

1659 Heavy Conversion Training Unit, Topcliffe Yorks (1)

January 1944

Log book entry

Crew captain F/O Lavallee (1)

Date	Hour	Aircraft Type and Number	Pilot	Duty	Flying Time	
					Day	Night
5/1/44	19:30	Halifax N	F/O Lavallee	Air Gunner "BULLSEYE"	04:30	

BULLSEYE - cross country navigation at night and locating a target

January 6/44

Letter received February 6/44

To F/O A. A. Anderson C6091

Dear Pop

Well how is everything at #3? (2)

All is fine here except the last few days it's been bitterly chilly. An Englishman's effort for a heater is a thing about the size of a tomato can which won't heat anything. Anyway you can't heat these buildings, they're built like match boxes. Well all they are is tin sheds just like Secord Smith's oil shed at Ninga.

You would wonder how two stations could be so different. Our last one was perfect. This is just the opposite. Three hours later. Well we're called out for a long cross country. It took me an hour to put on all my kit including electric suit gloves etc.

We got all ready, drove out to the kite and they scrubbed it. Sure makes us mad. They gave us flying rations, chocolate, gum etc. Luckily I ate all mine on the way to the kite, so when they scrubbed it, the others had to hand theirs in.

I guess we will have the afternoon off now and if so I'm going over and see Jim Manson. He's only five miles away. It's a calm day and I got a bike now so I'll cycle over. I'll meet him when he gets off work and go to a show with him this evening. I'll sleep with him in his billet and cycle back tomorrow a.m.. Boy it seems perfect to be just 15 minutes from one of my best pals. I dropped in on him the day before yesterday and spent an hour with him.

I guess you knew I spent that cheque on a bike. I went to a big city nearby and got it and rode it back to camp. It's sure a dandy. Cost me £9 (\$40) complete with head and tail light. Yesterday I got a can of yellow paint and put my name and number on the back fender and my sqn. No. and station on the front so I can identify it. It sure is handy here and I don't think I'll regret buying it.

Our bomb aimer's name is Wilson (3) and he's from Winnipeg but he's no relative to the Wilson's we know or are related to us. Our skipper and Bombardier just got their WO2's (both RCAF) and our Navigator just got his F/S Crown (he's RAF) and has been an NCO as long as the rest of us and WAG is RAF and his Crown is soon due. The rest of us are Sgts.

Our Bombardier is very witty and he's got a dry wit. I get a lot of laughs from him and he's very cool in the air. Our skipper is a short guy but sure can fly and I have lots of confidence in him ever since the other day when we could not get our flaps down and with no flaps these four engined kites come in pretty fast about 145 m.p.h. and there was no wind and the brake pressure was gone. A slight overshoot might have been bad. We got a priority landing and old Ray brought her in right on the deck. Just at the beginning of the runway he cut her, as soon as he did she dropped about 6 feet and a perfect landing. He's sure a good skipper.

Our WAG and Navigator are RAF and sure know their stuff too. I like flying here. I like it more every time I go up. It's sure thrilling. Riding in the mid upper is like being on top of the world.

Jim Manson is getting leave next week and is going to meet Jack in London. They both have 9 days together. It will be the first time they've seen each other so that is ok. Well that's about all for now. I hope this finds you as well as I am.

So long for now, Bob

Notes & Commentary

(1) Crew captain F/O Lavallee was killed 13 days later with his crew.

<http://www.yorkshire-aircraft.co.uk/aircraft/planes/44/lw334.html>

(2) #3 is #3 B&G Macdonald, Manitoba

<http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/sites/macdonaldairport.shtml>

January 8/44

Letter received February 2/44

To F/O A. A. Anderson C6091

Dear Pop

Well its about 4 days since I last wrote so I better get going.

Got 5 letters today 2 mailed on Dec. 27. The wrist watch keeps perfect time but one of those pins (springs) that holds the strap to the watch is broken and in trying to fix it I broke the other pin. I went into Leeds yesterday afternoon to try and get the pins but there's none in England. The guy wanted to solder a bar in but it would take 2 weeks so I didn't bother. I don't know what to do unless you can send some. You know the type of watch well the pins fit at either end of it and are spring loaded to hold on the strap and look like this. In the meantime I'll put the Bulova away and use my pocket Ben I got in Montreal and it keeps very good time.

So you volunteered for overseas eh. Well I know you would want to be here and I'm proud of it but it's pretty monotonous especially for wingless guys and a F/O here has less authority than an

AC2 (Aircraftman 2nd Class). The only thing is leave when you can explore country a bit. I am also afraid after what I think you think about it - you might be disappointed. The country is pretty but it's very easy to stray from the straight and narrow. You go to a town after being on a camp and you want some recreation. Well there's no such thing as a bowling alley – pool room and dances are scarce, the shows are okay but mostly all old American films I've seen. But there's lots of pubs and no shortage of “wine women and song” but not for me. I will spend my leaves with Manson or Kerr.

