

DECEMBER 19-20, 1951

CRASHED COMMANDO

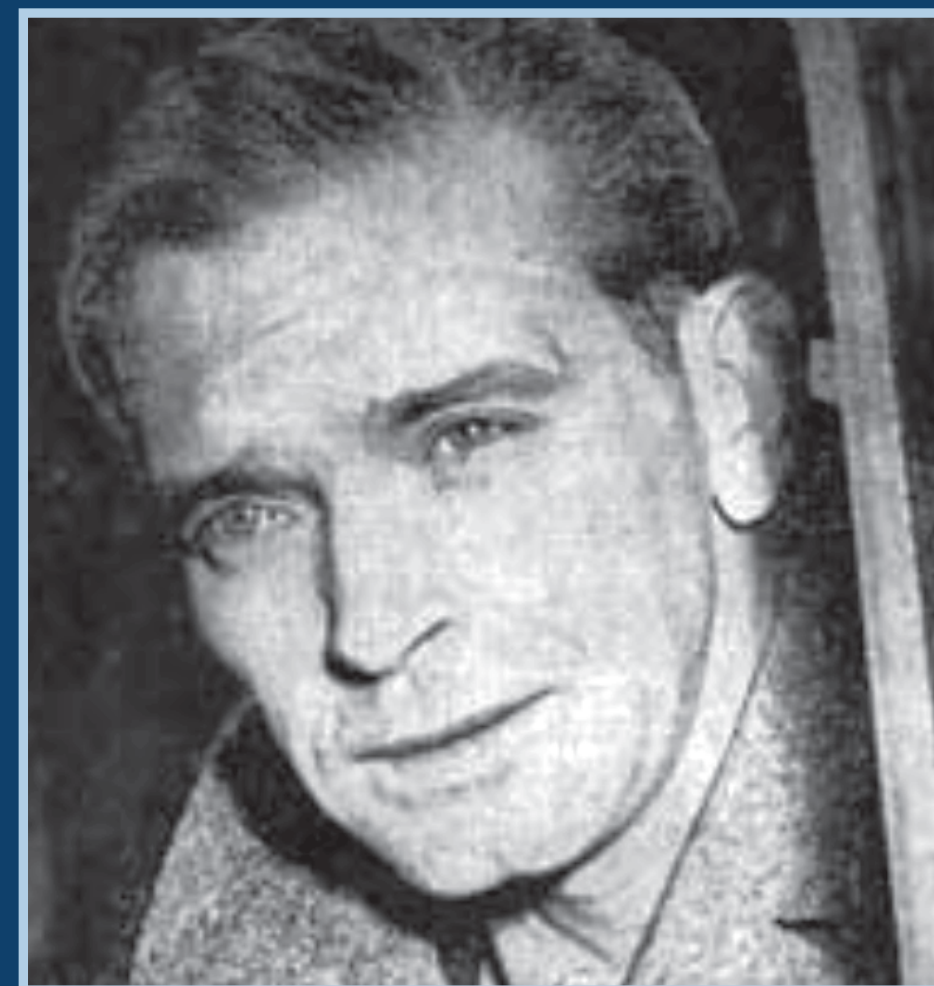
A huge snowstorm had dumped two feet of snow on Cobourg during the night. It was 7:45 AM on the Wilson farm - where Canadian Tire is now located.

Charley Wilson was leaving to take his milk cans to Cobourg Dairy. Mrs. Wilson was getting breakfast for her boys. It was a normal winter weekday morning until the hired man ran in with the news that a plane had landed in the Wilson's field!

