

Interviewed at
Crestwood
Preparatory
College on April
8th, 2012

Len Levy

By: Justin Memar

The RCAF and Canada's Contributions

- o The Royal Canadian Air Force was created in 1918 and continues to exist to this day.
- o The RCAF worked hand in hand with the RAF, with the majority of RCAF recruits serving in British squadrons.
- o 249,662 people served in the RCAF, with 93,844 serving overseas.
- o The highest amount of casualties came from Bomber Command.
- o More than a million Canadians served in World War Two, with tens of thousands being killed in combat.
- o They served in all branches in service, from the navy to the infantry.
- o To commemorate the contributions that Canadians have made, Remembrance Day is celebrated on November 11th.



RCAF

roundel

<http://www.seaislandhome.org/files/pre64roundel.jpg>



Poppy

http://www.toronto.ca/events/images/poppy_300.jpg

Stationing in England

- o England was left battered after Luftwaffe raids devastated major cities, most notably London, which was under heavy fire during the Battle of London.
- o When Len arrived in England, he was shipped to Warrington, which is just outside Liverpool.
- o Warrington was home to Padgate Camp, a training centre for RAF recruits, and Burtonwood USAAF Airbase.
- o In addition, there was an explosives factory and a Royal Navy Air Station.
- o There were an abundance of air bases in England during the Second World War. Most of them being located in the south, close to France, Germany and the rest of Europe.



Warrington

<http://maps.pickatrail.com/europe/england/map/warrington.gif>



Padgate Camp

http://museum.warrington.gov.uk/Images/ptlo%2060_tcm22-42747.jpg

Forming a Crew

- Once at Warrington, they were to form crews. There are seven crew members aboard a Lancaster bomber.
- Mr. Levy was the captain, or the skipper. His crew consisted of a flight engineer, bomb aimer, wireless operator, tail gunner, mid upper gunner, and an air gunner.
- His job included piloting the aircraft, managing the other crew members, and ensuring everything was running smoothly.
- Each crew member has a specific job they have to do to complete the mission. The bomb aimer must steer the plane into position to drop the bombs, the gunners must shoot at enemy aircraft to protect their own, and the wireless operator must retain communications with the base.
- Len's crew consisted of servicemen from all over the world; his tail gunner was from Australia and his bomb aimer was from Edinburgh, Scotland.



Len and two other crew members



A full Lancaster Crew

http://www.stewartbooks.com/graphics/Lancaster_Crew.jpg

Preparing to Attack

- There are three stages to a mission, with the entire ordeal totalling about fourteen hours.
- They would first be told that there is a mission that night. All the missions happen at night to camouflage the dark Lancasters against the night sky.
- All the men of the squadron gather in a room for briefing. There are twenty aircraft in each squadron and seven men per aircraft.
- They are informed of their primary target and their alternate target, should they not be able to reach the primary one, and their return routes.
- They would then be informed on the whereabouts of searchlights and fighter squadrons.



Lancaster bomber

<http://www.birmingham101.com/lanca-ster-night-watercolour-DETAIL.jpg>



Briefing room

http://ww2db.com/images/air_me163_3.jpg



Searchlights

<http://www.skylighters.org/howalightworks/maltaraid.jpg>

Executing an Assault

- o The final stage is executing the attack.
- o The targets for raids were many and varied; ranging from a city, to chemical plants.
- o The primary target were usually military installations such as air bases, U-boat pens, and armament factories.
- o Industrial areas were also targeted with the aim destroying factories, natural resources, and production plants. The Ruhr Valley, ironically nicknamed “Happy Valley,” was an industrial centre and a prime target for bombers.
- o Perhaps one of the most important goals of the bombers is to break to peoples’ morale. By constantly pounding cities with explosives and killing thousands of people, the citizens of the country will become discouraged and want the war to come to an end.
- o Returning to base safely was no easy task, with almost half of all Lancasters being lost in combat. They were faced with many threats, including night fighters and anti-aircraft guns.



