

The Making of a WWII RCAF Spitfire Pilot
P/O Gordon Hill J37340



Maclean's RCAF Sergeant Fighter Pilot cover for 15 November 1943, artist – W.A. Winter

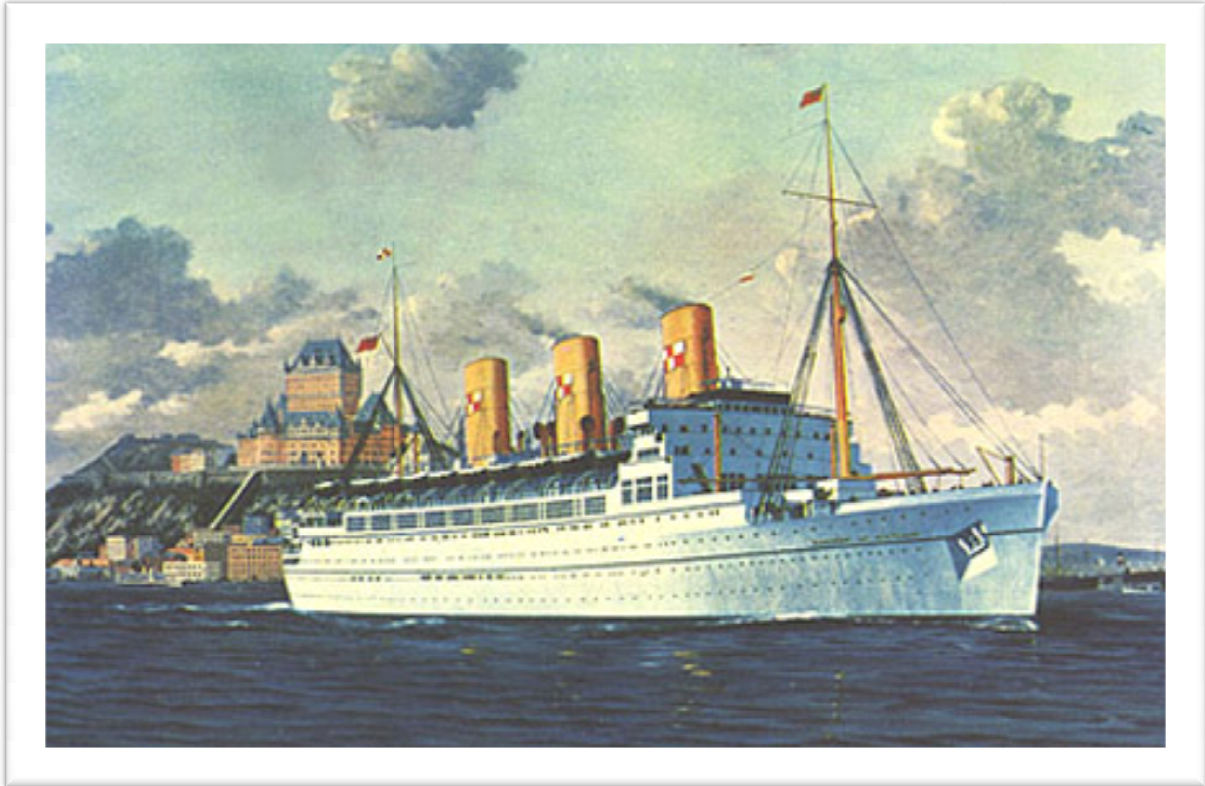
Part One

After flying Canadian built Hurricane fighters in protection of our Canadian West Coast, P/O Gordon Hill was posted overseas, from RCAF No. 133 Squadron, effective 18 April 1944.



Comox Air Force Museum via Mike Kaehler

He arrived at No. 1, "Y" Depot, Lachine, Quebec, on 6 May 1944, reporting for posting overseas.



Canadian Pacific poster showing the S.S. Empress of Scotland leaving Quebec City.

Gordon Hill recalls he sailed for Glasgow, [Greenock] Scotland, on the Canadian Pacific Steamship Lines *S.S. Empress of Scotland*. He was in Draft E.870, with 340 Officers, 642 Sergeants, and 675 other ranks. He said the funny part was all the direction markings of the ship interior were in Japanese, with no English.

