



Canadians on Radar Background

In 1940, Great Britain stood alone against the Nazi horde. Her greatest need was for trained technicians to service and maintain her rapidly expanding radar defences. She appealed to Canada and Canada responded. From December 1940, to May 1943, five thousand trained Royal Canadian Air Force Radar Officers and Airmen Radar Mechanics passed through Pier 21 on their way overseas to serve with the Royal Air Force. Dispersed in penny packets from North Africa and Malta, from Sicily and Italy to Northwest Europe, from the Murmansk Run to Australia, from Burma to Britain and "neutral" Turkey, these Canadian radar specialists provided over one third of the RAF's expertise in this critical, war-winning area. In all, over six thousand RCAF radar specialists were sent to serve with the Commonwealth and other Allied Air Forces.



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Born in Montreal on August 21, 1919 , on a kitchen table at home on Park Avenue. I joined the RCAF in Montreal the beginning of September 1941 after graduation from McGill (BA 40) and one year of graduate law at Osgoode Hall Law School, Toronto.

The recruiting office made a pitch for the secret trade of RDF (radar) as soon as they realized I was both a High School Graduate and a University Graduate. But they certainly didn't offer me a Commission - only quick overseas service. After initial training at Manning Pool, Toronto, I went to McGill (at my request) for my radio physics training (Sept-Dec, 1941) and then went to Clinton, Ontario, to be trained on RDF by the RAF.

I was at Clinton from January to June. Let me explain. I took both Air, and Ground RDF instruction and was also interviewed for a Commission. As nothing seemed to happen after that, I went on embarkation leave as an LAC and then went to the Embarkation Depot in Moncton, N.B., to await shipping overseas. But soon after my arrival there, my name was called out (as were about 10 others) and we were told we were then Pilot Officers (PO). We placed white arm bands on our arms and then were treated quite differently by the Station Sergeant Major.

I went back to Clinton for a short officers' course, then back to Moncton and finally, with 19 other brand-new PO's, we got on a small Free French freighter, the Indochinois, in Halifax harbour in September 1942.

We didn't stay in Halifax very long. We sailed WITHOUT ESCORT after being told we were faster than submarines and that there was 'double life boat capacity' on deck. We ate great French meals on board (a Chinese cook) and carried a load of sulphur on deck. We eventually landed at Liverpool and then went by train to Bournemouth to await our fate. I



was sent to RAF Station, Fairlight-just outside Hastings, where I immediately became the Commanding Officer. Our CHL Station was very active without let-up and we were often praised for our work. We were about 25-30 men and women, RAF and WAAF, all of whom boarded in Hastings except for me who had to sleep on the station for security reasons.

My fate arrived one day when the CO of our Wing, Wing Commander Shirley, made an unexpected visit to my station and proceeded to give me HELL for having too much litter on my grounds. He didn't even bother to visit (let alone praise) my operations room and its great operators and technicians for their excellent and untiring work. To make a long story short, I soon found myself posted abroad once more. My destination turned out to be India and Ceylon after a very long 2-boat journey via South Africa.

In India, I first served as an assistant signals officer on a jungle ground station near Madras. I eventually complained and finally got sent to a radar station -CHL- NAMUNUKULA at the heart of a tea estate in the

centre of the island of Ceylon. I also served temporarily on a very remote station where they thought the CO might take his own life AFTER his wife in England ditched him. (he didn't)

Then back to India for a course at Bangalore and then posting to 212 squadron at Korangi Creek outside Karachi. (now Pakistan, then India). I went soon after to a squadron detachment up the Hoogly River from Calcutta on the other side of the country. Finally, I was transferred to another squadron at Red Hills Lake near Madras where I had first served. There we celebrated VE Day with a bonfire and I was told a short while later that I would soon be returning to Canada.

I left India in July, 1945, and was on the High Seas sailing to the UK when we heard about the atomic bombs being dropped on Japan. We were in camp at Bournemouth on VJ Day, then to Torquay and, finally, on a large Dutch ship (Nieu Amsterdam) for Canada. Yes, we landed at Halifax early September, 1945, with bands playing popular songs (Conchita Banana) from in front of the huge shed. It seemed like Hollywood to me--very unreal and very-unlike what we had been through for the past 3 years and, in a way, unlike our memory of the Canada we had left 3 or more years ago. We went by train to Montreal where I was met by my Mother and Dad and sister and brother-in-law who all seemed to me to be talking through their noses (after my living with the English for so long). But, of course, it was great to be HOME again.

