



Oral History Project

Interview with Fred Davies



By: Katherine Charness
Interview Date: December 14th 2010

The Start of WWII

- After WW1, Germany was suffering due to the harsh conditions of the treaty of Versailles
- They were in an economic recession, and the people of Germany were desperate for a strong, new leader to carry them out of their troubled times.
- This new leader would be **Adolf Hitler**
- Hitler's idea for Germany appealed to many people.
- He saw Germany as being a controlling force in the world, with a strong, pure German race
- Under Hitler's power, Germany began to rebuild their army, navy, and air force to take over other countries in order to strengthen Germany
- The Germans had invaded Austria and Czechoslovakia when other world leaders decided to step in and make Germany promise peace
- When the Germans invaded Poland in 1939, war was declared



http://adolfhitlerfans.com/files/2008/12/adolf_hitler.jpg



http://images.google.ca/imgres?imgurl=http://multimedialearningllc.files.wordpress.com/2009/10/munich_agreement.jpg&imgrefurl=http://multimedialearningllc.wordpress.com/2009/10/29/munich-pact-1938/&usq=_3xSYNHZWgye9XJ6wBtbDjA6sMWw=&h=356&w=600&sz=41&hl=en&start=1&um=1&itbs=1&tbnid=DCX7BZXahJPnaM:&tbnh=80&tbnw=135&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dmunich%2B%20agreement%26um%3D1%26hl%3Den%26sa%3DN%26rlz%3D1T4ADBS_enCA280CA282%26tbs%3Disch:1

- The call went out around the world for people to sign up to help defend their countries
- In Canada men were signing up everywhere to join the army, the navy, or the air force
- People wanted to join to serve and be a hero
- Men poured onto the ships heading overseas for the adventure and excitement of fighting for Canada



*Lick Them Over There - Canadian World War II Poster
Library and Archives Canada, Acc. No. 1983-30-236*



Davies



Charness

- One of the people fortunate enough to share their experiences is **Fred Davies**
- To better understand the different wartime experiences his story will be compared to another WWII veteran, **Mark Charness**

Manning Depot, Montreal



Davies

Fred Davies

- Born: Halifax, Nova Scotia
- Family: six brothers and one sister
- Graduated high school and volunteered for the RCAF
- He chose the air force because the army and navy had been in Nova Scotia for a while, so that was nothing new
- He wanted to be a pilot

Mark Charness

- Born: Montreal, Quebec
- Family: two brothers, one sister
- Graduated high school in May 1940
- Worked at a textile mill
- Joined the RCAF in November of 1942
- He chose the air force because he thought it was the coolest option
- He wanted to be a pilot



Charness

Manning Depot, Montreal

The Story of Fred Davies

Joining the War:

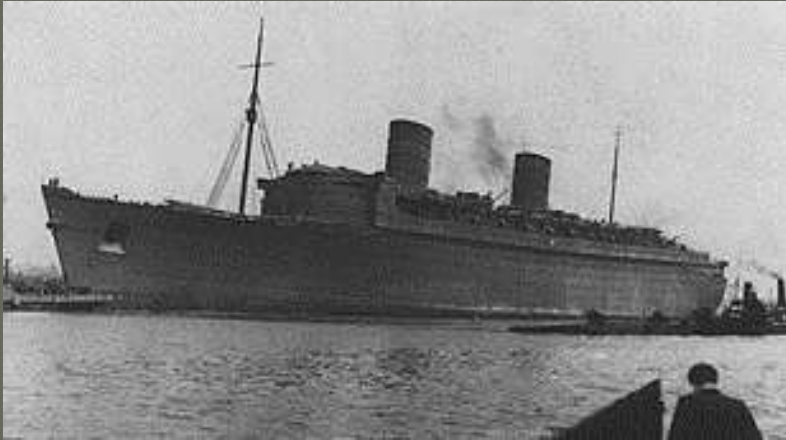
- After enlisting in the RCAF, Davies was sent to Manning Depot in Montreal for training
- On his first day he recalls being given a rifle and a uniform
- His training began by learning the basics first: walking, marching, and throwing a gun around
- This training lasted for a year; after which he moved onto ITS
- That is where he learned everything he needed to know about flying including navigation calculations and how to fly airplanes
- After this was told what his role in the air force was going to be
- Davies ended up being selected to be a navigator



