

Aces High

In the first World War Canada had more aces than a pinochle deck.

The top man among all allied flyers was Captain Billy Bishop, of Owen Sound, Ontario, who shot down seventy-two planes.

He was decorated so often that when King George V presented him with a Distinguished Flying Cross he said, "You now have V.C., D.S.O., M.C. and D.F.C. after your name. If you distinguish yourself again we shall have to give you something to put in front of your name. Perhaps we could call you Arch Bishop."

William George Barker, of Dauphin, Manitoba, was the Canadian air force's number two ace with fifty planes downed. He was a more skillful airman than Billy, but Billy was a better marksman.

A third Canadian, Raymond Collishaw, shot down sixty planes, but he flew with the British Navy. His RNAS B Flight, consisting of five Sopwith Triplanes, all painted black and all piloted by Canadians, shot down a total of eighty-seven planes in one two-month period.

Some other aces worth mentioning were Major D.R. Maclaren, forty-eight planes; Captain W.G. Claxon, thirty-seven; Captain F.R. McCall, thirty-seven; Captain Frank G. Quigley, thirty-four; Major A.P. Carter, thirty-one; Captain J.L.M. White, thirty-one; and Major A.E. McKeever, thirty.

The adventures of Billy Bishop have been wonderfully celebrated in a hit musical, *Billy Bishop Goes to War*, which played across Canada in 1979, then ran on Broadway.

Writer, composer, director John Gray played the piano in the production and Eric Peterson acted all eighteen roles, including that of a Sopwith Camel.

Avro

In the 1950s A.V. Roe Canada Ltd. (Avro) built the first commercial jet plane in North America. It was praised by engineers and test pilots, but its developers failed to find airlines at home or abroad who were willing to order it. Avro also built the Arrow, a supersonic interceptor, but after spending \$500 million and six years on its development, the Canadian government decided it was too expensive and dumped it in 1959.

The Great Atlantic Air Race

Strictly speaking, Canada was not involved.

Newfoundland and its future Premier were, but in 1919 Newfoundland was still a separate, self-governing colony and Joey Smallwood was a

newspaper reporter.

The aviators and planes were British and American. The race was sponsored by Lord Northcliffe, the publisher of the *London Mail*, and Newfoundland supplied the weather and the take-off point.

Two Brit teams eventually got off: Harry Hawker and Mackenzie Grieve were one, Jack Alcock and Teddy Whitten-Brown the other. The three American crews were all members of the U.S. Navy's first Seaplane Division, headed by John Towers.

Lord Northcliffe said the contest was open to anyone except "enemy fliers" and was to be from "any point in North America to any point in Europe." The award was 10,000 pounds from the *Mail*, another 1,000 donated by an anonymous British businessman, and another 2,000 put up by the Ardath Tobacco company.

The U.S. announced early that its people were not competing for the money, just for the glory.

Joey Smallwood interviewed the fliers, who began arriving in early March, and helped them find take-off fields that were fairly flat and not too rocky.

The U.S. Navy NC's, which were sturdy but slow, planned to make two stops in the Azores and then wing it for Portugal. The British intended to fly non-stop to Ireland.

Each day the pilots made their plans, and each day fog and low visibility kept them in place.

Finally Hawker and Grieve took off on May 18 in their single Sopwith, the *Atlantic*, and crashed halfway across into the sea. They were picked up by a Danish tramp steamer.

The U.S. seaplanes took off together on May 16, and two, NC 1 and NC 3, got lost, landed in the sea to get their bearings and were battered by the waves and unable to rise again. The crews survived unscathed.

NC 4, commanded by Albert "Putty" Read, got lost too, went into a dive and almost crashed into the sea, but made it to the Azores. On May 20th it flew to Ponto Delgada, another point in the Azores, and on May 27 to Lisbon, Portugal. *The New York Times* announced in a banner headline, "NC 4 Wins First Ocean Flight of America."

The race was not quite over, however.

Alcock and Brown took off on June 14, flew nonstop for fifteen hours, landed nose first in an Irish bog, and were awarded the prize money. The Americans all became Admirals. Alcock and Brown were knighted.

Lord Northcliffe went crazy—on one occasion he sent one of his subordinates a telegram saying, "Be very cautious in dealings with B.P. (Baden Powell). I have reason to believe he is not the inventor of the idea of Boy Scouts."

Joey Smallwood became the architect of Newfoundland's confederation with Canada and the province's first Premier. He is now 81 years old, hale and hearty and very active on his farm in St. John's.