

DUTY'S TOKEN

2LT HENRY MAURICE CORBOLD & 2LT FREDERICK HARVEY COOPER O'BEIRNE
19 SQUADRON, C FLIGHT

by Stewart K. Taylor

ORPHANED AT BIRTH by the sudden loss of his parents in a tragic Montreal house fire and adopted, Henry – a name he detested – Maurice Corbold was given the best of schooling, an Upper Canada College education and an entry position of considerable influence should he continue in the same financial line of employment. However, in a manner of some repudiation and lack of appreciation, his adopted family concluded, he was wooed early on by the singular romantic appeal of becoming an aviator. News stories of the pioneers flooded his mind and, military or not, his application as a Major Ross Hume RFC Candidate was honoured in Ottawa. He was given a provisional commission upon selection. Instead of completing any flight training in Canada, he was, along with 24 others, instructed by the Quartermaster General, Canadian Militia in Ottawa, via the Officer Command, Second Military Divisional Area, Exhibition Grounds, Toronto, where the accepted candidates were temporarily quartered. They left that city by special train, bound for St John, New Brunswick and embarkation aboard the SS Metagama, whose departure was ostensibly set for 08.00 on 1 January 1916.

At Reading, some in the group showed signs of indecision: should they continue with what they got themselves into,



*This portrait photo of 2Lt Henry Maurice Corbold was sent, not to his parents who raised him but to one of his Toronto girlfriends, who gave the above to them after his death.
:Mrs Hubert Corbold (sister in law) via S.K. Taylor*

return home or go join the army? A fair proportion never made it to France, resigning their commissions well in advance, for a plethora of reasons. What Gordon Lascelles, one of the selection, found so astounding was that so few had any real 'air sense' and just why they offered their services to the Major Ross Hume recruiters in Canada he could not really answer. A couple struggled with the exams at Reading, were required to repeat the course and those who passed were despatched to one of five different locations: 3 RS Shoreham, 5 RS Castle Bromwich, 6 RS Catterick, 9 RS Norwich and 12 RS Thetford. As students they sampled their first taste of the 'wide blue yonder' in the nacelle of a 'Longhorn'.

The earliest in the air were up for a few minutes on 23 March 1916 and one of those was Maurice Corbold. At 5 RS Castle Bromwich, his allocated destination, he took longer than most to solo and was chosen to remain at 5 RS while others moved on to locations such as Dover, Montrose, and Beaulieu. 2Lt Corbold took until June 1916 to acquire his 'wings'. He passed this fundamental landmark at Filton, near Bristol, where 19 Squadron retained their cumbersome RE7s that, as one squadron diarist noted could scarcely clear the trees which surrounded it, although no bomb of any description was now carried. Further hampered by the gross inadequacies at Filton; immediate improvement

*Thirty three 'Ross Hume chosen' RFC Canadian candidates, Wantage Hall, Reading, January 1916. They sailed aboard the Metagama to Liverpool shortly after being promoted 1st January 1916 as officers in the 'Special Reserve' RFC. None had previously obtained their RAeC or AAC in North America. Twenty of this group eventually reached the front, only two, 2Lt H.M. Corbold, fifth from left, second row, and 2Lt W.M. Carlisle, second from left, back row, flew single seaters at first in France. Both were killed in action.
:G.A. Lascelles via S.K. Taylor*

