The British Commonwealth Air Training Plan

One of a series of articles written specially for Weekly Newspapers by Hugh Templin, Editor of the Fergus News-Record

R.C.A.F. MANNING DEPOT MAKES RECRUITS INTO AIRCRAFTMEN

The first impression one gets on visiting the Manning Depot at Toronto is one of size, and that impression grows and deepens. Everything is big, or tremendous, or colossal. The building itself is the Coliseum, with adjoining livestock buildings, the largest under one roof at the Canadian National Exhibition grounds. Outside, the building looks the same as ever, except the sign over the door, but inside it is utterly changed. In parts of the building, there are double-deck bunks everywhere. A portion that used to house the trucks and farm machinery and the flowers at the Winter Fair, is now a huge dining room that will seat five thousand at one time, and there's a mechanized kitchen that enables the five thousand to be fed inside an hour—a modern miracle—and they don't eat just loaves and fishes, either.

Here the newly enlisted man comes from a recruiting centre somewhere in the province. His papers are made out for him and his records filed in the office. He is given an identification card, signed and sealed. Without it he cannot leave or enter the depot. He gets a number and a bed, and the system is so complete that when his friends come to visit him, a runner knows where to find him and "pages" him more effectively than if he was a guest at an expensive hotel.

The entrance hall is impressive. Long racks hold the "time cards" of the men at Manning Depot, and there are literally thousands and thousands of them. I watched an Aircraftman come in, pick his card out of the rack, fumble in his pocket for his identification card, punch a time clock as he passed the entrance, and then deposit his card in another long rack inside. A glance over this rack showed that while most of the cards were white, a few were blue: those unlucky men were confined to barracks because they forgot to make their beds, or for some other offence.

Beds—Then and Now

To an old soldier who had spent many a night in Exhibition Camp in 1916, sleeping on hard boards, those beds seemed unreal. They stretched in endless rows in every direction, like the young stalks in a field of corn—each one had springs and a mattress. "But my guide, Flight-Lieutenant R. L. Puxley, Wing Adjutant, pointed out that there were also white sheets and pillow cases. Some of the boys who come in have never used them before and keep them carefully folded up under the mattresses all the time.

I sat in the Adjutant's office while he explained to me just what they do with the raw recruits at the Manning Depot to make them into creditable Aircraftmen in four weeks or so—the drills, inoculations, lectures and the like. A knock at the door interrupted the talk and a telegram was delivered. It was from a wife with a foreign-sounding name, living out on the prairies somewhere. She wanted to know where her husband was: she had not heard from him for six or seven weeks. Neither had the Manning Depot. He had far overstayed a leave. But there are few like that. The majority are keen to learn and get ahead. If not, they are soon weeded out. Once or twice, two different "wives" have enquired about the same man.

But, as I said, these are the exceptions. The young man comes to the Manning Depot in civilian clothes with the most exciting weeks of his life lying ahead. A few are probably homesick at first, though the Adjutant said he had no complaints along that line—and few about anything else in the camp. The man gets his uniform and his kit. I saw two men in brand new uniforms going out that afternoon and a proud looking pair they were.

In the first week, there are lectures in service methods and the first drills. After that comes guard duty for the future air crews, with lectures, drill and physical training. Then the coming pilots and gunners go out to various schools on guard duty till there are vacancies at the Initial Training Schools. The men of the ground crews stay three or four weeks, then go on to various trade schools.

Feeding the Five Thousand

Lunch time was past before I went to the Manning Depot. When I saw the dining room, I was sorry. I would have liked a meal there, but there might have been complications. I was with two officers and there was a sign on the door saying that officers were strictly forbidden to eat in the men's mess. The officers solemnly affirmed it was because the men got better meals, so some officers had formed the habit of slipping away from their own mess and eating with the men. I asked some of the men about it and they just smiled, but they said the food really was good. I think maybe the officers told the simple truth. I saw their mess, too, and although it had white table cloths, it didn't look any more attractive.

Nowhere does one get the impression of size at the Manning Depot so much as in the men's dining hall. Row after row of long tables stretch across the width of the Coliseum. A skylight makes the room bright and a great eagle emblem covers one wall. The tables were being set for supper and the waiters were carrying in big bowls of Canadian apples, one more surprise for an old soldier.