Originally constructed in 1930, for Canadian Steamship Lines, it was named the “Empress of Japan” and sailed from Vancouver to Yokohama, to Hong Kong and then returned same route to Vancouver. That’s why the ship lettering was all in Japanese. With the attack on Pearl Harbor the name was changed to “Empress of Scotland” and she would make twelve return trips, taking troops to the war in Europe, and returning RAF cadets for pilot

training in Canada. The major shipping ports were Halifax, Nova Scotia, and New York City, New York.

Draft E.870 left Halifax, Nova Scotia, on 17 June 44, and sailed 3,098 miles to dock at Greenock, Scotland, [25 miles west of Glasgow] on 23 June. The pilots then boarded a train and travelled south to RAF Station Innsworth, which was located N-E of RAF Personnel and Training Command at Gloucester. RAF Innsworth was a non-flying station, associated with the Women's branch of the service, and some 4,000 females were on strength. Gordon said the Canadians had no idea, and never saw any British WAAF.

The RCAF pilots Gordon can remember were Doug Douglas, Terry Watt, Mac Donald, Scotty Galbraith, Digger Harrison, Vic Legear, Don Campbell, Keith Lyle, Gus Gaskin, John Cordick, Deke Passmore and Reilly Jackson. They all spent one week in London, drinking, before they assumed training. Gordon was not a drinker, and kept control of the group, when they tipped a few too many.



Mac Donald, Digger Harrison, Scotty Galbraith, waiting for train to London.



Gord and Deke Passmore in London, 1944.



Gord, Passmore, Jackson – London June 1944.



Jackson and Passmore drinking beer in London, 1944.



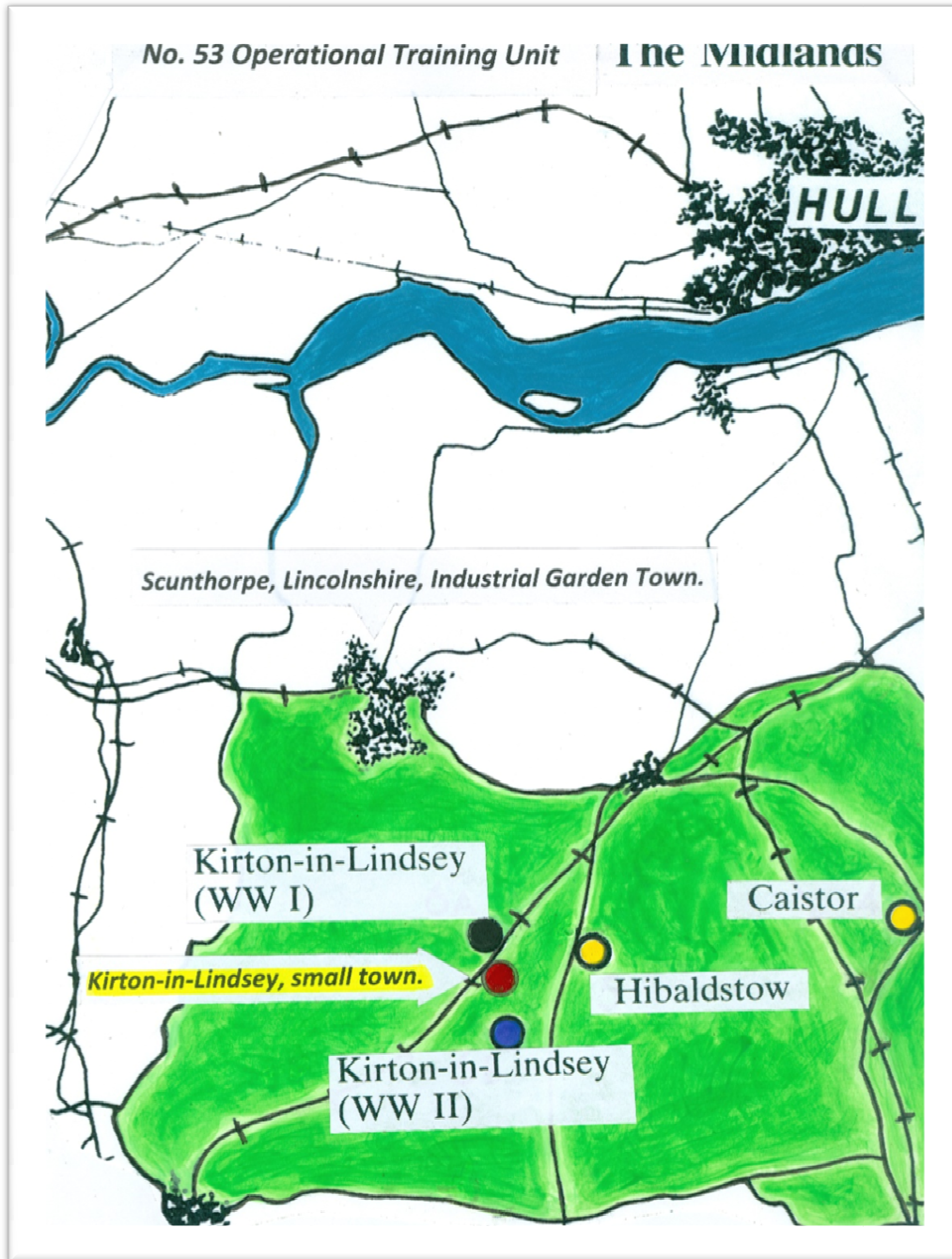
Reilly Jackson drinking beer in London.