The Ruhr Valley

[http://www.b24.net/missions/trolleyimages/may8/12May45%20German%20Industry%20in%20the%20Ruhr%20Valley%20108%20\(HDeVoe\).jpg](http://www.b24.net/missions/trolleyimages/may8/12May45%20German%20Industry%20in%20the%20Ruhr%20Valley%20108%20(HDeVoe).jpg)



Bombing of Dresden

<http://www.subvertednation.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/bombing-of-dresden.jpg>

Technological Advances

- Aircraft played a bigger role in World War Two than had ever been seen before, and as a result, countermeasures were developed to deal with enemy aircraft.
- These countermeasures could be as simple as guns in aircrafts' wings to as complex as radar.
- Searchlights were a basic method of identifying aircraft; they worked by shining powerful lights into the night sky, though they were not always effective.
- Radar was more reliable, due to the lack of stealth technology at the time. Radar works by using echolocation and the Doppler shift.
- Once identified, there were several methods to take down an aircraft.
- German night fighters, the nickname for fighter planes used at night, were a common threat for bomber pilots.
- Anti-aircraft guns shot aircraft out of the sky from the ground, by means of explosive shells.



German anti-aircraft gun

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Bundesarchiv_Bild_101I-635-3999-24,_Deutschland,_Flak-Batterie_in_Feuerstellung.jpg



German night fighter

http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/d/d7/ME-110G-2_at_RAF_Hendon.jpg/300px-ME-110G-2_at_RAF_Hendon.jpg

Bombers of World War 2

- o Bombers played a tactical role in World War Two, targeting the enemy's industrial centres, to slow or halt the production of goods contributing to the war effort.
- o The British bombers included the Wellington, the Lancaster(which Len flew in), the Halifax, and the Mosquito.
- o The Mosquito was the fastest of these bombers, with the Lancaster having the greatest load and range.
- o The B-24 Liberator, an American bomber, had the greatest range of any Allied bomber and was used to, among other things, destroy Germany's oil sources, and conducting submarine watches in the Atlantic.
- o Most of the German bombers were less advanced than the British or Americans' bomber, with most of them being medium range bombers, with smaller payloads.
- o The Russian bombers were not excellent either, having very small payloads, and suffering heavy losses.



RAF Mosquito

http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/d/d7/Mosquito_600pix.jpg/300px-Mosquito_600pix.jpg



B-24 Liberator

http://www.dark-history.eu/images/B-24_Liberator_web.jpg

The Avro Lancaster

- o The Avro Lancaster was a heavy bomber designed by Avro.
- o It was one of the most prominent aircraft of World War Two, having completed over 150,000 sorties with over 7,000 built.
- o It was equipped with eight machine guns, and four Rolls-Royce Merlin engines.
- o The maximum payload was up to 10 tons, though they generally carried less.
- o The Lancaster was involved in such operations as Operation Chastise, the bombing of Dresden, and the bombings of Berlin.
- o The Lancaster was one of the most sophisticated aircraft of the time, having an excellent range and payload, along with the ability to defend itself.



Avro Lancaster

<http://www.warbirdalley.com/images/Lanc4.jpg>

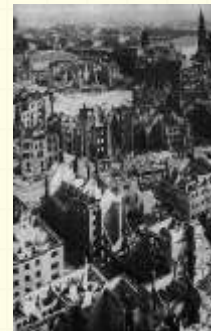
Bombing of Dresden

- o The bombing of Dresden was one of the most controversial offensives of the Second World War.
- o From February 13th to February 15th, 1945 1,300 bombers, including Mr. Levy's, dropped more than 3,900 tons of bombs.
- o This ended up in 39 square kilometre of the city being destroyed and an estimated 25,000 casualties.
- o The bombing was controversial because it was towards the end of the war, with the defeat of Nazi Germany imminent, and also because Dresden was not a major industrial or military centre, rather a cultural centre.
- o The head of bomber command stated that any city helping the Nazi regime was a valid target.



