

**THE FIRST
OF
THE SIX THOUSAND
WW 11 RADAR
AND
AN ACCOUNT OF CANADIANS
ENLISTING IN 1940-1941
AND ATTENDING RAF RADIO SCHOOLS
YATESBURY, CRANWELL, PRESTWICK**

Prepared by W.H. (Bill) Barrie

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The First of the Six Thousand by Fred B. Grahame

Preface

The following is a section of the Canadian Radar History Project undertaken by a committee chaired by R.F. Linden and completed during 1998-1999.

This section is an account of those "Direct Entry" Canadian Officers and Radar Mechanics who enlisted in Canada and received their radar training in the UK at the Royal Air Force Radio Schools of Yatesbury, Cranwell and Prestwick.

This "Direct Entry" history was ably assembled by Fred Grahame from material written by thirty radar veterans who took the time to contribute their experiences. I have expanded Fred's January 1995 Revision using material from the Canadian Archives, from later submissions and from personal experience.

Fred B. Grahame died in 1996. As a friend of Fred's I am honoured to be able to add to this work so ably begun.

William H. Barrie

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The First of the Six Thousand

Part I- Introduction

The Call from the Royal Air Force, October 4,1940

In early 1939, the High Commissioners of the Dominions were apprised of the Most Secret defence device, Radio Direction Finding (RDF), by the British government. (The acronym RDF was changed to RADAR in 1941/1942). Shortly thereafter, A.G.L. MacNaughton, President of the National Research Council of Canada (NRC), spent some time in the United Kingdom (UK) examining the research and these new devices. In September, 1939, Dr. R. W. Boyle of NRC delayed his return to Canada to examine and report on the many advances in RDF that had been made during the summer. During the spring of 1939, airborne radar was still a hot-house flower requiring the care of, and operation by, skilled scientists and even with this treatment it often failed to give consistent results. The radar control of fighter aircraft that provided victory, in September 1940, for the Royal Air Force (RAF) in the daylight Battle of Britain, was no more than an early warning of an air attack during the Blitz of Britain that followed. The effectiveness of the ground defences in 1940 was reduced almost to zero at night because Fighter Command possessed neither the aircraft nor equipment nor training for useful night air defence. Air Vice Marshal H. C. Dowding, Air Officer Commanding, Fighter Command, correctly foresaw the solution to the problem in scientific terms - interception by airborne radar (AI) which would have to "become a gunsight."

On October 4, 1940, the High Commissioner for the UK in Ottawa, Sir Gerald Campbell, wrote to the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, Dr. O. D. Skelton: "The Royal Air Force is in urgent need of recruits for the actual maintenance and operation of RDF equipment in the United Kingdom. As you know, RDF work is a very recent development, and war conditions are forcing the pace. In view of the great operational value, the supply of the necessary apparatus has been very greatly expedited in the United Kingdom in recent months, and there is now a serious shortage of trained radio personnel, both officers and men, for the maintenance of the available equipment....The present deficiency is most serious in the categories of radio officers and radio mechanics, and I have been asked to ascertain whether the Canadian Government would be willing to assist in meeting the urgent need of the Royal Air Force in this connection by recruiting men in Canada who have radio experience for service as radio officers and radio mechanics with the Royal Air Force."

Canada's Response, October 10, 1940

The Canadian Government responded 10/11 October by authorizing RCAF Recruiting Centres to recruit immediately up to one hundred radio officers and one thousand radio mechanics. All possible sources of recruiting were explored. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation made the following broadcast:

"A large number of radio men are required by the RCAF for service overseas, according to an announcement by the Minister of National Defence for Air at a press conference today. Selected volunteers will be enlisted in a new category, for which

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the requirements are:

First class practical knowledge of the theory of radio transmission and reception. Candidates would have considerable experience in servicing and fault-finding in most up-to-date modern receivers, and they must know the basic principles on which these receivers work. A knowledge of short-wave receivers is an advantage.

Only experienced men are to be accepted, and they should apply in the first instance at the nearest RCAF Recruiting Centre in their locality, but it is particularly requested that only thoroughly qualified men should apply.

The majority will be required for ground duties only, and it is expected that they will be sent overseas immediately on completion of their recruit training.

A limited number of vacancies also exists for officers in the same branch. Candidates for commissions should preferably have a University degree in Electrical Physics or Radio Engineering, and a first class knowledge of modern radio both from the theoretical and practical side. It is desirable that they should also have had experience in short-wave transmission and reception. Professional experience in radio is not essential, and radio amateurs with considerable experience in operating their own stations are eligible, providing their other qualifications are acceptable. Officers should apply in the first instance to the nearest RCAF Recruiting Centre. It is emphasized that knowledge of the Morse Code is not necessary either in the case of officers or men."

Recruiting Results

The following excerpts are from an article titled "*Radar: Canada's Hidden History*" by R.F.Linden, published in the magazine "Airforce" Vol 17 No 4, in the winter of 1993:

"After one month of strenuous recruiting activities, it was evident that this number of qualified men was not available in Canada. The recruiting drive netted only 61 radio officers and 794 radio mechanics all of whom received their radar technical training in the UK As the Minister of National Defence for Air, the Hon. C. G. "Chubby" Power told the Canadian House of Commons: "The urgency of the need for RDF mechanics, which had the highest priority of all requests for manpower from the UK, started with a request for 1,000, then 2,500, and by January 1941, reached a total of 8,500. The War Committee, (Canadian) however, in view of other manpower requirements, authorized commitments for only 1,500. Following a subsequent enquiry from the UK, this figure was raised to 5,000 to be enlisted and trained in Canada."

The recruiting officers faced the problem of screening hundreds of men for work that was not and could not, either for security reasons or otherwise, be precisely defined. They went to the Department of Transport to obtain the names of Ham Radio Operators, and while this lead was very helpful, there was no easy way to determine the technical competence of the applicants. Some were highly skilled while others had merely purchased a short-wave set and learned the Morse Code.

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Some recruits were incorrectly placed in the officer category, while others who deserved to be officers were signed up as LACs. In at least one instance the promotion was made after the man arrived in the UK. A month or so after the recruiting drive had begun, 68 officers had been signed up and of these only 61 continued in Radar work in Britain. Practically all of the 794 radar mechanics went to Britain, and while some were suitable for entry to the radar school at Yatesbury, a large number were first given "ab initio" training at London's North Polytechnic, and Woolwich Polytechnic, as well as Leeds Polytechnic before proceeding to Yatesbury.

Part 11 - Preparing the History

Gathering the Information

When it was decided to prepare this "History," requests were made to veterans for letters relating their experiences and 30 were received from the group who proceeded to Britain to take their training before the Radar schools opened in Canada in May, 1941. All of the letters contribute to the record of the events that occurred half a century ago, and the names of those who took the time to write are listed elsewhere in this volume.

Selecting a Method of Presentation

Space does not permit us to repeat the letters in their entirety but in order to present a coherent chronicle, we have decided to use one typical story and embellish it at various stages with the experiences of others relating to the same place or topic. We selected the story of W.H. Barrie who sailed to Britain in January 1941, and was sufficiently qualified to begin the advanced course at #2 Radio School at Yatesbury. To represent the large group who saw Iceland, and also required the "ab initio" course, we have chosen parts of Chas. Baster's letter, and supplemented it with excerpts from letters by others who also saw Iceland, many of whom also required the "ab initio" course. Finally, two others wrote who had begun their basic training in Canada before embarkation in August, 1941.

Part III - "You're in the Air Force Now"

Manning Depot

At the Exhibition Grounds in Toronto, the RCAF located its #1 Manning Depot in the Cow Palace and the Coliseum. Here in 1940, radar recruits were assembled, housed, and over a period of six weeks, kitted, drilled and documented. No one forgets the button polishing, the inoculations, and the medical examination indignities. (See Figs. 1a, 1b, 1c)

Drafts

Groups of radar personnel were gathered into drafts in preparation for proceeding overseas. These drafts varied in number from about 33 to 160 men and were sized to match the ship space available at the ports of Saint John and Halifax. Travel from Manning Depot to the East Coast was by train (See Figs. 1d, 1e). The short cut across Maine was not used since the United States was a neutral country until December 1941. Some terrible snarls occurred at the ports when cases of measles or

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scarlet fever were found. Some personnel were delayed to later drafts. The "Gypsy Squadron" story is one of unplanned chaos, as about 130 men full of enthusiasm in February, spent about two months in frustration before being able to travel overseas.

Part IV - Drafts from Canada to the UK, 1940-1941

There are, of course, several methods which might have been used to select the poignant excerpts from the letters, but we have chosen to sort chronologically the sailing dates of the ships which carried us across the North Atlantic and to name those correspondents who sailed in each, thereby facilitating the grouping and screening process.

An extremely important phase of the history of the RCAF radar personnel filling the need by the RAF, is the story of how we were transported across the North Atlantic, between December 1940 and the summer of 1941. It would have been disastrous to have spent weeks recruiting and screening and then have lost the lives of those who had volunteered their services in Britain's hour of need. We therefore trust that the reader will bear with us while we reproduce excerpts relating events that appear to have been vividly remembered by so many. Future research may well expose casualties presently unknown. (See Figs. 2a, 2b and 9)

Conditions prevailing in the North Atlantic from November 1940 until May, 1941, are described in "My Radar Service Record in WW 11" by Fred Grahame, (ISBN 0-9693817-3-5) dated 1993. In 1940, when the Germans had captured Denmark, the British occupied Iceland to protect the sea routes to and from America. They established at least two bases in Iceland, one being a transit camp near Reykjavik, and the other a naval base in a fjord on the northwestern coast of the island. The British occupation lasted until July 1941, when the Americans took over following the signature of the Lend-Lease Treaty. It should be noted that the Nerissa was torpedoed during its next round trip, the Leopoldville was sunk in the Bay of Biscay, the Georgic was destroyed in the Mediterranean and many of the others were damaged or sunk before the end of the war.

Some of the ships that carried veterans who submitted letters, went directly to Britain. One of these, the Georgic, made two trips. There were four ships that stopped briefly in Iceland. From those veterans who submitted letters, the following is a summary of their ships:

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<u>Ship</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Names</u> (See Appendix "A"- Passenger Lists)
Pennland	Dec. 13, 1940	Ashword, W; Bell, Herbert C; Bourne, Bruce; Jackson, Herb W.
Leopoldville	Jan. 5, 1941	Booth, W.M; Boyanoski, F.V; Clarke, D; Morgan, W; Porter, S.P; Stacey, S.D; Stott, W; Taylor, Roy A; Valeriotte, P.
Nerissa	Jan. 27,1941	Barrie, W; Card, L.C. ; Dowden, B; Gooderham, D.
Johan Van Oldenbarnevelt	Feb. 6, 1941	- then to Georgic, Apr. 6, 1941 (Gypsy Squadron)
Georgic	Feb. 23, 1941	Camden, J.O ; Glazer, A.
Montclare*	Mar. 1941	Baster, Chas; Breault, Alton; MacPhail, G.
Georgic	Apr. 6,1941	Ball, R.H; Greenaway, J; Kee, F; Keeley, J; McMillan, L.T; Reid, Geo; Rhodenizer, C.T.
Laconia*	Apr. 11, 1941	Bradford, M.F; Grahame, F.B; Little, G.M.
California*	Apr. 17, 1941	Adlington,R. ; Barrett, A.C.W; Boving, P.A; Brule, R; de Macedo, F.J. (Royal Ulsterman to UK)
Derbyshire*	Apr.24, 1941	Gardner, John; Smith, Frank (Royal Ulsterman to UK)
Circassia*	Apr. 1941	Small, D.R.
Andes	May 1941	Killen, Marshall
Erria	Aug. 1941	Harbottle, G.
Dominion Monarch	Aug. 1941	Smith, N.P.
Hectoria	Aug. 16,1941	Johnson, E.L.
Warwick Castle	Oct. 9,1941	McLeod, Harry.