F/O Gordon Hill at RAF Innsworth, with 4,000 females?

**Next stop No. 53 Operational Training Unit RAF Kirton-in-Lindsey, arriving
3 July 1944.**

No. 53 Operational Training Unit



From the British historical point of view, there seems to be some uncertainty in regards to the correct name for RAF Station Kirton Lindsey. The nearby railway station was constructed in 1849, with the name Kirton Lindsey. In December 1916, a military airfield was constructed just north of the railway station, used by the Royal Flying Corps, with name RAF Kirton Lindsey. In 1919, the airfield was dismantled and returned for agricultural use.

On 15 May 1940, a new airfield was constructed just a few miles south of the original location, used by Fighter Command RAF Station covering Northeast England. The early Operations Records Book used the name Kirton Lindsey, and that remained until July 1941, when the title Kirton-in-Lindsey begins to appear.

A relief field was constructed eight miles east of the aerodrome, titled RAF Caistor. A second relief field was opened on 12 May 1941, located two miles Northeast, titled RAF Hibaldstow.

No. 53 Operational Training Unit was formed on 18 February 1941, at RAF Heston, under control of No. 81 Group, for the purpose of training Spitfire pilots for Fighter Command. The three original flights were separated in June 1941, and two remained at Heston, forming the basis of No. 61 O.T.U. In April 1943, control was transferred to No. 9 Group, Fighter Command, and they were re-located to RAF Kirton-in-Lindsey on 9 May 1943. The first Spitfire pilot course conducted at Kirton-in-Lindsey was No. 46 which began on 23 May 1944.

Course No. 48 began on 5 July 1944, and P/O Gordon Hill soloed in his first Spitfire Mk. I on 8 July 1944.



R.A.F. Kirton-in-Lindsey and the village [top left] with same name.

The RAF base had three British Type “C” aircraft hangars, four blister aircraft hangars, Sergeant and Officers Mess, technical buildings, and accommodation for married quarters. It also had an Officers tennis court, where Gordon spent many hours. The airfield had some early Fighter Command history, as this was where No. 71 RAF Squadron of American volunteers, “Eagle Squadron” trained and flew from November 41 to April 1942. The Canadian pilots arrived on 4 July 1944, were assigned quarters and a British RAF bicycle for transportation. The largest town in the area was Scunthorpe, which was seven miles Northwest of the airfield.

