

**Stars, Stripes, and Sacrifice:
A Wartime Familial Experience of Hope, Loss, and Grief, and
the Journey Home of an American Bomber Crew**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyses the experiences of ten American homefront families as they negotiate their loss following the fatal crash of a military aircraft near Gander in February 1945. The writer provides a brief history of Gander airport, with emphasis on American operations, followed by a biographical overview of the crew and a description of the final flight, search effort, and discovery. The writer assesses the phenomena of wartime rumours, both general and hope-based, and potential reasons for their transmission. The written correspondence between mothers of the crew and between next of kin and the military is analyzed for evidence of popular wartime narratives surrounding private grief and public expectations, and for evidence of the conventional state and military ideology of sacrifice, meant to give meaning to the bereaved. This thesis identifies commonalities in the overall familial experience and explains the state-controlled postwar repatriation program of America's wartime soldier dead from Newfoundland. Finally, the writer examines postwar remembrance and commemoration and their forms of expression, from grave markers and monuments to narratives inherited by family members.

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List of Abbreviations

ASV	Air-to-Surface Vessel
ATC	Air Transport Command
CPTP	Civilian Pilot Training Program
GCA	Ground Controlled Approach
GRS	Graves Registration Service
IDPF	Individual Deceased Personnel File
IFF	Identification Friend or Foe
JPAC	Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
PJBD	Permanent Joint Board on Defence
QMC	Quartermaster Corps
RAF	Royal Air Force
RCAF	Royal Canadian Air Force
U.S.	United States
USAAF	United States Army Air Forces

A Mother's Prayer

Dear God, it seems but yesterday
Thou gave this boy to me.
The one who's many miles away,
Whose face I cannot see.

The years have swiftly come and gone,
So eager in their stride
To brush me lightly by the way,
And take him from my side.

It seems to me he's still a child
So full of boyish glee,
But pleadings of a war torn world
Have forced the man-to-be.

And now, Dear God, he's joined the ranks
Of men with silver wings,
And soon will search the heavens wide
For peace and finer things.

But O Dear Lord, if in his flight
He fails to come to me,
Please God take o'er the controls
And chart his course to thee.

A Mother (circa. 1943)



Standing left to right: Cpl. Nicholas Brando, 2nd Lt. John S. Barry, Cpl. John E. Baker, Cpl. Charles J. Parsons Jr. and 2nd Lt. Charles E. Topham Jr. Kneeling left to right: Pvt. Harry J. Karpick, Pvt. Mark G. Lantz, Cpl. John W. Tarpey, 2nd Lt. Robert E. Billings and 2nd Lt. Edmund H. Breschini. (Photo courtesy of Mary McCosker) Inset: Colonel William C. Dolan.

Chapter 1

Introduction

The present-day Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemetery, adjacent to the Trans-Canada Highway several kilometers east of Gander, Newfoundland, is the resting place of one hundred British, Canadian, and Australian Second World War soldier dead. However, by war's end in 1945 that number was significantly higher. A walk around the well-kept grounds reveals several large and conspicuous gaps between grave markers. The remains of some fifty American servicemen, the majority being airmen lost in aircraft mishaps around the airfield, once occupied these now empty plots. Military headstones are sobering reminders of past conflict, but at Gander, their absence has inadvertently concealed the actuality of death and its attendant grief.

This thesis, better defined perhaps as a case study, will examine the fatal crash of a B-24 Liberator bomber near Gander in February 1945, and analyse the experiences of ten American homefront families as they attempted to understand and negotiate their loss. Although personally unacquainted until linked by tragedy, parents of the deceased, mothers especially, but not exclusively, came to rely on one another for emotional support and as a conduit for information sharing. Their search for answers, it turned out, extended beyond the war years. The fiancées of the deceased, on the other hand, had bonded while their men were in training. Significantly, this relationship came to function as a mutual support network, especially during the weeks of hopeful anticipation when their men were first reported missing. The writer will examine the period between February 1945 and the repatriation of America's soldier dead in 1947, identifying and

exploring certain attendant themes in the familial experience of the bereaved. This study will likewise reveal commonalities, especially specific to each family's relationship, attitude, and expectations towards the War Department, and conclude by assessing forms of remembrance and memorialization in the immediate post-repatriation years to the present. Ultimately, this analysis will show that the wartime familial experience of hope, loss, and grief was shared, and not exclusive to any one participant.

Urban homefront historian Roger W. Lotchin tells us that the outstanding performance of the American military in the Second World War has been well-documented. Less appreciated, he insists, and lacking in diversity and proportionality in present literature, is the American homefront. Lotchin's own homefront historiographical assessment revealed numerous neglected subfields, mostly falling under larger themes of production, organization, engineering, and nationalism. Regrettably, but forgivable since the topics are vast, Lotchin gives but passing and indirect attention to themes surrounding familial experiences as they negotiated the death or disappearance of a loved one on active duty. Still, this in no way invalidates the key conundrum that, in Lotchin's words, "The American homefront has been largely reduced to the tale of an especially narrow group of participants."¹

A review of published material on homefront America supports this claim. Homefront histories tend to focus on the mobilization of the workforce, especially the critical role played by women in war-related industry, or on those women who chose military service, volunteerism, or housewifery, with its attendant wartime responsibilities.

¹ Roger W. Lotchin, "Turning the Good War Bad?: Historians and the World War II Urban Homefront," *Journal of Urban History*, 33, 2 (January 2007): 172.

Other works reveal themselves as discourses in homefront social history, focussing on minorities, race, class, ethnicity, politics, and Hollywood. Scant literature exists about families burdened by loss and grief and whose wartime participation is better defined as latent or sacrificial. Indeed, in its one chapter on the homefront, Judy Litoff and David Smith's *American Women in a World at War: Contemporary Accounts From World War II*, offered but five trite sentences on the subject. Other literature specific to women at war is equally dismissive.

The study of wartime families is commonly limited to themes surrounding births, juvenile delinquency, and the "rush to the altar," says Karen Anderson in her work on women, sex roles and family relations, as many young women adopted the wartime strategy, "get your man while you can."² Doris Weatherford's expansive *American Women and World War II*, offers a passing but revealing assessment of mothers and widows, noting that present literature on combat death is aimed mostly at widows.³ Moreover, such works all but ignore the experiences of fiancées and girlfriends. Likewise does Emily Yellin offer but a terse reminder of wartime sacrifice in *Our Mothers' War: American Women at Home and at the Front During World War II*. Carol Acton's seminal *Grief in Wartime: Private Pain, Public Discourse* is an exception to these works and focusses on the lived experience of wartime loss and its gendered representations. These academic works are consistent with contemporary approaches to history writing that focus on the interaction of war and society, still often identified under its older label, the

² Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women During World War II* (Westport, Connecticut and London, England: Greenwood Press, 1981), 76-77.

³ Doris Weatherford, *American Women and World War II* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 1990), 299.