Note: Ships marked * went to Iceland.

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Part V - Excerpts from The Letters of Thirty Radar Veterans

Three of our ships Pennland, Nerissa and Leopoldville, made their crossings during December 1940 and January 1941 while the German battleship, Admiral Scheer was in the North Atlantic. Prior to the departure of W.H. Barrie on the "Nerissa". the "Pennland" had sailed in December 1940, carrying two veterans, Bell and Jackson, whose letters are, in part, as follows:

Bell, Herbert C

..... We left Halifax (after boarding a train at Union station, Toronto, on Fri. 13th) Dec. 1940. Arrived in N.W. Scotland on Xmas Day on S.S. " Pennland", Holland American Line. Proceeded to London, and then to Upper Heyford Bomber training station, located between Oxford and Banbury.

We removed electronic equipment from aircraft when defective and which was sent to Leighton Buzzard for repair. I told my Warrant Officer that I was capable to repair this equipment without sending it elsewhere. He tested my abilities to do this, and proceeded to do it with success, and I was promoted to Corporal, after which I applied for a Commission. After being interviewed by Senior Officers I was sent to London for tests by a special board, and granted the rank of Pilot Officer - the first Canadian to be commissioned in the UK. I returned to Upper Heyford and went to Oxford to get my Officer's uniform. I then packed my things and went to Yatesbury for an Officers' Training Course, in July, ' 41.

Jackson, Herb W

..... We sailed from Halifax on a troop ship (Pennland) in the middle of a convoy of cargo ships. In the middle of the North Atlantic, we came out on deck one morning to find a very worried army commander pacing the deck. The convoy was nowhere in sight. Rumour had it that the degaussing cable developed trouble during the night and had to be switched off. This threw off the calibration of the ship's compass-so the Pennland blissfully sailed on a course all its own. Near dusk, a Royal Navy cruiser showed up on the horizon to escort us to Scotland.

.... The first station (January to April, 1941) was a non-operational reserve bomber field. Because we had no experience with RAF radio equipment, Milt Hallman (related to band leader Art Hallman) and I lived at the station's transmitter site about two miles from the field - thus releasing a couple of RAF WEMs for duty on the base.

The RDF school at Yatesbury was an isolated compound in the back corner of the main Radio School where most of the trainees seemed to be W/T operators. My permanent pass as an instructor identifies the RDF section as C Squadron, 4 Wing. At Cranwell, the RDF school was again a small isolated compound beside the peacetime RAF College. The operational CHL stations I was stationed at between the winding down of intakes at Cranwell and returning to Canada were identified as

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RAF Foreness and RAF Fairlight Glen, which were administered by 75 Wing located in a suburb of London. Clinton was still No. 31 RDF School, RAF, when I was posted there in July 1943, but by the end of the month became No. 5 Radio School, RCAF.

The "Nerissa" made an eastward crossing leaving Halifax January 27, carrying W.H.Barrie and Lester Card as part of a draft of about 55 Radar personnel.

World War 11 RADAR - As seen by W.H. Barrie RCAF July 1991

Introduction - Historical, Philosophical

The following account is in response to an appeal by Allan Revill for material relating to the Canadian contribution to radar (RDF) in World War 11. In 1991, over 50 years later it is fascinating to recall the events of a titanic struggle against a ruthless, well armed, determined enemy. Hitler, Mussolini and Tojo looked down upon the peace loving democracies and laid their plans to conquer and divide the world. It was not to be so for many reasons. Courage, self-sacrifice, human spirit and at the darkest hours divine intervention saved the day.

In Britain the intellectual and scientific freedom of a pre-war society led to developments which were to play major roles in the air, sea and land war. One of these developments was radar, first developed by Robert Watson-Watt and known first as RDF (Radio Direction Finding). As one of thousands of Canadians actively engaged in the "Radar War" I will outline my four and a half years in the Royal Canadian Air Force attached to the Royal Air Force and the Royal Indian Air Force.

Beginnings - 1918 to 1940

I was born the year of the end of World War I, the "War to end all Wars." Home was one of the best managed, best equipped farms in Ontario and I was the fourth generation of Barries to reside in a large granite block house situated west of the city of Galt, and where at night the sky reflected the street lights of Waterloo, Kitchener, Preston, Guelph and Brantford. A fascination with things electrical led me through "peanut tube" radios, the Delco home lighting plant, Model "T" Ford spark coils, short-wave radio, public address systems to a radio amateur transmitting license in 1934. A radio club was formed that same year bringing together many amateur radio hobbyists in Galt, Preston, Guelph, Kitchener and Waterloo. Many of these early amateurs were to show up later as participants in the "radar" war, and continuing in the hobby in the post-war years, retained bonds of friendship by re-establishing their radio communications. Looking back at the amateur experimentation in the 1930's it is significant that the frequencies used were coincident with the early British radar frequencies and one wonders if Watson-Watt ever heard signals on his receiver from Canada. It was my personal experience in

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1941 to listen on the RF7 receiver at Yatesbury and tune in US radio amateurs who were communicating on the 30 Mhz band. By the end of 1939 I had passed the Dept. of Marine examinations for my Commercial Radio License. This was to permit me to sail the world as a shipboard "sparks." These plans were interrupted by the outbreak of war. Radio amateurs had all been instructed to dismantle their transmitting equipment and commercial operation on ships was limited to sending S O S! The disasters leading to Dunkirk upset most of us, especially when one of our Hespeler Radio Hams who had been in Royal Signals in France arrived home with a first-hand account of his narrow escape. In late summer of 1940 I received a letter from the RCAF indicating the urgent need for radio men in the RAF. This was followed up by a visit from a Flight Lieutenant who stressed the urgency, and that I would be "Direct Entry," i. e. on the job with a minimum of delay. Scarlet Fever intervened and the quarantine delayed events about six weeks. I was delivered to the recruiting centre in Hamilton by my father and still remember the look on his face as he drove away. It was November, 1940, and it was going to be "a year" before we could win the war and I could return home!

Another pre-enlistment statement is from the letter by J. O. Camden: .

....1930 was a big year. I built my first crystal set.... Like six people sitting listening to a crystal set with three pair of headphones split in half. In 1934 I passed the exam and obtained my Amateur Radio Operators licence. In 1935 I finished high school. In the summer of 1936 I obtained employment in the Radio Department of Canadian Westinghouse and finally got rid of the paper route. In the spring of 1939 I wrote and passed the exam for a Commercial Radio Operator's Licence, and in September of 1939 I left Westinghouse and became chief engineer and one man technical staff at Radio Station CJCS in Stratford for \$15 per week.

By the beginning of 1940 I was making \$21 per week and decided I could afford to buy one and a half hours of flying instruction two weekends out of three. In February I started flying in the old Waterloo airport, north of Waterloo. I flew about five hours and went solo. I went for my medical and didn't make it because of the new Ishihara colour vision tests. The Waterloo field closed down as the club took over the operation of the EFTS at Goderich.

In October of 1940, the Radio Inspector and a Recruiting Officer from London came to Stratford to try and enlist as many knowledgeable radio people as possible for some very secret radio work with the Air Force. An aircrew medical was required and when I told them I was colour blind the Recruiting Officer said "come and see us anyway." It was interesting to see how they could get around the colour vision

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problem when they wanted something. Over the next several months they gave me a lantern test four times before they were satisfied. I was so colour blind that I had been earning a living for several years working with colour coded resistors, capacitors and wires.

Continuing with Barrie's letter

Off To War- November 1940 - Manning Depot, Toronto.

The process was speedy. Oath of Allegiance, drawing up a will, getting a uniform, learning to drill, learning the rules. The Coliseum, not a home but at the Exhibition Grounds, Toronto became home for a few weeks. As Manning Depot it was take-off point for Britain and other Air Force destinations.

Another reference to Toronto Manning Depot is as follows:

P.A. Boving:

At the No.1 Manning Depot RCAF, in the Toronto Exhibition Grounds, we were permitted to go to downtown Toronto, that hive of iniquity, and me so innocent. We were marshalled into Squadrons and Flights according to our trades. The General Duty erks were put in No. 6 Squadron. The WEM(R)s were in No. 3 Squadron and 'B' Flight. We were about 33 bodies, and I remember such names as Red Matthews, Vancouver, Art 'Ding Dong' Bell, Aylmer, Ont., George Fair, Gene Krupa, George Christian, Don James, Bill Braider, Geordie Hamilton, Toronto, to name a few. In April, with a strep throat (standard for the dust in the building) was given two immunization shots, leading to 'flu and high fever. Whipped off to hospital for 10 days (Toronto University Hospital), I reported back to the Manning Depot, only to find I'm demoted to No. 6 Squadron. By arguing my way back to B Flight, No. 3 Squadron, I found the rest of the Flight coming back from a week's embarkation leave. The storekeepers hurriedly fitted me out with a gas mask, tin hat and webbing kit (fellow draftee showed me how to put the webbing gear together). "turn in your overalls and winter cap please!" Off we went to the darkest wilds of Nova Scotia, to RCAF Camp Debert. Our draft of about 30 WEM(R)s and a bunch of Sgt. Aircrew, were joined with another earlier draft of WEM(R)s from the Gypsy Flight that had been hit with Scarlet Fever. A few days later we were back in Colonist cars to be taken to the Halifax docks, where we embarked on the Armed Merchant Cruiser "California." She was the convoy Commodore's ship in a merchant convoy.

Returning again to W.H. Barrie's letter:

Various groups were assembled for overseas drafts. In January, 1941, along with 55 others I left Halifax on the RMS "Nerissa" for Glasgow. Five days of North Atlantic were frightening and several passengers never managed to leave their cabins. Explosions were heard near the Irish coast and a welcoming destroyer was seen from time to time as it topped the waves. Gun duty was a pleasant break but on

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an unstabilized platform it didn't look very dangerous to any enemy.

Surprise - we didn't know you were coming.

Disembarking in Glasgow led to an overnight stay in a large armoury and sleeping on a blanket under which was a solid concrete floor. Next day it was by train to London. We didn't know you were coming so how about seven days leave with ration money and ration card and a free railpass to go home! Meanwhile please fill in a form indicating your preferred destination! Along with a like-minded American who had joined the RCAF, I said home was Inverness. There followed a week of sight-seeing from bomb-battered London on a zigzag path north to Aberdeen since the rail pass had stop-over privileges for a pair of Canadians on the loose.

On return to London, Kobel and Barrie were posted to an RAF Base in Shetland. (We were not aware that our Yatesbuty destination had been deferred due to the earlier arrival of a large draft on the Leopoldville).

Shetland - The party is over - take cover.

The Atlantic was scary, London was bomb-scarred, but Shetland was "into the frying pan." The first inkling en route to Shetland was a daylight strafing in Aberdeen - right on the main street, by the Luftwaffe .

The tiny St. Rognevald carried Kobel and Barrie up the choppy North Sea from Aberdeen to Lerwick. Two other "Nerissa" draft people, Collins and Grove were along, having been posted to a Sunderland flying- boat squadron at Sullum Voe. However we found ourselves on an RAF fighter & bomber base on Shetland's most southern tip. The Hurricanes carried live ammunition and the Blenheims carried live bombs. Within radar sight across to the east was Trondheim, a major naval and air base. Daily it was a case of raid or be raided or both.