No.	DATE	AIRCRAFT		PILOT, OR 1ST PILOT	2ND PILOT, PUPIL OR PASSENGER	DUTY (INCLUDING RESULTS AND REMARKS)
		Type	No.			
						TOTALS BROUGHT FORWARD
				# 53 O.T.U. NORTON IN LINDSEY.		
5		MASTER I	16	Po INGLE	SELF	CHECK.
8		SPIT I	H.	SELF		SOLO ON TYPE
11		SPIT I	C	SELF		EXP ON TYPE
11		SPIT I	C	SELF		SECTOR RECCO.
12		SPIT I	M	SELF		SECTOR RECCO.
12		SPIT I	M	SELF		EX 4A X.C.
14		SPIT I	P	SELF		FORM.
14		SPIT I	P	SELF		CLOUD & AEROBATICS.
16		SPIT I	B	SELF		CLOUD & AEROBATICS.
15		SPIT I	C	SELF		CLOUD & AEROBATICS.
17		SPIT I	U	SELF		EX 4B X.C.
18		SPIT I	B	SELF		FORM.
20		SPIT I	R	SELF		FORM.
20		SPIT I	R	SELF		MAP READING
23		SPIT I	M.	SELF		MAP READING & CLOUD FLYING
				SUMMARY FOR 100 PHASE ENDING 23/7/44.		TYPES: MASTER
Foster F/Lt.				UNIT # 53 O.T.U.		SPIT I
D. W. Smith S/Ldr				DATE 23-7-44		
G.C. HOE Squadron				SIGNED: <i>G. Hill</i>		
GRAND TOTAL [Cols. (1) to (10)]						TOTALS CARRIED FORWARD

First Solo in Spitfire Mk. I, code “H”, 8 July 1944.



Gordon on the RAF bikes.



Gus Gaskin



“Bins” John Cordick, #53 OTU



F/O Don Campbell and Keith Lyle studying.



A large number of squadrons used this airfield and this is No. 65 Squadron, which shows the grass landing area looking south from the hangars.





There was spare time for playing tennis. The other pilots were all RCAF, however Gordon cannot recall their names.





Course #48 ended on 4 September 1944.

YEAR		AIRCRAFT		PILOT, OR 1ST PILOT	2ND PILOT, PUPIL OR PASSENGER	DUTY (INCLUDING RESULTS AND REMARKS)
MONTH	DATE	Type	No.			
						TOTALS BROUGHT FORWARD
9	1	SPIT V	J	SELF		FERRY to H. BALDWIN
9	1	SPIT V	J	SELF		DUSK & NIGHT
<i>[Signature]</i>				SUMMARY FOR DATA ENDING		1/9/44.
O.C. 5 SQUADRON				UNIT. # 53 O.T.U.		TYPES.
V.H. King				DATE 1/9/44		SPIT V.
O.C. 5 SQUADRON				SIGNED. <i>[Signature]</i> F/O		
				TOTAL #1 SQUADRON		TYPES.
				TOTAL #2 SQUADRON		SPIT
				TOTAL #3 SQUADRON		MASTER.
				TOTAL # 53 O.T.U.		<i>[Signature]</i> F/O.
GRAND TOTAL [Cols. (1) to (10)]						TOTALS CARRIED FORWARD

Next, No. 83 Group Support Unit.

No. 83 Group Support Unit

The next posting was No. 83 Group Support Unit [G.S.U.] located at Bognor Regis on the southern coast of England, P/O Hill arrived on 7 September. These Group Support Units were formed in February 1944, and were holding units for aircraft and pilots of two Groups in 2nd Tactical Air Force. They maintained around 90 aircraft of different types, ready for issue to squadrons to replace losses. Gordon spent eight days living in tents at this station, then posted for more fighter pilot Spitfire air-firing at No. 13 P.T.U. at Warmwell, on 19 to 27 September 44.