Davies on his first day
at Manning Depot



Going Overseas



“We thought for sure it was going to tip over.”
- Davies

http://www.google.ca/imgres?imgurl=http://farm3.static.flickr.com/2646/4081311554_44a28b058c.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.flickr.com/photos/mhwildwood/4081311554/&asg=...zT8yK28WAeJg-W10022X8D-a40-&h=800&w=390&sz=160&hl=en&start=0&zoom=1&tbnid=ExVrCoFzYtCLM:&tbnh=118&tbnw=97&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dqueen%2Belizabeth%2Broopship%26um%3D1%26hl%3Den%26sa%3Dn%26rlz%3D1T4SKPB_enCA391CA391%26biw%3D1259%26bih%3D495%26tbs%3Disch:1&um=1&tbs=1&iact=hc&vpx=11&vpy=37&dur=2496&hovh=254&hovw=198&tx=98&ty=168&ei=OVofTCHALMennQeidlnoDQ&oei=OVofTCHALMennQeidlnoDQ&seq=1&page=1&ndsp=21&ved=1t:429,r:0,s:0

- After graduating training, Davies traveled overseas on the Queen Elizabeth in January of 1943
- After a journey of 5 or 6 days, they landed in Scotland then traveled down to Bournemouth
- Davies was a member of No. 408 squadron and then No. 405 squadron
- No. 405 squadron became a part of the Pathfinder's group

The Queen Elizabeth

- began making trips to Europe in 1942
- Carried a total of 750,000 troops though out the war
- Sailed a total of 500,000 miles

History of the Pathfinder Force

- It was first developed in 1943
- It was the original vision of a young Australian, **Donald Bennet**
- The job of those in the Pathfinder force was not an easy one
- They had to identify the target, fly over and mark it with flares, and then take pictures of the damage that the main bomber force caused
- Therefore, the members of the Pathfinder force were in danger for the longest amount of time, and this group had a very high number of casualties
- Because the pathfinder force led the rest of the bombers, it was very important for them to have the best navigators, and the newest navigational equipment



Squadron 405

Motto: "We lead"

- Squadron 405 was formed at Driffield Yorkshire on April 23, 1941
- They flew the RCAF's first bombing mission
- They also took part in the 1,000 bomber raid on Cologne
- In March of 1943, they were selected to join group No. 8, the Pathfinder's
- The motto indicates that this was the first RCAF bomber squadron formed overseas and the only RCAF Pathfinder Squadron.

<http://www.rcan.com/Squadrons/squadronDetail.php?No.-405-Squadron-64>

"I guess we can die just as easy on that squadron as we can on this squadron."

- Davies

Davies and crew in front of Lancaster



- Davies flew 46 missions in total
- His first 6 were on the Halifax
- His next 40 were on the Lancaster

Lancaster



<http://www.richard-seaman.com/Aircraft/AirShows/YankeeAirMuseum2003/Sampler/index.html>

Halifax Plane



<http://www.raf.mod.uk/gallery/lostbombercrew.cfm?viewmedia=11>

The Lancaster Bomber

- wingspan: 102 feet
- Weight: 17 tons (31 when loaded)
- 8 rapid fire guns
- Max. Speed: 462km/h
- Range of 2,500 kilometers
- 7,366 were constructed in WW2

<http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/lancaster.htm>

The Final Mission

- Davies's 46th mission was to destroy some railroad tracks in Aachen
- On the way, an Me109F training plane got under them and fired their machine gun up at their plane
- They lost it in a course change, only to meet a fighter plane that blew their left engine off
- The crew had to bail out
- it took 3-5 minutes for them all to get out
- Once on the ground, Davies and another crewman, Jack, walked from Holland, into Belgium, and then right down to France

Me109F



<http://www.military-aircraft.org.uk/ww2-fighter-planes/messerschmitt-me-109-buchon.htm>



Davies and crew

CLASS OF SERVICE	SYMBOL
Full-Rate Message	
Day Letter	D L
Night Message	N M
Night Letter	N L

If none of these three symbols appears after the check, number of words this is a full-rate message. Otherwise its character is indicated by the symbol appearing after the check.

