

# Wing Mate

Royal Canadian Air Force Association of Canada

Newsletter 408-437 Wing



Bell P-39 Airacobra

March  2021

## AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION of CANADA MISSION STATEMENT

The Air Force Association of Canada is a national aerospace and community service organization whose aim is to commemorate the noble achievements of the men and women who have served as members of Canada's Air Force since its inception, advocate for a proficient and well equipped Air Force and, support the Royal Canadian Air Cadets.

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818 Squadron.....	Jackie Johnston
110 Squadron.....	Cécile Thompson



### Sick and Visiting

Be sure to advise Barbara Newman, Fellowship Chair, if you are aware of a Wing member who is ill or in distressed circumstances.

Barbara can be reached at 416-223-7840.

**Did a load of  
pajamas so I would  
have clean work  
clothes this week.**

**MARCH**

**Happy Birthday!**

19th.....John Bamlett  
24th.....Hassina Heather  
27th.....Gordon Peckett





Lest We Forget  
**Charles Clarke**

21 December 2020  
We will remember him...



Charles was born on September 29th, 1922 in Fredericton Junction, New Brunswick to Donald and Edna Clarke. Charles was the dear and beloved husband for 69 years to Dolores Clarke who predeceased him in 2018.

He was the loving father to daughter Beverley Freel (David). The proud grandfather of Patrick Freel, Katriona Westacott (Jeremy) and Laura Freel. Oldest brother to Douglas, and John (Jean). Loving uncle to nieces, nephews and grand-nephews.

Being the son of a railroad man, Charles grew up in New Brunswick and many parts of Ontario. His favourite town growing up was Sarnia where, in high school, he won star athlete of the year in both 1938 and 1939: an achievement of which he was particularly proud. He also loved to build airplane models and entered them in many contests of which he had many awards. This love of airplanes and aviation led him to joining the RCAF in 1942, and he bravely served his country in World War II until 1946.

If you ask anyone who knew Charles, they would all readily admit he loved a challenge. He was a man both interested and interesting in anything presented to him. Those interests translated into life-long hobbies: stamp and coin collecting, model railroading, the aforementioned airplane model building, photography, oil painting, and square dancing (in which he and Dolores achieved challenge level expertise). He loved his personal computer, and was an early adopter of the technology in the early 80s.

Charles' faith and loyalty to Christ were an important element in his life. A service will be held at St. Andrews' Presbyterian Church at a later date. Details will be provided on this site.



In memory, donations may be made to the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada.



# President's Report



**S**till in the rabbit hole, our fearless leaders I'm sure must be sweating overtime to come up with a semblance of a plausible projection to keep us in our warrens to get past the May long-weekend. The other day I was driving along looking for a place to get some much needed plumbing supplies when I became aware that the air felt different – birdsong in the air, sun shining bright and smiling eyes everywhere. I realized that I just crossed the DMZ (a.k.a Steeles Avenue) from Never Land to do some much needed personal shopping well before 2000 hrs of course. I, at first furtively, shopped at one of the Box stores for some hardware; I was amazed at the festive atmosphere and the almost full parking lot. Of course, like everyone else, I wore my plague mask and rigorously guarded my personal space. I figure if it was good for the Venetians and they're still here, then it's good for me.



*In the 1576 Plague, Venetian doctors wore a **mask** with a bird-like **beak** to protect them from being infected by deadly diseases that they believed were airborne. In fact, they thought that a noxious form of 'bad air' spread this disease.*

On the Plus side, everyone is holding their own and the Wing's finances are on solid ground – in fact improved since a year ago. Hang in there. I think we deserve one heck of a party at the end of this mess. But life goes on with some pretense of the ordinary; at the end of this month I will be sending out the ballot form for the May election. Please return it. If anyone would like to join the exulted ranks please send me your name for the ballot.

[ncz@aerosafety.ca](mailto:ncz@aerosafety.ca) On the down side I haven't had hair this long since the mid seventies. I'm sorely tempted to



wear my tie-dyed t-shirt again.

Tentatively, on 20 March there will be a regional meeting at Mount Hope for the Wings. If you have any issues you would like to have voiced please send it to me.

*Nick Czernkovich*



Dress for future Wing meetings. Specially ordered through Nick.



