



## Canadians on Radar Background

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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.

### Robert 'Bob' F. Linden

Royal Canadian Air Force 1941 -1946 CAN C19567

### Sheila Mary Linden

War Bride

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At Winnipeg, I enlisted in the RCAF u/t RDF (Radar) mechanic in 1941 before my 21st birthday. Four months training in radio Physics at the University of Toronto followed by six weeks on airborne (AI) radar at 31 Radio School. I was posted overseas for service with the Royal Air Force as an LAC B group radar mechanic. I sailed on the Queen Elizabeth from Halifax, October 22, 1942. In the UK I was posted to 537 (Night-fighter) Squadron RAF, and later to #6 Air Observer School. In May, 1943, I was selected for a commission. At the RAF Officers' Training School I received my commission in February and was posted to the Mediterranean Allied Air Force in Italy for duties as Radar Officer 236 (Strategic Bomber) Wing RAF. I reached the rank of Flight Lieutenant and returned to England after VE Day. Sheila and I were married August 4, 1945. I returned to Canada, again on the Queen Elizabeth but via New York in December, 1945. I enrolled in Engineering at the University of British Columbia, January 1946.

As soon as we boarded the QE in Halifax, the other ranks were ordered to assist in carrying supplies for the Ship's canteen. We formed a "bucket line" moving boxes from a truck on the quay, up the gangplank to the QE's canteen. Each box contained 5000 cigarettes. With a branch in the "bucket line" we diverted 27 boxes to our group on C deck. 27 bunks in hammocks or mattresses on the deck for a room approved for five seamen by the British Board of Trade. The following day we were ordered to be waiters for the voyage. Now the system of meals for the QE was 2 meals a day, four sittings in the morning and four in the evening. As waiters we had four meals a day; before and after each breakfast and dinner. Fat and happy, this group of radar mechanics landed in Scotland; each with 5000 cigarettes.

Sheila

When war broke out I was 14 years old. My school was evacuated, but my mother decided that if we were to die we would do it together. My father died in 1943. When I was called up for essential work I was told that I was deferred because I was the only child of a widowed mother.

My mother and I lived in London all through the war in the top flat of a four-story house in West Hampstead. There were no air raid shelters near us. We lived in a row of houses converted into flats; our

"underground" train station was above ground at the West Hampstead suburb of London. On some bad nights during the war my mother and I would go down to the first floor and sleep under the stairs.

Protected from the waist up !!! We had a near miss when an aircraft dropped a bomb at the top of the road. The ceilings came down in our flat ruining a special dinner.

In May of 1943, my friend Merle and I went to Tottenham Court Road dance hall. A young man in 'Civvies' asked me to dance. He said " May I have this dance" not in an English accent nor a foreign accent so I thought he might be a serviceman. We danced and he saw me home. The next time that I saw him he was in uniform. At that dance Merle also first met her husband-to-be, Trygve Hansen, a sailor in the Royal Norwegian Navy. They now live in Wilton CT and our daughter was a bridesmaid to their younger daughter.

We were engaged in November, 1943, and Bob sailed for Italy in February 1944. Later that year when I was employed in a shop on High Street Kensington the manager of the shop, Mr Townsend, went down the Street to the local pub. The pub received a direct hit from a V1 Buzz bomb. Mr Townsend was killed but the shop assistant and I were unharmed because we were having our lunch in the basement of the shop.

The interior of the shop was a mass of debris and shattered glass and we had to climb out gingerly through the shattered front window. I had another near miss when I was going home on the No 28 double decker bus. A V2 rocket bomb landed in West Hampstead not too far from the bus route. On the upper deck I could feel the sway of the bus from the bomb's blast and I was mesmerized to see a large piece of masonry fall from a nearby building. No damage was done to the bus and it continued on its way.



We were married in August 1945. Bob left for Canada in December 1945, and I sailed on the Ile de France in May of 1946 to Halifax and Pier 21.