The only two Canadians at Sumburgh soon realized that no one knew what a WEM(R) could or should do. Capitalizing on this ambiguity, we lost no opportunity in explaining that ours was a special and secret assignment but we were willing to help the RAF for the several months of our stay.

The big CH tower at Noss Hill and the CHL antennas on the headland soon gave up their secrets as also did the Type X cipher communications. Being a fairly high speed Morse operator opened the door to an invasion warning network for me. When an underground cable was severed by a bomb in March 1941 it was a big joke to hear Lord Haw Haw describe how the Luftwaffe had destroyed a large part of the RAF installation in Shetland. Like Bell Canada, the RAF had some speedy cable splicers. Night time was eerie, the North Sea seemed full of suhmarines, small boats and blinking lights. Countless Norwegians braved the hazards of escaping the German

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occupiers in small boats.

Card describes the voyage across the Atlantic as follows:

Card, Lester C.

...I was accepted as a direct entry LAC WEM(R)...one day (in late January ---- Ed) we were told to report on parade with full kit. We marched to a truck and then were taken to the station and boarded a train on the way to Halifax where a small group of WEM(R)s and some aircrew were boarded on the "Nerissa," a mail packet ship which ran from New York to the West Indies. There were approximately 133 passengers on board and being only the exalted rank of LAC our quarters were above the drive shaft, noisy and smelly. Some of the WEM(R) LACs on board were Bill Barrie, Art Scott, Bob Broughton.

We did not join a convoy and (January 27/41---- Ed.) we made a dash to the UK. We had some southern diversions to escape submarine attacks. Lord Haw Haw mentioned our ship and who was on board, and stated we would never make it. We did, however, after sea-sickness etc., by most of the passengers. We landed in Scotland and boarded a train for London arriving there in an air-raid. We were stationed at Uxbridge awaiting our posting to a unit. Here the first night I had a very quick lesson in English currency after being short changed 10 shillings out of my first pound.

While awaiting our course at Yatesbury I was stationed in Norfolk and Hendon, finally getting to Yatesbury on the 4th of April, 1941. We were # 2 Canadian course I was at Yatesbury until the 30th of May, 1941.

Doug Gooderham describes his trip from Halifax to Glasgow on the Nerissa in January 1941.

Gooderham, Doug

..... A delay in finding passage for us led to a joyous Christmas leave, and it was not until late in January '41 that we boarded the SS "Nerissa" at Halifax, in company with a number of Canadian and Australian aircrew. The "Nerissa," formerly a Caribbean Cruise vessel, had a fair turn of speed, and sailed without escort. She made two more such trips across the Atlantic before her luck ran out. My memories of our crossing are not happy ones. My attendance in the dining salon was limited to a brief stay at breakfast the first morning out of Halifax, a pity really, as I was later told that the meals served by the "Nerissa" were excellent throughout the voyage.

I had recovered my vision, if not my stomach, by the time we passed the Orkneys - a blessed sight - and was actually able to walk ashore at Glasgow unaided, an event acknowledged immediately by a passing Glasgow pigeon. I was at once told that this somewhat messy event assured me of much good luck in the future; many subsequent events have made me a believer - I am ashamed of my scepticism at the time... A longish train ride took us to RAF Uxbridge, just outside of London ... Day three

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brought us back to reality, with a train ride to Yatesbury, Wiltshire, the home of RAF Signals School.

The largest draft of "Direct Entry" Canadian Radar personnel travelled on the "Leopoldville" on January 5th, 1941, carrying 162 airmen of whom eight veterans wrote the following:

Booth, W.M.

There were 162 of us in the first group and we sailed from Saint John, NB, on Jan 5th 1941 aboard the S.S "Leopoldville" (H.M. Troopship L/15) arriving in Liverpool on Jan 15th. From there we were posted to the RAF Signal School at Yatesbury for our training, arriving on Jan 17th We were the first batch of "Colonials " to arrive at the Signal School.

Boyanoski, Frank V.

We left Canada on Jan 5'41 aboard the good ship "Leopoldville" (5000 tons) from Saint John (Halifax?). The ship was of Belgian registry and built for the tropics. All the plumbing froze up when we hit the North Atlantic! We went unescorted and arrived in Liverpool without incident on Jan 15/41. There was much evidence that the port had been badly bombed. We spent the next day at Wilmslow near Liverpool. I believe Wilmslow was a Manning Depot of some sort. The next day we left for Calne, in Wiltshire, a town not far from the village of Yatesbury where RAF Radar School # 1 was located.

Clarke, D.

..... On January 4th we embarked on the "Leopoldville", a Belgian vessel normally on a run from Belgium to the Belgian Congo, and in our opinion not very well suited for the cold waters of the North Atlantic. Our biggest "beef" was about the food. It was awful, we mostly bought food from the dry canteen and ate that. I didn't suffer from sea-sickness for which I was thankful. I have just learned (Feb 12/92) that the "Leopoldville" was sunk on Christmas Eve 1945 near Cherbourg, France.

Morgan, W.

.... 152 of us left Canada for the UK, 5 Jan '41 aboard the S.S. "Leopoldville", a Belgian ship equipped for the tropics and therefore a stranger to the rigours of the North Atlantic! We were unescorted so we zigzagged our way, arriving in Liverpool 15 Jan '41. We arrived at RAF Yatesbury 17 Jan '41 and commenced a two month RDF (radar) course, graduating as RAF RDF Mechanics!

Porter, S.P.

The "SS Leopoldville" was not your barrel of fun. A cold January in Mid-Atlantic 1941, howling winds out of the north-east, a monstrous sea; none of these made the 2 AM watch an inviting place to be. You began to wonder - what am I doing in this place? A simple answer - of course you asked for it!

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Stacey, S.D.

Proceeded overseas Dec. 1940 on the "Leopoldville" of the Belgian Congo.... Posted immediately to Yatesbury, Hut W 10.

Stott, W.

.... There were about 168 in this initial Radio Mechanics group. We left for the UK shortly after the New Year 1941, arriving at Liverpool about January 11..... Upon arrival at Liverpool we were transferred to the technical training station at Yatesbury, Wiltshire.

Taylor, A. Roy.

.... I joined the RCAF on Nov 15th, 1940 as LAC WEM(R). Our group sailed to Britain on the Belgian Congo ship "Leopoldville" on Jan 2nd, 1941. After Radar school at Yatesbury, I was posted to a CHL Radar station at Formby, Lancs (outside Liverpool) just in time for the German blitz on that city in May.

Those were the sailings to the end of January, 1941, and on February 23 the "Georgic" sailed carrying one of our men, J.O. Camden. He does not give the exact date nor does he mention any escort, but he landed on March 5th, and the time taken for the voyage is assumed to be two weeks as documented for the second sailing. This is his letter in part:

Camden, J. O.

... I reported to the Exhibition Grounds Jan 6, 1941, for 4 weeks indoctrination (Learning to be an Officer and a Gentleman), followed by a couple of weeks embarkation leave. When we got back to the Exhibition Grounds there was an epidemic of a contagious disease, so we were billeted in the Royal York. We left Toronto in late February for Halifax where we boarded the "Georgic". After a very rough passage we landed at Liverpool, March 5th. We were put on a train for Uxbridge arriving about one in the morning. They had prepared a supper for us and we got our first taste of Britain's wartime food. After about a week we were dispersed in groups of 2 to 4 as supernumeraries at various RDF stations around Britain. Seven weeks later we were gathered together at Yatesbury in Wiltshire for an eight-week course in the technicalities of RDF. (Later Radar, after the Yanks got into the war).

I spent most of the first seven weeks at Air Ministry Experimental Station Drone Hill. AMES was the official Air Force designation of all RDF stations. Drone Hill was on the east coast, north of Berwick-on-Tweed, just inside the border of Scotland. It was one of the original 13 CH (Chain Home) stations built before the war. It operated about 21 megacycles (now megahertz) with a peak pulse power of 250, 000 watts. The transmitting antenna was a curtain array hung on four 365 foot steel towers. The receiving antennas were mounted on 240 foot

On March 15th, The "Scharnhorst" and "Gneisenau" sank thirteen tankers and freighters, and on

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March 17th the Admiralty decided to have a battleship with every convoy....

The armed merchantman "Montclare" sailed in March, acting as "Ocean Escort" for a convoy of 57 ships whose "Close Escort" was the battleship "HMS Revenge." The "Montclare" left her convoy and continued to Reykjavik, in Iceland. Two of our letters came from veterans Charles Baster and Alton Breault describing their crossing as follows:

Charles Baster:

Arriving in Halifax, the thirty of us were paraded alongside a vessel... called the "Montclare" an armed merchant cruiser... We were actually the sole escort for some fifty-seven ships. We zigzagged along at the speed of the slowest ship, which was five and a half knots.... The vessels seemed to maintain their places in the convoy day in and day out. Before dark we would have a last look at all these vessels and in the morning they were in the same positions. As we were now crew, we were given what were called action station positions. We were located with members of the crew at particular gun positions and when the Klaxon sounded, we hustled to our stations and helped with the ammunition. The "Montclare" would proceed in the direction of whatever had been sighted. The rest of the convoy simply scattered and, in a short while, we would leave everything behind and we would be alone, on our own, with every one at action stations all looking in the direction we were heading, ready to challenge whatever shape and size of vessel we were approaching. Action stations were sometimes more than once a day, and on one memorable occasion, a little while before dawn when we came up on deck, it seemed every mortal soul was there, all the members of the crew, even the chef, were peering into the misty darkness... I heard one of the nearby seamen say to his mate, "If this is the Scharnhorst, she'll blow us out of the water from where she is" (about twenty-five miles, I heard someone say) ... Suddenly we could discern some large vessel, barely visible in the darkness and at quite a distance. A light began to flash signals, the "Montclare" responded and slowly changed direction. We saw the Commander come down from the Captain on the bridge and, as he passed us, he was shaking hands with himself and he said, "Thank God it's the Revenge." Eventually the convoy seemed to gather around us once more like a hen with her chicks and we continued on our way safe and assured. Although there were quite a number of occasions when we left our convoy to challenge other ships, we never actually had a hostile encounter. All were friendly! On one memorable day the "Montclare" met up with a relatively small, but beautiful, trim, motorized sailing vessel. We observed that virtually all her deck-space was filled with strapped-down aircraft. She swept past us in the bright sunshine, gracefully inclined as she turned on her way to Britain. At the rail, her smiling crew waved their greeting as we waved ours.

When we were at sea the first day or so, one of the crew told us that vacant cabins, cargo space and every available bit of unused area was packed with empty oil drums,

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sealed tight and boarded in place.... every door we opened revealed the oil drums stacked and fastened. The "Montclare" evidently was prepared to stay afloat as long as possible in the event of being hit

Within a day or two of our rendezvous with the "Revenge".... three destroyers from Britain ... took over. In a short while our flock had disappeared and we were on our own, our destination unknown.... Very soon there appeared ahead of us in the distance a vista of beautiful, sunlit, snow-capped mountains. Word soon spread that this was Iceland..... We docked at the capital called Reykjavik... At last two Royal Air Force transports pulled up alongside the vessel and we were off the ship and travelling along a coastal road some miles from the city to a camp where we were destined to spend the next few weeks....

