

Fort York News



Fort York Branch 165 Royal Canadian Legion

Battle of Britain Day: 15 September



Branch 165 President's Dinner September 11

September



2024

Fort York Legion Branch 165
1421 Yonge Street
P.O. Box 69009
Toronto, ON M4T 1Y7

<https://fortyorkbranch165.wildapricot.org/>

Future Events

Sept 11... President's Dinner
(Toronto Hunt)

Dec.....Christmas Dinner
(Granite Club)

Newsletter Staff

Writer/Publisher..... Terry Sleightholm
Writer..... Capt Larry Rose
Editor..... Ann Unger

All Fort York 165 members should have received a Legion lapel pin. If you need one, please contact us.

If you require a name tag, please contact the secretary and he will arrange to have one made for you. The cost is \$5.00. Indicate whether you prefer a magnet or pin closure.

f.mccague@rogers.com

Executive 2024

President..... Col Geordie Elms
Immediate Past President Maj George Chabrol
1st Vice President..... Vacant
2nd Vice President..... Bill Utton
Secretary..... Col Fred McCague
f.mccague@rogers.com
Treasurer..... Leonard Feldt
Membership Officer..... Patricia Luna
Events Team..... Malcolm Morrison-Chair
LCdr D. Murakami
Bill Utton
Joyce Lloyd
Simon Milberry
Chaplain..... Maj Gillian Federico
District D, Zone 5 Rep.... LCdr Donna Murakami
Fort York News..... Terry Sleightholm
tsleight46@gmail.com
Sergeant-at-Arms..... Barry Downs
Public Relations Officer. Sgt Peter Moon
Remembrancer..... Terry Sleightholm
Branch Services Officer. Cdr Ed Sparling
Sunnybrook Rep..... LCdr D. Murakami
RCMI Liaison..... Susan Cook
Members-at-Large..... Sam Billich
Glenn Carter
Kathryn Langley Hope
Tom Pam



Fort York Branch 165

Canadians and the Battle of Britain

On Sunday, September 15, 1940, the day Great Britain and the Commonwealth now celebrate as Battle of Britain Day, the Luftwaffe launched its largest and most concentrated aerial attack to date on London and Southern England. This day is widely considered to be the climax of the Battle itself, and though it would wind down slowly over the next month and a half, the Luftwaffe would never again attack in such numbers.

With the RCAF in the throes of expansion and training, no Canadian fighter unit would be dispatched to Europe for nearly nine months. In order to show the people on the home front that Canadians were indeed fully engaged in the war, it was decided, as a public relations effort, to bring together Canadian pilots who were already serving in the RAF into one squadron — 242 (Canadian) Squadron. The squadron was formed in late October 1939, but only converted to Hawker Hurricane fighters in February of 1940. It would be in training or flying convoy patrols until the start

of the Battle of France. A detachment from the squadron deployed briefly to France and Belgium in May, then returned to England in time to participate in the evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force at Dunkirk. At the beginning of June, the squadron was back in France where it suffered heavy losses before leaving in haste ahead of the advancing German army.

In England, the squadron regrouped and prepared for the start of what would soon be called the “Battle of Britain.” By the beginning of the “Battle,” the squadron had a new commander — Douglas Bader, the inspiring and legless fighter pilot known for his tenacity and leadership. There were fewer Canadians in the squadron by then, but there were still several outstanding fighter pilots among them, including Stan Turner of Toronto (then with seven victories of his final total of 15), and the enfant terrible of No. 242, Willie McKnight.

Here are two brief biographies of two young Canadian aces : Willie McKnight and Hilly Brown . . .

Contrails over Kent, 1940



Willie McKnight, DFC and Bar

Flying Officer William Lidstone McKnight, of Calgary, Alberta is probably the most celebrated Canadian of the Battle of Britain.

McKnight, jilted by his girlfriend whilst attending medical school at the University of Alberta, quit his studies and travelled to England on his own money to enlist in the Royal Air Force in 1938.

McKnight, an enfant terrible with his wild, rebellious ways, cut quite the swath through his squadrons, being confined to barracks on two occasions, held in open arrest as “perpetrator of a riot”. McKnight was credited with 18 victories and was Bader’s preferred wingman. He survived both the Battle of France and Britain, but was shot down over the English Channel in January of 1941. He was the fourth highest scoring Canadian fighter pilot of the Second World War.



He downed 17 German planes in his short but illustrious career. During the Battle of France, McKnight shot down 10 planes and scored six victories in four days over the beach of Dunkirk, while the British evacuated hundreds of thousands of troops from French soil before the Germans could push them into the sea.

He epitomized the boisterous, “pushing the envelope” panache that is said to characterize fighter pilots, whether that carefree spirit comes to them by innate design or conscious imitation. While flying in France, McKnight is reputed to have “commandeered” a general’s staff car to help carry out a romantic liaison with a Parisian beauty.