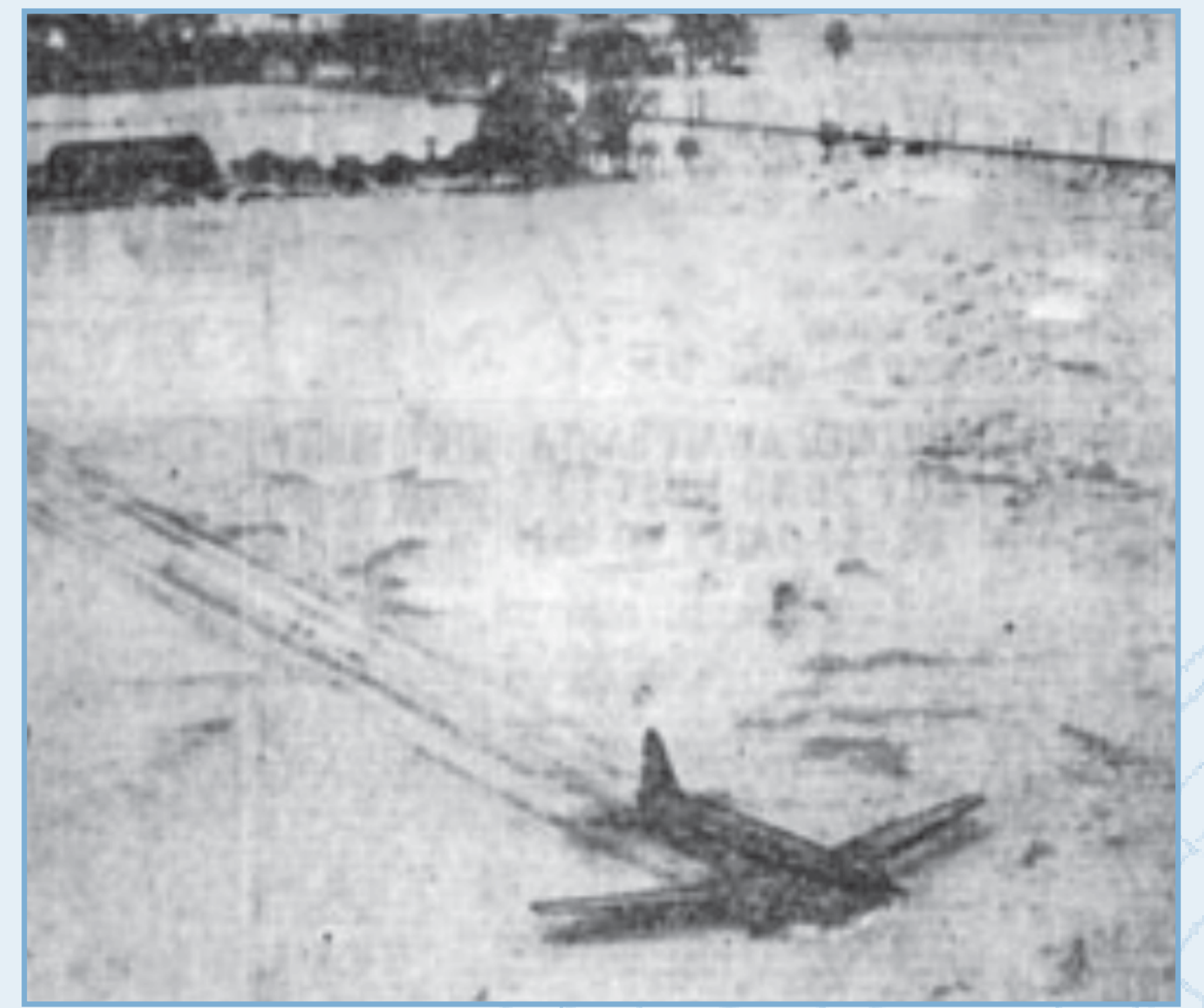
It was a Curtis Commando, with 44 U.S. citizens on board. Before long, the Wilson farmhouse was filled with men and women, some carrying babies, who had climbed down from the crashed plane and walked through the deep snow, to be greeted with hot coffee, sandwiches and all manner of fruit cakes and cookies from friendly neighbours. Mrs. Wilson handed out woolen socks to the frozen passengers: the plane had been without heat for the last two hours.

The troop plane, piloted by Bruce Smelser and co-pilot Edgar O'Leary, had set out from Chicago on the last lap of a long journey starting in California four days before. Dogged by mechanical failures on the first part of the journey, the plane ran into a terrible storm in this last Chicago-Newark segment of the trip.