## 818 Toronto Falcon Squadron

Royal Canadian Air Cadets

With Jackie Johnston



Even though February is the shortest month of the year, for our Squadron in 2021 we had a lot of fun and interesting things to do and learn. Our cadets took part in a very cool Superbowl themed activity where we hosted an interactive game show style event on a Monday evening. It was so much fun and brought enjoyment and balance to the stressful reality of the world our cadets are living in. For Family Day we obviously could not come together for our traditional Heritage Night Celebration at Moss Park Armoury but we encouraged cadets and staff to share pictures of individual families celebrating family togetherness. On top of that we had one cadet send in a post of his family dinner and a recipe of a traditional dish from his family's country of origin. So we still had a little taste of our Heritage Night festivities.

The Cadet Program as a whole is still working on plans for returning to in person training, aiming for September 2021. However, things are still not confirmed. Interestingly there were 4 confirmed in person summer training opportunities that were announced to return for the Summer of 2021, which is optimistic for a new beginning and moving past the worst days of this pandemic. For now though we are still 100% virtual but we are beginning to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Stay positive, stay safe!

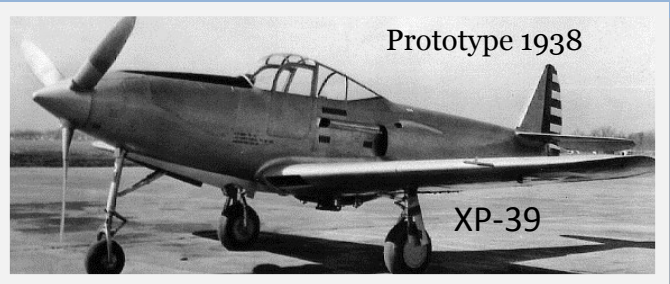
Capt. D Abbott CO



Cécile Thompson's column will return.



Kurt & Ursula Abels at an annual Wing BBQ



The P-39 Airacobra featured a tricycle landing gear, which was the first such arrangement ever used on a production fighter. It had an engine behind the cockpit, automobile-type doors and a cannon that fired through the propeller hub. The photo above shows the original canopy and side air inlets. The oil cooler air intake was *on the right-hand side while the supercharger air intake was on the left.*

It was a sexy-looking fighter but had too many shortcomings to put it into full production. The Russians, with their own specific uses for the P-39, were big fans of this misguided aircraft. It accomplished a great deal for them while disappointing the Americans and British.

## P-39 Bell Airacobra

**B**elieved by some to be America's worst World War II fighter, the P-39 was the star of the Russian Air Force — a strange irony as the Airacobra may be the least loved American fighter plane of World War II, deemed inadequate by military planners at the outset of hostilities and written off as nearly useless by many historians. Really? Was it actually that bad? I can think of a few U.S. fighters that would give it a run for last place in a popularity contest. There's the Brewster Buffalo or the Douglas Devastator for starters.



Admittedly different and innovative with its tri-cycle landing gear, mid-fuselage motor, long propeller shaft and “car doors”, the P-39 had design flaws which hampered its performance. It was handicapped by the absence of an efficient turbo-supercharger, preventing it from performing high-altitude work. For this reason it was rejected by the RAF for use over western Europe but suited Russia where most air combat took place at medium and lower altitudes.

Together with the P-63 Kingcobra, the P-39 was one of the most successful fixed-wing aircraft manufactured by Bell.

The P-39 enabled individual Soviet pilots to collect the highest number of kills attributed to any U.S. fighter type flown by any air force in any

conflict. Other major users of the type included the Free French, the Royal Air Force, the United States Army Air Forces, and the Italian Co-Belligerent Air Force.

The P-39 first flew in 1939, and was introduced in 1941. While it had good weapons, it was known for being very unstable and could lose control easily. It was fast but not very good above 15,000 feet without the turbocharger. Very near the ground, the Airacobra became extremely maneuverable and could out-turn any German airplane. The Russians liked the plane, and they often removed the wing guns to make it even more maneuverable. Several Soviet pilots became aces in P-39s. Its main weapon, a 37 mm cannon, was so powerful that it could destroy almost any airplane on a single hit. In a sense, the P-39 was an aircraft built around a cannon. (Reminiscent of the more modern Thunderbolt or “Warthog”) The engine was behind the pilot to make room for the cannon.

The "Q" version could go 375 miles per hour and had four 12.7 mm machine guns, and one 37 mm cannon.

Grigori Rechkalov of the Soviet Air Force scored the most aerial victories., shooting down 57 Germans with the Airacobra. His squadron mate Aleksandr Pokryshkin, had 59 victories, of which 47 were with the P-39.

