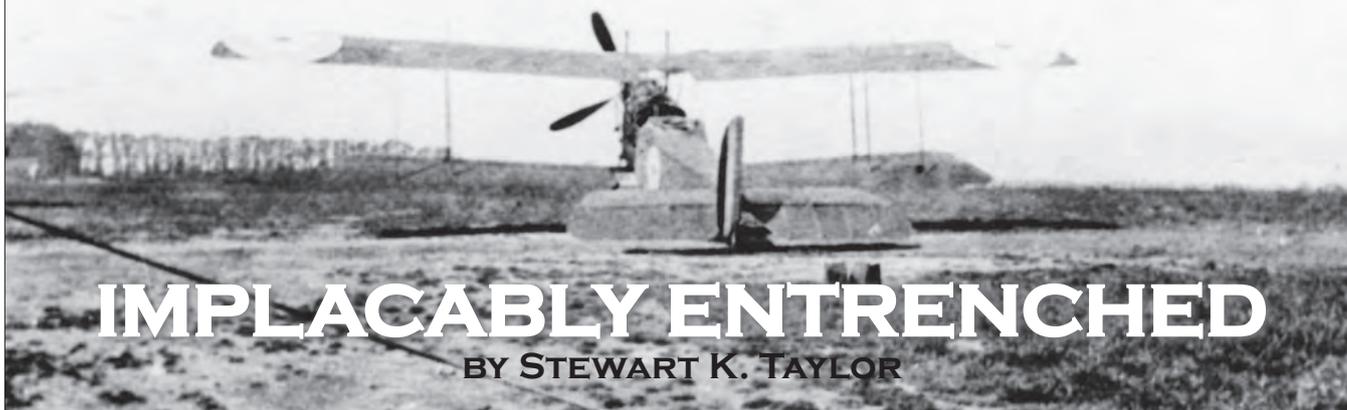


LT JOSEPH WILLIAM GREIG CLARK

13 SQN RFC



IMPLACABLY ENTRENCHED

BY STEWART K. TAYLOR

All photographs J.A.P. Clark (son) via S.K. Taylor unless stated otherwise

HE HAD NO CHOICE in the matter but to follow in his father's footsteps or starve! Joseph T. Clark, the family's 'Godfather', the former Editor in Chief of the *Toronto Star* newspaper, all his life in the same business, extolled the virtues of the business as he did with another son, the notorious Gregory Clark, one of Canada's more famous journalists. Brother Joseph William Greig Clark, born in Toronto on 31 January 1896 and after school (he attended Jarvis Collegiate) already assisting his father in the journalist field, signed up on 30 March 1916 to serve as a lieutenant in the 84th Overseas Battalion, CEF. His five months previously with the 109th Regiment, Toronto gave him a leg up in the commissioned ranks. The 84th left Canada on 18 June 1916 and a week after reaching England he and much of his old battalion were transferred to the 75th Battalion CEF. As they were part of the Fourth Canadian Corps they were sent to France just over a month later, disembarking on 12 August 1916 in Le Havre. Trench work had little appeal, his memories of the Somme hardly uplifting. Requests to join the RFC were penned. His, according to a son, were more like SOS appeals.

Christmas 1916 had only been attended to when Lt Clark was steam-rolled through an observers' course on which, if he had blinked, he would have missed the briefest of instruction at Reading and little more of the airborne practical: location Brooklands. Apprehension as to what may have lain ahead not an issue: 'Never was' his admiring son Joe, without any hesitation, admitted.

With not a shy bone in his body Joe senior parked the trunk and himself in a hut at Savy, this 28 January 1917, a warm welcome on such a mid winter day, seasonable in temperature, sunny with a strong wind, the velocity not enough to impede a near full flying routine. Artillery patrols, artillery observation and a few camera exposures were to round out the final Sunday that month.

Wasting no time in securing a flight the next morning, another flyable day, few clouds, plenty of indications this promised to be a profitable one. Lt Clark was seated in the front cockpit of BE2c 4589 with Lt Henry Fergus MacKain behind.

Everything was partially wonderment until Joe attempted to wind down the wireless aerial. It stuck, necessitating a return. In five minutes the problem was solved. BE2c 4589 completed a designated artillery patrol. This permitted him to use that succession of flights to introduce the younger son to his war in the air. A naturally chatty writer, just like brother Greg and Joseph senior the Clark's literary patriarch, Joseph junior let her rip:

29 January 1917:

Well here am I, Lt J.W.G. Clark, Observer 'B' Flight 13th Squadron, RFC, France and I'm a real one too because today I flew in a fighting patrol over the Bosche lines for three hours. We were 'Archied' heavily, every few minutes ... in other words the Bosche anti-aircraft tried to down us all the time.

It was wonderful. I felt as I had never felt before.... but the feeling lasted only for about five minutes and after that I felt quite at home, comfy and very keen to beat a Bosche. I went up with MacKain, a fine young kid as my pilot and my job was to spot 'Archies', that is to draw fire from their 'Anti's' and then watch for the flames from their guns. The ground was covered with snow and we were flying pretty high and we didn't catch any. But we suspect one and 'Mac' and I are going to spot it and then we will go back and get one of our batteries to strafe it. To spot a Hun battery in action is a triumph indeed and Mac, an old timer, and I are out for gore.

I have all my air togs, a wonderful outfit, and feel like a bally veteran already. The officers of my squadron are awfully fine fellows and nearly all of them are kids of my own age. All are Englishmen except myself, Leggo of Ottawa and formerly of the Canadian Cavalry and an American millionaire. They call me 'Canada' or 'Canook'. The squadron commander, a perfect prince by all accounts, before the war was a master at Eton. My flight commander Capt Thorne is one of those cricketing Englishmen Young, lively, hair parted in middle I might go on talking about these fellows all night long to tell the truth.

Got orders on 26th January. Fooled about at Brigade



Formal studio portrait of Lt Joseph William Greig Clark taken while on leave in England June 1917.