

'CANADIAN
CAPTIVITY'

Captain Mansell Richard James
45 Squadron by Stewart K. Taylor

The Jiří Rajlich article, Multinational Air Combat, in CCI 43/1 investigated the 31 August 1918 combat in which Flik 3J suffered at the hands of 45 Squadron RAF. One of the RAF pilots involved was M.R. James and that pilot's diary helps give insight to not only that combat but also the everyday life in the RAF on the Italian front, a completely different one from that in France. As S.F. Wise put it, in Canadian Airmen of the First World War: 'To the experienced airmen of the RFC squadrons, there was a great contrast between the strain and intensity of the virtually incessant air battle in France and the hide-and-seek tactics of the Austrians.' As Williams (T.F. Williams, 28 Squadron) saw it, 'Flying in Italy was a holiday by comparison with that in France. It was a different type of warfare entirely. It was more of a gentleman's game. The scout pilots we encountered in Italy didn't seem to have the same viciousness that we met up with on the Western Front, where it was a blood for blood affair. They were not so aggressive in Italy.'

MANSELL RICHARD JAMES grew up in Watford, Ontario, with the family of a relative, E.A. Brown. He had a younger brother, Dr. Frederick James, who practised medicine in the US for more than 50 years and retired to Sarnia, Ontario. He was the youngest of the three James boys, orphaned about 1914 when their parents died. Mansell James' father had been a physician in Michigan.

All three boys, although not Roman Catholic, were placed in a Catholic orphanage in Michigan. This shocked their grandmother in Strathroy, a strict Methodist, and the boys were redistributed among the family.

The above was extracted from notes taken by a reporter during a family interview undertaken in 1980. I have taken the liberty of putting some of his notes' into form and using them as a preamble to the diary kept by Mansell.

Mansell James was born on 18 June 1893, in Leamington, Ontario. He attended Watford High, (his public school education began in Leamington, switched briefly to Michigan and the Catholic orphanage) and was remembered by an old school chum as a *quiet, studious chap, who always used an uncle's barn to dismantle old cars and motorcycles. After school, Mansell worked in the same uncle's dry goods store, delivering and other such errands.*

His most intimate school chum was Ross Annett, who later became an outstanding Canadian writer. They studied and played together in the home of Mrs E.A. Brown. As far as I have ascertained, Mansell James did odd jobs around the

dry goods store until he enlisted in the RFC at the Toronto recruiting centre on 10 June 1917. He had actually submitted his application shortly after the first advertisement for RFC recruits appeared in the newspapers of major cities across Canada. The date was either March or April, 1917. His Canadian number was 70415. That meant that he was the 415th person to be accepted for training in the 1917 RFC Training Programme. His brother Cecil joined the RFC later, his number being 74713. He was the 4713th cadet to be accepted. If this number seems quite large, one must accept the fact that many of the cadets, beginning in the summer of 1917, were American.

Like all RFC cadets in Canada at that time, Mansell was billeted in the East Residence of the University of Toronto for ground school studies which lasted for one month. I might say that a few of the candidates never saw an aircraft as they could not pass the four or five different exams. They invariably ended up in the Canadian Army. Mansell began his actual



A studio portrait of Mansell James, with his RFC 'wings' and 'Canada' epaulette bar barely visible. James only wore the RFC 'maternity jacket' and never had the inclination to purchase a RAF one.
: Cecil James via S.K. Taylor

flying at 87 CTS (Canadian Training Sqn.) Deseronto, Ontario, on the north shore of Lake Ontario, near Belleville. His first flight was on 11 July 1917. His instructor was Lt J.A. Stewart (from Montreal) and the machine was JN4-A C584. He required over 5 hours of dual instruction before he soloed on 23 July 1917 in JN4-A C627. After 5 hrs solo on the JN4a he was transferred to 82 CTS at Camp Borden, Ontario. His first flight in the unit was on 31 July and his instructor was Cadet W.H. Collins from Chatham, Ontario. 82 CTS specialized in formation flying, cross-country and photography. He took his instructor's test (this was mandatory for all fledglings) on 8 August and passed. Lucky for him the RFC by that time had ample instructors in Canada, or he would have been retained for such purposes. At Camp Borden, the centre of RFC training in Canada, James was transferred (or advanced) to 78 CTS. Here, he was subjected to artillery-observation training, i.e. ground strips, panneau, bomb dropping with sacks with flour, puff shoots and, again, formation practice.

He had flown 40 hours solo (about average) when he and others in his Course No.7 were given one-week's instruction in aerial gunnery, also at Camp Borden. The time aloft for that period was 3 hours, most of the time being spent in the back cockpit of a JN4-A fitted with a Lewis machine gun. Then it was back to 78 and 82 CTS for a final formation flight tour of the area (a triangular course that encompassed Camp Borden, Barrie and Collingwood) before his final leave and overseas