CANADIAN NATIONAL TELEGRAM

(46)

W. M. ARMSTRONG, GENERAL MANAGER, TORONTO, ONT.

Exclusive Connection with WESTERN UNION CABLES Cable Service to all the World Money Transferred by Telegraph

STANDARD TIME

RXMDA547 33 GB 2 EXTRA=RCAF OTTAWA ONT 26 1115 1944 MAY 27 AM 12 45

F V DAVIES, REPORT DELIVERY=

81 EAST YOUNG ST HFX= 20

10594. REGRET TO ADVISE THAT YOUR SON PILOT OFFICER FREDERICK CHARLES DAVIES J EIGHT FIVE NAUGHT NINE THREE IS REPORTED MISSING AFTER AIR OPERATIONS OVERSEAS MAY TWENTY FIFTH STOP LETTER FOLLOWS=

RCAF CASUALTIES OFFICER.

1944 MAY 27 AM 12 50

XOO *Y*



OUR FILE 22-24 (CCRC)
REF. YOUR
DATED

ROYAL CANADIAN AIR FORCE

End June, 1944.

Mr. F.V. Davies,
81 East Young St.,
Halifax, N.S.

Dear Mr. Davies:-

Word has been received at this office that your son, Pilot Officer Frederick Charles Davies, is reported missing after air operations overseas May 25th, 1944.

This is sad news for you and your family; a time of terrible uncertainty. Even if the future news is the worst possible, his death, you have already braced yourself to accept this great sacrifice. If it is anything less, that he is a prisoner or an escapee, it will be a joyful reaction to know.

The Air Force is grateful to him for a service nobly given. Every effort humanly possible will be made to dispel this anxiety for you. Be assured of a constant attendance of my prayers and masses for him and you. Your own faith in God's Providence will be your greatest comfort.

Devotedly yours in Xto,

T. B. Grace
T. B. Grace) Squadron Leader,
Command Chaplain (RC),
Eastern Air Command, R.C.A.F.,
Halifax, Nova Scotia.

- The telegram and letter sent home to Davies's family after his plane was shot down

Becoming a POW

- Davies and Jack avoided the German army with the help of the underground for a while
- But a week after D-day, someone finally sold them out and they were handed to the Gestapo
- They eventually ended up at Stalag Luft III POW camp

The POW Process

- 1) Pass through a transit camp where you are questioned for information.
- 2) You are then transported to a POW camp by train
- 3) Live and work at the camp until liberation



Stalag Luft III

<http://www.b24.net/pow/greatescape.htm>

Stalag Luft III
This POW camp became famous because of an event known as "the Great Escape".
80 prisoners attempted to escape by digging a tunnel, but only 15 made it to freedom

<http://www.b24.net/pow/greatescape.htm>

Life as a POW

- Each camp had a different layout, but all were enclosed with barbed wires and guard towers
- Prisoners were often housed in one story barracks with bunk beds
- Prisons were given two meals a day of soup and bread
- the Red Cross would deliver more luxurious food items
- Every day there would be a roll call
- The thing shared by every POW was boredom and hunger



http://www.historyonthenet.com/WW2/german_pow_camps.htm



The telegram sent to inform Davies's family that he was a POW

The Death Marches

- As Russia began to close in on Germany, it was decided that prisoners were to be marched further west
- These marches went for hundreds of miles, right in the middle of a terrible Winter
- Approximately 3,500 US and commonwealth POWs died during the death marches
- Davies was in a POW camp that was marched away

<http://www.b24.net/pow/march.htm>



<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/Gestapo.html>

The Gestapo

- The Gestapo were Nazi Germany's secret state police
- They had authority to investigate treason, sabotage, and criminal activity against the Nazi Party
- They were also in charge of establishing and enforcing concentration camps
- They used torture techniques, and they knew that there were no consequences for any of their actions
- Davies was handed to the Gestapo when him and Jack were discovered

<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/Gestapo.html>

- Davies and the group of POW he was with were freed by General Patton
- He arrived back in England on May sixth



Uniform insignia,
medals, and photos



Comparing War Experiences



- After enlisting in the RCAF and completing his training, Mark was selected to be a navigator, just like Davies
- He traveled to England on the Empress of Scotland
- In 1944 he was transferred to serve in the RAF with No. 582 squadron in group No. 8 with the pathfinder's force