The kitchen completely fascinated me. This is a mechanized war, as everybody knows, but even the cooks must be skilled mechanics. There were huge motor-driven food mixers, with monel metal bowls large enough to mash a bushel and a half of potatoes at a time. Another machine peels them. Half a bag is dumped in a big hopper, a switch turned on and a stream of water from a hose directed into the machine. It whirls around and the peelings are taken off by coarse disks of sandpaper and washed away down the drain. There isn't any waste because of unskilled peelers. Instead of hundreds of unfortunates doing kitchen patrol, just half-a-dozen men were digging out the deep eyes.

There seemed to be wonders everywhere around that kitchen. I went into a big refrigerator room where the meat was stored and into another where deep pans of jelly cooled on the shelves. The meat stock for tomorrow's soup boiled in great monel metal vessels and tempted the appetite. Fresh bread and cakes lined the shelves of the big pantries.

Plenty of Recreation

Beside the dining room is the recreation room, with easy chairs and reproductions of paintings of Canada's air heroes of the last war on the walls. There is a radio, the gift of some friend, and writing desks here and there, most of them in use that afternoon.

The theatre is in the north corner of the Coliseum, and it has a full-size stage, the letters "ROAF" on the curtain, and thousands of seats. An electric organ provides the music. Current moving pictures are shown there three or several times a week.

The arena where the horses performed during Winter Fair week is used for games. At first it was left with the tanbark on the floor till an epidemic of colds cast suspicion on the tanbark. Now there's a new asphalt floor in the ring and the colds have ceased. Several different games were in progress there that afternoon.

The day begins at Manning Depot at six o'clock, with physical training for half an hour before breakfast. At 8.30, there is the first parade, with drill till 11.30. An hour and a quarter is allowed for lunch, followed by more drill from 1.15 to 4.30. Supper is over by 6 o'clock. The evenings are free, except for some lectures given by college instructors on mathematics to brush up the future air crew members, who will need their trigonometry and algebra again.

A month at Manning Depot and the future pilot or gunner is ready to go to the Initial Training School, which is one of the most fascinating branches of the Royal Canadian Air Force.

Next Week—Initial Training School

Going Somewhere?

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R.C.A.F. recruits on parade at Manning Depot.

"As We See It"

By J. A. Strang

Judging by the letters that appear in the Herald from time to time it is the readers away from home that appreciate the local paper more so than do the local readers. Or perhaps the local readers are a little shy. We sometimes forget that the newspaper is the only means that many of its readers at a distance have of forming an opinion of our town.

Of course the local paper is owned by the editor, yet everyone of us have an opportunity of making that paper more interesting. There are plenty of happenings in a community the size of ours from day to day that would be of interest to others and the local paper is the best means available of distributing that news.

Why not take advantage of its columns to broadcast any item that you know of that would interest others. In doing so you not only help make the Herald more interesting but you would be giving our town a boost at the same time. There would also be that satisfaction derived from so doing, that comes from helping another, that is impossible to value in dollars and cents.

* * *

Some of the local school results were published in last week's Herald. We are not acquainted with many of the local students and do not know what percentage of those that tried would be successful.

We would like to see a list published of those that failed as well as the one of those that were successful. The idea is not one of ridicule but it would give the public a much better idea of the school's progress. It is very easy to congratulate a winner but it isn't so easy to have the right word for the one that failed and yet it is the one that has failed that needs the encouragement. It is no disgrace to fail. We have all been there, in fact many of us would never have amounted to very much had we never failed, and we do like to see the student that has failed dig in all the harder during the next term and chances are they will seldom fail again.

When we were going to school one of the lessons was the one about Robert Bruce and the Spider. Its logic still holds.

* * *

Since the introduction of motor cars there have been a good many different makes, almost two hundred on this continent we understand, and yet today there are not very many different makes of cars being turned out. One wonders why some particular car should go over big and another that looked just as good fail to make the grade. We've had a car of our own since 1914 and we recall an incident along about 1919.

We were coming into the City of St. Catharines from Queenston and noticed a big car parked alongside the road and the driver was signalling for us to stop. At that time we stopped for signals of distress. His car, which by the way was a brand new Cole 8, had balked on him and he wanted to get back to the city to get a mechanic. We were driving a model T touring at the time and as this gentleman that we picked up was rather haughty we felt like apologizing to him because we hadn't a better make of car for him to ride in. He leaned over from the rear seat to enquire "How fast can these things go"? We had a speedometer but as usual at that time it wasn't working and we couldn't tell him. However it did take him back to the city and it seemed that his new Cole 8 wasn't able to do that. Today Model T's and their brothers roll along the highways by the millions, but how many of our readers ever heard tell of a Cole 8? It was a nice car too but it failed to make the grade.