Dresden before

<http://spad1.files.wordpress.com/2010/01/dresden-before.jpg>



Dresden after

<http://www.internationalist.org/dresden1945www.jpg>

The Battle of Berlin

- o The bombings of Berlin began on August 26th, 1940 and continued to the end of the war.
- o Through these attacks, over 6000 acres of land was destroyed.
- o Its was one of the most difficult targets to attack, being heavily defended.
- o Mr. Levy described Berlin as “the worst in the world...They had night fighters on all sides, they had guns on all sides, they had searchlights on all sides.”
- o Despite these circumstances, countless raids were conducted on Berlin.
- o “We blew that city apart,” stated Len.
- o The attacks intensified and the destruction was magnified in the later years of the war as the Allies developed the means to attack Berlin more effectively.



Bombed out street

http://img.dailymail.co.uk/i/pix/2008/05_01/BERLINwar0305_468x429.jpg



Kaiser Wilhelm's palace

<http://www.kilroywashere.org/04-Images/Berlin/04--misc-BerlinKaiserWilhelm'sPalace.jpg>

Close Calls

- Being a bomber pilot is among the most dangerous and stressful jobs in the world, so it is a wonder that Len was able to leave the war unscathed, but not without some close calls.
- On a trip back to Berlin, they were forced to crash land at a fighter base.
- They landed on the fields, with their bomb bay doors open, tearing up the land.
- Mr. Levy described the field as “It looked like it had been ploughed.”
- Another circumstance that plagued bombers was hung up bombs.
- This occurred when not all of the bombs had dropped onto their target, and they were carrying those live bombs back to base.
- To remedy the situation, the mid upper gunner came down and literally kicked the bombs out into the North Sea Channel.

A Lancaster crash landed on a field

<http://media.iwm.org.uk/iwm/mediaLib/15/media-15184/large.jpg?action=d>



The aftermath of landing with a hung up bomb

http://natureonline.com/37/Liberator_Crash.jpg



Most Memorable Experience

- o Len's friend who was a pilot on a Mosquito bomber had freed a group of insurgents was rewarded with the DFC (Distinguished Flying Cross).
- o "The cross is awarded to officers and Warrant Officers for an act or acts of valour, courage or devotion to duty performed whilst flying in active operations against the enemy."
- o He invited Len to go to Buckingham Palace with him to be presented with a medal by the King.
- o When they arrived, they presented the guard with their invitation, but were declined because "we were in no shape to be presented to the King."
- o The entire ordeal lasted three days and ended with his friend having his DFC mailed to him.



A DFC

<http://www.veterans.gc.ca/images/collections/cmdp/dfc-m.gif>



Buckingham Palace

http://www.tourist-information-uk.com/uploads/images/attraction_images/359/xlarge/buckinghampalace03.jpg

Anti-Semitism

- o Anti-Semitism was commonplace and accepted in Canada right up to the 1950s.
- o In Saskatoon, at flying school, was the only time Len encountered anti-Semitism in the service.
- o In the dead of winter a group of Australians arrived with no winter clothes. Everyone pitched in to help them out, but two of the Australians did not agree with the way in which Mr. Levy was handling the handing out of the clothes, and therefore believed he was not a “nice Jewish person.”
- o Just as the fight was about to get under way, a couple Australians stepped and said “This is our fight, not yours,” and straightened the other Aussies out.
- o Len was fortunate that he never came into any serious danger due to anti-Semitism, but another Jewish captain in his squadron got badly beat up.



An anti-Semitic sign

<http://melach.org/wp-content/uploads/2007/10/copy-of-anti-semitic-2.jpg>



Saskatoon Map

http://www.pccademy.ca/images/S_K_map.gif

The Atomic Bomb

- o Albert Einstein sent a letter to Franklin Roosevelt before the war, warning him of the threat of enriched uranium being used to create an atomic bomb.
- o The atomic bomb was developed through The Manhattan Project, with the lead scientist being Robert Oppenheimer.
- o “The Gadget,” as it was codenamed, was first tested on July 16th, 1945 in New Mexico.
- o The “Little Boy” was dropped on Hiroshima, Japan on August 6th, 1945, killing 66,000 and injuring 69,000.
- o Three days later, another bomb, “The Fat Man,” was dropped on Nagasaki, killing 39,000 and injuring 25,000.
- o Japan was forced to surrender and on September 2nd, 1945 the war was officially over with the signing of the deck of the Missouri.
- o Mr. Levy said that they had no idea about Hiroshima and Nagasaki until it was general knowledge.