The camp was situated at the bottom of a mountain -which ran down to within a mile or so of the water's edge. The area was subject to the most ferocious winds ... Our own quarters however, were beautifully built.. The dining hall, on the other hand, was continually flooded with water from the mountains. Usually we wore Wellingtons when we went for meals.... Several times we were taken to some hot springs..... ...Nearing the end of April.... we were on the move. Once more the transports appeared and picked up our own group and several others who had been waiting for a ship going back to Britain. We found ourselves on the "Royal Ulsterman." It was quite a fast ship and had bunks allocated... Before our departure, we first had to run up into a fjord and wait there for reasons known only to those in charge. A rugged coast lined both sides of the fjord but on one side at some distance, approximately half a mile or so, a huge battleship lay with a number of smaller vessels (which I took to be destroyers) around her. I ventured a guess as to what we were looking at "maybe a cruiser of some sort," to a nearby seaman. He looked at me pityingly and said, "that is the world's largest battleship, the Hood." Little did I think that a few weeks later while waiting sleepily for a rail connection at Dundee on my way up to see my sisters in Aberdeen I would be shocked into wakefulness by a newspaper boy running along the railway platform shouting, "HMS Hood sunk!" And so she was, with a single shot which hit her magazine! I think that there were only one or two survivors.

.... We all lined the rail as the crew of the "Hood" stood at theirs. I can still visualize the scene. The "Royal Ulsterman" was very fast and I believe we were only on it overnight. Early next morning a bright and beautiful one, May 1st, 1941, my buddy C.F. Bedford and I stood and watched as we passed up the beautiful banks of Clyde on our way to Greenock.

Breault, Alton

On Feb 27th I arrived at Debert, NS, prior to our departure on an armed

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*merchantman. * On April 4th ** we set sail for England, but got side-tracked to Iceland for about three weeks. Finally we made it to Greenock on a flat-bottomed boat called "Royal Ulsterman."*

I spent a few days at Uxbridge, then ended up at Yatesbury for a 19-week Radar course.

Notes:

* Breault confirmed by telephone, with F.B.Grahame that the ship was indeed the "Montclare".

**He also agreed that April 4th was probably the date of arrival at Iceland, because he was definitely there for about three weeks.

The "Georgic" left Halifax again on April 6th carrying six of our correspondents. This group was part of the "Gypsy Squadron," a name adopted after they had been frustrated repeatedly by cancellation of orders to sail due to an outbreak of scarlet fever. They sailed directly to Gourock, accompanied by one other ship and the battleship "HMS Rodney". They wrote in part, as follows:

Ball, RH

The following notes have been taken from RCAF Service and Pay Book, Identity Pass, Air Forces in India, and also from my personal notes. Some of the names of the stations I served on are quite interesting.

R.H.Ball, R79948

Enlisted RCAF 6-12-1940, Regina, Sask.

Trade and Classification WEM(R) LAC "B" 6-12-40.

Posted overseas 10-1-41, (Dutch ship "Johan Van Oldenbarnevelt").

Scarlet Fever, all Radar Techs were removed from ship and sent to Debert, NS.

(Retrade tested, 25-3-41, passed).

Sailed on second ship "Georgic." Arrived England 6-4-41 (date of sailing?).

Yatesbury, Class I7, 25-4-1941. RM. "A" 4-10-41 posted to 74 Wing 4-7-1941.

Posted CHL station Dunwich 18-7-1941, East Coast, England.

T/Cpl. RAF 21-9-1941.

Attached to a civilian group modifying GCI stations around Hull (Hamston Hill)

Returned to Dunwich Dec. 1941.

Posted overseas (Singapore, 6-1-42).

Greenaway, J

...I enlisted at the age of 19 years on Dec. 2, 1940, in Winnipeg. I proceeded immediately to the Manning Depot in Toronto. After six weeks of basic training (marching, button polishing and other similar essentials), I was home on embarkation leave by the middle of January 1941.

By the middle of February we were on board the Dutch liner the "Johan Van

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Oldenbarnevelt” in Halifax. Someone in the group came down with Scarlet Fever, so we disembarked and were sent to North Sydney, Cape Breton Island, in quarantine. After the required weeks of quarantine we proceeded to Debert, NS for a short stay, then back to Halifax and on board the Cunard liner S. S. "Georgic" for our delayed trip across the Atlantic. After a very rough crossing, escorted by the “HMS Rodney" and several smaller war ships, we arrived at Gourock on the Clyde in Scotland. From there we went by train to London and our first experiences with air raids.

At Hammersmith (London) we were issued gas masks and introduced to their usefulness by an exposure to tear gas - horrible stuff. After a few days of such orientation we proceeded to the radar school at Yatesbury, Wiltshire.

Kee, Fred

The records show that I was posted from #1 Manning Depot, Toronto on Feb 4/41. My own recollection is that we left on a troop train (old colonial type wooden coaches)... While enroute to Halifax, an epidemic of scarlet fever broke out in Manning Depot. We arrived in Halifax and boarded a Dutch Indies cruise ship called the Johan Van Oldenbarnevelt. We stayed for only one meal and disembarked again to entrain for North Sydney on Cape Breton Island. We crossed the Straits on a train ferry and arrived at what I recall as the 8th Bomber Reconnaissance Squadron. Here we were all given a test for scarlet fever germs and a number of us, including yours truly, tested positive. We all received shots to immunize us against the disease and were all confined to camp. There is an interesting story to tell about this stretch of time. There were about 150 of us and because of all this apparently aimless wandering around, somebody got the idea of calling ourselves the Gypsy Squadron. I can remember that we found some enterprising outfit in the town to make us up some silk handkerchiefs (in light Air Force blue) the centre of which was our squadron emblem. In the centre of the RCAF crest instead of airplanes, eagles or animals, we simply showed the symbol for a triode tube. Thus was born the "Gypsy Squadron.” (See Fig. 3a, Fig. 10).

I can recall only a handful of names of people that were in the Squadron. There was an Irishman named Pennefather (who suffered recurring bouts of malaria). There was a French Canadian lad L.G. Dickie. There was an Australian named Kerr. Joe Bouzek, Johnny Craven and Ernie Cooper hailed from BC. Len McMillan and George Morgan were from Winnipeg. McMillan I know to be still alive and living in Calgary. Ossie Luce from St. Catharines where he worked as a mechanic on transmissions for G M. Ossie was a prisoner of war of the Japanese as he was posted to Singapore on completion of training at Yatesbury. Ossie survived the war and is living in St. Catharines. He would have some tales to tell and he and I had some adventures together before he went to Singapore. (Ed. note : Ossie Luce passed away Nov.9, 1999 in his 81st year. He was the last known RCAF radar survivor of

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the Japanese Prisoner of War Camps. He is survived by his wife Ida.)

Ronnie Neal was a Prairie boy who also was posted to Singapore and died fighting the Japanese. There was Goldworth Hinton who served later in Africa and actually manned (with others) an early warning radar set which they located behind the German lines. He told me they could detect tanks in the desert. Terry Keenan from Toronto and a character called Gunnar Clavering about whom I can tell you a number of interesting stories There was a guy whose name I believe was Bob Salinger who played a dirty trick on me at Debert that I never forgave him for. Ed Schafer hailed from Edmonton and figured in an interesting tale when we were at Yatesbury. He was an amateur before the war with call sign VE4RU. Jim Mc Vey and I met several times on leave in London

Keeley, J

...I got my notice to report to Toronto Manning Depot, located at the Exhibition Grounds... We were given leave to return home for two weeks 10 Jan to 24th Jan On the 4th of February '41 we wireless and radio mechanics were put on the train in Toronto and headed for Halifax and then overseas.... Our group along with Army and other Air Force trades were put aboard a Dutch liner "Johan Van Oldenbarnevelt" which was made for Caribbean Cruises, with cabin doors that opened to the deck. Next morning our group were taken off the boat and put back on the train. A few of the men in our group had come down with a contagious disease and were quarantined at a brand new Air Force station at North Sydney. Those of us who didn't catch the disease were put to work cleaning surplus putty off the new building's window panes. We also went on a few route marches. I was hospitalized a few days with the flu. On the 25th of February we were moved to another new Air Force station at Debert and once again we were put to work removing putty and cleaning panes. We had to move from building to building on "duck-walks " (wooden sidewalks) because of the red mud. I remember one lad thought he could take a short-cut and dropped into a hole up to his waist and the red soil didn't do much for his blue uniform.... We spent over a month here but finally left on my birthday 6 April and boarded a larger boat MS "Georgic" of the Cunard line. This boat was stripped of its many cabins and made into large rooms big enough to accommodate about 75 men. There were long mess tables anchored to the floor, each about 12 feet long. We slept in hammocks attached to the ceiling of the boat.

McMillan, LT

... I was sent to Toronto Manning Depot and served as a Rifle-toting guard until becoming a member of a draft of 130 men. We paraded with full kit and two blankets until Feb. 4/41 when we entrained for Halifax. Boarded a Dutch ship with bunks and white sheets. Boarded on the 6th Feb and disembarked Feb 7/41 because of a Scarlet

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Fever outbreak.

Sent into quarantine in North Sydney, N S. Our draft staffed the station as it had been just built and had no regular cooks, clerks, general duties, Medical Officer, guards, etc. Since I had office knowledge my duties were in the Orderly Room.

By Feb 25/41 we had entrained for Debert, NS, another new station not staffed to handle this overload. So again we became part of the Station staff where needed. It was under construction and it was wet. There was red mud and ditches everywhere. The ditches claimed their daily quota of the unwary. It was about this time we called ourselves "THE GYPSY SQUADRON".

On April 6/41 we are again on overseas draft and on board the "Georgic" in Halifax harbour. Poor rations, tight quarters and bunks with two blankets. We carried our kit. The "Rodney" escorted us to Gourock, Scotland. April 19/41 we were taken ashore in Lighters and put on a train for somewhere in England.

Rhodenizer, CT

Responded to the 1940 fall call for people who knew something about radio. Was promised to be on the way overseas in 30 days. Got on a very nice troop ship at Halifax in January 1941. Unfortunately one person in our draft broke out with smallpox and our entire draft was taken off the ship and sent to Kelly's Beach near North Sydney, NS, for vaccination and confinement to camp awaiting the outcome. Because of all this we named ourselves "Gypsy Squadron." Back to Debert to await another boat, this time the "Georgic" and we got to UK in mid-April, 1941.

On April 11, 1941 the "Laconia" left Halifax acting as "Ocean Escort" for the 39 ship convoy HX120, accompanied by battleship "HMS Royal Sovereign." There were three of our correspondents aboard, Bradford, M.F., Grahame, F.B. and Little, G.M. (Bob). Excerpts are as follows:

Bradford, MF

... By accessing deeply buried memory cells, I managed to dig out some long forgotten details of my experiences during WW 11. After fifty years I would hate to be pinned down on precise details or exact dates of many events.

... I joined the RCAF in Calgary in November 1940, in response to an ad in the Calgary Herald for men with a background in radio repair work. The recruiting office sent me to the Ministry of Transport Radio Inspector who asked me a few questions about how various parts of a radio worked. A few days later I was on my way to Toronto. Boot camp was in the Cow Palace in the CNE grounds. After being kitted out, inoculated and learning a minimum of military drill, we were off on embarkation leave over the Christmas period. Shortly after our return to Toronto in

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January 1941, we were loaded onto a train for the trip to Halifax. One of the men on our coach became very ill and an MO identified his illness as Scarlet Fever. All the occupants of the coach, perhaps 100 men, were turfed off the train at Truro and placed in quarantine in a barracks at Debert, Nova Scotia.

At the end of the quarantine period we were moved to North Sydney where we were held awaiting transport overseas... we were put aboard an armed merchant cruiser which escorted a slow convoy to Reykjavik, Iceland..... we saw the battleship "Hood" anchored in a fjord. A few weeks later it was sunk in a battle with the "Bismark". My most vivid memory of Iceland was the high wind that made it necessary to hold onto a rope which was stretched between the barracks and the mess hall to successfully navigate the 100 yard walk between the two buildings.