McKnight flew with the Royal Air Force’s 242 Squadron, which was dubbed “all Canadian” because so many Canadians served in it. The unit’s commander during the Battle of Britain was Squadron Leader Douglas Bader, a renowned ace and an incredible pilot who flew with two artificial legs. Bader was so impressed with the abilities of the young McKnight that he made the Canadian his wingman in the squadron.

On August 30, 1940, following hard fighting, S/L Bader tucked in alongside his wingman, McKnight as they returned to base. The exuberant Bader held up two fingers indicating his two victories. The Canadian flashed back three indicating a “Hat Trick”. Bader was elated. The squadron that day claimed a total of 12 enemy A/C destroyed without loss to themselves. The tide of the battle was turning.

McKnight indicates a hat trick to S/L Douglas Bader who had 2!





F/L Eric Ball, S/L Bader & F/O McKnight admire their squadron motif



McKnight designed this grim reaper on his Hurricane



F/Lt Mark Henry Brown

DFC & Bar

Flight Lieutenant Mark Henry "Hilly" Brown, DFC and Bar (left) was born in the farming village of Glenboro, Manitoba in 1911. He received his wings from the Royal Air Force in 1938, and following actions in both the Battle of France and the Battle of Britain, he became the first Canadian ace of W.W.II. By the time of his death in November 1941 while on a fighter sweep from Malta, he had become a triple ace.

The citation accompanying the award of his first Distinguished Flying Cross reads:

"Since the beginning of the war Flight Lieutenant Brown has destroyed at least sixteen enemy aircraft. On 14th June, when leading his flight on patrol, he encountered nine enemy bombers, two of which were destroyed. Later he attacked nine Messerschmitt 109s, destroying one and driving the remainder off. As a result of bullets entering his aircraft he force landed near Caen, and was unable to rejoin the squadron before it withdrew from France. Flight Lieutenant Brown has shown courage of the highest order, and has led many flights with great success and determination when consistently outnumbered by enemy aircraft."

A versatile pilot as well as a fighter, Brown was reputed to be the first man to fly a German Messerschmitt 109 back to England for research inspection. He'd fly any machine to attack any enemy, once plowing with another British fighter into 16 Junkers 87's which they drove back from a British target.

Easy going and good natured, he accepted his part in the war as strictly business. He had worked up from



the rank of pilot officer to command of his squadron. He came to England in March, 1936, after obtaining his pilot's license from the Brandon Flying club at Brandon. He was made a flying officer in 1938 and flight lieutenant in May, 1940.

Brown had established a brilliant reputation long before going to the Middle East. In fighter circles he was known as one of the Royal Air Force's best. Once he was described by another Canadian, Wing Cmdr. J. A. Kent, as "one of the real top men in the whole outfit."

To his men he was known as "Hilly," a contraction for his nickname, "Hildebrande." How he got that nickname none of his men could explain.

Killed In Action (by flak) over Gela A/F, Sicily, 12 November 1941, he was buried by the Italians with full military honours.





Aaron Campbell
Gwendolyn Mathieson
Arik Sternberg
Barbara Venus

Welcome to
Fort York Branch 165



The unveiling of the new deck, tables, chairs and umbrellas for the Veterans Centre. The Veterans Council thanked us for our donation. It was a perfect day for the August 7th event with sunny skies, cake & coffee!





Fort York Branch 165

Royal Canadian Legion

The 88th President's Dinner
Wednesday 11 September 2024
Toronto Hunt

1800 hrs for 1900 hrs

Black Tie/Mess Kit/Business Suit

\$95.00



Please join us for our fall dinner event at the Toronto Hunt September 11 as we celebrate the 100th anniversary of the founding of the RCAF with two very special guests – Honorary Lieutenant General Richard Rohmer and the distinguished aviation author, Larry Milberry.

Our speaker for the evening is Larry Milberry, one of Canada's leading aviation writers, who will talk about his new book, *The Royal Canadian Air Force: 100 Years of Service*.



RESERVATIONS

Please confirm your reservation and payment on our new Zeffy website no later than **September 4**.

For assistance contact Fred McCague at . . . fred.mccague@rogers.com or 416-558-1291

Please register and pay via our new website:

<https://www.zeffy.com/ticketing/62dc6a43-cad3-4ea6-97fb-050f2f9df03b>

If you must register/pay by cheque:

Payable to “Fort York Legion Branch 165”, to be mailed to:

Fred McCague, 187 Wynford Drive, Suite 319, Toronto, M3C 0C7



MEETING WARREN BERNARD

By Capt Larry D. Rose

Warren Bernard was famous during the Second World War. His picture was on the front page of the Vancouver Province newspaper in 1940 and, after that, it appeared in Maclean's magazine, Liberty and other Canadian publications during the war. Pretty amazing since, in 1940 he was only five years old.

If all that sounds a bit confusing the explanation is that Warren "Whitey" Bernard is the little boy in the famous photo "Wait For Me Daddy."