- Whether you were in the RCAF or the RAF it was clear that being a member of the Pathfinder's force was a dangerous job
- Both Charness and Davies commented that someone could come in, put there bags down, and never come back
- Or you could have a conversation with someone at breakfast, and never see the again
- They both share stories of missions on which they had to make it back with just two engines, or running out of fuel
- The dangers were high, yet the Pathfinders force was almost entirely volunteers



http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/britain_wwtwo/overview_britain_1918_1945_01.shtml

3727 people from the Pathfinders died

“The Path Finders Force – No.8 Group – during its brief existence from August 1942 to December 1945 was a select formation and became the spearhead of bomber command’s part in the awesome destruction of Germany during the last three years of World War Two. Its aircrew members were almost wholly volunteers, and despite the terrifying odds against any individual, or complete crew ever completing their tour of operations, the most ‘feared punishment’ was to be sacked or posted to another unit.”

- Mr. Chaz Bower

- One key difference between the experiences of Mark and Fred happened because of Fred becoming a POW
- The war in the air was very impersonal
- Often people wouldn't consider that the person they are shooting at has a family or that they are in the same position
- Mark, never having left the navigation area in his Lancaster, would not have had to deal with the personal connections that are made as much as someone fighting the war on the ground
- When Davies parachuted to the ground it seems as though a face was added to the enemy for him
- He mentions helping a German soldier on a death march who reminded him of his father
- He also helped feed some Hitler youth who reminded him of his brothers and sisters
- Mr. Davies was put in a situation where he was able to find humanity even in the enemy



R.C.A.F. 447
Part I.

**CANADIAN AIR FORCE
SERVICE BOOK**

**INSTRUCTIONS TO OFFICERS
AND AIRMEN**

is held responsible for the safe custody of the
always carry the book on your person both at
produce the book whenever called upon to do
at authority, civil, naval, military or air.
not alter or make any entry in this Book (except
form of W/E on page 35, see instructions on
and disbursements of this order will be treated
remember that any entry in the book is binding
should you lose the book, you will report the
immediate superior in the Royal Canadian Air
force in name or address of person to be informed
be reported immediately to your Commanding

Air Force *John Thomas Charles*
Christian Name in Full *MARK*
Date of Birth *11-22-1918*
Date of Enlistment/Appointment *11-22-18*
Maximal (M), Widower (W) or Single (S) *S*
Occupation in Civil Life *Engineer*

Signature of Holder *Mark Charles*
Name and Address of Next-of-Kin

Name, Address, and Relationship of Person to be
of Convenience
John Thomas Charles
11-22-18
11-22-18

Classified Current
Date *Nov 20 1918*

- May 8th 1945 marks the day the allies accepted Germany's surrender
- It became known as Victory in Europe Day
- **Fred Davies** remembers celebrating at a party that day
- **Mark Charness** remembers seeing Winston Churchill driving by with his 'v' symbol in the air



Winston Churchill waving to crowd

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victory_in_Europe_Day

-
- After the war ended Mark returned to Montreal
 - He chose to forget his experiences in the war and never really reflected on them
 - He chose not to accept veteran's aid provided by the government
 - However he is grateful for the opportunity to document his experiences and sees the importance of having future generations learn from this
 - Fred Davies returned from the war constantly on edge and wanting to protect himself
 - He eventually got over this but never really talked about his war experiences until his fifth child was 21
 - Mr. Davies documented his experiences in a book he wrote



The Importance of Oral History

The Oral History Project exposes the emotions and personal thoughts that cannot be found when learning about these events through a text book. The event is often only studied as a whole, forgetting about the individual stories of people who experienced it. This project also documents this event further, allowing future generations to learn from these people's experiences. Perhaps if it weren't for the Oral History Project, the stories of some veterans would never have been told, and the memories would have been lost. Thank you for sharing your stories.

"As I came to know many of them, and their stories, I became more convinced of my judgment, that this is the 'Greatest Generation' any society ever produced."

- Brokaw



Bibliography

http://www.historyonthenet.com/WW2/german_pow_camps.htm

<http://www.b24.net/pow/greatescape.htm>

<http://www.b24.net/pow/march.htm>

<http://www.fleetairarmarchive.net/rollofhonour/pow/StalagLuftIII.html>

<http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/lancaster.htm>

<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/Gestapo.html>

<http://www.rcaf.com/Squadrons/squadronDetail.php?No.-405-Squadron-64>

http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victory_in_Europe_Day

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RMS_Queen_Elizabeth