Leave, final discharge as a Flight Lieutenant--and then what? I immediately applied to take the exams for the Canadian Foreign Service (which I had heard about in India from the RCAF Liaison Office). But I still had to earn a living while I waited, and waited, and waited, for developments. I did visit Osgoode Hall in Toronto briefly but quickly decided not to become a student again.

Through my Dad, I landed a temporary job with administrative duties at the War Assets Corporation in Montreal. Soon I offered to try to sell their surplus radar equipment. At least I knew what it was. No-one else did.

Meanwhile I wrote the FS exam at McGill in December. I was called for an interview in Ottawa in June and I received the golden telegram (by phone) in November, 1946, asking when I could report for work in the East Block of the Parliament Buildings.

I first served as Secretary of the Canadian Delegation to the United Nations Atomic Energy Commission; then the Secretary of the first Canadian Permanent Delegation to the U.N. in New York City with the rank of Second Secretary. General A G L McNaughton was my great boss. He was very much admired (and trusted) by everyone at the U.N. While

there, I attended the U.N. General Assembly session in Paris in 1948 as advisor.

My second posting abroad was as First Secretary of the Canadian Embassy in Athens, Greece, (1952-54). Greece was just emerging from the ravages of its Civil War. My next position abroad was to West Berlin where I was both Canadian Consul and the resident Chargé d'affaires of the (so-called) Canadian Military Mission in Berlin. Our Ambassador in Bonn was the real head. I was there in that hot spot when Khrushchev issued his famous ultimatum. This was before the Berlin Wall was erected (1957-60).

My first, and therefore the most memorable head-of-post position was in 1964 to Colombo, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) as Canadian High Commissioner. In my stay there Canada started to build Colombo's first international standard airport at KATUNAYAKE.

My next ambassadorial posting was to Oslo, Norway, as Canadian Ambassador. I was, at the same time, accredited to Iceland as Ambassador and visited there several times. Next to Vienna, Austria, as Canadian Representative to the Mutual and Balanced Force Arms Reduction (MBFR) negotiations. It took several years and a new conference to achieve a positive result.

Finally, I became Canadian Ambassador to South Africa (1976-79) when Apartheid was still in vogue and the majority Blacks lived second-class lives for the most part. Being in this beautiful country was a heart-wrenching experience. I was also High Commissioner to the three neighbourhood Commonwealth countries of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland. A lot of my time was taken up representing Canada at the South West Africa (Namibia) Independence negotiations which finally succeeded after my day.

Long stints in Ottawa between postings abroad: in Mike Pearson's office, the UN Division, Far Eastern Division, Defence Liaison (1) Division, Consular Division, Defence Liaison (2) Division, the Inspection service, and the Defence Relations Division. And so ended my diplomatic career.

I have never regretted choosing the Foreign service over completing my law degree and being a lawyer. But I often tell people I am “a third of a lawyer”.(1 year completed of a 3-year course).

Upon retirement from the Foreign Service, I and my (second) wife, Diane, have jumped back and forth quite a bit, never seeing as much of my four children and her son as we would have liked. We have lived in the Vancouver area (Burnaby, Richmond, near the Vancouver General Hospital, White Rock, South Surrey, in some six homes as well as in the Ottawa area in 3 different houses.



I have acted as a businessman (Later Chemicals), a hotel manager (The Clydesdale Inn, Cloverdale, B.C.) and a journalist (Vancouver Province, Ottawa Citizen and free lancing from Brussels, Belgium). In my second retirement, in B. C., I became a volunteer for an RCMP Community Police Station in South Surrey and, in Ottawa, I have served on Boards of the Grace Hospital, the Grace Manor, and the Retired Heads of Mission Association.

I was the editor of “Canadians on Radar, RCAF, 1940-45” and am the Secretary of the Canadian Radar History Project (CRHP). I also serve as Secretary of the PAFSO Awards committee and on the Senior Editorial Board of Bout De Papier, the publication of the Professional Association of Foreign Service Officers.

Diane is very busy with her French language groups and is very highly respected by her peers. A very courageous lady, given her medical background (Cancer twice) and experiences. Our four children and three grandchildren live in Montreal, Ottawa, British Columbia and Brussels.

George K. Grande

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