**Mushroom clouds over
Hiroshima and Nagasaki**

http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/54/Atomic_bombing_of_Japan.jpg

The Holocaust

- The Holocaust is defined as “The mass murder of Jews under the German Nazi regime during the period 1941–45.”
- Over 6 million Jews were killed, about half the total Jewish population in Europe.
- The Jews were systematically murdered: they were sent into ghettos, then shipped to death camps such as Auschwitz and Treblinka.
- Even though Mr. Levy said that they did not know about the atomic bomb, he said they sure knew about the Holocaust.
- After the war, Mr. Levy flew Holocaust victims out of concentration camps and had the opportunity to speak with victims.
- The Holocaust was the largest genocide in human history, wiping out a whole generation of Jews.



Auschwitz

<http://polishfiles.wordpress.com/2009/09/ausch-o.jpg>



Warsaw Ghetto

http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/images/Holocaust/footbridge_chlodka.jpg

The End of the War

- With the Soviet Red Army closing in, Adolf Hitler and his wife, Eva Braun committed suicide together on April 30th, 1945.
- A week later, on May 7th, 1945 Germany surrendered.
- The day is commemorated as VE Day, or Victory in Europe Day.
- Len and his crew were sent back to Canada and outfitted for a war in the Pacific.
- They were given new clothes and updated on navigation, ready to attack Japan.
- The war ended earlier than expected due to the use of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.
- On September 2nd, 1945 Japan surrendered .
- This is known as VJ Day, or Victory over Japan Day. This also marks the end of the Second World War.



VE Day celebrations

http://www.toronto.ca/archives/images/f1266_it96241.jpg



Japanese Surrender

<http://www.history.navy.mil/photos/images/g330000/g332701.jpg>

Photo #: 89-G-32271. Caption: U.S. Navy. Surrender of Japan, 2 Sept. 1945

The Cold War

- o Beginning in 1945 and continuing to 1991, the Cold War was characterized by high tensions between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R., a series of proxy wars, and a power struggle to become the world's most powerful superpower.
- o After the war, Germany was divided into sectors. The Western countries wanted to rebuild Germany, but the U.S.S.R. wanted no such thing.
- o As they tried to get supplies to the people of Germany, the Soviets blocked them.
- o To get around this, the Berlin Airlift was introduced to get supplies to Berlin.
- o They would fly supplies over to the people of Berlin.
- o Mr. Levy remembers flying cargo planes into Berlin, delivering supplies, and seeing the destruction that they had caused to the city.



Berlin Airlift

<http://www.spiritoffreedom.org/images/luftbr2.jpg>



Berlin Airlift

http://cdn.dipity.com/uploads/events/d3b5f58bce87eca30f4ef87d1693bd3_1M.png

The Importance of Oral History

- o Oral history is a great resource to learn about the past.
- o By listening to someone's story, you can hear a first hand account of the events that took place, from someone that was actually there.
- o You get to hear a unique point of view, and hear a particular opinion.
- o I felt that oral history is a great resource but should be used in conjunction with textbooks and other sources because peoples' memories are not always one hundred percent accurate and the story may be told with a bias.



Bibliography

- o <http://www.canadianwings.com/history/creation.php>
- o <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005143>
- o http://inventors.about.com/od/astartinventions/a/atomic_bomb.htm
- o <http://thecanadianencyclopedia.com/articles/antisemitism>
- o <http://www.2worldwar2.com/bombers.htm>
- o <http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/collections/cmdp/mainmenu/group01/dfc>
- o <http://ww2today.com/25th-august-1940-berlin-bombed-for-the-first-time>
- o http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/bombing_of_dresden.htm
- o http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bombing_of_Dresden_in_World_War_II
- o http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antiaircraft_warfare
- o <http://science.howstuffworks.com/radar.htm>
- o http://www.edenbridgetown.com/in_the_past/bill_walters_story/lancaster_bomber.shtml
- o <http://www.anti-aircraft.co.uk/airfieldmap.html>
- o http://museum.warrington.gov.uk/Local_History/war.html