“new military history,” and from which studies continue to emerge on previously unexplored areas such as wartime civilian life in general.

Significantly, Acton explores how public narratives on bereavement behaviour, dominant in wartime and manipulated by media and government propaganda, came to shape and control the private experience of grief and its expression. The established narrative in First World War Britain saw the male soldier’s battlefield death as glorious; an heroic sacrifice for “King and Country.” On the homefront, the wartime adage, “for women must weep,” and the juxtaposed imagery of men dying in battle and a woman weeping, reflected “the conventional stereotype of women’s role in war as passive and men’s as active,” Acton contends. Such imagery, she adds, revealed another more important wartime narrative: “the woman who waits and weeps, and potentially mourns, is glamourized and given an elevated status as her emotions are set against the image of combat.”⁴ The salient theme here is sacrifice, or self-sacrifice, as the woman sacrifices through the man, sending him to war and possible death. First World War British rhetoric, whether in print form or from the pulpit, positioned the woman as sacrificial mourner, courageously yielding to public insistence for stoic acceptance.

So how does a warring nation galvanize public support for the wholesale slaughter of its young men and women? It does not ask for consent, it manufactures it. A wartime culture shapes and controls emotions of bereavement and constructs “grief and mourning behaviour in a way that supports rather than undermines the state’s pursuit of war aims.” Indeed, as Acton again points out, the rhetoric surrounding “both combatant death and the

⁴ Carol Acton, *Grief in Wartime: Private Pain, Public Discourse* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 18.

conduct of the bereaved have played an important role in the manufacture of consent in twentieth-century war in Britain and the United States.”⁵ Notwithstanding its scholarly contributions to the subject, Acton predicated her assessment of First World War grief narratives predominantly on British sources. Moreover, when she included the United States as a wartime manufacturer of consent, she speaks mostly of her research on the American experience in Vietnam and Iraq. Her work on Second World War grief narratives is, again, largely a British perspective. However, she did identify parallels with their American counterparts on grief, silences, and public expectations, revealed in the written correspondence of but one American woman. This hardly qualifies as a representative sampling of America’s homefront wives; nor does it speak of the bereaved mothers, fathers, siblings, fiancées and girlfriends. Furthermore, if letters were a medium by which to express grief in the first war, the opposite applied in the second. In the interests of morale, says Litoff and Smith, magazine articles warned despondent service wives against writing their husbands, instead urging them in a patronizing manner to take their “tears to a stirring movie where you can really let yourself go. Then when you have got it all out of your system, go home and write your husband the swellest letter, with not a hint of sob in it.”⁶

As regards to direct enemy contact, the American and British homefronts were vastly dissimilar. German bombers did not blitz American cities; yet, narratives did exist on the American homefront. The evolution of America’s wartime narratives is the focus of Ana

⁵ Acton, *Grief in Wartime*, 2.

⁶ Judy Barrett Litoff and David C Smith, ““Will He Get My Letter?”: Popular Portrayals of Mail and Morale During World War II,” *Journal of Popular Culture*, 23, 4 (Spring 1990): 24-26.

Garner and Karen Slattery, associate professors of journalism and media studies at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. In their journal article on the mobilization of maternal sacrifice in the First World War, they identified two cultural archetypes in America, the good mother, who in peacetime “protects her child from harm and nurtures the child psychologically and socially,” and the patriotic mother, who in wartime, “supports the war effort and her child’s role in it.” She is willing to sacrifice her child and remains “stoic and silent about the personal costs involved.”⁷

The Second World War witnessed significant change in gender roles as women revolutionized the workforce and served in larger than ever numbers in the armed forces. War work took precedence over mourning and official rhetoric encouraged the silencing of private pain. Public discourse held that death was the price of victory, while popular culture (radio, film, music and magazines) “conveyed the same sanguine message” to Americans about the war.⁸ Still, maternal expectations changed little and cultural archetypes carried over from the first war. In their journal article, “The World War II Patriotic Mother: A Cultural Ideal in the U.S. Press,” Garner and Slattery restated their definition of the good mother and patriotic mother archetypes. Their research identified wartime news narratives as cultural mythmakers, positioning the mother as patriotic citizen and “providing symbolic cues about who and what to value and how to behave.” Significantly, news narratives formed a metanarrative that transformed a mother’s sacrifice, unacceptable in peacetime, into a regrettable but acceptable and justifiable

⁷ Ana C. Garner and Karen Slattery, “World War I and the Mobilization of Maternal Sacrifice: Considerations for Peace Politics,” *Journal for the Study of Peace and Conflict*, (2009/2010): 46.

⁸ Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 180.

wartime necessity because it served a great and noble cause. Ultimately, news stories accentuated the positive virtues of the patriotic mother, but in the interests of public morale, revealed little of their private pain in times of loss. As well, the government reinforced the notion of the “good death” by symbolically honouring the mothers of soldiers killed in combat by “awarding them gold star medals and flags as reminders of their country’s appreciation.” Again, in keeping with First World War narratives, and because the wartime culture controlled her mourning, public expectations held that mothers accept these honours in silence.⁹

For the families of the crew lost near Gander, confirmation of their loss came from the War Department within a month. Yet, for a short while they remained hopeful, sustained at times by rumours. Still, every rumour that circulated between the families had its origins; sources presumably outside the family circle, either public or military. The eventual discovery of the missing bomber and its deceased crew induced new rumours. Indeed, as years passed, memories and stories of the mishap and subsequent events, some unchanged and others distorted or modified, became part of family lore; its narrative inheritance as it were. The postwar repatriation program that saw the return of America’s soldier dead, likewise became part of each family’s immediate postwar experience, and its narrative inheritance. Moreover, and significant to the ensuing analysis, from the time of death until the conclusion of the repatriation program, military process and procedure controlled the bodies of its soldier dead, and as such, controlled the mourning process.

⁹ Ana C. Garner and Karen Slattery, “The World War II Patriot Mother: A Cultural Ideal in the U.S. Press,” *Journalism Studies*, 11, 2 (2010): 145, 148, 150.

The Individual Deceased Personnel Files (IDPF), a casualty file created by the military post-mortem and documenting all actions pertaining to the disposition of the remains, provides a framework or historical methodology through which the writer can explain the repatriation program and explore its procedures for evidence of state practices aimed at controlling the mourning process. Of added significance, IDPFs contain correspondence between the military and family members of the deceased, some predating the repatriation program announcement; valuable evidence for interpreting the familial experience surrounding loss and bereavement in wartime. Moreover, they can reveal something of each family's pre-repatriation program expectations and wishes regarding the disposition of their loved ones' remains, and the importance both they and the War Department placed on the return of each airman's personal items. Likewise are IDPFs useful as surrogate material for military personnel files lost in 1973 when a fire broke out at the Military Personnel Records Center in St. Louis, Missouri. Of the center's approximately twenty-two million army and air force personnel files, roughly sixteen to eighteen million dating between 1912 and 1963 were destroyed.¹⁰ Consequently, researchers of military service personnel, especially wartime casualties, must take a piecemeal approach and consult hometown newspapers, family members, unit histories and war diaries, unit alumni associations, and IDPFs.