## The P-63 Kingcobra

Based on the preceding Bell P-39 Airacobra, the P-63's design incorporated suggestions from P-39 pilots and was superior to its predecessor in virtually all respects. The P-63 was not accepted for combat use by the U.S. Army Air Force; but



it had another feature the Soviets desperately needed: good radios. Before World War II, only one in 10 aircraft was equipped with a radio, and “they were poor excuses for radios,” said Golodnikov. “Garbage! The circuitry was wound on some kind of cardboard material. As soon as this cardboard got the slightest bit damp, the tuning of the circuit changed and the whole apparatus quit working. All we heard was crackling.” To communicate with their pilots, commanders relied on hand signals. With the arrival of the P-39 and other Lend-Lease aircraft, Soviet pilots were finally able to communicate effectively, and this ability was a significant factor in their success against the Germans from 1943 on.

The aircraft were flown from Nome, Alaska and across the Bering Sea to the Soviet Union. They were flown in groups of six or more, escorted by a North American B-25 or other medium bomber with more sophisticated avionics than those in the P-39, hopping from base to base across Siberia



The T-9 cannon, produced by Oldsmobile, fired through the propeller hub.

The engine was somewhat unique. A long driveshaft ran underneath the cockpit to connect

he Allison V-12 engine to the propeller. One would have expected the driveshaft to be a high point-of-failure but apparently it was never a problem. The driveshaft ran through a tunnel under the cockpit. This had the unintended benefit of raising the cockpit and improving visibility. The rear mounted engine allowed for a very sleek, aerodynamic nose. Unfortunately this came at a cost. There was no place to mount the turbo-supercharger back there and the P-39 went into production with just a single-stage supercharger.



P-39 Cockpit

Why is this important? A turbocharger on an airplane serves a slightly different purpose than the one on a car which is normally used to get more horsepower out of a smaller engine.

On an aircraft, the turbocharger lets the engine keep producing its maximum power as altitude increases and the air gets thinner. Without a turbo to cram air into its Allison engine at high altitudes, the P-39 was a dog about 17,000 feet — a problem for a plane that was intended

to be a high-altitude interceptor.

The unique configuration had some other issues as well. The compact fuselage was crammed full of engine and 37mm cannon. There was no room for gas tanks in there, so the P-39 carried its relatively small fuel load in the wings.



Finally, the rear-mounted engine placed the center-of-gravity relatively far aft and gave the P-39 a nasty reputation for flat-spins and even tumbling end-over-end. Since the P-39 used a car-style door instead of a sliding canopy, bailing out of it was difficult as well. All of this gave it a reputation for being a death-trap.

**“Don't give me a P-39.**

**The engine is mounted behind.**

**They'll tumble and spin and auger you in,**

**Don't give me a P-39”**

The reputation wasn't completely deserved. Testing showed that the P-39 was stable as long as it was properly loaded with ammunition in the forward compartment. When empty, the center of gravity would move aft and make the aircraft susceptible to flat spins.

The P-39 proved to be unloved by both the Americans and British. The British ordered 675 of them, equipped with a 20mm cannon in place of the 37mm. The RAF found the P-39 to be a

disappointment, with a top speed 30-40 mph slower than what it was supposed to do. Only one RAF squadron was briefly equipped with P-39s and the order was cancelled before all 675 could be delivered.

The remaining 200 British P-39s were renamed as P-400s and served with the Army Air Forces as training aircraft. Some actually went to the Pacific theater, where the joke came to be that a P-400 was a P-40 with a Zero on its tail. Others joked that trucks would have been better, since a truck was faster and better handling than a P-400.

In the Pacific Theatre, the P-39 did about as well against the Zero as anything else did at the time. The Zero was tough to beat in the early years of WW II and the Japanese pilots were at the top of their game at this point. Even the vaunted Spitfire was unable to turn with the Zero, as the British found out.

The P-39 had a roughly even kill ratio against the Zero. Not great, but good by 1941-42 standards against an enemy with numerical advantage and more experienced pilots.



Depending on which source you believe the P-39 was either slightly faster than the Zero at low altitude or roughly equal.



Soviet pilots found the type to be sturdy, maneuverable at low altitude and possessing better firepower than early Soviet types. It also had instruments and a radio that actually *worked* at a time when many Russian-built aircraft didn't even have radios.