* * *

If some cars failed to become popular we could say the same thing about many of the improvements that were added to cars from time to time. Who ever hears of free wheeling today; even knee action is seldom mentioned. Back in 1933 we bought the first Reo that came off the Canadian factories assembly line equipped with automatic gear shift. We still drive that car and it has gone over 76000 miles and the automatic gear shift still works perfectly. We like it. We merely steer that car and never have to think of the clutch no matter at what speed we may be driving, unless of course we want to stop.

At an intersection we merely shove out the clutch and step on the brake. When the green light flashes we take the foot off the clutch and we are moving with never a thought of shifting gears. It looked like a big improvement back in 1933. It still is and yet it never became popular. It is a simple arrangement. A dog merely kicks in the proper gear according to the speed of the car. There never is any gear clashing no matter whether they move up or down. One wonders why an improvement of this kind never became popular.

CHISHOLM CLAN HELD REUNION

A very successful reunion was held by the Chisholm Clan at the home of Gordon Chisholm, at Hornby, on Saturday, June 28th. There were over 90 present, coming from Buffalo, Walkerton, Brantford, Hillsburg, Georgetown, Hamilton, Toronto, Oakville and surrounding district. James Windsor, noted 13-year-old piper from Oakville, dispersed sweet music throughout the afternoon with his bagpipes. Before the gathering broke up a collection amounting to over $20.00 was taken up for the Evening Telegram British War Victims' Fund.

—Recent rumors that Elsie the internationally famous Borden cow has met an untimely end must be regarded as "greatly exaggerated" for we have it on the best authority that Elsie and her luxurious boudoir will visit the Canadian National Exhibition, from August 22 to September 6.

HAWK in the WIND

By Helen Topping Miller

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"Yes'm—I hit him. He dropped clean. I'd have hit the other one but my gun jammed."

"Shut up!" snapped Virgie. "I'm going to take you over the Tennessee line and put you on a train to Cincinnati."

Tom gulped. "No'm—no'm, I can't go. I can't go to no big town. I'd git lost. I got to go to jail. You lemme out of here, Mis' Morgan, and I'll walk back. I got to go to jail."

But Virgie only drove faster. The road was crooked and slippery. She had to slow down. She would have to buy gasoline at daylight but she had to get across the state line first. Once over she could breathe again. She was, she knew, doing a mad reckless thing. Defying the law, aiding a man to escape—a woman of position with a business reputation to uphold—but there was nothing else to do.

She turned west again, avoiding the traveled road that led up to the power-plant. The road she took was wild and wandering. Boulders scraped the running gear, branches snatched at the fenders. Tom sat tensely, talking to himself, mumbling.

"You lemme out of here, Mis' Morgan. You lemme get out and walk."

Virgie's face was grim. Her eyes fixed themselves on the wan beam of the headlights. A few more miles and she would feel safe.

She saw the other car overtaking her before Tom did. Lights appeared in the mirror over the windshield, made the gangled growth on either side leap out of the shadow. She knew, somehow, what it was.

A horn blasted. Virgie put on speed, but the slewing of her wheels told her that it was no use. She had failed. She chose a wide spot, pulled aside, slowed, her heart pounding, hoping against hope that this might be some mountain boys returning from drinking in town, knowing somehow that it was not. Tom did not move. The car came alongside, crowded her so that she could not go on, stopped. A man got out.

Virgie said, "Hello, Lon," wearily.

Lon Hicks, the deputy sheriff, said "Howdy, Mis' Morgan. I been following you. You got Tom Pruitt, ain't you? We got to take him back with us."

Virgie employed none of the glib falsehoods she had been making up in her mind as she tore along. They would have been useless anyway. She could not lie. She was a mountain woman, without guile.

She said quietly, "All right, Lon. I was hoping I'd get him over the line so you wouldn't get him quite so quick. I guess you better take me along too. I'm to blame for this —not Tom. He didn't want to come."

Lon Hicks' lean face was inscrutable in the dim light, but his drawling voice was quiet.

"I reckon I won't take you, Mis' Morgan. I reckon I'd have run Tom over the line myself if so be it wasn't against the law. You go on home. I ain't seen you real good, anyway."

At dawn Virgie drove her old car into the garage. The house was dark and still. She made herself a cup of coffee, drank it hot, went upstairs, and took off her damp shoes and her dress. She would get a couple of hours' sleep.

