

Douglas Victor Conlon (May 31, 1920–January 4, 2011)

Douglas Conlon served in the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) during World War II and was eventually posted to 170 Squadron in Hemswell, Lincolnshire. Doug was a tail-gunner and became part of a crew of seven in a Lancaster Bomber. His pilot for his 30+ missions was Owen (Scotty) Scott (DFC). During the war they shared some truly frightening and hair raising exploits in missions over enemy territory.

On one such occasion they were approaching their target and all the bombs were armed, which meant that they would now explode on contact. It became apparent that when the shout of 'bombs away' was heard the bombs were still hung up in the bomb bay, but were no longer secure on their racks. This posed a very real threat to the lives of the crew, but also potentially to other aircraft and personnel on the ground if they made it back to base. Their control gave them very few options, one of which was to bail out over the sea and await pickup. Owen Scott was a very skilled pilot and with encouragement from his tail gunner Doug, decided that the best course of action would be to land the Lancaster back at base. After suitable preparations were made on the ground, they approached the airfield and made a classically perfect landing. As they were rolling to a stop Doug was heard to exclaim on his intercom "skipper that was the best landing you have ever made, and probably ever will."

One of the missions that Scotty and Doug were involved with was 'Operation Manna.' This initiative was to provide food to the starving people of Holland, towards the end of the war. In the late 1990's Doug and his wife Nancy were flying on KLM (Royal Dutch Airlines) to the UK for a holiday. Doug had always kept a keen interest in aviation and he asked if he could visit the cockpit, which was granted. He told the pilots and some of the crew of his time in Lancaster bombers during the war and of the relief mission they flew to Holland. Sometime later, when Doug was back in his seat, one of the cabin crew brought Doug and Nancy a bottle of Champagne with a simple message of thanks for saving her grandparents from starvation.

The solid camaraderie that was forged among the aircrews during these incredible experiences was very strong, but also quite short-lived. For those men who were lucky enough to survive this ordeal many just wanted to find peace in civilian life. At the end of the war, the aircrews dispersed with promises of staying in touch for life. As so often happens, memories dim, promises are broken, and people move on; Doug back to Canada, with his new English 'war bride,' Nancy Woolrich.

Doug was from Ste. Anne de Bellevue, Quebec, Canada a suburb of Montreal and he was the beloved husband for 65 years of Nancy; the cherished father of Peter and Michael (Diane), and a proud and loving grandfather.

Doug worked as a research technician with the Canadian Department of Agriculture for most of his working life. He was an outdoorsman, log cabin builder, keen gardener, traveler, and painter. Most of all he was a kind and gentle man, with a great sense of humour, who loved to laugh. He and his wife Nancy shared a rich life full of love.

The UK had always held strong ties for Doug's son Mike and in 1998 he relocated to England from his native Canada. Jump ahead to the summer of 2008 when Mike happened to be outside in his back garden when he heard the distinctive sound of 4 Merlin engines of an approaching propeller driven plane. Sure enough it was the last remaining Lancaster Bomber that still flies in the UK. It came right over the house, at quite a low altitude and made a lazy turn directly overhead.

This particular aircraft is part of something called the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight. Together with 2 Spitfires it makes special appearances at air shows and commemorative 'fly pasts' in the UK. There is, of course, a BBMF website and Mike felt compelled to write something in their guestbook after seeing the Lancaster so close to his home. Mike happened to be perusing this guestbook about six months later and purely by chance saw the following message:

**Calling Mike Conlon of Silkstone Common, Yorkshire. Your father Doug V Conlon was my rear gunner on Lancaster aircraft 170 squadron at Hemswell, Lincs. I was your dad's pilot for his 30+ missions. Happy to talk; call or write to Owen Scott (posted on 07 December 2008 from United Kingdom).**

When Mike saw this message he was overcome by emotion and he immediately wrote Mr. Scott a letter to let him know that he had made contact. That night Mike phoned his dad to tell him that he would soon be in touch with a man to whom he literally owed his life. Doug was also very moved by this news and within days he had spoken to Owen ('Scotty') on the phone.

It turns out that Owen had been trying to find his 'crew' for more than 60 years. He especially had wanted to contact Doug, the only Canadian in the group. He had tried many different means over the years of trying to trace everyone and he had all but given up. It was only a chance sighting of an iconic Lancaster Bomber, the posting of a message and then seeing a response that gave this story a happy ending.

Unfortunately Doug and Scotty weren't able to meet up again in person, but they were able to correspond by letter and to speak on the phone. Sadly both men have now passed away, but their memories are still kept alive through their stories and their families and friends. Mike and his wife Diane have subsequently become close friends with many members of the Scott family. They have met up on many occasions, including the Spire dedication at the IBCC (International Bomber Command Centre) and also the opening ceremony of the centre.

Mike, his wife Diane, and his brother Peter decided to commission a commemorative stone for the 'Ribbon of Remembrance' at the IBCC to remember Doug, who would have celebrated his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday this year. Mike also wrote a poem entitled 'For the Heroes.' We were given the great honour of being able to recite this poem at the funeral of Owen Scott.

At the opening ceremony of the IBCC Mike was interviewed by the videographer who put together a fantastic tribute to all the brave men who served in Bomber Command and the many people who worked tirelessly to see this project through to fruition. Mike's interview can be seen near the start of the DVD talking about the friendship that has developed between his family and the Scott family.