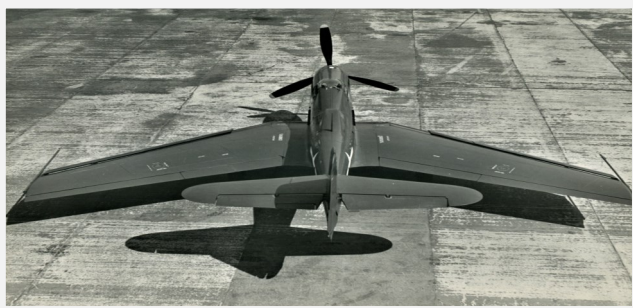
Some other qualities of the P-39 included good cockpit visibility, and decent armour protection for the pilot (but not the engine which was vulnerable).

At low altitude the Airacobra was roughly equal to the mid-war Bf-109 and superior to the FW-190.



All in all the type just didn't fit the needs of the Army Air Forces. It didn't have the legs for high-altitude bomber escort in Europe or Island-hopping in the Pacific.

Today the Airacobra remains largely unloved in the West. Unlike other WWII fighters, there is no "P-39 Pilots Association". There is no P-39 monument at the Air Force Academy. Too bad really. It was good enough for the Russians.



Swept-Back Wing King Cobra Post WW 2

## Kurt Abels CD, CMA, CPA, RIA

I saw the light of day on February 17th, 1932 in Koblenz, Rhine, Germany . Koblenz is situated at the mouth of the River Mosel where it joins the Mighty Rhine. Wjich has its birth in Switzerland. The hills produce highly desired, excellent wines. I know!



A few years ago, I found myself with a few friends on board a steamer, when I heard English being spoken in front of us. I noticed a nearby gentleman wearing a label on his jacket reading, "Seneca College". I could not resist speaking to him, and learned that he, indeed, belonged to the Seneca College in Toronto. Yes, it is a small world.

Back to reality. From ages 6 to 10 I attended public school with the best teacher ever. I enlisted in Kaiser Wilhelm High School, learning the English and Latin languages, among other subjects.

Yes, at the age of ten I also had to enroll in the forerunner of Hitler Youth, to which one would be transferred at the age of 14. We wore Manchester black shorts, black belt and shoulder straps, a black tie run through a leather knot below the chin. On the belt we wore a knife and our cap. Quite good-looking, you know.

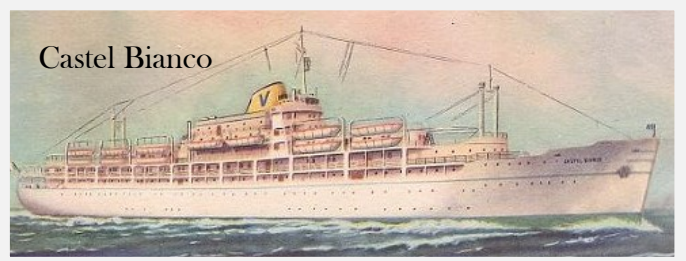
We met at my school for sports activities and learning to march in step, etc. It was our duty to salute all and any soldiers in uniform, especially every wounded soldier. On the streetcars we had to allow females and older persons to take over our seats.

Our city was clear from attacks until 1943. Our home, a house for six families, was destroyed. Evacuation to Meuselwitz, close to Leipzig, followed. In late 1944, when I was 12, we were sheltered deep down in a coal mine, when all of a sudden we felt the air escaping with a frightful sound. Luckily the air soon returned. Our quarters were gone — where were we to go? My Dad had the answer. Collecting our family, we retreated far away to a small village where relatives resided.

The main road ran through the village, crossing a small waterway leading to villages higher up. They were no good to us, so my Dad planned a per pedes (walking) trip all the way to the Rhine. Unfortunately, the baby carriage wheels gave up after arriving at the next village and a return trip to our starting point was necessary. Luckily in the next village heading back I noticed a 4-wheeled cart with a long handle bar for pulling. There was enough room for our four suitcases and a seat for Heidi, the smallest member of our family. It cost us our typewriter, our shoes, etc., but we expected it to get us to Koblenz. My Dad, a good organizer, always found decent farmers to help out. Following

poor roads, small uphill paths and crossing rivers, we finally arrived close to home. The destroyed city was sealed off and there was no place for us to find accommodations. What next? We ended up in a forester's cabin somewhere in the woods, a welcome sight after many miles, and many days.

