

G/C J.R.D. (BOB) BRAHAM, DSO, DFC**, AFC, CD UNsung FIGHTER ACE**

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Introduction: Group Captain "Bob" Braham retired from the Royal Canadian Air Force in 1968 after a distinguished career with both the RAF and RCAF, and passed away in 1974. He was the 5th ranked RAF fighter ace in World War II and the most decorated British Commonwealth airman of the conflict.



Despite his military accomplishments and awards, his name is scarcely recognized either in Canada where he served in the RCAF after the war, or in the UK where he served so gallantly during it. The names of other WWII Commonwealth fighter aces – Johnson, Beurling, Malan, Bader – are familiar, but that of Braham, virtually unknown.

Chronology: John R.D. Braham was born in Somerset, England on April 6, 1920, the son of a Methodist Minister who had served as a pilot in the Royal Flying Corps during the First World War.

Possibly in acknowledgement of his father's war service he was accepted into the Royal Air Force in December 1937 at

the tender age of 17, having applied for an RAF Short Service Commission "just for the hell of it" and being surprised that he was one of the relatively few selected.

In his 18th year he flew his first solo in a Tiger Moth on March 30 1938, the month he became an Acting Pilot Officer, and was awarded his pilot wings on August 20, 1938. This rapid progress or "fast tracking" was to stay with him during his RAF career.

In December 1938 he joined the RAF's 29 Squadron as a Pilot Officer. The squadron was then equipped with the Bristol Blenheim 1F aircraft. There were so many "Johns" in the squadron that they put nicknames in a hat and he drew "Bob", which stuck with him all his life.



Bristol Blenheim

At the outbreak of war on Sep. 3, 1939 he was still with 29 Squadron which was then flying Hawker Hurricane 1's. However in October, the squadron was made into a night fighter squadron and was re-equipped with Blenheims once more.

After a year of almost constant flying, he destroyed his first enemy aircraft, a He 111 bomber on Aug. 24, 1940. This was to be the first of 29 destroyed, plus one probable, and six others damaged.

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Nineteen of those destroyed were at night, 18 while flying Beaufighters Mk IF & VIF in 29 and 141 Squadrons. On Dec. 22, 1942, he was promoted to Wing Commander at the age of 22, and posted from 29 Squadron to take command of 141 Squadron.



Bristol Beaufighter

In 1944, he was posted to the Headquarters of 2 Group and while there flew intruder missions deep into enemy-held territory flying the De Havilland Mosquito FB VI. He destroyed nine enemy aircraft while flying these missions. In addition, he engaged in "train busting" and attacks on enemy shipping including one on a U-Boat which was badly damaged in the battle.



De Havilland Mosquito

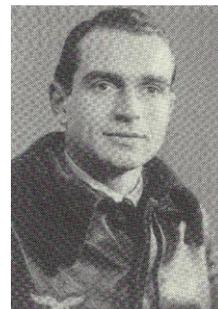
He was forced to ditch in the English Channel once and was picked up by the

Royal Navy. Several times, he returned to base with his aircraft badly damaged by enemy flak or aircraft and, at least twice due to his own aggressiveness. On one occasion, while in hot pursuit of an enemy warplane at low level he brushed the tree tops and returned home with part of the forest attached to the underside of his fighter. During a separate event, he bent the tips of his propeller blades as they clawed the ground during a very low-level chase of an enemy aircraft.



Braham & Navigator F/L Gregory Planning Sortie, 1944

His air combat war came to an end on June 16, 1944 when he was shot down over Denmark by a FW 190 piloted by Luftwaffe Leutnant Robert Spreckels and spent the balance of the war in Stalag Luft III, forced to participate in the infamous "Death March" as his German captors tried to avoid the advancing Russians. After the war, he and Robert Spreckels became good friends.



Leutnant Robert Spreckels, 1943

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He remained in the RAF until 1952 when he transferred to the RCAF.

While CO of 3AW(F) OTU at North Bay he was Mentioned in Despatches after an incident in which he took over control of a CF-100 from a student pilot after a flap broke away, and then managed to land the aircraft safely.



Avro CF-100

While CO of 432 Squadron in Bagotville he was involved in a mid-air collision with another CF-100 and forced to bail out. His ejection seat became entangled in the chute causing him to descend too quickly and to land heavily in the dense bush of northern Quebec. Despite being badly injured, he managed to crawl to a nearby lake, inflate his dinghy and get in before being miraculously found by a pair of hunters.



Braham (standing right) with 432 Squadron aircrew, 1958

He retired prematurely from the RCAF as a Group Captain in 1968 in protest to the unification of the Armed Forces. He served briefly with Parks Canada as the Superintendent of Historic Sites in Halifax. He died of brain cancer on Feb.7, 1974 at the age of 54.

Rank progression in the RAF: A/Pilot Officer Mar. 7, 1938; P/O Mar. 7, 1939; Flying Officer Jun. 29, 1941; Squadron Leader Jun. 1, 1942; Wing Commander, Dec. 22, 1942.

Decorations: DSO**, DFC**, AFC, Belgian Croix de Guerre & Palm; Belgian Order of Leopold & Palm, Canadian Forces Decoration.



Aircraft Flown: He flew 66 different aircraft types in his career ranging from the Tiger Moth biplane to the Mach 2 English Electric Lightning. Over the span of his career with the RAF and RCAF, he logged 5371 flying hours.

Notwithstanding the many types of aircraft he flew, three defined his career – the Bristol Beaufighter, the De Havilland Mosquito, and the Avro CF-100. Detailed information on these three aircraft types and their Canadian operations may be found in FCWM Fact Sheets #61 The Bristol Beaufighter, #62 The De Havilland Mosquito, and FS #35 The Avro CF-100 Interceptor.

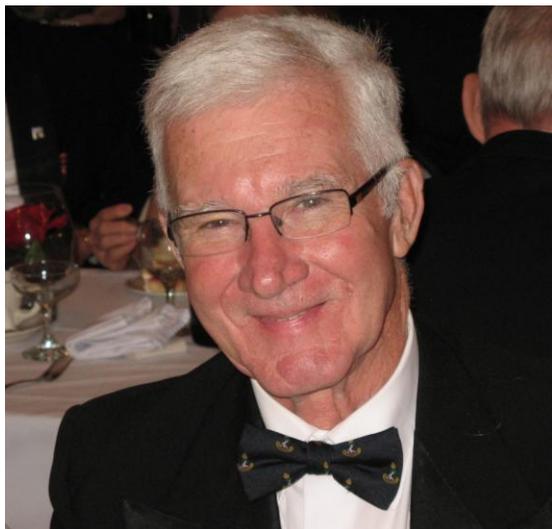
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Further Reading:

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officer and senior official with an abiding interest in history.

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