Nine of the ten airmen lost near Gander had no overseas combat experience, which further limits research resource options. In some cases, the IDPF will be the most important record that exists. The IDPFs for the ten airmen lost near Gander thus have a

¹⁰ Marta G. O'Neill and William Seibert, "Burnt in Memory: Looking Back, Looking Forward at the 1973 St. Louis Fire," *Prologue* (Spring 2013): 28-29.

multi-dimensional function as interpretative evidence, as do the letters written between family members of the crew in the wake of the tragedy. The letters obtained to date are not parentally specific, although weighted more towards mothers, with a lesser number from wives and fiancées, and revealing each writer's personal anxieties, character, behaviour, and beliefs. Likewise were they a medium by which to transmit information, or misinformation as it turns out, which magnified the confusion and heightened the anxiety of family members. Moreover, if mothers faced grief in silence, they were hardly so when describing their sons. Just as letters conveyed the bad, they allowed mothers the opportunity to speak candidly of their deceased loved ones, and in prose that underscored their virtuous characteristics. Ultimately, however, the letters are especially useful as evaluative evidence, revealing commonalities in the collective familial experience.

Frustrated by distance, uncertainty, and military bureaucracy, buoyed by hopeful rumours and maternal instinct, and ultimately grief stricken by their confirmed loss, events at Gander deeply affected ten American homefront families. In evaluating their experiences, numerous attendant questions arise covering a multiplicity of themes best categorized under three larger headings: family, the military, and the public. Does the written correspondence reveal popular wartime narratives surrounding private grief and public expectations, and the good mother versus patriotic mother as defined by Garner and Slattery? What role did rumour play in the familial experience, and in sustaining hope? Is there evidence of the conventional state and military ideology of sacrifice, intended to manufacture consent and give meaning to the bereaved, and did families resist or acquiesce to state control of their mourning? Were there commonalities in the physical and psychological experiences of the bereaved? If wartime grief narratives existed around

the conduct of mothers, was there an equivalent for fathers, wives, fiancées, or girlfriends? How did they negotiate their loss? Did they simply erase their painful memories and move on with their lives? The interplay revealed in the written correspondence between the mothers, fathers, wives, and fiancées of the crew and between next of kin and the military, is crucial to answering these questions. Finally, the Second World War left America to address contentious questions surrounding memorialization. Commemoration of the crew lost near Gander saw expression in various forms, from a simple grave marker to elaborate state and national memorials. This, and verbal remembrance in the form of the narrative inheritance, will be briefly assessed in the final chapter, with the aim of shedding light on the memorial debate and narrative distortion and possible reasons for their present form.

The body of scholarly literature on homefront familial experiences in Second World War America is lacking. Indeed, homefront historian Roger Lotchin acknowledged as much, noting that to date (2007), historians had produced only one such book-length study.¹¹ Second World War American casualties exceeded 400,000, with a corresponding number of grieving mothers and fathers and an appreciable number of grieving wives, fiancées, and girlfriends. Surely there are more stories to be told. Still, scholarly discourse has not ignored the socioeconomic implications of the so-called American “friendly invasion” of Newfoundland and Labrador. The significance and breadth of American wartime air force operations, on the other hand, has received little attention, despite the plethora of published material on the American military in general in the Second World

¹¹ Lotchin, “Turning the Good War Bad?”: 180.

War. Indeed, Gander's collective memory and commemorative efforts have focussed predominantly on the important work of the Royal Air Force (RAF) Ferry Command, thus overshadowing American operations, while the postwar repatriation program remains a little known aspect of this province's history. Few are aware that hundreds of U.S. soldier dead once rested in cemeteries throughout the island and in Labrador. The writer therefore aims to draw attention to certain neglected aspects of both America's homefront history and ours, and to illustrate how one tragic homefront event came to affect ten American families on another.

Chapter 2

Gander: Allied Crossroads

Former federal and provincial politician and wartime radio broadcaster Don Jamieson remarked, “In some respects, Newfoundland's greatest contribution to the war effort lay simply in being there.”¹² Notwithstanding the contributions by its men and women in uniform, Jamieson may not be far off the mark. Politically, a Commission of Government had administered Newfoundland since 1934, consisting of six commissioners and a governor as chair, appointed by the British government and answerable to the Dominions Office. This political arrangement remained in place throughout the war years, which saw Newfoundland and Labrador, and Gander in particular, develop as a geographically strategic location for military transatlantic aviation. Development of the airfield, initially called Newfoundland Airport (hereafter referred to as Gander for consistency), and nearby Botwood seaplane base, came about at the 1935 Ottawa Conference following discussions on transatlantic aviation between the United Kingdom, Canada, Newfoundland, and the Irish Free State. Interest among other European nations in transatlantic flying, stressed the conference report, compelled “the British Commonwealth to decide what part they were to take, and to make definite plans for the future.”¹³ The attending nation governments ultimately agreed to cooperate in a

¹² Don Jamieson, *No Place for Fools: The Political Memoirs of Don Jamieson* (St. John's, Breakwater Books, 1989), 30.

¹³ “Ottawa Conference Report 1935-1936,” GN 4/5, Public Works and Services, Civil Aviation, box 1, file AG/2, The Rooms Provincial Archives (The Rooms). At the Imperial Economic Conference in Ottawa in 1932, these same commonwealth nations agreed to form a committee to explore a commercial transatlantic air service. Attendees saw the 1935 conference as a natural sequence to the work of this committee.

“programme of development of a transatlantic air service,” involving survey, experimental flights, and ultimately the establishment of a regular service.¹⁴

It happened that surveys for a suitable flying boat base and land aerodrome in Newfoundland had begun several months before the Ottawa conference. “The primary need was for a seaplane base,” pointed out historian Peter Neary, “since for the moment flying boats offered the only practical means of introducing a scheduled transatlantic service.” Following the survey work, Ivor McClure and Maurice Banks, visiting British officials from the Department of Civil Aviation, recommended the seaport town of Botwood as a principal seaplane terminal. Beginning in July 1937, the port having been equipped with moorings, buoys, control launches, petrol, and accommodations for ground engineers and crews, flying boats of Imperial Airways and Pan American Airlines completed a series of successful experimental overseas flights via Botwood, so that by 1939, scheduled mail and passenger flights were spanning the Atlantic.¹⁵

The progenitors of the conference agreement also proposed to experiment with long-range land-based aircraft, still under development, and for this, McClure and Banks recommended a heavily wooded plateau on the north shore of Gander Lake. The site, conveniently located adjacent the railway, also boasted relatively good, fog-free weather, but most importantly, lay on the great circle route, the shortest geographic air route from

¹⁴ Ibid., “Trans-Atlantic Air Service,” Ottawa, 2 December 1935. Addendum to “Discussions on Transatlantic Air Services, Ottawa, November-December 1935, Minutes of Final Meeting,” prepared by Squadron Leader A.T. Cowley, Secretary.

