

## The British Commonwealth Air Training Plan

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

### PILOTS LEARN TO HANDLE PLANES AT ELEMENTARY FLYING SCHOOLS

This is the sixth in a series of articles about the R.O.A.F., written for the weekly newspapers of Ontario.

One year ago, Mount Hope was a little crossroads village south of Hamilton, about half-way between that city and the Grand River. Now it got its name. I don't know, but the hopes of the early citizens must have been realized at last. The village itself is little changed as yet, but on the high ground nearby there are two air training camps, one of them operated by the Royal Air Force of Great Britain, the other by the Royal Canadian Air Force as a unit of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan. Previous stories in this series have followed the future pilot through the first two months or more of his training but he has not been in the air yet. He has had to prove his fitness in many ways, but the nearest he has come to actual flight has been in a miniature plane, anchored firmly to the ground. At some one of the 28 Elementary Flying Training Schools scattered across Canada, he will experience the thrill of his first flight, unless he has, at some time before enlistment, paid for a ride as a passenger, or is one of those rare recruits with training as commercial pilots.

#### The "No Admittance" Sign

It isn't easy to get inside the gate at any of the R.C.A.F. training schools. That is as it should be, and no one can object to the rules, but sometimes the guards interpret them more strictly than at others.

I drove up to the gate, armed with letters from the Training Command and accompanied by a Flying Officer in uniform. The guard at the barrier was adamant. I had no pass, so I didn't get in. He must have been an N.C.O. in the Imperials—rules to him were rules. Protestations by my guide and a telephone call to the Commanding Officer didn't alter the fact that I had no pass. Finally, it was suggested to the guard that he write me out one himself. He did so, and I passed triumphantly inside.

There isn't much beauty about the Mount Hope School. The countryside is flat and uninteresting. A year ago the camp site was still farm land. The landing field hasn't grown up in grass yet, though the runways are paved. The buildings are of the familiar pattern found at all the schools, with everything standardized for rapid and economical construction. The outside of the huts is covered with roofing paper. Everywhere there is a look of newness.

#### The First Flying Instruction

After graduation from the Initial Training School, the future pilots part from the other students and go to the Elementary Flying Training Schools, of which Mount Hope is a typical example. These schools are not run by the Government, but by private companies, each one sponsored by a Canadian Flying Club. One result is that there is a certain division of labor at each of these Elementary Schools. There is a civilian manager, whose duty it is to supervise all the actual flying instruction and maintenance of the planes, and an R.C.A.F. officer in charge of discipline and of the classroom teaching.

The arrangement has been criticized, but it seems to be working well. Early in the war, when the great Air Training Plan was first put into operation, it enabled the R.C.A.F. to take advantage of the most experienced instructors available, the enthusiasts who had kept alive the Flying Clubs. That saved precious weeks and has worked so well, there is not likely to be any immediate change, except in minor details. All other types of schools are directly under the R.C.A.F.

All the planes used at Mount Hope are Fleet Finches. Some other schools use Tiger Moths. There was a time, months ago, when they used some of each or whatever training planes were available, but there is no longer any scarcity of training planes. The Fleet Finches and the Tiger Moths are both double-seated biplanes. Two pairs of wings enable them to fly steadily in the hands of beginners and to land at a safe speed. Flying speed is slightly over 100 miles an hour; landing less than half that.

Officials at Mount Hope are proud of one record. Since the school was opened last October, not one student has been injured or killed. The hospital hasn't had an emergency case to handle. I found similar records at other schools. It is not the beginners who crash, but those who think they are experienced pilots.

#### Parachutes and Their Uses

The student takes his first flight in the front seat of a Fleet trainer with an experienced pilot in the rear. Before he goes up, he puts on one of several types of warm flying suits, a helmet with ear phones, so that he can listen to the instructor, and a pair of big, soft moccasins. A parachute is strapped to his body. There is a broad belt of webbing around the waist, with two narrow straps over the shoulders and two more around the legs. All the straps are fastened to a look in front of the body. The parachute itself is carefully folded inside a bag which serves as a cushion on which the student sits while flying. The "rip cord" isn't a cord at all. Fastened to the belt, on the left side, is a large metal handle, in easy reach of the right hand. When it is pulled a metal cable, like that used in camera shutters, jerks open the bag in which the parachute is folded. Four shock-absorbers will ever have to use one, in Canada—at least, but the feel of a parachute on the back gives added confidence.

One of the buildings at Mount Hope is the parachute room. The parachute is made of the finest grade Japanese silk, with braided cords. The length is about 40 feet and the cost of one is about \$400. Parachutes are given constant care, since lives depend on them. Every few days, they are unpacked and hung up in a tower, looking like a flock of big bats hanging from the ceiling. Folding and re-packing are done by experts.