Our next home was a basement apartment in Koblenz. My sister, Helga, meanwhile had moved from England where she had been living, to To-



Castel Bianco

ronto. My Mother's thinking after the war was to send me to visit Helga for the purpose of coming home with me. That would never work...and did not. Instead, I spent about three years working to buy passage to Canada. In 1952 I sailed on board the Castel Bianco, disembarking at Quebec City. What a joy to see my sister waiting for me later



Kurt on parade with Mimico Squadron No.142



on at Union Station, Toronto.

I wasted no time. I registered for evening night school and, at 20 years of age, learned a new language — English. I worked at the Trane Technologies, then for Border Brokers, a Custom House Broker. Next, it was Clairtone Sound Corporation Electronics, where I met Peter Munk.



Kurt & his Cessna 172

I worked as an accountant in the accounting departments of Philips Electronics, Clairtone Sound Electronics and finally with American Barrick Corporation where What a great place! My travels took me to London, U.K., Sydney, Australia and Fiji.

I worked for 50 years and retired in the year 1999 after working with Dr. Peter Munk and his adoring family for 37 years.

Interested in flying from boyhood, I was involved in building and flying gliders in Germany. I obtained my pilot's licence and in 1973 purchased a four-seater, fabric-covered CF-LQK which was equipped with a 160 horsepower engine.

In May of 1975, I flew south to Kissimmee, Florida with his children Robert and Barbara. It took us three days to get there but it was a great. My second aircraft, purchased in 1996 was another 4-seater, CF-YIQ, a Cessna 172.

## Wing Mate March 2021

My favourite pastime was being there for the benefit of our younger generation and the Air Cadet organization: No. 631 Centennial Air Cadet Squadron, Scarborough as an officer and No.142 Air Cadet Squadron, Mimico and Flying Instructor. I was also with No.337, Queen's York Rangers, Army Cadet Corps, parading at Fort York Amoury, as Commanding Officer with the rank of Captain. In 2005, I joined Canadian Legion Branch No. 614 in Agincourt as did my wife Ursula in 2014.

I am very proud of these organizations and my years with them, as well as my five years as President of the 408-437 Wing. Most gratifying to me! I am proud to recall so many committed men and women who have shined with pride in



Kurt with General Rohmer

fulfilling their responsibilities. Our commemorative bricks in Trenton are proof of our pride in our Air Force. I salute you. I shall never forget you L

Ladies and gentlemen, best wishes for the future success of all your dedicated work for our veterans and youth.

I thank you,

Kurt H. Abels, CD, RIA, CMA, CPA

February 2021



## Canadian Airmen

### George Frederick

### “Buzz” Beurling

DSO, DFC, DFM & Bar

1921 – 1948

**G**eorge Beurling was the most successful Canadian fighter pilot of the Second World War and is recognized as "Canada's most famous hero of the Second World War". He was known as "The Falcon of Malta" and the "Knight of Malta", having been credited with shooting down 27 Axis aircraft in just 14 days over the besieged Mediterranean island. Before the war ended his official total climbed to 31 $\frac{1}{3}$ .

Beurling's wartime service was terminated prior to war's end, for repeated stunting and his lack of teamwork. His other nickname was "Screwball". Having found a way to potentially continue combat flying in the postwar era, Beurling lost his life in a crash near Rome while attempting to deliver an aircraft to Israel.

Beurling began to develop an interest in flying at the age of 6 when his father built him a model aircraft. His parents wanted him to study in McGill and become a successful commercial artist like his father. At 15, Beurling quit school and took up a job at an air freight company in Gravenhurst to increase his income. One year later, he had 150 flying hours and managed to pass all examinations for a commercial pilot licence. He first took the controls of an aircraft in 1933.

To increase his flying experience, he planned to go to China, hoping to join the Chinese Nationalist Air Force. He first crossed the U.S. border, intending to head to San Francisco then work for a while in China.

Eventually, he was arrested as an immigrant at the border and was repatriated back home.



At the outbreak of war, Beurling tried to join the RCAF, but his lack of academic qualifications led to his rejection. He then tried to join the Finnish Air Force (fighting the Soviets in the Winter War), but could not get his parents' permission. Instead, Beurling sailed across the Atlantic on a convoy, landing in Glasgow, intending to enlist in the Royal Air Force. Unfortunately, he had forgotten his birth certificate and had to return to Canada. In September 1940, after he had survived the return trip, the RAF accepted him as a pilot.