If you think you are not doing a good job in Canada you are wrong because my pilot has got your name in his log book. Our crew is all NCO's and we get along fine. The Nav-Engineer and WAG are Blokes, fairly quiet guys but reliable. I like them fine and our squadron no is 420 and now I'm just 2 ½ miles from Jim Manson. In fact we are a satellite of his drome so I'll see lots of him.

You asked about leave. I've had 14 days now and we should get 7 days very shortly. Very often we get days off 3 or 4 a week. Of course we can stay out all night if we want but I'm not caring much about leave. Camp life is soft. All we do is fly and the mess is always cheery.

Glad to learn how you spent X-mas and hope you all get together for new years. I sure enjoy those reunions in Grandmaw Anderson's house. Family reunions like that are one of the finest things in the world I think and I'm looking forward to them again. I guess you know by now but I'll remind you again of my X-mas. I certainly didn't have a dull time. I had the best x-mas possible here with Jim Kerr in his camp. I thoroughly enjoyed it, despite the fact that I was away from home.

The rest of my crew have got 5 ops in in Africa so they're no rookies at it. We're converting here from 2 to 4 engine kites, 4 engines means an extra engineer and mid-upper A.G. (me). Oh yes yesterday I sent home for \$25 (for my weeks leave). I also cut my allowance from \$30 to \$20 per month home. Money sure goes over here. I had just as much on AC 2 pay at home it seems. Well so long for now. More in a couple of day. So long Bob

Log book entries

Date	Hour	Aircraft Type and Number	Pilot	Duty	Flying Time	
					Day	Night
10/1/44	1400	Halifax G	F/S Leonard	Air Gunner Check Dual And Solo	:55	
14/1/44	09:00	Halifax J	F/S Leonard	Air Gunner Circuits, Landings, Air Firing	4:40	
21/1/44	09:30	Halifax N	F/S Leonard	Air Gunner Height Test, Bombing	2:55	
23/1/44	13:45	Halifax A	F/S Leonard	Air Gunner Air Firing, Bombing	1:40	
28/1/44	1:00	Halifax X	P/O Pearce	Air Gunner Fighter Affil.	:55	
28/1/44	15:00	Halifax P	S/L Neal	Air Gunner 2 Engine Flying	1:30	
28/1/44	19:00	Halifax J	F/S Leonard	Air Gunner Circuits, Landings	05:00	

Fighter Affil. – *chased by a fighter; learned evasive action (corkscrew flying) and sighting for the air gunners*

2 Engine Flying – *learning to fly with two engines down*

Notes & Commentary:

About F/O Lavallee who was the pilot on January 4, 1944.

Date	Hour	Aircraft Type and Number	Pilot	Duty	Flying Time	
					Day	Night
5/1/44	19:30	Halifax N	F/O Lavallee	Air Gunner	"BULLSEYE"	04:30

Source:

<https://www.rcfassociation.ca/heritage/history/fallen-aviators/rcf-casualties-second-world-war/labach-to-levitt/>

LAVALLEE, JOSEPH PIERRE F/O(P) J10983. From Quebec City, Quebec. Killed Jan.18/44 age 22. #1659 Heavy Conversion Unit, Topcliffe, Yorkshire. The pilot of Halifax aircraft # LW 334 was flying in poor visibility when the aircraft crashed into a 1,300 foot hill two miles

south-east of Osmotherly, Yorkshire. F/O.s W.L. Boisvert, W. Phillips, WO. G.E. Giff, Sgt.s R.G. Kimball and G.H. Hivon were also killed. Flying Officer Pilot Lavallee is buried in the Stonefall Cemetery, Wetherby Road, Harrogate, Yorkshire, England.



More information

<http://www.yorkshire-aircraft.co.uk/aircraft/planes/44/lw334.html>

Excerpt

At 10.30hrs on 18th January 1944 the crew of this 1659 Heavy Conversion Unit aircraft were to undertake a day-time cross country training exercise and prior to taking off from Topcliffe received instruction to not fly below 3,000 feet in height. Fog was effecting visibility on this date and in the previous days. The instruction to remain at above 3,000 feet was a common instruction for flying in poor visibility and this would ensure that aircraft would be well clear of the highest hills in England over which the training flights were flown. The weather was deemed fit for take off in the mid-morning and this crew were given clearance to take off from Topcliffe at 09.58hrs. Shortly after taking off the weather appears to have deteriorated and at 10.04hrs the crew were instructed by flying control at Topcliffe to return to base, the wireless operator in LW334

acknowledged the instruction. As they had not landed at 10.22hrs another message was transmitted with the same instruction to return to base and again the message was acknowledged. At around 10.30hrs the aircraft was thought to have been letting down land to land but flying a very wide circuit of Topcliffe airfield, they were almost certainly flying in fog and could not see the high ground when the aircraft flew into the north-west side of the North Yorkshire Moors. The aircraft clipped the top of Black Hambleton hill near the village of Osmotherley and then crashed much lower down the hillside where upon it broke up. Sadly all six airmen in the aircraft were killed. It was not known why they were flying so low when the aircraft crashed; a faulty altimeter or minor a navigation error in the bad visibility was probably to blame though neither were ever established as fact. It transpired through my research locally that a game keeper was on Black Hambleton prior to the crash and had heard a low flying aircraft, he heard and felt the aircraft crash below him and was almost certainly the first on the scene but sadly nothing could be done for those involved. The remains of a propeller blade were found on top of Black Hambleton; on Dodd End, in the mid-1990's by a fellow historian and this seems likely to have been from LW334.