¹⁵ Peter Neary, *Newfoundland in the North Atlantic World, 1929-1949* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1988) 110, 112-113; Malcolm MacDonald, Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, to Sir Humphrey Walwyn, Newfoundland Governor, 7 June 1937, GN 4/5, Box 1, file AG/16, The Rooms. Neary also notes that conference representatives, excluding Newfoundland, had previously reached an understanding with the U.S. on reciprocal landing rights.

eastern North America to Europe.¹⁶ Construction of the airfield, a joint undertaking by Newfoundland and Great Britain, began in 1936. When war broke out in Europe three years later the airfield boasted four hard-surfaced runways, one large hangar, a control tower, quarters for married officials, a staff house with fifty single bedrooms, thousands of gallons of gasoline, and complete wireless telegraphy, direction finding, and meteorological equipment.¹⁷

Gander's significant wartime role came fortuitously; indeed, in 1939 its future lay very much in doubt. The airport landing register shows that the primary activity that year was upper air meteorological observation and data collection. Each day, weather permitting, pilots Douglas Fraser, Clifford Kent, and Donald McGregor, took aloft the Newfoundland government's Fox Moth (VO-ADE) or Fairchild 71C (VO-AFG),¹⁸ measuring atmospheric properties with a meteorograph and strut psychrometer. These observations, reported the *Evening Telegram* at the time, "gave the only information available on the structure of the 'fronts' moving out over the Atlantic, [and] the associated icing conditions and cloud systems."¹⁹ The work of Fraser, Kent and McGregor marked "the first time we knew anything about what went on" ten to twenty-

¹⁶ Neary, *Newfoundland in the North Atlantic World*, 111.

¹⁷ Paul Bridle, editor, *Documents on Relations Between Canada and Newfoundland, Vol. 1, 1935-1949, Defence, Civil Aviation and Economic Affairs* (Ottawa: Department of External Affairs, 1974), 77-78, Air Officer Commanding (AOC), Eastern Air Command, to Secretary, Department of National Defence (DND), 19 May 1940.

¹⁸ Landing register, Newfoundland Airport, Department of National Defence Directorate of History and Heritage (DHH).

¹⁹ "Trans-Atlantic Meteorology," *The Evening Telegram*, 26 May 1938. In January 1938, Douglas Fraser piloted the first plane to land at Gander, ski-equipped Fox Moth VO-ADE.

five thousand feet above Newfoundland, remarked Dr. Patrick McTaggart-Cowan, head of Gander's meteorological section.²⁰

By year's end, the airfield had yet to receive an aircraft on the transatlantic service as the landplanes were not ready and their construction now halted due to the war, reported the Dominions Office.²¹ Nor had the airfield received many visitors, save Swedish-American Charles Bachman, piloting the first aircraft to arrive from abroad, and a couple of curious American vacationers. The twenty-five year old Bachman, delivering a Monocoupe 90A to his native Sweden, refueled and made history as the first aircraft to depart Gander on a transatlantic flight. He was never heard from again.²² The only other aerial activity in 1939 saw two British Handley Page Harrow tanker aircraft arrive in May to conduct mid-air refueling trials in conjunction with Imperial Airways' transatlantic flying boat service at Botwood, but even that service shut down in October. "To fly the North Atlantic later than that," explained historian Carl Christie, "was considered too hazardous."

"At the outbreak of war," says Christie, "transatlantic flying attracted no military interest."²³ Nor did Gander, suggests McTaggart-Cowan, having "received instructions from Ottawa to close down the meteorological section, because it wouldn't be used." Likewise, he claims, Ottawa sent instructions to mine the runways, lest they fall into

²⁰ "Address by Dr. P.D. McTaggart-Cowan on Early Trans-Atlantic Aviation in Newfoundland," 18 November 1945, 6-7, DHH, DHist 80/350.

²¹ Bridle, *Documents on Relations*, 53-54, Dominions Secretary to Governor of Newfoundland, 6 November 1939.

²² Landing register, Newfoundland Airport, DHH. An RCAF Norseman and British naval Walrus aircraft also visited Gander that year, but landed on Gander Lake.

²³ Carl Christie, *Ocean Bridge: The History of RAF Ferry Command* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 23.

German hands,²⁴ putting enemy aircraft within striking distance of the Maritimes and shipping through the Strait of Belle Isle and Cabot Strait.²⁵ As it then stood, Gander was less an asset than a liability, but by mid-1940 that thinking had changed. Recognizing the implications of enemy control of the airfield, railway, and Botwood seaplane base, and with Britain focussed on its own survival and Newfoundland Governor Walwyn raising alarms over “the defenceless condition of this country,”²⁶ Britain allowed Canada to send a detachment of Digby patrol bombers to Gander for general reconnaissance and local air defence. More Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) anti-submarine squadrons followed as the war progressed, but for the time being at least, the airport remained under local control, with Squadron Leader Harold A.L. Pattison, RAF (retired) at Gander as Newfoundland government air representative. Significantly, foretold the air officer commanding, Eastern Air Command, Halifax, in a secret communique to the Canadian Department of National Defence, the airfield “may be of paramount importance to the Allied War Effort [sic] as the main aerodrome on this side of the Atlantic from which to dispatch” aircraft for delivery by air to England.²⁷ This indeed came to fruition, with the first experimental ferry flights dispatched from Gander before year’s end by the later named RAF Ferry Command. It was dangerous work, but by war’s end, Ferry Command had safely delivered more than ten thousand aircraft.²⁸

²⁴ “Address by Dr. P.D. McTaggart-Cowan on Early Trans-Atlantic Aviation in Newfoundland,” 18 November 1945, 23. DHH, DHist 80/350.

²⁵ Bridle, *Documents on Relations*, 77-78, AOC to DND, 19 May 1940.

²⁶ Ibid., 76, Governor of Newfoundland to Dominions Secretary, 26 May 1940.

²⁷ Ibid., 77-78, AOC to DND, 19 May 1940.

²⁸ Christie, *Ocean Bridge*, 305.