Ice began to form on the wings and tail portions of the craft... A gust tore off the radio antenna... Radio contact with the ground was lost... The plane was straying north of Lake Ontario. Traffic controllers were aware of the mystery plane as it passed over Toronto and Oshawa. Trenton was notified. As dawn broke, the pilot saw land to the north of the lake (which he had assumed was ocean) and as the left engine ran out of fuel, followed by the right, he guided the craft westward - over Cobourg Dye Works, over the County Home and the Burnham farm, spotting the Wilson's level field. Turning back eastward, he touched down into the deep snow and released the landing gear, allowing the tail wheel to come down and act as a rudder on a boat. The landing was so smooth, a cup of coffee on the pilot's console did not spill! The plane came to a stop several hundred feet from a tree.

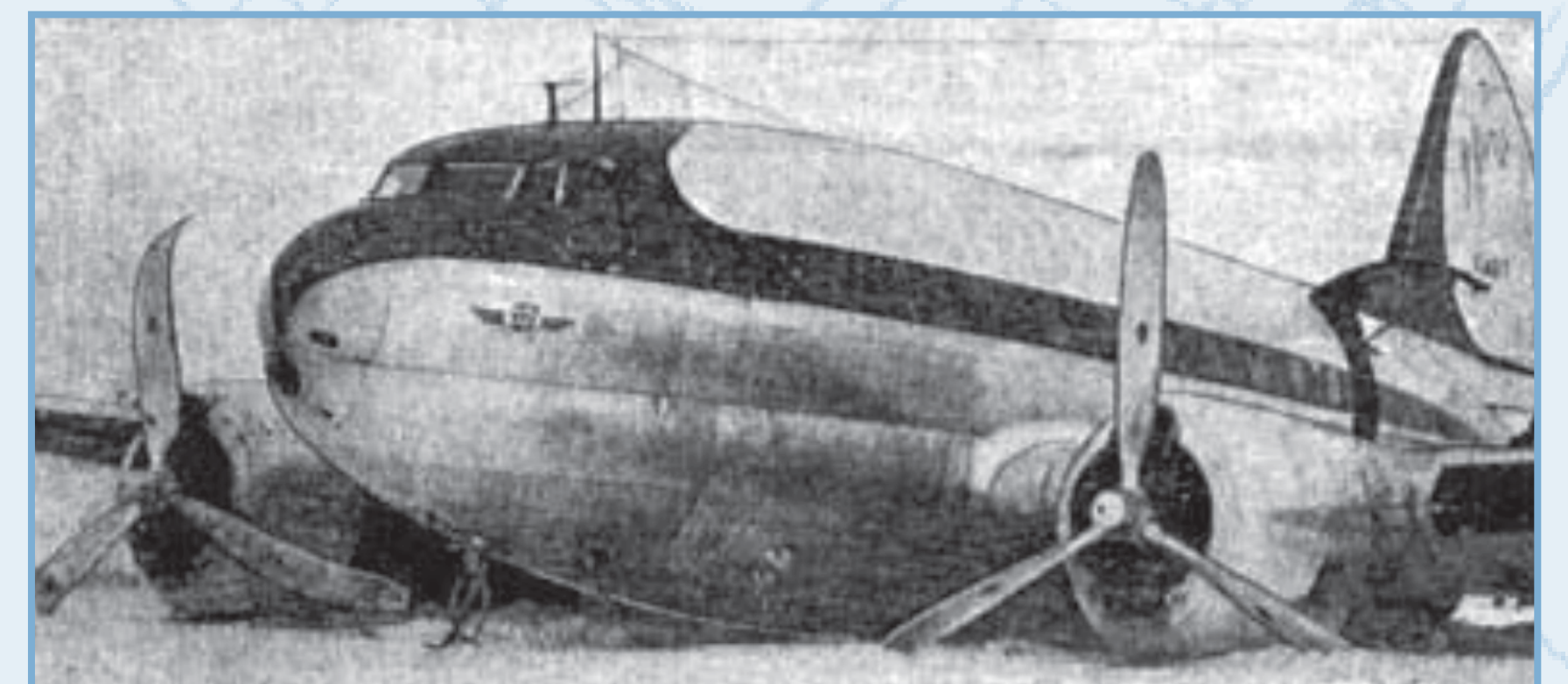


Captain Bruce Smelser



Newspaper report photo: Across the top is the drive way for the Lane farm. The top right corner is Hwy #2 & the farm buildings.

Photo by Larry Wilson



Newspaper report photo: Passengers leaving the house to get to the bus that could not get in the driveway, as the driveway was plugged with snow.