The crossing from Reykjavik to Glasgow was on a small ship that had been used in peacetime to carry the mail and passengers between Scotland and Ireland. I spent the entire voyage sitting on the deck peeling potatoes.

After disembarking we were immediately put on a train for the overnight trip to Yatesbury. It was on this train that we experienced our first air raid. The train was put off on a siding because a town on our route was under attack by the Luftwaffe. We were near enough so that the coach shook as each bomb exploded.

Upon arrival at Yatesbury we were given a more comprehensive test on our knowledge of electronics. Based on the results of the tests we were divided into two groups. Those who passed went immediately on a radar course while the remainder underwent further training in basic electronics. I was in the former group and started to learn what made CHL equipment tick.

Grahame's book- titled "My Radar Service Record in WW 11" in late 1993, ISBN 0-9693817-3-5, referred to above, gives a detailed report of his crossing of the Atlantic after departing from Halifax on April 11,1941., in the "Laconia."

There were six Officers and 124 men of the RCAF and four Officers and 76 men of the Royal Norwegian Air Force aboard the "Laconia ", according to Captain Hewett, and this coincides with the Daily Routine Order (DRO 49) under which Bradford, Grahame and Little were posted from Debert to "ELSEWHERE", effective 8-4-41. Of the 124 RCAF airmen there were the following 18 LAC'S, all of whom were WEM (R) "B," (Wireless Elect. Mech. Radio):

Bell, WD R75597
B r a d l e y, AWL . R72487
Bradford, MF R77641 *
Cavanagh,WJ R74558
Dean, JA R70730
Fair, PA R60538

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Grahame, FB R71094
Johnson, C R63625*
Little, GM R81381 *
MacDonald, PD . . . R65394
MacLean, KA R66503*
Olson, G R59984
Salome, W R67810
Stubbs, RD R74678
Vogt, PP R74680
Westcott, CJ R60442
Wood, VD R72458

* Asterisks mark those who did not arrive from Brandon.

Our correspondents Bradford and Little had been at Toronto Manning Depot, and Grahame was at Brandon Manning Depot. After landing at Gourock they split up, Bradford going directly to Yatesbury, while Grahame and Little went respectively to North Polytechnic in London and to Leeds for "ab initio" radio courses. (See Fig. 3b)

Little, GM (Robert), R81381

I joined at Vancouver, B C, in December, 1940. They sent me to Toronto Manning Depot. After the measles and other stuff, I got shipped out late Spring, 1941 ... We went to Iceland for a couple of weeks and then to England on the Royal Ulsterman. After a few stops around England I ended up at Leeds Technical College. (That is where I first met Dave Small). From there to Cranwell for Radar school. After that to Oban Seaplane Base, Scotland. Can't remember how long I was there. From there to one of the Shetland Islands Then I was shipped back to Canada, I think it was late 1942, to Rockcliffe, near Ottawa. From there to temporary duty to Norfolk, VA, for about 2 or 3 weeks.

Then to Quonset, Rhode Island for 3 or 4 months, where I met a girl who I finally married (we just had our 50th wedding anniversary last April). After a few stops I was posted to Sydney, Nova Scotia, where I got my two stripes. From there to Gander, Newfoundland. I got my third stripe there. I was there about a year with two months in New York for an ASD course.

From Gander to Clinton, Ontario, on an instructor course, but after we graduated they cancelled the class and sent us to various stations. I got Debert, Nova Scotia. I ended up in charge of the Radar (and other stuff) repair department. This was good duty. From there I got my discharge in November 1945 and went back to BC.

Robert M. Little - (P.S. I go by the name Robert M. Little now).

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The next ship to sail after the "Laconia " was the "California" which left Halifax on April 17, 1941, carrying our veteran correspondents Barrett, ACW; Boving, PA; and de Macedo, FJ; who wrote the following:

Barrett, ACW

.... After a short time at Manning pool in Toronto, most of which time I spent at the Riverdale Isolation Hospital in Willowdale being a suspect of scarlet fever which was raging then. I received the requisite needles and one uniform. We were told we would get another uniform overseas. At this point we were given embarkation leave. I believe it was only one week. In any case, no sooner were we back in Toronto than we were turned around and moved down to Debert, NS. which was then functioning as a holding depot for drafts going overseas.

On April 17th 1941, with about three hundred other RCAF bods, mostly Sgt aircrew, we embarked at Halifax on the Armed Merchant Cruiser "California". It was small comfort that the "California" was a sister ship to the "Jervis Bay" which, a short time before, had been sunk by a German battleship. As it turned out the "California" with its eight 6-inch guns bolted to the deck was the escort for a 45-ship convoy which travelled at eight knots. Of course the sergeants were not called upon for any duties but the WEMRs certainly were. We were no sooner aboard when they called out for eight volunteers. I figured the first to volunteer would get the best jobs. My job along with a buddy, Ray Dempsey, was to operate the elevator between the galley and the officers mess several decks above. That job had some fringe benefits as you might expect. WEMRs who were reluctant to volunteer were not so fortunate. They became expert at peeling potatoes and washing dishes.

Our route across the Atlantic Ocean took us very far north. For a few days out of Halifax we were visited by friendly Hudson aircraft. The Submarine "Thunderbolt" and Cruiser "Ramillies" left Halifax at the same time as our convoy but they were diverted south. From then on we saw nothing exciting until a couple of days out of Iceland we were met by several lend/lease destroyers which Britain had acquired from the USA. Shortly after the destroyers joined our convoy there was some action. The destroyers dropped quite a number of depth charges and smoke markers. We were not aware of whether it was practice or for real. As we came into the fjord near Reykjavik, the battleship "Hood" was there and in salute the band was on the foredeck. It was a most impressive sight. Little did we expect that this mighty battleship would, in a few weeks, be on the bottom of the Atlantic.

At Iceland, May 1st 1941, I expected to see nothing but snow and ice. To my surprise the grass was green on the slopes near the sea, although snow could be seen on the higher elevation inland. We transferred from the "California" to the "City of

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Belfast" a diesel electric powered smaller ship then being used for troop transport. The "City of Belfast" was said to be too fast for submarines and travelled unescorted. I have learned later that it was subsequently sunk by submarines. It must have slowed down. In any case it was a stinking ship. I could not stand the stench below decks, so with my one blanket and greatcoat spent the nights under one of the lifeboats. Food was not up to the standard of that on the "California". We were handed a can of fat USA bacon for breakfast and some dry bread. For dinner and supper it was a tin of McConniky's Irish stew or a tin of bully beef. Many of the group didn't eat their bully (corned) beef so I hoarded it in my one-quarter-filled kit bag. It came in handy when we were hungry some later days.

Our voyage from Iceland to Greenock, Scotland, was uneventful. For many they were glad to feel firm ground underfoot. We were loaded on a train and our destination turned out to be Uxbridge. We were there for about a week during which time we picked up that second uniform and were given a trip to Windsor. At Windsor we met Her Majesty, the Queen and the Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret in the gardens. We had been told not to take cameras to Windsor, but when the Queen gave permission for pictures, it was surprising to see how many had not heard the order "no cameras." We had a short prayer in St. George's Chapel where the Royal Family worship when at Windsor. Then it was back to the bus and Uxbridge.

From Uxbridge we went to RAF Wilmslow. It was there the bully beef was appreciated. The meals were light and there was no food available for a bedtime snack so many who had spurned the bully on the way over smacked their lips on it. By now we had about 150 would-be WEM(R)s. That was soon to change because the RAF produced a trade test of their own. Out of the group twenty were selected to go directly to Yatesbury, and about one hundred went on to ab-initio training in London. The remainder were sent back to Canada. I was one who guessed right on the trade test and went to Yatesbury where we formed class RM13.

Boving,PA(he was also aboard the Armed Merchant Cruiser "California")

.....While underway near Greenland, we heard Lord Haw Haw claim we were sunk for the third time, while we were sloshing tea in the mess. For action stations, we were fire piquets on the forward magazine; otherwise I became LAC of the officers' heads.

From Halifax (the submarine "Thunderbird", ex "Thetis" sailed out in front of us) we sailed for 10 days to Iceland, zigzagging at 5-7 knots. In Helgefels fjord, just north of Reykjavik, HMS "Hood" was at anchor in the fjord too, as we transferred to the "Royal Ulsterman"(ex-Irish ferry), for the 24-hour dash to Scotland. We landed at Greenock the morning of April 30, 1941, and boarded an English train to go via Edinburgh and York in dark. We stopped-and-went all night to arrive at RAF station Uxbridge, west of London, in time for breakfast. At this time Red

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Matthews and another Airman were returned to Canada for compassionate reasons as well as medical ones.... we were shunted off to RAF Station Wilmslow, near Manchester. Here, a Rhodesian Flt. Sgt. told us "I don't like Colonials". He got creased by a beer bottle a few nights later. Jerry shifted night targets to Manchester, so we were shunted again, this time to RAF Station Cranwell.

Here we finally had some pay given us, and also a trade exam to weed out the RDF trainees from those who should have a basic radio course. I was in the group going for basic training, and we were taken by train to London Balloon Command at RAF Station Cranmore (Stanmore). From here we were trucked to billets near the Northern Polytech School, Holloway Road in North London, just down from the Womens' Prison. We were enrolled in the R/W Mech Class Group 10, June to September 1941. We had a delightful time with an equal number of RAF types, educating each other, learning English wireless theory, electrical shop skills, and internal combustion engine theory ... In September we graduated, were given a week's leave, and posted to an RDF Training Camp in deepest Wiltshire, RAF RDF Training Station, Yatesbury.

de Macedo, Francis J

. ... Our outfit was called the "Gypsy Squadron " because we travelled back and forth so many times. Eventually nothing came of these changes of plans and we were once more on our way....We left Montreal for Halifax, and boarded a converted merchant ship, the "California".

These armed merchant cruisers had 6" guns and were used as convoy escorts. There was a British submarine nearby called the "Thunderbird". It had been sunk in an accident before the war and was then known as the "Thetis." Also in the harbour was the old First War battleship, HMS "Ramillies." It wasn't long before we headed out to sea and our old tub was at the head of the convoy. What a target, and those old guns wouldn't do much good against a "U" boat's torpedo. Stan (Dunn) and I would play darts (for money) in a cabin up-top and I often have thought: "Why were we allowed to listen to St. Johns' radio programs when subs could detect emissions from the oscillator circuitry of a super-het? Enroute we did the usual emergency drills and I finally realized we were really at war when we passed a half dozen bodies still clad in life jackets; victims of the war at sea.

... Our convoy headed to Iceland where I noticed the HMS "Hood" nearby as well as several cruisers. We were soon transferred to three Irish mail boats and on our way, unescorted to Britain. My ship was the "Royal Ulsterman" and she could really move along. Not much chance of a sub catching her. We arrived at Greenock on the Clyde and were immediately given the "King's Shilling" and boarded trains for the London area.... We did a stint at Cranwell and ran into our first set-to with the RAF. An overbearing RAF W/O addressed us as "You Colonials ", which was like waving a red flag in front of a bull. He wanted us for G.D. work and when he gave us the

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command "Attention, Right Turn," not a soul moved. Even I was surprised but not more so than our W/O. They never knew exactly what to do with Canadians, and he went red-faced to see the C/O. When he returned one of our braver types said we didn't come over to wash floors or do sweeping. That was for the flyers and we should receive disembarkation leave. I suppose the easiest way out was to give us leave and get rid of these brash, undisciplined "colonials " and we were all on our way with seven days leave....