The fall of France in June 1940 and the possibility of British defeat, worried U.S. President Roosevelt that Germany might eventually challenge North American security. In response to this potential threat, Roosevelt and Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King met at Ogdensburg, New York, on 17 August 1940 to discuss bilateral problems of defence, and U.S. interest in establishing bases in Newfoundland. Their discussions on defence cooperation produced the Ogdensburg Agreement and the creation of the Canadian-American Permanent Joint Board on Defence (PJBD) to study land, sea and air problems, and to “consider in the broad sense the defence of the north half of the Western Hemisphere.”²⁹ As a preparatory step in the defence of Newfoundland, the board in its first meeting, held in Ottawa on 26 August, recommended “selecting and preparing, as soon as practicable, bases permitting the operation of United States aircraft, when and if circumstances require.”³⁰ The destroyers-for-bases deal between Britain and the United States in September 1940 made this a reality. In exchange for fifty over-aged destroyers, Britain promised to make available to the United States base sites in Newfoundland, and to secure for them, “freely and without consideration,” the lease to these sites.³¹ The agreement precipitated immediate survey work and construction, even before the two countries signed the leases, of a naval operating base and naval air station at Argentia, an army base at adjacent Marquise, an army base at St. John’s, and an air base near Stephenville.³²

²⁹ Bridle, *Documents on Relations*, 1406, A.D.P. Heeney, Clerk of the Privy Council, Order in Council, 21 August 1940.

³⁰ Ibid., 219-221, PJBD, Journal of Discussions and Decisions, 26 August 1940.

³¹ Neary, *Newfoundland in the North Atlantic World*, 135.

³² Colonel Stanley W Dziuban, *Military Relations Between the United States and Canada 1939-1945* (Washington: Center of Military History of the U.S. Army, 1959), 166.

Still, explains military historian Stanley W. Dziuban, the U.S. Army desired to establish an air garrison on the island before completion of an airfield on one of the base sites. The president, however, had earlier rejected an appeal by the U.S. Air Corps to include Gander, presently Newfoundland's only operational airfield, as one of the leased areas. The War Department therefore "renewed its request on 28 November 1940, this time for the lease of land adjacent to the airport so that it could be used for urgently needed training of a composite group of U.S. Army aircraft."³³ At a PJBD meeting in New York on 17 December 1940, members of the U.S. section put forward their preferred idea of a lease, and an alternative of having Canada provide the facilities on an informal basis for operational training. The Canadian government, then in discussions with Newfoundland to have the RCAF assume control of Gander, and not wishing "to have any permanent U.S. establishment at or near the airport," rejected the lease proposal. They preferred instead the alternative, and further agreed to incur the cost of erecting additional buildings.³⁴ The president approved the arrangement, says Dziuban, but with the caveat that the pending leased bases agreement include "appropriate language ... to provide for the status of forces stationed outside the areas of the leased bases." On 27 March 1941, following weeks of negotiations, with jurisdictional matters presenting a major obstacle, British and American officials formalized the Leased Bases Agreement. Among its thirty-one articles, the lease granted the U.S., "All the rights, power, and authority within the leased areas necessary for the establishment, use, operation, and

³³ Dziuban, *Military Relations*, 96.

³⁴ Bridle, *Documents on Relations*, 410-411, 417, PJBD, Journal of Discussions and Decisions, 17 December 1940, and Minutes of Meeting of Cabinet War Committee, 18 December 1940.

defence thereof, or appropriate for their control.”³⁵ The president’s caveat, suggests Dziuban, was the genesis of Article XIX in the agreement, which gave U.S. forces stationed or operating outside the leased areas the same rights and status as those stationed within the leased areas.³⁶

The proposal to dispatch U.S. aircraft and air force personnel to Gander, and Canada’s willingness to accommodate them, effectively ignored the fact that Newfoundland still controlled the airport. Indeed, such actions had convinced Newfoundland Commissioner for Public Utilities, Sir Wilfred Woods, that Canadian and American authorities were acting upon the assumption that Gander was “theirs to use and develop as they think fit,” without the governments of Newfoundland and the United Kingdom “having much say in the matter.”³⁷ Newfoundland, displeased with the lack of consultation, despite an agreed protocol with the U.S. that allowed participation in discussions involving defence considerations, complained to the Dominions Office “that they have been and still are insufficiently in touch with the activities of the Joint Defence Board.”³⁸ The PJBD reconciled by inviting Newfoundland government commissioners J.H. Penson and L.E. Emerson to participate in the board’s next meeting, held in Montreal on 17 April 1941.³⁹ The same day, following a conference that began at Gander on 7 April, Newfoundland formally transferred control of the airport and responsibility for its operation to Canada for the duration of the war. Canada also secured a lease on the lands

³⁵ Dziuban, *Military Relations*, 96, 166-167.

³⁶ Ibid., 96; Bridle, *Documents on Relations*, 1401, Leased Bases Agreement, 27 March 1941.

³⁷ Bridle, *Documents on Relations*, 422, Memorandum from Commissioner for Public Utilities to Newfoundland Commission of Government, 8 March 1941.

³⁸ Ibid., 231-232, Dominions Secretary to High Commissioner of Great Britain, 28 March 1941.

³⁹ Ibid., 232-233. PJBD, Journal of Discussions and Decisions, 16 and 17 April 1941.

occupied by hangars and other structures constructed for the RCAF at Canadian government expense.⁴⁰

Also in April, the British government gave permission for U.S. air forces to use Gander, and with Canada having prepared housing and other facilities, the 21st Reconnaissance Squadron arrived the following month.⁴¹ The squadron, its intelligence officer none other than Captain Elliot Roosevelt, son of the president, represented the first U.S. air unit deployed to Newfoundland, and its arrival marked the formation of the Newfoundland Army Air Base at Gander. As the American base historian pointed out, it made for a unique arrangement, with U.S. forces occupying Gander essentially as guests of the Canadians. The frictions inherent with “two families living in the same house,” as one U.S. official phrased it, were generally solved by local agreements, or referred to the PJBD if beyond the jurisdiction of officers in Newfoundland, while Article XIX allowed the Leased Bases Agreement to be applied to certain problems.⁴²

When the U.S. entered the war seven months later, aerial activity intensified dramatically. Added strength began to arrive and facilities in the American sector of the field were expanded to accommodate overseas ferrying operations. Infrastructure on the “American side,” as it came to be called, was vast and a community within itself. The buildings, Canadian-owned and built by the Atlas Construction Company, came to include ten aircraft hangars, a hospital, chapel, theatre, post office, bank, bowling alley,

⁴⁰ Ibid., 1409, 1411, Memorandum of Agreement between Canada and Newfoundland Respecting the Transfer of Air Bases, 17 April 1941.

⁴¹ Dziuban, *Military Relations*, 98, 183. In March 1941, an American weather and communications detachment arrived at Gander, preceding the first U.S. air unit (see Dziuban, 190).