Then she would go to Asheville—perhaps to Roanoke or to Richmond. She would get the best lawyer in the country to defend Tom. It was all she could do now.

A heaviness of defeat was upon her. Dark wings shadowed the sun.

CHAPTER VIII

In a long trough, fed by slow streams of water, a mass of macerated wood moved steadily toward the great caldrons that would steam and froth and dissolve it, with sharp bisulphides, turn every raw, green chip to a limp and obedient mass of fiber while the noxious breath of the process steamed out on the mountain air.

Branford Wills, his first day in the mill less than two hours old, stood beside the trough and tended the moving mass with a wooden tool hand-made and polished to a rich patina by the hands of a generation of pulp-makers. He was learning the "process" as Virgie had instructed him, and if the men who initiated him were stiff and curt and taciturn about answering questions, Wills put it down to the stubborn aloofness of the mountaineer, the same intolerant independence that he had encountered on the government work in the National Park.

He met their glumness with a quiet dignity of his own knowing how foolish and r[illegible] taken any attitude of wise-cra[illegible]ng familiarity would be.

When old Jerry, lean-faced and sour-eyed, said roughly, "If you're a-figuring on working here you better git yourself some working gloves. Men don't fool with this stuff with bare hands," Wills countered by inquiring where gloves could be bought. Slightly mollified, Jerry expressed himself concerning the value of two-bit and four-bit gloves, then as though afraid that he had unbent too much, growled, "Git a hold this-a-way! You're the awkwardest feller I ever see!"

Wills had expected dislike and resentment, the usual hostility of a clannish group to a stranger, and he was relieved to encounter no active antagonism. Only the chemist, young Daniels had been definitely unfriendly. Daniels had shaken hands, but with a withdrawn and slightly contemptuous look in his eye, and had gone back to his laboratory without a backward look.

The dampness, the steam, and the nauseous odors were pretty bad and Wills was not entirely strong yet. But a dogged determination made him swallow grimly and stand braced, with his feet apart, listening to Jerry's impatient instructions. These muscular, grim, [illegible]ent men might despise him for an outlander now, but they should not pity him for being a weakling and a quitter.

"Keep that there moving," ordered Jerry, yelling above the howling crunch of the drum-barkers. Then he muttered, "Time and nation!" and scrubbed his nose with his glove.

Across the damp, odorous, roaring mill, a red-clad figure was hurrying—Marian Morgan. Jerry pushed back his cap, in a half-grudging gesture of respect. The mountain woman has been a chattel and an inferior for generations. The mountain man has learned to admire and respect the female sex but slowly.

Wills mouthed, "Good morning," but the words were lost in the grinding bedlam.

Marian's face was pale, her lips straight. She said, "I want to talk to you," but it was the gesture of her hand that made the words intelligible.

Wills handed the wooden paddle to Jerry, who received it with a

"I want to talk to you and I don't want Lucy to hear."

flourish of obvious relief, and followed Marian past the battery of steaming digesters, through a sheet-iron door into the yard. A cold wind was blowing but after the noise of the mill Marian's voice sounded loud and flat.

"Please come over here to the car. I want to talk to you and I don't want Lucy to hear."

He followed her into the car. She shut the door, drove out the gate, and into a little weedy lane that ran through a lumber yard. There she stopped the car and said without preamble, "I'm sorry to impose on you. I know you're busy—with a new job and all—but there's no one else I can turn to. It's about Tom Pruitt. You didn't know Tom—but he helped my father build this mill. He has been like one of our family always. A week ago he disappeared—and that's why mother got the idea of putting you in the mill. She needed a man. Last night I found Tom. He was over on Hazel Fork. He owns some timber over there—rich timber. A man named Cragg from Baltimore was trying to steal it. And Tom shot him."

Wills sat silent for a moment. Then he said, "Do they know—the men back there?"

"I suppose so. They took Tom to jail last night. Mother went to Asheville early this morning to get a lawyer and arrange about a bond for Tom."

"Then—this Cragg isn't dead?"

"Not yet. Tom shot too low. The bullet went into his shoulder and hit the spine."

"I see." Things were coming clear. The attitude of the men in the mill. Their eyes, judging him gloomily. Tom Pruitt, who belonged to the mill, had always belonged, was in trouble, and he, Branford Wills, a young upstart had blandly walked into Tom's job.