... On our return we were posted to Stanmore, Uxbridge; Wilmslow and then at last we were put on a three-month wireless course at the Northern Polytech on Holloway Road. We were billeted in private digs near Aberdeen Park and right nearby was a great target for the Jerry's - Cossor radio factory was in Highbury and this was where much of the RDF equipment was manufactured. The air raids on London were gradually tapering off at this time (May-June 1941) but there were a few nights when things got hot & heavy. You could always tell the German planes by the sound of their un-synchronized engines. One night Stan and I were in our room when we heard the loudest screaming, howling noise like all hell was loose and we dove under the table but nothing happened. A dud bomb, I hope!Our next station was #2 Wireless School at Yatesbury, Wilts, and this was the beginning of our introduction to the real world of RDF or Radar, as it was later called My posting was to Rodel, wherever that was, and my Wing was in Inverness in the Highlands.

In late April 1941, the armed merchant cruiser "Circassia" sailed with **Dermot R. Small** (Dave) aboard who states:

The "Circassia" must have sailed from Halifax some time in late April. I know I spent my 24th birthday at sea and that was April 29th. I think there were only about 30 troops aboard, and these were mainly British Fleet Air Arm aircrew.

There were about 60 ships in the convoy and the "Circassia " was sole escort for the first 8 days. Two British destroyers took over and we went on Atlantic patrol for several more days. The only thing we intercepted was a Spanish tramp steamer bound for South America.

We landed at Reykjavik at night and so saw nothing of the Icelandic coastline. We went directly to a transit camp about 17 miles out of Reykjavik called Helgasfel. We arrived in Scotland sometime in May. We went directly to Uxbridge, were there for a short time, then on to Cranwell. We arrived in Leeds on Friday the 13th of June.

After the "Circassia" had sailed, no more ships are mentioned until August 16th when the "Hectoria" set sail with E.L. Johnson, who wrote, in part, the following:

Johnson, EL

Bob Milton of Flin Flon, Manitoba, was one of the first group of Radio Mechanics

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to enlist as an LAC in late 1940. In early 1941 he came back to Flin Flon to recruit more mechanics. I managed to pass my trade test and so on March 12th, 1941 I travelled to Winnipeg, enlisted on March 18th ... and on March 20th was on the train heading for Manning Depot, Toronto... and on April 23rd I left Manning Depot for the West - embarkation leave.

Back in Toronto on May 10th, then Halifax on May 15th. Things were still moving at a fast pace, but the pace reversed itself at Y Depot in Halifax.... A frustrating month went by -fatigue duties every day and rumours and ever more rumours about ships ready to take us aboard. My frustrations are indicated in the following imaginary conversation with the CO....

A rumour on June 18th was that our posting had come through. Instead, an RAF trade test officer appeared on the scene. After grilling me for 15 minutes it was evident to him I knew little about radio. But his comment was "you are worth encouraging." The end result of the trade testing was that some boys sailed and some boys didn't. I was one who didn't and found myself back in Toronto Manning Depot June 30, 1941. And on July 2nd an ultimatum - revert to AC 2's and go to England for an elementary radio course before an advanced course or take discharge. My decision? Back in Halifax July 23rd - on board the S. S. "Hectoria" August 16th, arriving in Liverpool, England, August 31, 1941.

In England the pace picked up again and we were soon taking our "ab initio" radio course at the Sir John Cass Technical Institute in London. We were AC 2's (having been demoted before we left Canada) and imagine our chagrin when the next group came - LAC's who had taken their training at Clinton! Our screams were heard all the way to Canadian Headquarters with the result that we were promoted to LACs retroactive to August 31, 1941, the day we landed in Liverpool.

Later in August, 1941, the "Dominion Monarch" sailed carrying:

Smith, NP

The deal was you would become an RCAF trainee, as a civilian, and they would finance you to the tune of thirty-five dollars a month to attend a Dominion Provincial Vocational School to learn the basics of radio and learn the morse code to the passing requirements of twenty words a minute - send and receive; and further, on completion of the course (approximately four months), to enlist in the RCAF and after basic training, finish training in England.

About half the hopefuls attending D.P.V.S. were farm boys mostly from Manitoba, though there were some city slickers as well! D.P.V.S was situated on Henry Avenue at Lulu Street.

After the course was completed,... we were most frustrated at the delay ... Not all those at D.P.V.S. went into the RCAF. Some were too impatient and went into other Services. I also passed the morse code test at the (Army) Wireless School in Tuxedo, on the chance of being called up as a signaler. They finally enlisted me on Jun 10/41.

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I was the only one from D.P. V. who was posted to Manning Depot, Toronto, while most of the others went to Alberta. So I celebrated my twentieth birthday there on June 17, 1941.... Upon receiving our uniforms we received the rank of LAC. After basic training of about seven weeks, other potential radio mechanics began arriving from other Manning Depots and of course all those from D.P.V.S. I knew. When all had arrived we were given a few days of embarkation leave. Before we boarded the train for Halifax we had our group photo taken in front of Manning Depot entrance. This was near the end of July, 1941.

At Halifax "Farewell Barracks" we waited for a convoy and were eventually called out, but they had room for only half of us of the group of about one hundred and thirty-five; so the remainder waited for the next convoy which was a few days later. Finally we boarded in alphabetical order.

Our convoy was a small one of five or six ships plus escorts. We were on the "Dominion Monarch" - a very new New Zealand passenger refrigeration ship carrying a full load of New Zealand beef, lamb and butter to England. Arriving at Liverpool quite safely we found out the other convoy we missed had been attacked by German subs, with several vessels being sunk. The ship with the other half of the radio mechanics survived, but they had the paint of their vessel blistered from the heat of a burning tanker torpedoed nearby.

From Liverpool we went by train to No. 3 PRC Bournemouth, a holding centre... After a week or two, approximately thirty-five of us were sent to London and attended #1 BC (balloon centre) Woolwich Polytech. We were all billeted in private homes. At Woolwich we were split into two classes which included about 15 RAF so there were twenty-five in each class. The course was similar to D.P.V.S. - a bit more advanced and with an English flavour - such as wireless, valves and al-u-minni-um!

That course ended the end of January 1942. This course of fifty were posted to #5 Signal School at Malvern, Worcestershire, and we were there for three months. #5 S.S. was a brand new establishment - we being the first course attending. In fact the plumbing in the barracks was not finished so we were billeted in tourist hostels for two weeks but attended classes and had our meals on the station. Malvern is noted for its mineral springs and baths and is a very pretty and picturesque town.

After we completed our course, the war effort "Brains" decided that they needed radar mechanics much more urgently than wireless mechanics, so after a two week debate by the "UPPERS", they sent us - the whole course, to #2 Radio School at Yatesbury, Wiltshire, and we were there for four months, May to August 1942; - learning all about Radar!

Of the original 135 that went overseas when I did, some did become wireless mechanics on ground and aircraft sets. I do not know how many more were to become radar mechanics as there was another radar school at Cranwell.

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After completing the radar course I was posted to RAF Westcliffe to a CHL station, situated on Portland Isle on the South Coast of England near Weymouth. Along with me was Bill Firby from Winnipeg who had also attended D.P. V.S. I was at Westcliffe for approximately one year, Sept '42 to August '43.

We now return to W.H. Barrie for his description of Yatesbury:

Yatesbury - April 1941 -famous and infamous.

April 1941 found the "RMS Nerissa" draft of 55 gathered at the RAF's major radar school. Reputed to have been a POW camp in WWI it was large in area, surrounded by high fences and located in an uninspiring part of the Wiltshire plains. Beside the Radar, Yatesbury was a training school for Wireless Operator Air Gunners (WOP A/G). WOP A/Gs were as a rule air crew who had failed their pilot's or navigator's courses, hence a considerable element were bottom of the barrel. Canadian WOP A/Gs preceding us had been a very unruly lot, having broken into and out of camp, wore improper uniforms and baited the camp disciplinary staff. Trainee - Staff relations were generally tense and at times explosive. It is easy to predict the events on the parade ground, following a bellow into the barracks door at parade time by a discipl. corporal with a distinctly non- Canadian accent. "Get fell in youse guys, the whistle's went." It was my lot on one occasion to see a harassed drill corporal break into tears at his inability to exercise control of a mischievous squad of Canadian Colonials! (Cub Scout leaders will understand the feeling well).

Yatesbury was a wonderland of radio towers, antennas and gen men. The technology was advanced, the instructors good and the pressure to get going was great. The principles of detection of aeroplanes by radar were easy to learn. The fact that Britain had a successful working television system gave radar the availability of receiver elements and suitable circuit components. We saw flexible RF cables, both 52 ohm coaxial, and shielded balanced 72 ohm line. Also of importance were high-gain, low noise VHF vacuum tubes. Cathode ray tubes of an advanced nature were in use, also stemming from the receivers in British television.

Yatesbury in the spring of 1941 was not a target for German bombs. It was, however in the Luftwaffe path to Bristol, whose devastation was witnessed nightly as bombs exploded and fires raged.

It was too much to expect radio Hams not to tune an RF7 ground radar receiver to the now banned 10 meter band. With the big antenna tower and spring propagation there they were, the U.S. Hams. Lucky devils, still having fun and working all over the world.

Before leaving Yatesbury, Ralph Bartlett and I visited Bath to see the remains of the Roman structures. Like many other Yatesbury friends we were to part and not meet for years. Class members included Art Scott, Marshall Killen and Les Card.

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Other excerpts relating to Yatesbury are:

Barrett, ACW

...Yatesbury was a revelation. What they were doing distorting waveforms was astonishing to say the least. Our ChiefInstructors were Flt.Lt. M.G. Scroggie, B.Sc., M.I.E.E. assisted by a Sgt. King. It was all very secret. We were not permitted to take notes out of the secured compound. We were not allowed to discuss what we were learning with anyone. The principle of pulsed radio magnetic waves for direction finding and ranging was most exciting. Thirteen out of our class of twenty graduated.

Booth, WM

... arriving on Jan 17th, we were the first batch of "Colonials" to arrive at the Signal School and we caused a lot of confusion. With our winter hats the locals thought we were Russian. It was at Yatesbury that we first learned of the wonderful world of aircraft detection. We were first known as RDF Mechanics, later as Radio Location Mechanics (this was when the news of the system was made public) and much later as RADAR Mechanics. We left Yatesbury March 28th 1941 From Yatesbury we were posted to various RDF stations in Britain and, after further experience, many of us were posted further overseas. Some of our people were posted from Yatesbury back to Canada to help start the School at Clinton.

Gooderham, Doug

Day three brought us back to reality, with a train ride to Yatesbury, Wiltshire, the home of RAF Signals School. Instruction at the Radar School was primarily lectures with some hands-on fault-finding on typical radar receivers and transmitters. Lectures were held in a small wooden frame building heated (I use the word loosely) by a small, centrally located stove similar to a Canadian "Quebec Heater." Those students whose desks were close to the stove were usually uncomfortably hot, while those near the walls necessarily kept their greatcoats on - Wiltshire winters can be cold. At first the RAF instructors opened all the windows when entering the building to lecture, but soon bowed to our protests. The Station PT officer came in one day with the news that PT would be held outside with jackets off, a proposal that we regarded as bizarre to say the least. Open rebellion and a breach of discipline was avoided by treating his announcement as "an obvious attempt at humour," not to be taken seriously. The RAF Instructors that tried their best to teach us the mysteries of radar were first-rate, and we quickly came to respect and like them. The course, of eight weeks duration, clearly presupposed that all of us had a good grasp of basic electronic theory, and started off with a detailed analysis of an assemblage of radar circuitry called a 'spongy lock oscillator.' We were encouraged

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to take full note with circuit diagrams, primarily to enable us to swot on the subject in the evenings, and also to cover the possibility that we might find ourselves on stations that had not received technical manuals; as a result our notebooks were highly classified documents and a damned nuisance. By the end of the eight weeks the Course had covered the circuitry of the three types of ground air defence radar then in general use in the RAF: CH (Chain Home), ACH (Auxiliary Chain Home), and CHL (Chain Home Low), and GCI (Ground Controlled Intercept). Little or no mention was made of microwave radars being developed. Airborne radar gear was taught at another school (in Scotland?). The School had a few pieces of ground radar equipment on which we were given fault-finding instruction.

