's many volunteers continues to be recognized by all!



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Peter Horsley, Reluctant Instructor at No. 36 SFTS

By Bill Mackay

Other than those who died we know very little about the instructors at RAF No. 36 SFTS Penhold. However there are a few who we know a good deal about, one of them is Air Marshall Sir Peter Hosley who was an instructor at Penhold in 1942/43. His time at Penhold was pointed out to me by Penny Paine, daughter of Don Wallington who was also and instructor at No. 36 SFTS when Peter Horsely was there. Horsely went on to a distinguished career in the RAF. He left the RAF with the rank of Air Marshal and was knighted for his service - Air Marshal Sir Beresford Peter Torrington Horsley, KCB, CBE, LVO, AFC

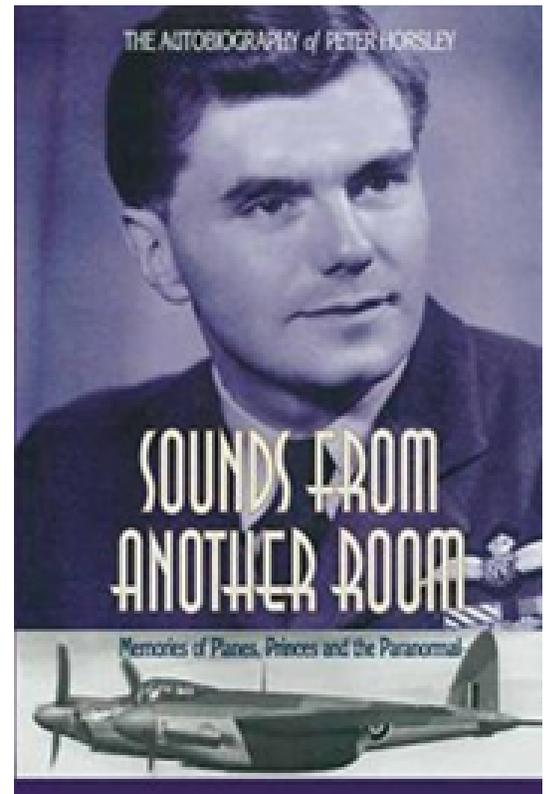
Peter Horsley had an upper middle class upbringing and attended Dragon School, Oxford and Wellington College, both private (called Public Schools in England) boarding schools. He left Wellington college when he was 18 and obtained a position as a deck boy on a ship to Malaya. He obtained the position through a school connections whose father was a director of the shipping company Blue Funnel. When the ship he was on, Cyclops, docked in Malaysia he heard about the start of WWII and he immediately transferred to Menelaus, another Blue Funnel ship, that was heading back to England.

On his return to England Horsley abandoned his position in the Merchant Navy which should have made him ineligible for the RAF. But eventually he was able to join the RAF and train as an air gunner.

However he was able to lobby a family friend who was senior in the RAF to allow him to re-muster and train as a pilot.

He did so well in pilot training that he was made an instructor, first at RAF Cranwell, In Lincolnshire, England then at No. 36 SFTS Penhold. Horsely was an instructor for Air Speed Oxfords at RAF Penhold where he was stationed from 1942/43. He was apparently unhappy about this assignment to the back woods of western Canada away from the war action. He considered this a low point in his career but according to information from Don Wallington's wife, Joan, he participated in the local social scene, including attending the dances put on for servicemen in the local towns and dating local girls.

In 1943 Horsely transferred from No. 36 SFTS Penhold to the Mosquito conversion unit at Greenwood, New Brunswick where he learned to fly twin engine Mosquito bombers. While at Greenwood he met his future wife, Phyllis Phinney, a student at nearby Acadia University. An example of a reverse war bride. Also at Greenwood Horsley partnered with his navigator, Frank "Bambi" Gunn. om. (continued....)



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In late 1943 Horsely and Gunn returned to England on the Queen Mary and there they joined No 140 wing of No 21 RAF Mosquito night intruder squadron at Hunsdon, Hertfordshire. They flew as low as 50 feet above the English Channel and their targets. After dropping their bombs they scrambled to escape enemy fire. From D-Day, June 6, 1944, and several days afterward Horsely and Gunn flew several low level night mission each night. They were eventually shot down and the aircraft crashed into the sea near Cherbourg, France. Horsley yelled to Bambi to bale out before baling out himself. Although injured he survived in a small rubber dingy that was attached to his survival equipment. Bambi did not survive. Three days later Horsley was picked up by a RAF rescue launch. During the time he was recovering Horsley was tormented by his dreams and became convinced that Bambi had contacted him although Bambi was dead. This conviction lead to a life long interest in the paranormal in addition to his interest in aliens and flying saucers.



Mosquito bomber in flight

Following his recovery Horsely was expelled from No. 140 Wing as a result of some bad behaviour, splashing naked in a public fountain, after a pub crawl with fellow rowdy airmen. He managed to join 2nd Tactical Air Force's communications squadron in France. He was then posted to No 23 Training Group and in 1948 was made adjutant at the Oxford University Air Squadron. Horsley was promoted to Squadron Leader and in August 1949 he appointed equerry to Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip. When Elizabeth became Queen in 1952 he became equerry to the Duke of Edinburgh.

The role of equerry is equivalent to that of an aide-de-camp. In January 1957 Horsely returned to his RAF career which included training roles as well as a some Cold War activity in Cyprus. He achieved the rank of air Vice-marshal and on his retirement in 1975 he was Deputy Commander in Chief, Strike Command.

In 1997 Horsely published his autobiography, Sounds from Another Room.

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The Tiger Moth project is in full force! The team of volunteers are looking for the following tools to assist them in this build project, please contact our team at info@penholdbase.ca should you have any of the following you are interested in donating to the Harvard Historical Aviation Society.

- 1/4 drive socket sets S.A.E
- 3/8 Drive Socket Sets S.A.E
- Sets of wrenches S.A.E
- Pliers of all types
- Screwdrivers :Phillips 1.2&3, Standard(slotted)
- Riveting tools
- Sheet metal tools
- Woodworking tools
- Painting equipment
- Work lights
- Drill indexes (numbered set would be great)
- Floor model sandblasting cabinet
- Vises
- Larger containers to use for cleaning parts

Are you interested in becoming a volunteer with the Harvard Historical Aviation Society?

We are always looking for new members of our teams, and no experience is necessary to become a part of aviation history! We are currently looking for assistance in the following areas:

1. Aircraft Builds and Maintenance
2. Fundraising and Event Planning
3. Ticket Sales and Event Support
4. Inventory and Asset Management

Email info@penholdbase.ca or contact us on social media today!

Wishing you and yours a
Merry Christmas and a
Happy New Year!

FROM THE TEAM AND VOLUNTEERS OF THE
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