"The reason I came to talk to you is this," Marian went on. "Even if you don't admire me an awful lot—"

"But—great Scott!" Wills began, and then as abruptly ceased. He could not say, "I'm mad about you." He could not speak out the things that seethed in his heart and stormed at his guarding lips to be spoken. She was Marian Morgan, of the Morgan mill. And he was a mill-worker, empty-handed and undistinguished by any prowess of skill or accomplishment.

"But I know," Marian went on, not looking at him, "that you are fond of mother. And this morning, after she left, Lon Hicks, the deputy at the jail, telephoned. He says Tom is going to refuse bail. That he wants to stay in jail. He's old and queer—and he was over on that ridge for days with no shelter and very little to eat, watching for those men, lying in a bush to waylay them. He's upset—and somebody will have to talk sense to him. He has to come back—mother needs him. So I'm going over to talk to him—and you have to go along."

"I'll be glad to help, of course—to do anything I can. But I'm not quite sure what it is that you want me to do—or why—"

"You've taken Tom's job. It's all over town, of course—things get around in a flash. Tom will have heard it by now. But—if you talk to him—tell him he hasn't been pushed out—"

"I see. Shall we go now? Could I wash my hands and get a coat?"

She drove back to the mill yard and waited, aware of Lucy Fields behind the window of the little office, watching—and on fire with curiosity probably, poor silly Lucy.

Wills came back and Marian drove away without a word. She sat, stiffly erect, behind the wheel, looking straight ahead, the stern line of her lips and the guarded chill of her eyes hiding the aching tumult that seethed in her heart.

She was hating herself for being so vulnerable, for the mad desire she had now to swing into a lonely side road and let the engine die, while she cried helplessly and pitifully in this man's arms.

He was sitting straight. He hadn't cared, of course. That had been fever, the foolishness of illness, that had made him look at her adoringly and clutch at her fingers and say things about gipsy tambourines and her face burning behind his eyelids all night long.

But she, Marian Morgan, who all her life had been so fiercely individualistic, her mind as coolly practical as a well-made watch, always sure, always self-contained, was no longer sure. If this was being in love, it was white pain and torment and cruelty past belief. She stared at the damp road, scudding under, and at the leafless bushes slipping by, and fought for the grim pride she had from her father, and with it the sharp tonic of anger that made it easier to be frigid and not to look around at this man, sitting so near to her, who, even remote and unconsidering as he appeared, could make tingling flashes of awareness tremble along her arms and hands so that the steering-wheel quivered.

She fixed her mind on old Tom. Remembering things, remembering days when her father lay slowly dying, when the house was heavy with the tragic air of sorrow, when people walked on tiptoe somberly and telephones were muffled with wads of paper. She had been very young then, practically a child, but old enough to be frightened and to suffer keenly. She had been summoned home from school into an atmosphere of doom, and her one comfort had been old Tom.

Many times, when her mother was busy and harassed at the mill, and the incoherent mumblings of the paralyzed sick man made Marian's young flesh creep and her throat cramp horribly, old Tom had appeared in the drive, steering a rackety old truck.

"Got to go up toward Little Fork to fetch them boys in. You come along and go with me. Woods is too lonesome when you get as old as I be. Feller gets to talking to himself and next thing you know they'll be telling round town that old Tom Pruitt has gone crazy."

On those trips Tom had taught her all he knew. The ways of the woods creatures, how to tell poison-oak from the harmless five-leaved creeper, how to keep silent and observe while a snake shed its skin. He had told her stories of early days before the highways penetrated the mountains, when a trip to Waynesville was a day's journey, when wagons had to be taken apart and carried over the mountains, and what dim roads there were followed the beds of streams and were practical only for men on horseback.

He had taught her a little of the odd reserve of the mountain people, the friendliness that met an advance half-way but never presumed, never was forward, that rested always on a stony base of elemental pride. The scalawag sons of mountain men who ran liquor, set fires, and poached deer on the game reserves, he despised and disowned. "Country trash," he dismissed them. Braggarts and liars avoided him.

Gentle, mild, and kind—how could old Tom have done this incredible thing? What temporary madness had possessed him? Whatever the impulse, Tom had believed himself fundamentally justified. It was an old law. In the mountains a man defended his own. Now, he accepted the penalty with a dignified grace. She could not desert him.

Virgie would hire the best lawyer available, but a lawyer could do little with Tom and nothing at all for him till it was known whether the man, Cragg, would live or die.

(Continued next week)

We print nifty letterheads.