Bob

I chose to study engineering at UBC for two very good reasons. First, many prairie people dream of retiring to the benevolent climate of the West Coast. The RCAF would pay for me to be discharged there and would also pay for my war bride's transportation to Vancouver. Why not live the dream?. Secondly, UBC had accepted me as a student in engineering even though I had not completed the language requirement for senior matriculation and my marks averaged at 55%.

I had been 8 years out of high school so, in the winter term, I took refresher courses in mathematics, chemistry and physics. September, 1946, 2300 enrolled in first year engineering. Four years later 410 graduated. The limiting factor was capacity of the laboratories; chemical, electrical, material, mechanical, hydraulic, etc.

University was a grind. Highly competitive for the available spaces. I graduated with honours in the top decile of 101 Electrical Engineers. The British Columbia economy just could not absorb that many new electrical engineers. Some took temporary employment as electrician's helpers in the West Coast mills.

I was fortunate, I applied for and received a permanent commission in the Telecommunications Branch of the RCAF and was posted to Belleville, ON, as the resident RCAF engineer at Northern Electric which had a contract to produce the FPS 3 high power ground radar for the Pinetree Line

Sheila

From Pier 21, with other war brides, we spent seven days on the train, from Halifax to Montreal to Winnipeg to Edmonton to Jasper and finally Vancouver. A very kind porter on the train showed us how to sweep and dust our compartment. When I told this to my husband he was furious.

Bob's family were kindness itself. I still remember the first taste of Flapper pie and roast chicken with salad. Also it was strange to hear children, seniors and disabled people speak with Canadian accents. The only Canadians we had met were strong, healthy young men. Bob was attending UBC and we were living in a small room with shared bathroom and, with Bob studying, there was little social life. With marginal income we spent our savings and the extra income that Bob earned during the summers. In retrospect, Bob claims that he had more pocket money during the Great Depression than he had while at university. Our pay-day treat was grilled cheese sandwiches and vanilla milk shakes at the White Spot restaurant. We rolled our own cigarettes with one package of

"tailor makes" and a six pack of beer to share with John and Daphne Tuskey on our Saturday night bridge game. I went to work as a telephone operator " Number please" at the manual BC Telephone Kerrisdale exchange. Other compensations we had were Vancouver's beaches nor will I forget the dread, having crossed the Capilano Canyon cable bridge, to have to return back over the swaying bridge. In 1948, we were blessed with our first child Christine. After Bob's graduation in 1950 he rejoined the RCAF and we were posted to Belleville where, in 1952, our son Christopher was born. In 1953 we were sent to St Hubert .

Bob

After two years in Belleville I was transferred to Air Defence Command at St. Hubert QC. Two years later I was selected for post-graduate training at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). There I received a Master of Science in Electrical Engineering. I took every course that was given, several tutorials and wrote my thesis on computers. I was posted to Air Force Headquarters in Ottawa in the fall of 1955 to the position of Staff Officer - Analogue and Digital Computers.

Sheila

While Bob was attending MIT , for the first six months of his studies there, I sailed to England with our two children to visit my mother, whom I had not seen for 8 years, two months and four days. We returned by sea on January 1 via New York and Bob met us and we entrained for Boston. After graduation from MIT we were sent to Ottawa where, in 1956, our second son Dean was born. Bob resigned his commission in 1956 and began a long career working for the Federal Government in Ottawa. Our third son Justin was born in 1962.

Bob

November, 1956, I secured a senior appointment with the Organization and Methods Division (later called the Bureau of Management Consultants). After two years there I became head of Research and Development (Mechanization Development Division) of Canada Post. After a short while in the private sector I returned to the Government, Computer Systems Engineer with the Royal Canadian Navy. In 1965, I joined the new Department of Industry, Research Advisor for Computers and Automation and later

Division Chief in the Transportation Industry Branch. December, 1978, I took early retirement after 31 years of Government/Military service.

I had started work on my 16th birthday, 8 hours/day;48 hours/week. Now at 57 we had a house, new car, debt free and in good health. My children were growing up and it is my pride that they all graduated from university debt free.

