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Vapour trails over Westminster

PHOTO: DND PL 106650

## A few Canadians . . .

*When her need was greatest, they came to Britain's defence. Fifty years ago, these Canadians flew with the few in the Battle of Britain – and helped change the course of the Second World War. By the end of the war, 33% of the RAF were from the Commonwealth; 25% were Canadian.*

On September 15, 1990, a 20 km parade of aircraft will fly over Buckingham Palace, honoring the fighter pilots of the Battle of Britain. As they watch the parade few people will be thinking either of Canada, or of Buckingham Palace itself. But if it weren't for the efforts of a young Canadian on this day 50 years ago, the Palace could have been a bombed-out ruin today – another grim reminder of the long hot summer of 1940.

On that day 50 years ago the skies over London filled with wave after wave of German bombers and fighters. After trying daily for two months to bomb the country into submission, the Luftwaffe had launched its most massive assault yet in the epic Battle of Britain. Weary British fighters rose up once again to meet them.

By the end of the day, every available plane in British Fighter Command was in the air, trying to drive the assault back over the English Channel.

It's hard to imagine now the utter

chaos that followed – the exploding planes, the billowing parachutes, the dogfights circling at 300 mph, thousands of feet above the city. Witnesses said there seemed to be thousands of planes, everywhere. One pilot said the exhaust plumes from the aircraft were like 'skywriting gone mad'.

About noon, 148 bombers broke through to central London. One of these separated from the rest, and headed for its target: Buckingham Palace. An alert Keith 'Skeets' Ogilvie – a pilot from Ottawa, Ontario, flying with RAF No 609

Squadron spotted the move. As Londoners watched from the streets below, he hurled his Spitfire in to attack, lined up his gun sights, and sent the bomber into a tail spin crash over Victoria Station.

It may not have been the only Dornier menacing the Palace that day – records show as many as six pilots gave pursuit to what, in the confusion, could have been more than one bomber – but Ogilvie got it.

London's lunch-hour crowds were not the only ones who saw Ogilvie in action. Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands, a guest at the Palace, was watching from a balcony. She sent Ogilvie a personal letter of thanks, and that letter remains one of his most prized mementos of the war.

Later in the war Ogilvie was shot down over Europe, and he spent 4 years in a German POW camp.

With typical Canadian modesty, Ogilvie looks back over 50 years and says that saving Buckingham Palace was really just a matter of luck. Perhaps so. But a surprising number of Canadian pilots – about 102 – brought this kind of luck to serve in the Battle of Britain. Some, like Ogilvie, had joined the RAF prior to or just after the start of the war. Forty-six RAF squadrons included Canadian pilots, with the largest single group in No 242 (Canadian) Squadron.

Others served in the RCAF's No 1 Fighter Squadron. This was the only Commonwealth entry in the 71 units serving under Fighter Command in the Battle of Britain. It was also the first RCAF squadron to engage in combat.

Another 200 Canadians served in RAF



In the sky over England, No 1 Fighter Squadron of the Royal Canadian Air Force goes into action in 1940 in quest of the German Luftwaffe.

PHOTO: DND PL3096