

ALMOST A VICTIM

2Lt James Murdo Macdonald

B Flight 19 Squadron & B Flight 79 Squadron RAF

Stewart K. Taylor

My father came from Scotland, was a carpenter and made a good living for the family as a contractor after moving to Canada when Toronto began to expand before World War One ...

Interviewed at length in April 1968 at his home in Rexdale, Ontario, James Murdo 'Jimmie' Macdonald, to help guide his memory when the questioning concerned his flying service in WWI, brought out a tired looking three-ring school binder filled with stories he compiled shortly after the war, just to amuse himself as he tried to re-adjust back into civilian life, looking after the office affairs of his father's building business.

Born on 17 April 1894, in Weston, Ontario, Jimmie attended the local public and high school (Weston Collegiate), worked in a drugstore, a bank and for his father. Upon joining the RFC in September 1917, he was a member of Cadet Course No.18 which graduated from 4 SMA, University of Toronto, on 14 November 1917.

Whenever time permitted 3AM J.M. Macdonald made notes of the more interesting moments and while that portion of his diary is full of what did and did not turn him on (which will be left for another day when the RFC's Texas training sojourn is the prime subject) once he and his group returned to Toronto and received their commissions, on 10 February 1918, 2Lt Murdo Macdonald's diary begins to pick up the pace.

Together with other RFC second lieutenants, all representing overseas Draft No.14, he was shipped out on 26 February 1918, sailing aboard the *Metagama* from Halifax. References from his diary highlight particular days' of prominence:

11th March 1918: Arrived Glasgow. 'Submarine scare' prevented us from landing at Liverpool.

12th March 1918: Slept on ballroom floor of Savoy Hotel.

21st March 1918: Sent to Hooton Hall, just outside Liverpool. Sent along with me were Madill (USA), O'Neil, Maltby and Mousley, a divinity student.

I remained in the pool for nearly six weeks at Hooton with only two classes a day before I started flying. (Classes: one hour for gunnery, one hour for wireless).

Assigned as a pupil Capt Guy Pearson.... Weather turned bad.... Hardly any flying for four weeks. Then Pearson left for two weeks' instructor's course. He came back. I started flying in earnest.

Started on Avro. Almost every fellow was sick his first flight in an Avro account of burnt castor oil.



On the day I was to go off on my solo and while I was out on the field, just ready to take off, I saw a sight which made me so sick, I didn't know whether I'd better go up or not. An officer named Murray had been diving on a pond which we used as an aerial target. He was flying a Pup and he dived so straight down that his wings tore off and he went straight into the ground being instantly killed.¹

After twenty hours solo on Avros I was transferred to the 'Pup Group'. After two or three hours in it of course I had to do all the foolish stunts everybody else had done such as flying around the chimney pots of the houses etc. Some way or another I had gotten all over the scared feeling I had while flying JN-4s.

One day (20 June 1918) I had just come down out of the air and had stopped my machine when I heard the sickening crash overhead. I looked up just in time to see two Avros separate from a head on collision and come down in a slow spin to the earth. It was terrible to see those machines slowly spinning down for we knew that they would be killed instantly when they struck the earth. As was the custom, we were not allowed to run to any crash unless the machine was on fire and so we waited until the ambulance came back. I was dreading to be told who it was because I knew everybody who was flying. Finally I learned that three officers had been killed: Capt Pearson, Lt MacFarlane who was with him and Flynn a Canadian who had come over a little later than I but he had been in my course in Texas.²

Three days later Mousley was killed.³

Dunbar, my room mate, only got as far as the School of Aerial Fighting at Turnberry where he was killed while diving on a target. The wing came off his machine.⁴

By the 1st July I started flying Dolphins, our fastest and most treacherous machine. Any number of our fellows had been killed on it because it stalled so easily. It had a stationary engine which roared something terrible when opened out full. It made a person deaf after flying it an hour.

One had to complete five hours in this machine before graduation as a service pilot. Completed my five hours on 3rd July 1918.

5th July 1918: Graduation leave. After return didn't do much flying. My career at Hooton Hall was about ended.

14th July 1918: Told to leave for No 2 School of Aerial Fighting and Gunnery at Marske. Left with five other fellows: Bill Gordon, H.H. Gatfield, Dunn, E.G. Corey and R.C. Mills.

Marske at first was a most depressing dump. The camp was struggling through its first stages of construction and so we had to suffer all the inconveniences arising. The six days were spent in a ground course