

Compassionate Hero Inspires Local Student

By Maurice Smith

Details on contributions made by former residents of Stouffville over the years, in our community and further afield, can be found in many places. I recently received material about one such resident, which had been researched and presented by Nadine Carter, an 11-year-old Grade 6 student at Glad Park Public School.

"I never really thought of this story as a project because I was only writing letters to let people know that I didn't think it was the way it should have been - our town forgetting about one of our notable residents - Captain A. Roy Brown," explained Nadine.

Due solely to her efforts, council recently endorsed the purchase of a plaque to honour Capt. Brown and have it placed at an appropriate location in town. The following is Nadine's project, almost in its entirety:

Captain A. Roy Brown
by Nadine Carter
Flight Leader (1918) 209 Squadron, DFC, DSC, Captain Roy Brown, was officially credited with shooting down the German World War 1 ace known as The Red Baron.

When I started I was thinking it was about remembering Captain Brown but as I learned more and more from the people that I wrote to I started to think it was more about

our town and how it forgot about people when they are gone - not just Captain Brown. There was a neighbour next to his farm and she said even Captain Roy Brown didn't want people to call him Captain and didn't talk about the war. Roy Brown's daughters said that they only found out things about their dad from other kids at school. So even Captain Roy Brown wanted to forget things and I am not blaming anyone. But I do think people want to remember especially when they are sad about saying goodbye.

In the spring of 1918, Brown's Squadron was posted over the Somme where our Allied forces were suffering high losses and being pushed back - in the last great German offensive.

He was flying two missions per day and on the 21st spotted Baron von Richthofen's 'Circus' (Germany's premier air group of the war) as they were called. He led his group of 11 planes against them despite being outnumbered more than two to one. They shot down three of their triplanes, among them was the Baron Manfred von Richthofen, and did not lose any of their group. Brown did not know it was the Red Baron when this happened. He was fighting two other planes but had spotted a German plane chasing one of his group (a new pilot who was on his first combat mission) and went to save him.

After the battle Brown went to see von Richthofen's body and wrote, "What I saw that day shook me up a lot, as it was the first time I had seen a man whom I know I had killed. If you don't shoot them they will shoot you, so it had to be done. It is terrible thing when you think of it that they should examine a body to see who should have the credit of killing him. The sight of Richthofen as I walked closer gave me a start. He looked so friendly. His face, particularly peaceful, had an expression of gentleness and goodness, of refinement. Suddenly I felt miserable, desperately unhappy, as if I had committed an injustice. With a feeling of shame, a kind of anger against myself moved in my thoughts, that I had forced him to lay there. And in my heart I cursed the force that is devoted to death. I cursed the war. If I could I would gladly have brought him back to life, but that is somewhat different than shooting a gun. I could no longer look him in the face. I went away. I did not feel like a victor. There was a lump in my throat. If he had been my dearest friend, I could not have felt greater sorrow."

The more I really found out about him, the more I thought he was a compassionate man and

always tried to look out for others and not just himself. Movies wouldn't make heroes out of these kinds of people because they don't slap each other when they kill someone.

By defeating the Germans' best fighter squadron Captain Brown gave hope to the people of our nations who had been fighting the war for so long with so many killed and were now again retreating in the Somme.

In 1943, Brown stood as the candidate in the Ontario legislature for the Liberal Party in the riding of Toronto-Woodbine, but lost in August of that year. His poor health which had been declining for years hindered his campaigning. He wanted to make sure soldiers returning to Canada were taken care of.

"I got back into civilian life last time with 27 fractures and was a nervous wreck. I got no pension. That kind of thing must never happen again."

After the war he bought a farm and made his home in Stouffville, on land now occupied by parts of Rolling Hills Golf Course. He died there March 9, 1944, at an early age (50) contributed to by health stresses from his war injuries.

In June of this year (2015) Captain Brown will be inducted into The Canadian Aviation Hall of Fame. This seems to have taken a long time to happen.

It is not just to have his name as a memorial, but for all the kids who live here, to know that someone from our area can do things that people from all over our country and world recognize as being valuable. So we don't just think none of us can grow up and not be important - and that's why we have to name our schools after other people who don't come from here.

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The Town will honour Captain A. Roy Brown with a special plaque as the result of an in-depth study written and presented by Nadine Carter, a Grade 6 student at Glad Park Public School.

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