An interesting chute story comes from another school. New parachutes were taken there for testing. A weight was attached and the parachutes taken up in one of the big bombers. It was laid on two planks across an opening in the floor of the plane. One of the ground crew, not too bright apparently, was given the duty of going aloft and releasing the parachute to be tested. His duties were simple. The weight rested on a couple of planks stretched across the opening. All he had to do was tip the planks at the proper time, to let the parachute go. All went well until one day when a plank got caught. Jerking at it, the airman lost his balance and fell forward through the hole. Quite unexpectedly, he tested a parachute, but it was his own.

#### How to Aim a Spitfire

At the Elementary Flying Training School, the student pilot flies about 30 hours, 25 of them under the eyes of an instructor and the rest alone. He may go up as often as four times a day, but never over four hours altogether in one day. The other half of the day is spent in the lecture rooms. Two afternoons a week, there are sports at 4 o'clock, tennis, softball and soccer. One building houses the Link trainers, which are continually used for testing the students. Lectures include such subjects as navigation, engines, rigging, theory of flight, armament and signals. Classrooms vary according to the subject taught. I will describe only

one of the most interesting. It is obviously important that pilots of fighting planes should be able to recognize an enemy at a distance and get in the first shots—and those shots must be accurate.

All flying schools teach aircraft recognition. Walls of classrooms and halls are covered with pictures of British, American and enemy planes. Models, made of plastic and brought from Britain, or carved from wood by Canadian boys, accurately measured to scale, are suspended from wires in various positions and can be moved across the room.

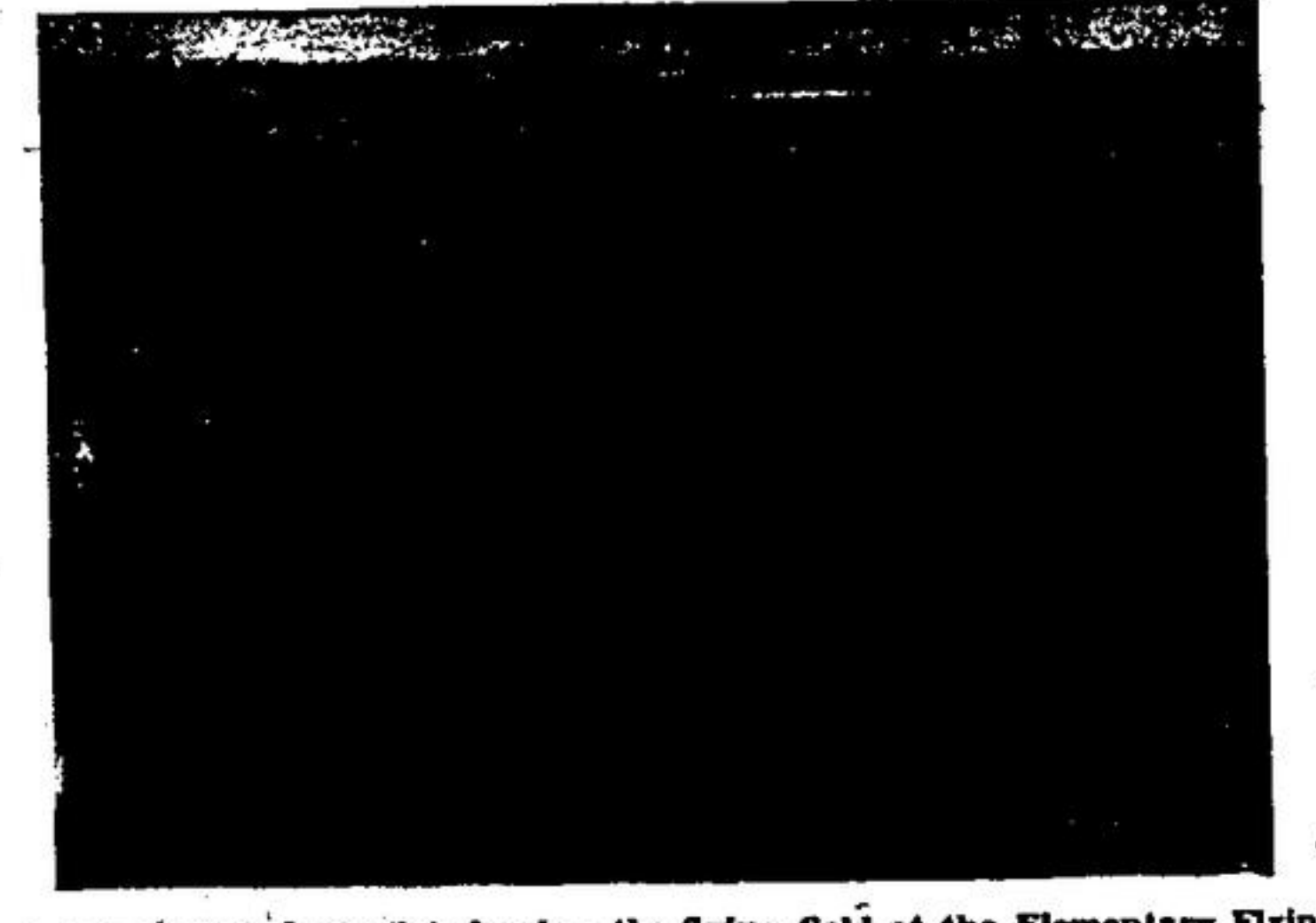
Using these models, the student learns to aim with the sights used on the famous Spitfire planes. I found this a most fascinating piece of optical equipment. It is not much larger than a flashlight and is illuminated by a small bulb at the bottom. The pilot looks through a sloping piece of glass which is transparent and yet acts as a mirror. On the glass, a circle of light appears, with a cross-bar of light, broken in the middle. In the exact centre of the circle is a spot of bright light.

