

BOMBER COMMAND VETS RECOGNIZED



Pictured in back row L-R: RCAF Past President #432 (Algoma) Wing Alan Fell, Sault Ste. Marie-Algoma MP Bryan Hayes, #432 Algoma Wing President Clyde Healey. In front Vets Paul Dalseg and John Burke DFC.

Two Sault Ste. Marie veterans of Bomber Command have been recognized for outstanding service during World War II.

Paul Dalseg (front left in photo) and John Burke DFC (front right) were presented Bomber Command Bars during a special ceremony at Branch 25, Sault Ste. Marie in September. Sault Ste. Marie MP Bryan Hayes presented the award on behalf of the government to the vets.

During World War II, Canada played a vital role in the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan, a collaborative effort involving Great Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

Graduates of the program formed the backbone of Bomber Command.

Many Canadians served with Royal Canadian Air Force squadrons in the No. 6 Bomber Group - the only non-British group to serve in Bomber Command.

By the end of the Second World War, 6 Group had carried out more than 40,000 sorties and approximately 8,000 members received decorations for bravery.

The Government of Canada created the Bomber Command Bar as an official honour to formally recognize these Veterans. Unfortunately many who served in Bomber Command have passed away over the years and for some that recognition has come just 'a little too late'.

During the presentation of the award, MP Hayes remarked "*From this day forward, when Canadians see your special bar, they will know you were among the approximately 50,000 Canadians who proudly served with Bomber Command,....They will know that you bravely accepted the most dangerous of missions, and that you*

prevailed against the greatest odds. This special bar will also remind Canadians that our nation paid a terrible price for victory."

John Burke DFC—Born and raised in Sault Ste. Marie, John enlisted in June 1941 and sent for pilot training to Regina. However due to depth perception problem he had to change plans and was sent to various training schools for air observer, bombing and gunnery school and astronavigation school. Sent overseas he was posted to Bournemouth England where he trained as a bomb aimer on a five-man Wellington bomber and assigned to #420 Sqd. His squadron would be sent on sorties over various targets on continental Europe.

After eight operational flights between February 1942 and April 1943, 420 SQN was posted to North Africa in preparation for the invasion of Sicily, however before those missions began, a harrowing situation developed over an airfield in Algeria. The landing gear hydraulics on John's Wellington failed after an engine ran into difficulties. He crawled into the plane's belly to help the pilot land by manually lowering the landing apparatus. The aircraft ended up crashing just short of the airfield but there were no injuries. That incident wouldn't be the last of its kind for the young Saultite.

The invasion of Sicily began on July 10, 1943, and six days later John and crew were sent to attack a Naples airport where enemy aircraft were concentrating. Enemy fire badly damaged John's aircraft and he took shrapnel in the leg. A shot up and crippled Wellington struggled to fly back to North Africa and crashed on landing. John's injuries saw him hospitalized for two months.

By early 1944, he had recovered John was assigned to a #424 Squadron flying in the Halifax, and were involved in June 1944 providing support for troops invading the coast of France during the D-Day invasion. He and his crew mates went on to fly 21 more sorties, strikes were concentrated on oil refineries, railroad marshaling yards and buzz bombing rocket sites. Awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) in November 4, 1944. The DFC is "awarded to Officers and Warrant Officers for an Act of Valour, Courage or Devotion to duty performed while flying in active operations against the enemy."

The citation for John's award read, in part: "*This Officer has successfully completed many sorties over such strongly defended targets as Wilhelmshaven, Cologne, Frankfurt and Stuttgart. In July 1943 he participated in an attack against Naples, during which he was wounded. He resumed operational flying June 1944.*"

Released from the service in October 1945, John took employment in Algoma Steel's chemical lab until he changed careers and joined the Canadian Forestry service where he worked until retirement in 1982.

PAUL DALSEG

A native of Rainy River, ON, Paul joined the Royal Canadian Air Force in September 1942 and graduated as an air gunner in July 1943. Sent overseas he was posted to the RAF, receiving further operational training in Yorkshire, Lincolnshire England before being posted to #57 Sqd. RAF in March '44.

On May 22, 1944, Paul was the mid-upper gunner on a new Lancaster that exploded in the skies over Dorkwerd, Germany. A remarkable story - referred to as "the Dorkwerd Miracle" - emerged from the ensuing circumstances.

The Lancaster had been on a bombing mission to Germany when it was attacked by an enemy night fighter. Fire broke out in the rear of the fuselage between the mid-upper gunner and the tail gunner, and dangerously close to flares and ammunition boxes. The tail gunner, Norman Wharf, tried to leave his turret to assess things and, if necessary, bail out. The hydraulically controlled door refused to open. Dropping from his position in the mid-upper turret, Paul tried unsuccessfully to open the door manually but it refused to give. Meanwhile, the possibility of an explosion grew by the second. The tail gunner urged Paul to open the side-hatch and jump to save himself. But reluctant to leave his friend trapped in the turret without a parachute and aware that opening the side-hatch would fan the blaze, Dalseg attempted to extinguish the fire but the flames were beyond control. With breathing becoming more difficult and close to losing consciousness himself, Dalseg finally opened the side-hatch and jumped. The plane exploded shortly after, splitting the Lancaster in two with the break coming immediately in front of the tail of the plane.

Incredibly, the gun-turret became the tail-gunner's parachute and landed in a water-filled ditch. The tail gunner received serious injuries but recovered in a German hospital. Meanwhile, Dalseg had made a safe parachute landing in a meadow close to Dorkwerd but sadly the remaining crew members were killed.

Captured by the Germans, Dalseg was sent to a POW camp 'Luft 7' until the great march of war prisoners to Luckenwalde Stalag 111A in the winter of '45. Liberation would come soon after and he returned to Canada. In post war years Paul Dalseg operated a Canadian Tire franchise.

—Article courtesy of Roy Eaton, District H PRO