Grahame, FB

... On October 17, 1941, we proceeded to Yatesbury, Wiltshire for training on the "Secret Stuff." My memories of Yatesbury are very limited. I can remember the white horse carved into the chalk hills, along the highway, and the little village of Calne with its churchyard. About all that I recall about the course of studies was that we had a tall, slim, Canadian instructor named Chapman (I think) who introduced us to the diagram of something called a "flip-flop" which generated a "square wave" to control the high speed switching for alternate transmission and reception of radar signals in the CHL system. We were told not to bother about the theoretical intricacies of the "flip-flop" but just memorize the diagram and note that its frequency could be controlled by adjusting the "time constant" of a circuit containing a resistor in series with a condenser. We were introduced to two large glass vacuum tubes, the Klystron and the Magnetron. The Klystron was triggered by the "flip-flop" and it could switch comparatively large currents on and off at high speed, making it suitable for controlling the pulsing of the transmitter. The Magnetron was a highly secret item used to generate the centimetre waves. For transportation it was packed in a wooden box and had to be personally escorted from place to place by a Sergeant for security.

While we were at Yatesbury the station was paid a visit by His Majesty King George VI. It was a very brief affair.

McMillan, LT

... Following this introduction to the RAF system, on April 24/41, we arrived at Yatesbury RDF (to become RADAR) school. There were many other courses being given by this school. A big camp and not very enjoyable. We were assigned huts and quickly marched one mile to this highly secret part of the camp. Very high board fence with barbed wire on top, and guard gate. Inside an officer told us, we were to train on VERY VERY Secret equipment and were to talk to no one outside of the technical group about the units. Following this we were toured around the different types of equipment. CH (Chain Home) CHL (Chain Home Low) GCI (Ground

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Control Intercept), AI (Air Interception), ASV (Air to Surface Vessel). School started about April 25/41. Exercise in soldering, meter reading and introduction to a Scope. Electronic terms were explained. Remember this is BRITISH - high voltage, low voltage, earth, valves. First Instructor I remember was a Dr. Scroggie who did not realize how little some of us knew. He would put information on the board with one hand and remove it with the other in short order. About this time came the word game, PRF (Pulse recurrence frequency), PW (Pulse width), IFF (Identification Friend or Foe), BIFF (Broad IFF emergency), AJBO (Anti-jamming Blackout Unit), BOLLICA STICK (Bulb to test for RF energy) and so on it went, too many to mention. Finally I was training on CHL with its chicken wire and copper tubing antenna. Along the way there were exams which I must have passed as I was still in class. A few hours were devoted to the power source for most of these units in the remote locations. The DIESEL ENGINE, HOW TO START, HOW TO STOP. In the field you needed much more information as there were no Motor Mechs on station. By July 5/41 I became RDF Mech. Group "B " LAC. Finally received leave and posting to new station, St. Cyrus near Montrose in Scotland. I had now left the draft of 130 GYPSY SQUADRON men, never to meet again.

Morgan, W

...We arrived at RAF Yatesbury 17 Jan '41 and commenced a two-month RDF (radar) course, graduating as RAF RDF Mechanics. We had the dubious honour of attending the first course for "Dominion Troops (Air Forces) " held there. A small RCAF officers course was held there prior to ours in order to implement the subsequent training in Canada. We were the first "erks" (other ranks) to attend other than the RAF. We had a few problems adapting to the RAF way of doing things at Yatesbury, but we managed to change things for future courses! After completing the course I was posted to RAF RAME Head, a CHL located near Plymouth.

Rhodenizer, CT

...we got to UK in mid-April, 1941....At the Radar School at Yatesbury, I achieved some notoriety for being asleep at my desk when the Duke of Kent, a Group Captain, visited our class. I had been on guard duty the previous night and constantly walked over when trying to get some rest between shifts on duty. The C.O. for the station threatened court martial and I said "go ahead and make sure I am represented by a Canadian lawyer." That settled that and it died. On completion of the Radar Course I was 12th in a class of 200 and this same C.O. asked me to remain as an instructor. I had the pleasure of telling him that I did not think "the Flower of Genius could blossom in that climate." I opted for a posting to Singapore. My first Radar station was at Bamburgh in Northumberland, an old-style CHL with

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separate T and R antennas.

This story includes the following excerpts from three letters received at a later date. Again, these are Direct Entry personnel who received their radar training at schools in the UK.

Harbottle, G

I was a direct entry officer and after a few short weeks of drill and lectures on the duties of commissioned officers I was sent on embarkation leave. While on that leave I married and duly informed the authorities of this when I reported to Halifax. This caused some consternation; I had committed the sin of not getting permission to get married; I had my parents permission and blessing, I had my wife's permission and blessing, I had the permission of the state in getting a license and the permission of the minister of the church.....

NOT SO !!! I had not received the permission of my Commanding Officer! The authority turned a deaf ear to the lowly pilot officer's plea that since I was in transit from Manning Depot to a Royal Air Force RDF School somewhere in England... I had no idea who my Commanding Officer was..... In due course my records were amended to show that my next of kin was my wife and that I had become married without obtaining permission. After a short stay in Halifax 1, along with twenty potential radar officers, boarded a lighter in Halifax harbour. As we moved into the reaches of the harbour we asked "which ship?" The reply was, "that four-masted schooner over there." OMYGAWD, were we to cross the Atlantic in a sailboat? ... "Fear not laddie, She is rigged four masts but she has twin diesels and can cruise a healthy twenty knots." It was uneventful and took three weeks. First class all the way. (Editor's note; Gerry Harbottle sailed from Halifax in August 1941 for Liverpool, destination Royal Air Force #3 Radio School, Yatesbury).

McLeod, Harry A

My first encounter with the RCAF occurred when I reached the age of 18 in November, 1940, and attempted to enlist as aircrew at the Halifax, Nova Scotia recruiting centre. Considering the myopic condition of both eyes it was somewhat presumptuous on my part and I should have anticipated their, "thanks for your offer but no thanks!!" Foiled in that endeavour I returned to my second year at college and completed my first term in the new year of 1941. About the same time, I noticed the Air Force advertisements appearing in the Halifax Herald, looking for individuals with some knowledge of radio, mathematics and physics to train as radio mechanics for specialized equipment..... On the specified date we duly reported to No. 1 "Y" Depot to find ourselves members of a group of one hundred and five potential Radio Mechanics, representing the three Maritime Provinces. That evening we entrained for Yarmouth, NS..... On the 30th of May we were SOS Yarmouth and on the 31st TOS Dalhousie University, Halifax N.S. for our course.

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The subjects studied were Fundamental Theory, Applied Theory and Practical Laboratory Assessment, all of which centred on radio with its associated mathematics and physics. The course ended on the sixth of September..... instructions arrived on the seventeenth of September that I was posted overseas ... we learned that we were now LAC's retroactive to the sixth of September and classified as RDF Mechanic, Group A On the third of October we were SOS "Y" Depot and TOS RAF Training Pool. The late afternoon of the next day we marched as a unit through the streets of Halifax to the deep water terminals and embarked on the Warwick Castle..... The trip over was uneventful except for one early morning alarm that most of us believed was to keep us on our toes.... Our passage up river was memorable as shipping and dock areas had only recently been subjected to formidable German air raids. To our young and inexperienced eyes it was chaos beyond description for we had to thread our way around sunken ships of various types and barges that held barrage balloons in place. In late afternoon of that memorable day we boarded a train for Bournemouth. Bournemouth to Hibaldstow was a day-long journey by rail with several changes and it was late evening when we arrived at the station guardhouse The MP in charge gave each of us a blanket to bed down in the holding area for the night.....The signals officer at 1459 Flight would not let us work on any of the AI equipment as we were not qualified, but we were able to handle DI's and repairs on the RT used in Havocs, Hurricanes and trolley accs with their small gasoline-powered engines. On the eighteenth of the month we were cleared from the station and on our way to 3 RS Prestwick.....Classes were to commence in a day or so on the ASV equipment (I've forgotten what mark number it was) and would take about six to eight weeks. I believe we were the last of our original draft to make it to radar school.

Valeriotte, Pacifico

When World War II began I was attending Radio College of Canada in Toronto. I was taking a Commercial Radio Operator's course which upon completion would qualify me for a position as a Marine Radio Operator. The students were advised by the school to continue on the course and join the Merchant Navy or the Military Services after graduating from the school in March 1940. After graduation I applied for a Merchant Navy position with International Marconi Co., and was told that I would be advised when a position became available. I then accepted a summer job as a Radio Operator with the Ontario Department of Lands and Forests in the Port Arthur district (now called Thunder Bay). The summer of 1940 was spent at an Ontario Forestry Fire Station north of Port Arthur, deep in the woods at a place called Obonga Lake, in the company of two forest rangers. In September I returned home and awaited a call from International Marconi. Sometime in October I received a form letter from the RCAF addressed to Ham Radio Operators. The RCAF was urgently recruiting Wireless Electrical Mechanics, Radio, WEM(R) for immediate service in Great Britain with the RAF. I then went to the RCAF Recruiting

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Office in Hamilton, and after completing the necessary paper work I was inducted into the RCAF as a WEM(R) with the rank of Leading Aircraftsman (LAC).

On November 6, 1940 while I was at the Hamilton recruiting office, a telegram was received at my home asking me to report to a ship in Halifax. I was now in the RCAF so I had to decline the Marine appointment. The new recruits were told to report to the RCAF Manning Depot at the CNE grounds in Toronto, where we were kitted, medically inspected, and spent several weeks learning to march around the CNE grounds. By the end of September we were ready to be shipped overseas and so at Christmas time we said goodbye to our relatives and our friends. Our group consisted of about 164 men from all across Canada.

On January 5, 1941, we left Saint John, New Brunswick for England on the "SS Leopoldville" and arrived in Liverpool on January 15. From the docks of Liverpool we were sent by train to RAF Station Wilmslow, and then on the 17th, we arrived at the RAF school in Yatesbury. After a short orientation period we were assigned to classes in groups of about 30 or 40 students. We were then inducted into the mysteries of RADAR. The course lasted about 11 weeks, after which we were assigned to various Radar Stations in Britain.

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Part VI - Radar Hams

A large proportion of the Direct Entry radar people were Radio Amateurs before the war. Licensed by the Radio Division of the Department of Transport, Radio Amateurs were hobbyists who spent much of their spare time building and operating radio transmitting and receiving equipment. The state of pre-war radio technology was based on vacuum tubes and discrete components, thus it was feasible to design and build almost anything electronic in a home workshop.

In order to obtain a license it was necessary to pass an examination in the theory and practice of shortwave radio communication. Proficiency in the use of the Morse Code was also required at a speed of 10 words per minute. A government Radio Inspector paid periodic visits to the station to ensure that the equipment was operating properly and did not interfere with commercial services such as radio broadcasting.

