

NO WAY OUT

2Lts Carleton Aguila Crysler & Victor Reginald Pauline, 23 Squadron

by Stewart K. Taylor

PROUD of his towering height while a teenager and blessed with a fertile sense of fun, Carleton Aguila Crysler once leaned heavily on his father's shoulders and remarked *How about this 6ft 1½ youngster of yours?* The senior Crysler, a short man and, until 1924, a shopkeeper in Welland, Ontario, typically tried to ignore his strapping only son's attempt at humour. The Crysler family were, almost to a fault, reserved in nature and Carl was the only one of the siblings glib enough to make idle conversation, very different to his four unmarried sisters: Pauline, Gertrude, Ferne and Margery (only the last named would marry).

Born on 10 February 1899 in the town of Delhi, Southern Ontario, the fair-skinned and blue-eyed Carleton Crysler attended Welland Public School and Simco High School. He was always a teacher's pet: *A clever student, upright and the class spokesman*, according to his high school principal. The gangling youngster worked as a linesman for the Bell Telephone Company during his summer vacation, installing some of the province's first telephones and it was then made known his ambition was to become an electrical engineer.

Carl passed his senior matriculation in June 1917. Within weeks he wore an ill-fitting, far too short AM3 RFC cadet uniform. Ground School Course No 10 graduated on 10 August 1917 and, as one of ten, he experienced the sensation of actual flight on four days later, in Curtiss JN-4A (Buffalo) C556 at 84 CTS, Camp Mohawk, Deseronto, Ontario. His instructor, 2Lt J.M. Purcell, gave him a 25-minute joy ride and then handed off cadet Crysler to one of the other four instructors. To provide pupils with the more standard stick, instead of wheel control, those in training with him were transferred to 83 CRS, where Captain Vernon Castle, the OC, personally took each of the AM3s attached to his squadron up in the front seat of his personal JN-4 for a test flight using the joystick. Not all of them were comfortable at the unfamiliar controls. Apparently, Carl was. Yet landings, as for most novices, were the Achilles' heel. A freckled faced kid, 2Lt W.H. Collins from Chatham, Ontario, had Crysler practice five 'touch and go' landings the morning of 22 August in JN-4 C559 and, during those 45 minutes, proved his capability was worthy of progression to 78 CTS, a Camp Borden based unit specializing in the very basics of art observation and bomb dropping. By October, and with only one more step remaining on his RFC Canada flight training agenda, Crysler was almost ready to be on his way across the Atlantic to England. A week, sometimes two, at the School of Aerial Gunnery, Camp Borden, capped off the Canadian training experience for all cadets. Cadet



*2Lt Carleton Aguila Crysler. A favourite of his mother's, this studio portrait was taken by W. Hess of 7 Beresford Terrace, Ayr during early March 1918 after Crysler had completed a weather-plagued course at 2 (Auxiliary) School of Aerial Gunnery. He had flown some 87 hours, about 10 hours of that on English-built Spad VIIIs with 92 Squadron, Chattis Hill, before joining 23 Squadron.
:M.R. Gray (sister) via S.K.T.*

Crysler took his turn at the Lewis gun mounted in JN-4 C517 and, after 20 minutes on the afternoon of 17 October 1917 discharged 1000 rounds at a choice of two different targets. On this one day, the pilot, 2Lt F.A. Laughlin, had taken up ten cadets in JN-4 C517, starting at 06.50. Crysler was Laughlin's final occupant. This would prove to be one of his last flights in Canada.

The RFC's 7th Overseas Draft from Canada boarded the *Megantic* at Montreal and sailed for England on 19 November 1917. The draft comprised 71 half-trained pilots; mainly Canadians but including 27 RFC Americans and a few Englishmen. The majority had been given their commissions a week or more before boarding and, once in England, would be distributed to more than a dozen different training stations.

They were at sea for over three weeks, in a convoy of about 20 vessels subject to several submarine warnings; one ship had taken a torpedo hit, off the Irish coast, but made port. Then, following a wild night at the Café Royale in London and a week's leave after reporting to

the Air Board, a couple of Canadian RFC second lieutenants, from the same ship, were sent to 92 Squadron at Chattis Hill aerodrome and billeted in the nearby village of Stockbridge with private families.

One of those sharing the same accommodation was 2Lt Victor Reginald Pauline, born on 19 June 1897 in Victoria, *It is probable that this is JN-4 C559, in which Cadet Crysler received 45 minutes of landings practice – five in total – from 2Lt W.H. Collins, shown seated in the pilot's cockpit, on 22 August 1917 while with 80 CTS at Camp Mohawk, Deseronto, Ontario. Prominent is the RFC camouflaged Bessonneau hangar in the background. Also, notice the vertical black stripe, one of three to appear on the fuselage of this unit's machines, whose fins and rudders were painted green.*

:W.H. Collins family via S.K. Taylor