There are two dials on the gun-sight, similar to those on the lens of a camera. The pilot sees an enemy plane in the distance. He sets one dial according to the type of plane, say a Messerschmitt 109, and the other for the distance at which he intends to open fire, say 300 yards. After that he can concentrate on keeping the enemy plane inside that circle of light. When it is close enough that the wings of the approaching plane fill the space in the broken bar of light, the pilot touches a button and the fire of eight machine guns converges on the spot marked by the bright point of light on the gun-sight. In training, no guns are fired but the pupil learns to judge distance and to aim accurately and quickly.

Commanding Officer at Mount Hope is Flying Officer W. P. Pleasance. The Administration Officer, who was our guide, is Flying Officer L. W. Code. (Next Week—Camp Border)

#### BRUTE

She: "Your little wife made that cake with her own dear little hands!"  
He: "Well, now, if my little wife will eat that cake with her own dear little mouth I will be satisfied."



A group of student pilots leaving the flying field at the Elementary Flying Training School at Mount Hope, near Hamilton.



Student Pilot and instructor in flying suits with parachutes on their backs, enter a Fleet Finch training plane at Mount Hope. —Royal Air Force Photographs.



# SAVE GAS

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Every week the pages of the Herald are filled with advertisements of Georgetown merchants and businessmen, telling you of the services available to you in your own home town.

On another page of this issue, appears an advertisement inserted by the Government of Canada, urging Canadian people to reduce their purchases of gasoline, in order to conserve supplies and release transportation facilities for vital war purposes.

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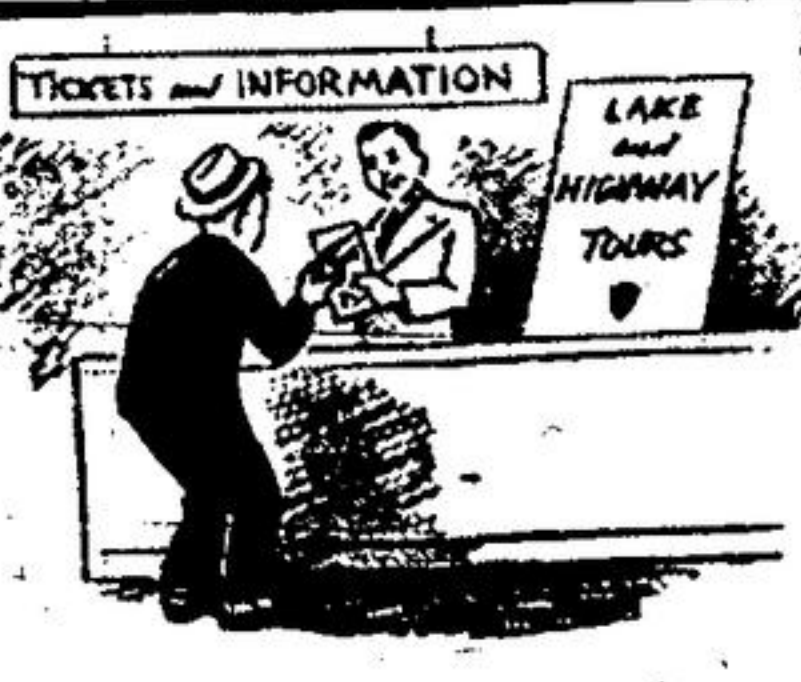
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