The picture was taken by Claude Dettloff in New Westminster, BC when the British Columbia Regiment was marching down to a dock. It appears the regiment was going overseas but, in reality, it was boarding a steamer to go to Vancouver Island for training.

Warren and his mother were walking alongside the regiment when Warren saw his dad, Pte. Jack Bernard, and ran toward him. Click! It was a one in a million photo because Dettloff happened to be in exactly the right place at exactly the right time. Dettloff took only one picture but he knew he had a winner.

The photo was later used for selling war bonds and little Warren was coaxed into taking part in fund raising drives, urging Canadians to buy bonds "so my daddy can come home."

Well, his daddy did come home. Sergeant Bernard returned home—safely-- to Vancouver at the end of the war.

I have been intrigued by the photo for a long time. I have two very minor connections to it. First, as I mentioned the soldiers marching down the hill were mem-

bers of the British Columbia Regiment and during the 1960s I was a member of "the Dukes," as the regiment is informally known. The second connection is that as a CBC television reporter in Vancouver, I covered the funeral for Claude Dettloff in 1978.

I have known for some time that Warren Bernard, when he grew up, moved to Tofino, BC on the west coast of Vancouver Island. He ran different businesses over the years and was both a town councillor and then mayor of Tofino.

In May of this year my partner and I planned to go to Tofino for a vacation to see the famous Pacific Rim National Park and the equally famous Long Beach. Both were magnificent.

But I thought as long as I was there, I would look up Warren Bernard. I wrote him a letter before I left saying I would be in Tofino and, if he had time, I would love to say hello.

When we got there, I phoned him, and got an invitation to go to his home later that day. He looked great. He is warm and hearty and offers a meaty handshake. Broad shouldered and a bit shorter than I expected. Uses a walking stick but is well for a man well into his 80s. A big blow up of "Wait For Me Daddy" is just inside the front door.

It is immediately clear that he is used to meeting folks, as one might expect of a mayor or town councillor. We have a good chat. He concedes that while he had a hard time in his early 20s and went through a divorce, he later re-married, had a family, and flourished in Tofino. He's fine, thank you. A bit about him; a bit about me as the conversation continued.

I did not want to wear out my welcome, and I am sure Warren has had this same experience dozens if not hundreds of times, so I did not want to stay too long. It was Mother's Day and the kids were coming over. I know that in addition to his service on town council, Warren Bernard had been a long time Legion member and has been a fine citizen for many years. What a treat to meet him.





Warren Bernard

Fort York 165 Past Presidents

LColonel John Alexander Cooper

John Cooper was President of Fort York Branch 165 in 1946. He was a Toronto militia leader, press editor and original president of the Canadian Club when it was founded in 1897. Born in Clinton, Ontario on 5 February 1868, he graduated from the University of Toronto in 1892 and joined the Queen's Own Rifles in 1896.

He married Agnes Massie and had four children: Marjorie, Norman, John and Donald. A long-time advocate for militia and defence issues, Cooper was authorized to raise the 198th Battalion from Toronto. Although connected to the militia for over two decades, Cooper admitted he was often embarrassed about discussing his activities "lest anyone should say I was spending my time and my money foolishly." However, after the outbreak of the Great War, Cooper celebrated the martial awakening in the country, observing, "A man can wear a military uniform on the streets nowadays without feeling that anyone despises him at least."

Despite the greater visibility of the military in Canadian life, Cooper was unsatisfied with the uneven response to the war. He argued that the voluntary system was dead because "it puts a burden upon patriotic citizens, and lets the unpatriotic go free." He championed conscription as the only equitable form of military service. Before departing overseas in February 1917, Cooper addressed the Canadian Club in Toronto, where he emphasized:

"I am a soldier of my country; I am willing to do my duty, implicitly, promptly, fully, and whether my country glorifies me with a uniform or keeps me in a back office. I am prepared to do everything which my country demands of me."

Hoping to keep his battalion intact, Cooper appealed to Prime Minister Borden, reminding him that many of his men were recruited from the Toronto constitu-

ency of Militia Minister Edward Kemp. "I have had more than twenty years experience in the Militia," Cooper assured Borden, "and have done considerable writing on military subjects."

"We are cowards in front of a word, and that word is conscription. So far as I am concerned, I never was afraid of conscription. I am not afraid of conscription. All the men who are with me in my battalion are conscripts and they are proud of it. They are conscripts to their own consciences."

Hoping to keep his battalion intact, Cooper appealed to Prime Minister Borden, reminding him that many of his men were recruited from the Toronto constituency of Militia Minister Edward Kemp. When the Canadian Buffs were broken up in March 1917, Cooper desiring to get into the firing line reverted to the rank of major, joined the 19th Battalion and was later posted to 4th Division headquarters in France.

In 1919, he was appointed by Ottawa as director of the Canadian Bureau of Information in New York City. He retired as head of the Canadian Motion Pictures Distributors' Association in 1944. Cooper died in

Toronto on 17 January 1956 and is buried in Mount Pleasant Cemetery, Toronto.

Terry Sleightholm