Halifax LW334 had a brief service history, it was built to contract ACFT/1808/C4/C by English Electric Ltd at the Samlesbury factory. It was delivered to Cunliffe Owen on 16th October 1943 and was then taken on charge by 1659 Heavy CONversion Unit on 7th November 1943.

Cat.E2/FA damage was recorded following the incident detailed above on 18th January 1944. It was struck off charge on 30th January 1944 once the paperwork caught up.

Pilot - F/O Joseph Pierre Lavallee RCAF (J/10983), aged 22, of Quebec City, Quebec, Canada.
Buried Harrogate Stonefall Cemetery, Yorkshire.

Flight Engineer - Sgt Richard George Kimball RCAF (R/54130), aged 24, of Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. Buried Harrogate Stonefall Cemetery, Yorkshire.

Navigator - F/O Wilfred Leger Boisvert RCAF (J/20970), aged 25, of Swastika, Ontario, Canada.
Buried Harrogate Stonefall Cemetery, Yorkshire.

Bomb Aimer - F/O Walter Phillips RCAF (J/23210), aged 23, of Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.
Buried Harrogate Stonefall Cemetery, Yorkshire.

Air Gunner - Sgt Guy Henry Hivon RCAF (R/187271), aged 20, of St Paul, Alberta, Canada.
Buried Harrogate Stonefall Cemetery, Yorkshire.

Wireless Operator / Air Gunner - WO1 George Ernest Giff RCAF (R/111125), aged 25, of
Smiths Falls, Ontario, Canada. Buried Harrogate Stonefall Cemetery, Yorkshire.

While photographs of each members of this crew have been located I am still seeking a crew photograph showing all six of the above together, and also I have yet to learn the name of what would have been their other air gunner who was not on board when Halifax LW334 crashed.

Joseph Lavallee was born on 28th July 1921 in Loretteville, Quebec, Canada and was a son of Joseph and Blanche (nee Perreault) Lavallee. He was known by his middle name of Pierre. Loretteville later became part of the growing Quebec City. He had four siblings; two brothers and two sisters and sadly Pierre's father died when he was young. Pierre had initially tried to enlist for RCAF service in June 1939 but his application was rejected as he was too young, he also tried to enlist in October 1940 into the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan but due to a change in their enlistment conditions he was also not successful. When he was eventually successful in enlisting for RCAF service on 11th June 1941 in Quebec City he had just completed studying for a B.A. degree at Laval University in Quebec City, possibly studying as doctor. He enlisted for aircrew duties and specifically to train as a pilot. After basic training he was awarded his pilot's wings on 10th April 1942 and received a commission on the same date. He was also assessed as being an above average trainee so was then selected to undertake flying instructor training and undertook a flying instructor's course between 25th May 1942 and 17th July 1942. Having qualified as a flying instructor he was posted to instruct at 13 S.F.T.S. at St.Hubert in July 1942. On 16th August 1942 while instructing at 13 S.F.T.S. he and a pupil were involved in a minor taxiing accident when Harvard 2918 collided with another aircraft at St.Hubert. Both aircraft sustained slight damage but no-one was injured. On 21st January 1943 he was still instructing at 13 S.F.T.S. when Harvard 2653 clipped a tree while making a precautionary landing in a designated low flying area as part of a training flight. He and his pupil did not sustain injuries though as the instructor he was deemed responsible. Soon after this mishap he received an assessment and was taken off instructional duties.

He was then selected for service overseas he left Canada for service in Great Britain on 26th March 1943, travelling by boat and arriving on 10th April 1943. His service and training over the coming months saw him posted down the regular Bomber Command training programme. He was posted to 20 (P)A.F.U. on 4th May 1943 with a brief spell at 1519 (B.A.T.) Flight from 2nd June 1943 to 7th June 1943, returning to 20 (P)A.F.U. with this complete. He was then posted to train at 23 O.T.U. at Pershore from 6th July 1943 to 12th October 1943. At O.T.U.'s it was common for many Bomber Command airmen to form the main part of what became their regular crew. Here however his service file stated that there was a problem with his original navigator and this appears to have resulted in a partial re-crewing and then a longer than normal period at 23 O.T.U. In mid-October 1943 he was posted to Dalton Battle School and then on to 1659 HCU on 4th December 1943 with probably all of those listed above. I thank Mr Louis-Charles Lavallee for kindly contacting me in March 2016 and for supplying the photograph of his uncle shown above.