⁴² Early History of the 1387th Army Air Forces Base Unit (AAFBU), Vol. 1, May 1941-June 1944, 14, 15, 18, microfilm A0163, Air Force Historical Research Agency, Maxwell AFB, Alabama (AFHRA); Dziuban, *Military Relations*, 314.

library, recreation building, athletic fields, parade grounds, a parachute drying tower, and messing facilities and quarters for one thousand officers and 2,700 enlisted men.⁴³

The first major overseas movement of combat aircraft through Gander, code name Bolero, got underway in late summer 1942 with the buildup in the United Kingdom of the American Eighth Air Force, its combat units tasked with strategic daylight bombing operations over Western Europe. As the staging point for the northeast ferry route, explained General Harold L. George, Commanding General, Air Transport Command (ATC), the unit tasked with aircraft ferrying, Gander's mission was to clear all ferried aircraft, which entailed briefing of flight crews, communications, weather forecasting, and aircraft servicing and maintenance. By December 1943, nearly eighteen hundred B-17 Flying Fortresses and B-24 Liberator heavy bombers had been dispatched overseas, the majority staged through Gander and a small percentage by way of Goose Bay.⁴⁴ Indeed, the RCAF station diary for Gander tells of one busy day in April 1943 when eighty-five B-17s landed en route to the United Kingdom. Among the visiting personnel was Hollywood actor-turned-air gunner, Clark Gable.⁴⁵

As ferrying operations evolved, the American crews transiting Gander came to be comprised of three sorts. Writing on the history of the North Atlantic route, air force historian John D. Carter explained, "approximately 27 per cent of all planes delivered were flown by members of established tactical organizations, notably heavy- and

⁴³ Early History of the 1387th AAFBU, 35, 37, 118-119; The Third Period: "The Established NAD-ATC Base," January-June 1944, 168, microfilm A0163, AFHRA.

⁴⁴ Early History of the 1387th AAFBU, 81-84.

⁴⁵ RCAF Station Gander Operations Record Book (ORB) Daily Diary, entry for 15 April 1943, microfilm C-12186, Library and Archives Canada (LAC).

medium-bomber groups destined to see service with the VIII Bomber Command [the heavy bombardment arm of the Eighth Air Force]. Thirty-eight per cent of the deliveries were made by replacement crews, that is, by crews intended for combat service in some tactical organization of the Eighth Air Force.” For security reasons the specifics of their posting was generally revealed in sealed assignment orders, opened upon leaving American air space. “The remaining 35 percent were delivered by ATC's Ferrying Division crews, who, after arrival in the U.K., returned to their home bases for new ferrying assignments.”⁴⁶

When the winter of 1943-1944 began, Gander was better prepared operationally, having improved its aerodrome facilities, weather forecasting, communications and maintenance. These improvements, along with the “experience gained during the previous winters ... helped make flights over the North Atlantic in mid-winter practical.” Winter storms slowed overseas traffic, but did not halt aircraft movements entirely as had happened the previous January and February.⁴⁷ The year 1944 also brought organizational change with the ATC assuming control of most American units at Gander. The U.S. sector became the 1387th Army Air Forces Base Unit of the North Atlantic Division, ATC, but otherwise, the task of supporting the overseas movement of aircraft and aircrews remained unchanged.⁴⁸

Air traffic during the first six months of 1944 broke all previous records with Gander dispatching more than one thousand bombers. During this movement, the base

⁴⁶ Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate, editors, *The Army Air Forces in World War II, Vol. VII, Services Around the World* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 99.

⁴⁷ Early History of the 1387th AAFBU, 90.

⁴⁸ The Third Period, 140-142.

accommodated 11,500 transient air personnel.⁴⁹ July was a peak month for ferrying as more than five hundred B-17s and B-24s transited the base, which meant accommodating roughly five thousand transients. Indeed, on one July day, Gander dispatched 140 of that number in a twenty-four-hour period, representing one aircraft every ten minutes for twenty-four hours straight departing for overseas. The last half of 1944 saw no let-up in ferrying operations with upwards of two thousand bombers serviced and dispatched by Gander operations.⁵⁰

With so much aerial activity, accidents and fatalities were an unfortunate reality. The need for a military cemetery at Gander became apparent following the fatal crash of one of the RCAF's Digby's in July 1941.⁵¹ The few casualties prior to then, most notably those from a Hudson bomber ferrying mishap that claimed the life of Sir Frederick Banting, co-discoverer of insulin, were flown to mainland Canada for burial.⁵² It happened that the Digby accident coincided with a visit by Sydney L. de Carteret, Canadian Deputy Minister of National Defense (Air), so he, together with Squadron Leader Harold Pattison, selected the present-day cemetery site.⁵³ Likely the first American personnel buried at Gander were from an American Export Airlines VS-44 flying boat crash in Botwood harbour in October 1942. From 1943 to 1945, forty air force

⁴⁹ Ibid., 153-158, 160.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 9-10; also post history entries for August and December 1944, 9 and 21, respectively. Bomber departures in July totaled 554 and 589 in August, although the latter figure likely included a small number of cargo aircraft. Post entries for September to November provide no figures for bomber deliveries, while the post entry for December recorded 203 departures. The RCAF ORB Daily Diary for Gander also recorded weekly departures of American B-24 and B-17 aircraft. Although incomplete, departures for September to November total no less than 641. C-12186, LAC.

⁵¹ RCAF Station Gander ORB Daily Diary, entry for 27 July 1941, C-12186, LAC.

⁵² Christie, *Ocean Bridge*, 72.

⁵³ Squadron Leader H.A.L. Pattison to Newfoundland secretary for Public Works, 10 February 1944, GN 38, Public Utilities, box S 5-1-3, file 21, The Rooms; RCAF Station Gander ORB Daily Diary, entry for 27 July 1941, C-12186, LAC.

personnel from five heavy bomber accidents around the airfield were interred at Gander, while no less than ninety airmen disappeared over the North Atlantic after take-off.⁵⁴

Early in 1944, the Canadians and British discontinued using Gander cemetery for the remainder of the war. In correspondence with the Newfoundland government secretary for public works, Pattison revealed that there were “no terms in the agreement between ourselves [Newfoundland] and the Canadian Government with regard to the plot of land now being used.” Canadian authorities had decided to hold future burials in St. John’s and were considering transferring after the war the remains at Gander “to whatever future plot they may obtain,” which turned out to be the Joint Services cemetery (later amalgamated with Mount Pleasant Cemetery). Pattison recommended against the removal of any remains, arguing that it “might cause distress to relatives.” Besides, he added, “the site is pleasantly situated and with care in maintenance we need not fear any adverse feelings of relatives.”⁵⁵ Canadian authorities ultimately shared Pattison’s view, but they did discontinue using the cemetery after February 1944. The Americans, on the other hand, continued using Gander cemetery until war’s end.

By January 1945, the Allies had achieved complete air superiority in the skies over the collapsing German Reich. Still, this did not obviate the need for replacement aircraft and aircrews to continue the Eighth Air Force’s bombing campaign, and new technology to prosecute the air war. The first month of the new year witnessed a slow-down in air

⁵⁴ No specific source exists for these figures. This is a cumulative conclusion, based on the writer’s examination of base unit histories, operations record books, and daily diaries, both USAAF and RCAF and specific to Newfoundland and Labrador, and USAAF Missing Air Crew Reports and accident reports.