YEAR		AIRCRAFT		PILOT, OR 1ST PILOT	2ND PILOT, PUPIL OR PASSENGER	DUTY (INCLUDING RESULTS AND REMARKS)
1944		Type	No.			
MONTH	DATE					TOTALS BROUGHT FORWARD
				# 83 G.S. U.		BOGNOR REGIS.
9	9	SPIT IX B	X	SELF		LOCAL.
9	10	SPIT IX B	C	SELF		FORM. LOW FLYING AEROBATICS.
9	10	SPIT IX B	E	SELF		FORM LOW FLYING. G.G.S.
9	11	SPIT IX B	2	SELF		DIVE BOMBING
9	11	SPIT IX B	D	SELF		FORM LOW FLYING ETC.
10	16	SPIT IX B	G	SELF		FORM LOW FLYING ETC.
		POSTED		G.G.S. COURSE R.A.F.		WARMWELL CO27
9	20	SPIT IX B	F	SELF		G.G.S. RANGING
9	20	SPIT IX B	F	SELF		G.G.S. RANGING
9	20	SPIT IX B	F	SELF		G.G.S. TRACKING.
9	21	SPIT IX B	F	SELF		G.G.S. RANGING & TRACKING.
9	21	SPIT IX B	H	SELF		G.G.S. CAMERA. RANGING & TRACKING.
9	21	SPIT IX B	E	SELF		G.G.S. RANGING & TRACKING.
9	23	SPIT IX B	B	SELF		AIR FIRING. 3. 18
9	23	SPIT IX B	C	SELF		AIR FIRING. 5. 15
9	24	SPIT IX B	C	SELF		AIR FIRING. 0. 14
9	24	SPIT IX B	R	SELF		AIR FIRING. 2. 0
9	25	SPIT IX B	L	SELF		DUG FIGHTING ABOVE 10,000
				SUMMARY FOR DATE ENDING 1/10/44.		TYPES
				UNIT # 83 G.S. U.		SPIT IX B
				DATE 1/10/44		
				SIGNED. <i>[Signature]</i> 7/0.		TOTAL

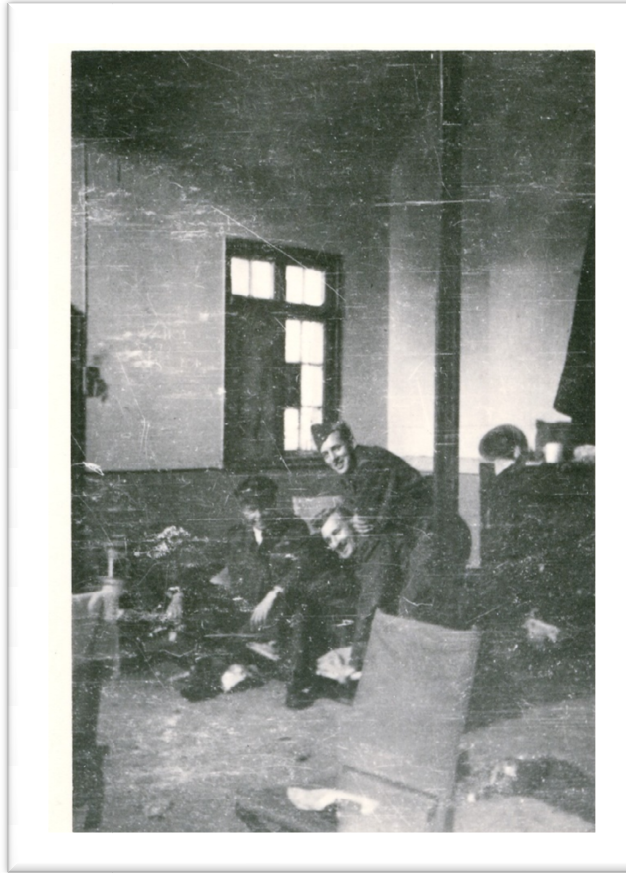
GRAND TOTAL [Cols. (1) to (10)]

65.6 Hrs. 25 Mins.

TOTALS CARRIED FORWARD



Living in tents at #83 G.S.U. Bognor Regis, seaside resort [55 miles] 89 k/m southwest of London.



**Doug Douglas, Terry Watt and Digger Harrison in old school house at Thorney Island,
27 September to 2 October 44, waiting for posting to combat unit.**

P/O Hill recorded his last training flight in Spitfire Mk. IXB, code “L”, on 25 September 44, dog-fighting over 10,000 feet. Gordon now had a grand total of 656 hrs. and 25 mins. in his log book. Posted to No. 127 Wing, No. 416 [Lynx] Squadron, he would next see frontline combat flying at Grave, Holland, just six miles from the German front lines. F/L S. H. Straub, F/O E.E. Whitehead, and P/O Gordon Hill, were flown by Avro Anson to Grave, Holland, on 2 October 44, arriving at 15:40 hrs.

Next, in Part Two, a short history of No. 416 Squadron follows.