Sheila, my London girl, was not too keen about the typical Canadian summer cottage so we traveled extensively. Gerry and Christine to England, Barbados and Portugal. My mother lived in Vancouver and Calgary so as a family or part family we traveled there by rail car and air. My younger sons to Antigua, Spain, Bahamas, Portugal and England. We still travel as a family. For the last 6 years we have spent the month of March on the French Riviéra. Two years ago Christopher came with us and last year Christine and her husband, Gerry.

After I retired in 1978 I worked part-time consulting and studied history at Carleton University. I received a B.A. in 1987 and a M.A. History in 1992.

Sheila

In 1958, we bought our mortgaged house in Bel Air Park, built sturdily by Robert Campeau. Our 10 year old and 7 year old started yet another new school. From here on their education would continue in a more normal fashion. We attended St. Michael and All Angels Anglican church under the benign guidance of the late Father Lackey, later Bishop of Ottawa. I did voluntary work with the girls at the Church teaching them how to knit. Also was treasurer at a later date with a small group of Wolf Cubs. We made lasting friends with many neighbours in the park.

In 1968, my mother retired and came to Canada to live with us, embarking on a career of babysitting for many of our friends and for us as well.

When Justin was still quite young we took him with us on many overseas trips, with my mother kindly taking care of the other three children. My mother and I, with Bob, took him by train to Vancouver and a birthday trip to PEI with his older brother Dean. We took him to Paris several times. One year we rented a Volkswagon camper in Holland and stayed in camps in Holland, Belgium, France and Germany. On a business trip we took him to England, Germany, Italy, Austria and France. A much traveled young man, who as a boy and youth, celebrated most of his August birthdays in Europe or at Hayling Island, Hants with his great uncle and aunt. Uncle Frank always had a huge vase of roses to help illuminate this happy event.

In 1962, my darling husband decided to build an extension on to our home. This enormous job was worked on in evenings and weekends. Two bedrooms and a new dining room and kitchen. After boning up on motion study, he designed and built a 14' x 14' (4 1/2 m x 4 1/2m) kitchen with one of the first (in Ottawa) centre island sink. I have the most beautiful kitchen with lots of cupboards and working space.

It took nearly four years to complete the project. Through the years we have had all kinds of pets: dogs, cats, birds and fish and our last three have been Dobermans.

In 1967 our daughter enrolled at Carleton University and received her B.A. in 1970. Christopher also attended Carleton but in a more sporadic fashion graduating in 1986. Then it was Dean's turn; B. Sc. and M. Sc. at Queen's and in 1986 Ph. D. in neurophysiology at Ottawa University. Justin then headed for Carleton earning B. Com. in 1986 and qualified as a Chartered Accountant (C.A.) in 1988.

In the meantime our daughter Christine married Gerald Potoczny who is the light of our eyes. They now have two sons: Michael 27 and Stefan 25 and a daughter Meghan-Anne who is 22. Sons Christopher and Dean have no children. Justin and his wife Caryl have a 13 year-old boy, Philip and a daughter Carmen who is 11.

Bob

In 1987 we formed the Canadian Radar History Project. The Canadian Radar History Project is a non-profit organization dedicated to gather information, analyse, publish and disseminate data about the WW 11 experiences of the seven thousand wartime RCAF radar technical officers and radar technician airmen. We have produced four books:

Canadians on Radar Royal Canadian Air Force 1940-1945

G.K. Grande, Sheila M. Linden, Horace R. Macaulay

Canadians on Radar in South-East Asia 1941-1945

Angus Hamilton

Radar Officers of the Royal Canadian Air Force 1940-1945

J.R. Robinson

Canadians on Radar Royal Canadian Air Force 1940-1945

## Honours and Awards

In addition, our project provided the story line, text, photographs and drawings, and concept for the “Radar Exhibit” which was opened at the Canadian War Museum on 9 May, 2003.

All of the above are available on a CD at Pier 21.

For her work on these series and her other contributions Sheila M. Linden was awarded the Queen’s Golden Jubilee Medal.

Sheila M. and Robert F. Linden

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