⁵⁵ Pattison to secretary for Public Works, 10 February 1944, as above, *The Rooms*. The exceptions were the burials of two Ferry Command personnel of long-standing with the Gander detachment, killed in May 1945, and members of an RCAF Hudson bomber, missing in 1943 and located in 1948.

traffic with sixty bombers dispatched,⁵⁶ but activity picked up in February, eventually tripling January's delivery numbers. On 13 February, Gander cleared forty-seven combat aircraft, B-24s and B-17s, to the United Kingdom and the Azores, "the largest single dispatch ever made under winter conditions," boasted the post historian.⁵⁷ The next day, a lone B-24 Liberator bomber, likewise bound for overseas, rumbled towards Gander, carrying a nine-man combat replacement crew and piloted by Colonel William C. Dolan.

⁵⁶ 1st Lt. Leo A. Beaupre, post historian, 1387th AAFBU, post history for January 1945, 25, microfilm A0163, AFHRA.

⁵⁷ Ibid., post history for February 1945, 19-20.

Chapter 3

The Crew

Thirty-seven year old Colonel Dolan, a native of Superior, Wisconsin, and a career military man, joined the Air Corps (then a branch for Army aviation) in April 1928 and attended his first aviation school. By year's end, he had begun training at the Primary Flying School at March Field in Riverside, California.⁵⁸ Following graduation (with honours) in June 1929, Dolan and fifty-six fellow flying cadets, including future general Curtis E. LeMay, set out for Kelly Field in San Antonio, Texas, to attend Advanced Flying School.⁵⁹ Dolan completed a four-month Pursuit (fighter) Flying Course and graduated as a pursuit pilot, receiving his wings as a member of the largest class of flying students from the Advanced Flying School at Kelly Field since the end of the First World War. He was also among the flying cadets to accept assignment to active duty in the Air Corps Reserve. The next stop for newly commissioned reserve officer 2nd Lieutenant Dolan was Marshall Field, Fort Riley, Kansas.⁶⁰ Incidentally, the day after graduation at Kelly Field, reported the *Air Corps News Letter* in November 1929, "Dolan married Miss Inez Koehler of San Antonio. The couple took two weeks' leave to acquaint themselves with the new routine of married life before taking up their residence in Junction City

⁵⁸ "William Dolan Ends Course at March Field," *The Evening Telegram* (Superior, WI), 27 June 1929, 9, C3.

⁵⁹ "Primary Flying School Students Graduate," *Air Corps News Letter*, Vol. XIII, No. 10, 20 July 1929, Office of the Chief of the Chief of the Air Corps, War Department, Washington, 251. Air Force Historical Support Division, Joint Base Anacostia Bolling, Washington, D.C., accessed at <http://www.afhso.af.mil/aircorpsnewsletter/index.asp>.

⁶⁰ "Advanced Flying School Graduates Its Largest Class," *Air Corps News Letter*, Vol. XIII, No. 14, 17 October 1929, 357-358; "Kelly Field Graduating Class Breaks Several Records," *Air Corps News Letter*, Vol. XIII, No. 15, 9 November 1929, 379-380.

[Kansas], while Dolan makes his acquaintance with the tactics of an Observation Squadron.”⁶¹

The year 1930 opened with Dolan at Marshall Field with the 16th Observation Squadron, flying the Douglas O-25A. His duties there over the next several years were multifarious and included periodic assignments as mess and athletic officer, photographic officer, and transportation, communications, armament, range, and parachute officer, while concurrently building up flying time as both pilot and observer.⁶² Flying duties saw Dolan deliver mail by parachute for the Signal Corps between Fort Sam Houston, Texas, and Fort Sill, Oklahoma.⁶³ In February 1934, following a Congressional investigation into allegations of fraud and collusion between the former Hoover Administration and the airlines over airmail contracts, then President Franklin D. Roosevelt suspended all domestic airmail contacts. The government again awarded contracts to commercial airlines several months later, but in the interim, Roosevelt placed Air Corps planes, pilots, and airfields at the disposal of the Postmaster General.⁶⁴ Dolan handled the Kansas City-Dallas run, once spending several tense hours flying blind in darkness and heavy snow, which forced him back to Kansas City.⁶⁵ At Marshall Field, he also served for a short period as assistant control officer and received a commendation for his initiative, dependability, spirit of cooperation and devotion to duty. “His official and personal

⁶¹ “Marshall Field, Ft. Riley, Kansas, November 5th,” *Air Corps News Letter*, Vol. XIII, No. 16, 29 November 1929, 423.

⁶² Personal Reports, Officers, Air Corps, 2nd Lt. William C. Dolan, for period 1 January 1930 to 30 September 1933, AFHRA, IRIS No. 911484.

⁶³ Bill Dolan, email message to author, 25 November 2007.

⁶⁴ A. Scott Berg, *Lindbergh* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1998), 291-292.

⁶⁵ “Nine Die in Bus Wreck, Plane Lost,” *Moberly Monitor-Index* (Moberly, Missouri), 24 February 1934, 1.

conduct,” praised Control Officer 1st Lieutenant W.W. Messmore in May 1934, “was such as to bring credit upon the Military Service.”⁶⁶

In June 1935, Dolan graduated from Army Signal School at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, and was promoted to 1st Lieutenant.⁶⁷ He then spent time in observation with the ground forces, out of which grew an interest in tactics.⁶⁸ The following year found him at Brooks Field in San Antonio, Texas, with the 12th Observation Group flying the Douglas OA-43, a single engine, monoplane observation aircraft. For five days that summer he joined in war manoeuvres at Fort Sill with both the 1st Balloon Squadron and Northrop A-17 attack aircraft from Barksdale Field in Louisiana. The manoeuvres went off smoothly and demonstrated that the OA-43’s high altitude observation could locate targets for attack and bombardment.⁶⁹ At Brooks Field, Dolan took command of the 62nd Service Squadron and served as aide (pilot) to then U.S. Army Major General Herbert J. Brees, Eighth Corps Area commander, who “made him work in every staff section to learn the ropes.”⁷⁰ Dolan provided air ambulance services and during the January 1937 Ohio River flood flew serum to flood victims. His work during the flood impressed Brees who commended Dolan for his flying skill and tireless efforts “to get the transport through.”⁷¹

⁶⁶ 1st Lt. Messmore, letter to Commanding Officer, 16th Observation Squadron, Marshall Field, 18 May 1934, Dolan Family Collection (DFC).

⁶⁷ “Promotions,” *Air Corps News Letter*, Vol. XVIII, No. 14, 1 August 1935, 17; “Officers Graduated By The Signal Corps,” *New York Times*, 12 June 1935, 15.

⁶⁸ Historical Officer, *History of the First Sea Search Attack Group*, Langley Field, VA., For Period 17 June 1942 to 1 October 1943, 11.

