

SAMMY

Lt MERRILL SAMUEL TAYLOR CdeG

9 Sqn RNAS/209 Sqn RAF

by Stewart K. Taylor



AS IF NOTHING ELSE MATTERED, 'Sammy' Taylor put his heart and soul into every letter he wrote his family; Mom and Dad particularly. He was a good son, rarely out of line, as was his older brother, Neil Joseph 'Piffles'. The brothers were practically inseparable, shared most opinions and rarely annoyed each other or their parents. 'Piffles' was already undergoing training with the RFC, as a cadet at Denham, Bucks in October 1916, when young Sammy really took the idea seriously that life in the RNAS would be preferable to the RFC. Both were committed to becoming pilots.

Sammy was a noted soccer halfback in the Regina, Saskatchewan amateur football league and in 1911, while attending Regina Collegiate, the local newspaper, the *Regina Post*, wrote how the Taylor brothers, Sam and Piffles, were credited with saving a charity lacrosse game for the collegiate students.

Sammy was born on 15 April 1893 at Singhampton, Ontario. Both his mother and father were active Wesleyan Methodist church members in the town, carrying on their religious, almost pious membership when the family moved west to the Saskatchewan prairie, to a village named Yellow Grass. Here, Sam received much of his education. When only a lad, he joined the Methodist church, continued to seek further inspiration with the congregation attending Regina's metropolitan church and, when in Toronto, his church of choice was Trinity Methodist. This aspect of Sam's life I stress, as he tried his best, without becoming a bore to his fellow officers in the RNAS. Also attending the same church in Toronto were Gordon Irving (future 19 Squadron 'ace'), George W. Bulmer (22 Squadron 'ace'), Russell N. Smith (54 Squadron on Pups), his brother 'NJ' (11 Squadron), William W. Lang (3 Squadron, Morane Biplanes) and Harold Anthony 'Dec' Oaks (48 Squadron 'ace'). He was in august company.

Once he completed two years at the University of Toronto, Sam returned to Saskatchewan and taught school for a year at Langland and Assiniboia. He then returned to the university and, at the end of his third year, enlisted with the University Training Corps. While awaiting an opportunity to join the RNAS, he attended Ridley College as a professor's assistant. He said his 'fond farewells' at Toronto's old Union Station on 19 January 1917, joined a number of others on a special coach for Ottawa and signed his application, which gave him seniority. He left Ottawa, on 21 January, for Montreal and, in five days, after a snow storm delay in Quebec City, departed Halifax aboard the *Scandinavian*. He wrote his mother on 6 February 1917, to tell her:

We have arrived safely and although the trip has been lengthened out due to a bad storm I stood it in fine style and proved myself to be a good sailor.

Once ashore, Sam found the people in London were quite nice and are not so different from Canadians as I expected.

Those aboard the *Scandinavian*, en route to the RNAS, were asked to send no mail or cables until four days after their arrival, an order in force for the entire war. Sammy was awed by the mere spectacle of Crystal Palace, the Royal Naval Depot in London, which he described as magnificent, elaborating in detail about the building's interior, laid out like streets with all sorts of business places and 'movie' shows, the accommodation, with special reference to the cots, a batman to look after their needs, the great large dining room, the choice of food and the fact they would eat using the finest of china. Like so many other rural Canadian lads in the RNAS Sam must have thought this was something of a Utopian dream.

PFO M.S. Taylor spared no detail in a 20 February letter to the Taylor clan in Yellow Grass and Regina. He gave them three paragraphs of a typical day in the life of an RNAS 'Quirk'.

The Taylor family have always considered this portrait of Sam, taken in England soon after he arrived at Cranwell July 1917, as the finest photo of him in his RNAS uniform.

:Mrs R.A. Milliken via S.K. Taylor