Radio Amateurs could learn from Radio Handbooks, from club classes and from code practice transmissions from the American Radio Relay League club station W1AW at Hartford, Connecticut. At the outbreak of WW II it was not surprising that with the easy world-wide communications, the Canadian Government cancelled all amateur radio licenses. Air Force recruiters made use of the list of licensees and it is estimated that over 100 responded.

It should be noted that the value to the RAF of these "hams" was strategically great, due to the speed with which they could be put to work. The CH Radar after all was a 10 metre transmitter, a 10 metre receiver and a 10 metre antenna. The CHL Radar was close to the VHF amateur radio bands in frequency, as also was AI and ASV. For some radio "hams" radar was a glorious opportunity to "play" with radio again.

Since the United States was not in the war until the end of 1941, their Radio Amateurs were on the air in the spring of that year. It was the writer's experience to hear them from Yatesbury on an RF-7 receiver and a CH antenna. Another surprise for Canadians was the availability in Britain of VHF and UHF hardware and flexible 50 ohm and 75 ohm coaxial cable. This was due to the advanced state of UK television.

Although many of the "Radar Hams" have passed on as of this date, many are still active on the air and keeping in touch with each other.

The following is a list by province of the known "Radar" Radio Hams and their call signs as issued by the Department of Communications.

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Alberta

VE6WA Bill Ambry
 VE6CA Les Card
 VE6BCL/4AQQ Len Heidebrecht
 VE6GU Tom Lamb
 VE6RRQ Ray Lapp
 VE6UR Geo.Pinnell
 VE6RU Ed Schafer
 VE6??? Tom Wilson
 VE6LMM ---

USA

K4EF J.A.Leach
 KH6TS Murray Robins

Manitoba

VE4BD Alton Breault
 VE4BP M.Hallman
 VE4AT Jack Sherman
 VE4SR Stu Talbot
 VE4TX Robert Tinkler

Nova Scotia

VE1JB Al Brown
 VE1MB Vern Carmichael
 VE1LN Bernard McKay
 VE1OC Aaron Solomon
 VE1??? Gord Waugh

Prince Edward Island

VY2YN Archibald Barrett

Ontario

VE3AAS William Barrie
 VE3BJX Ralph Bartlett
 VE3AXM Cliff Butler
 VE3ZI Don Clark
 VE3WEM Ted Dessette
 VE3FQZ Phil Eprile
 VE3CT Charles Grove
 VE3IXG R.G.Hames
 VE3AVI Herb Jackson
 VE3HHU Craig Knudsen
 VE3BND W.C. Lupton
 VE3AC Reino Martin
 VE3GX W.E. Morgan
 VE3JI Frank Pounsett
 VE3JFP W.A.Rose
 VE3VZ Walt Smith
 VE3DSC Puss Valeriotte
 VE3AJW Fred Wilkinson
 VE3BUV Charlie Young
 VE3ZEL Oliver Lovell

VE3AZZ James Barrie
 VE3AAA William Booth
 VE3??? J.O.Camden
 VE3MBB Ron Cumming
 VE3BDA M.S. Doran
 VE3ASR Jack Fowler
 VE3IX Dave Gwynn
 VE3NG George Hardy
 VE3KXJ W.S. James
 VE3CV Merv Lemke
 VE3IH J.G. MacPhail
 VE3LJR Tom Maunsell
 VE3??? Bob Overn
 VE3ADR Harvie Reid
 VE3CUP W.E.Scott
 VE3AGS Geo. Spencer
 VE3AVZ Robert Watson
 VE3??? John Williams
 VE3JQS Eric Stevens

British Columbia

VE7OQ Bob Butler
 VE7BYX Syd Chapman
 VE7XG Doug Clark
 VE7CK Arthur Craig
 VE7WC Wyn Cringan
 VE7ACQ John Gardner
 VE7RE Bert Giles
 VE7ETK Jack Knight
 VE7??? F.J. de Macedo
 VE7ADM Ken MacLean
 VE7CUV Phillip Pitt
 VE7SWS Clarence Scott
 VE7PZ Wilton Stott
 VE7PJT Phil Thomas
 VE7DGI Charlie Whittaker
 VE5AGQ Frank E. Smith

New Brunswick

VE9CF Phil Loosen
 VE1ACF Dan Lund

Saskatchewan

VE5EC W.G.Brander
 VE5BDX Wally Hill
 VE5ACE Dave James

Quebec

VE2QH George Dorias
 VE2CD Don Hann

VE3AHX Art Blachford
 VE3AKK Gordon Burniston
 VE3AHM Bert Chapman
 VE3UQ John Cunningham
 VE3TT Barc Dowden
 VE3AKN Toivo Frantsi
 VE3AKZ Glen Hall
 VE3TY Russell Heagle
 VE3KK Marshall Killen
 VE3EHL Ed Leslie
 VE3IC Bill Martin
 VE3??? Lawrence Montgomery
 VE3OJ Charles Poole
 VE3YH Crawford Robinson
 VE3AWE K.W.Scott
 VE3AHY Roy Taylor
 VE3UT A.E.West
 VE3ST G.G. Williams
 VE3NPD N.A.Moore

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Part VII - The Royal Air Force Radar Schools

Yatesbury

The largest of all the radio schools in Britain, Yatesbury is reported as having been a prisoner-of-war camp during World War 1. It is located on the Wiltshire plain in a dreary looking remote area of southern England. It was primarily a school for Wireless Operator Air Gunners (WOP/AGs) and for Wireless Electrical Mechanics (WEMs).

The first Canadians on course in the UK were trained at Yatesbury, the equipment at that time being the famous CH (Chain Home), and the CHL (Chain Home Low). Classrooms were in a special compound about a mile from the barracks, providing students a chance to limber up before the instruction started. It was "Left, Left, I had a good job and I left" and a lot of other well-known ditties adapted to four-four time. In 1941 the site was on the path of the Luftwaffe to Bristol and if you were on night-time fire picket you had a front row seat for the explosions and fires. Yatesbury has been returned to agricultural use with only a plaque to identify the site..

Prestwick

The Prestwick radio school was established to train personnel on airborne radar. The school was set up in a beautiful mansion, Adamton House, near Prestwick Airport in Ayrshire, Scotland. The countryside around was beautiful and the weather superior to most areas of Britain. Living accommodation was in the big house and the instruction laboratories were located in the stables, and later, in Nissen huts as more space was needed.

Airborne radar at first was Aircraft Interception (AI) for use on night-fighters due to the great need for defence against night bombing. The aircraft equipped at first were the Blenheim, then the very deadly and successful Beaufighter. Operator training was given at the nearby Prestwick Airport. A similar radar to the AI was the ASV (Aircraft to Surface Vessel). The equipment differed from the AI in frequency and in the antennas used. There was an urgent need for better detection of the submarines and surface raiders. Aircraft equipped with ASV were the Sunderland, the Catalina and the Liberator. Trainees from Canada, New Zealand, Australia, the Fleet Air Arm and the RAF all passed through the school. In late 1941, some staff and facilities were moved to the RAF Radio School at Cranwell. When Dippy (an RAF boffin) designed the "G" navigation system, specially secure laboratories were set up in the grounds of Adamton.

After WW II the Prestwick school returned to civilian use.

Cranwell

The Royal Air Force Radio School at Cranwell was established on the grounds of the famous permanent-force training school of the Royal Air Force College in Lincolnshire. Facilities were established in permanent buildings for instruction in both ground and airborne radar and many Canadians passed through its courses. WAAF (Women's Auxiliary Air Force) Radar Operators were trained here as well as a number of Americans before Pearl Harbour.

It is not known whether there were any casualties but the Cranwell School was bombed several times, mainly by incendiaries. The school converted from VHF/UHF to centimetre radar in 1942. To this day Cranwell remains an important institution in the peacetime Royal Air Force.

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Part VIII - Where after Graduation from Radar School ?

In 1940, as the first Canadians were being recruited, the major radar in use was the mighty CH. This radar played a decisive role in the Battle of Britain, giving early warning of the approach of enemy aircraft.

By the time the first Canadians had graduated and been posted to radar stations, emphasis was shifting to CHL for the low flying attackers and to the deployment of radar to sites outside the British Isles.

Airborne radar was needed to combat the night-time bombers and required trained personnel for the Beaufighter and Mosquito squadrons. The Battle of the Atlantic necessitated an airborne radar capable of detecting submarines, surface raiders and the convoys; trained people were needed now for the Coastal squadrons.

At the Calgary Radar Reunion in 1996, a pin-pointed world map was displayed with the locations marked where Canadian radar personnel had served during WW II. We were spread all over like the leaves before the wind.

The letters received by Fred Grahame reported experiences from Canadians who had served at hundreds of different locations, some of which are listed below:-

<u>Name</u>	<u>Radar Type</u>	<u>Service Experience</u>
Bill Ashworth	Ground	UK, Calcutta, Burma
Bob Ball	Ground	UK, S.E.Asia, Singapore
Bill Barrie	Airborne	UK, Airborne Instructor: India -ASV, Radar Beacons
Ed Bastedo	Airborne	UK, Ceylon
Herb Beall	Ground	UK, North Africa, Turkey
Al Brown	Ground	UK, Airborne Instructor: India, Radar Instructor
Ray Brule	Ground	UK, West Africa
Les Card	Airborne	UK, North Africa, Malta
Jim Camden	Airborne	UK, India
Don Clark	Airborne	UK, Kenya, Palestine, Island of Ponza
Barc Dowden	Ground	UK, USA, Canada
Al Glazer	Ground	UK, North Africa, Malta
John Greenaway	Ground	UK, India, Burma
Ed Goodchild	Ground	UK, Malaya, East Indies (Died from beatings and malnutrition as a Japanese POW)

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Doug Gooderham	Ground	UK, Iceland, India, Canada
Gerry Harbottle	Ground	UK, North Africa, Malta
Marshall Killen	Ground	UK, North Africa, Sardinia, Italy, Newfoundland
Craig Knudsen	Ground	UK, Faroes
Oss Luce	Ground	UK, Dutch East Indies, taken prisoner by the Japanese in March 1942, surviving a terrifying ordeal..
Geoff Marples	Ground	UK, India, Radar Barge on Bay of Bengal
Gord MacPhail	Ground	UK, Dutch East Indies, Ceylon
Stan Martin	Ground	UK, Malaya, Singapore, Ceylon
Innes MacKenzie	Ground	UK, North Africa
Gord McKenzie	Ground	UK, North Africa, Italy, Canada
Harry McLeod	Airborne	UK
Ed Morgan	Ground	UK, India
Harvey Reid	Ground	UK, North Africa, Cyprus, Sicily, Italy, Tunisia
Clive Roberts	Ground	UK, India, Bengal
Art Scott	Airborne	UK, Airborne radar instructor, returned to Clinton as an instructor
Roy Taylor	Ground	UK, Sicily, B.C. Coast
Carl Tory	Ground	UK, India, Ceylon
Puss Valeriot	Ground	UK, Shetland, North Africa, Italy
Bill Stott	Ground	UK, New Zealand, Guadalcanal
Charles Poole	Ground	UK, Saudi Arabia, North Africa
Charles Cheshire	Ground	UK, Australia
George Clews	Ground	UK, India, China

The above examples are but a part of the many remote assignments of the early radar personnel. Many are also listed in the publication:

Honours and Awards
Granted During the World War,
Royal Canadian Air Force Personnel
Hugh Halliday, Douglas A. Swanson,
Robert F. Linden 1996

Additional Information may be found in the Angus Hamilton book "Canadians on Radar in South East Asia".

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