⁶⁹ “Brooks Field Pilots in Maneuvers,” *Air Corps News Letter*, Vol. XIX, No. 12, 15 June 1936, 5; “Five-Day War at Fort Sill, Okla,” *Air Corps News Letter*, Vol. XIX, No. 14, 15 July 1936, 5.

⁷⁰ “Brooks Field, San Antonio, Texas, July 22nd,” *Air Corps News Letter*, Vol. XIX, No. 15, 1 August 1936, 21; “Former Base Deputy Comdr. Listed Missing,” *The Tailspinner*, Langley Field, Virginia, 24 February 1945, 1; Historical Officer, *History of the First*, 11.

⁷¹ Major General H.J. Brees, letter to Colonel J.F. Miller, Commanding Officer, Brooks Field, 31 January 1937, DFC; “Serum Sent Flood Area,” 25 January 1937. Newspaper unknown, DFC.

On another occasion, he flew a seventeen-year-old college student at Texas A and M, stricken with appendicitis, to Dodd Field in San Antonio. From there an ambulance conveyed the student to hospital at Fort Sam Houston.⁷²

Late in 1937, Dolan reported to Wright Field, Ohio, for instrument landing training, becoming among the first to take up blind flying in which a hood covered the cockpit, concealing external references, and the pilot flew using only instruments. “The instruction includes thorough ground training on the Air Corps Link trainer [an electro-mechanical flight simulator] set up in the equipment laboratory,” explained the *Air Corps News Letter*, “as well as actual flight training in blind instrument landings under the standard Air Corps instrument landing system.”⁷³ Having returned to Brooks Field, Dolan rushed to Tucson, Arizona, in February 1938 in an O-47 observation plane with Brees and Lieutenant Colonel S.U. Marietta, the Army’s foremost heart specialist, to see ailing First World War General John J. Pershing.⁷⁴

In January 1940, now promoted Captain Dolan attended Air Corps Tactical School at Maxwell Field, Montgomery, Alabama, where students studied American strategic and tactical air doctrine. Graduates over the school’s twenty-year existence included future generals Carl Spaatz, Ira Eaker, and Curtis LeMay.⁷⁵ Dolan’s was the third in a series of three-month short courses on the subject. Instructors had previously taught the course over a nine-month period but the Air Corps changed this to allow a higher number of

⁷² “Army Flies Stricken Student to Hospital.” Date and newspaper unknown, DFC.

⁷³ *Air Corps News Letter*, Vol. XX, No. 23, 1 December 1937, 6.

⁷⁴ “Pershing’s Relapse Endangers Life,” *The Arizona Daily Star*, 23 February 1938, 1, DFC; “Pershing’s Old Friend Flies to See Him,” *Dallas Journal*, 25 February 1938, page unknown, DFC.

⁷⁵ Robert T. Finney, *History of the Air Corps Tactical School 1920-1940*, USAF Historical Study 100 (Maxwell AFB, Ala.: USAF Historical Division, Air University, 1955), 43, 133; “Promotion of Air Corps Officers,” *Air Corps News Letter*, Vol. XXIII, No. 3, 1 February 1940, 12.

potential staff and command officers to attend. Dolan and his ninety-five fellow Air Corps officers attended daily morning classes and an average of two afternoon classes each week. The remaining afternoons were devoted to flying and equitation instruction under Lieutenant Colonel John C. Mullinex, Calvary. The curriculum included studies in air tactics and strategy, command, staff and logistics, and ground tactics. Course material included attack, bombardment, pursuit, reconnaissance, communications, logistics, military intelligence, antiaircraft, chemical warfare, infantry, and field artillery.⁷⁶ Following graduation, Dolan returned to Brooks Field for duty with 22nd Observation Squadron.⁷⁷ The *Air Corps News Letter* suggests a series of station changes over the next twelve months, beginning in mid-1940, among them the Hawaiian Department, and both Fort Sam Houston and San Antonio in Texas.⁷⁸

June 1941 found recently promoted Major Dolan at Gowen Field in Boise, Idaho, commanding the 76th Bombardment Squadron, then operating B-26 Marauders.⁷⁹ The squadron transferred to McChord Field near Washington in January 1942. Orders from group headquarters that February saw now promoted Lieutenant Colonel Dolan and several squadron subordinates deliver a B-18 Bolo medium bomber from Sacramento, California, to Duncan Field in Texas for special modification. Dolan then flew the aircraft

⁷⁶ "Third Three Months' Course Starts At Tactical School," *Air Corps News Letter*, Vol. XXIII, No. 2, 15 January 1940, 13; "Graduation of Officers From Air Corps Tactical School," *Air Corps News Letter*, Vol. XXIII, No. 8, 7; Finney, *History of the Air Corps*, 79-81.

⁷⁷ "War Department Special Orders: Changes of Station," *Air Corps News Letter*, Vol. XXIII, No. 9, 1 May 1940, 24.

⁷⁸ "War Department Special Orders: Changes of Station," *Air Corps News Letter*, Vol. XXIII, No. 12, 15 June 1940, 9; "War Department Special Orders: Changes of Station," *Air Corps News Letter*, Vol. XXIII, No. 16, 15 August 1940, 18; "War Department Special Orders," *Air Corps News Letter*, Vol. XXIV, No. 4, 15 February 1941, 20.

⁷⁹ "Former Base Deputy," 1.

to Boston municipal airport, reporting to a liaison officer attached to the Radiation Laboratory at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).⁸⁰ The purpose of his mission soon became clearer. Known as the Radiation Laboratory for reasons of security and secrecy, the name intentionally implied that staff was working in nuclear research, still considered an impractical military pursuit. Its actual and lesser-known purpose was to develop further the technology of radar.⁸¹ Laboratory staff had devised a workable Air-to-Surface Vessel (ASV) radar set, and the B-18 subsequently modified to house the equipment. This marked a watershed in Dolan's aviation career. He was "astounded at the performance of the radar equipment demonstrated for him in the laboratory ... and immediately enthusiastic," wrote an air force historical officer several years later. Dolan quickly envisioned a single aerial outfit to develop tactics and explore the possibilities of airborne radar. His proposal, approved in Washington by Lieutenant General Henry H. Arnold, Commanding General, United States Army Air Forces (USAAF), saw Langley Field, Virginia, selected as a base of operations. More B-18s were equipped with ASV radar and crews trained at MIT to operate the sets.⁸²

The First Sea-Search Attack Group, activated in June 1942 under Dolan's command (shortly promoted to colonel), owed its existence to radar. Aircraft patrolled the area from Boston, New York, Key West and Trinidad for enemy vessels, developed antisubmarine tactics and techniques, and tested the radar equipment designed at MIT. The group also

⁸⁰ Captain Glenn P. Neil, Special Orders No. 22, Headquarters 42nd Bombardment Group, Seattle, Washington, 16 February 1942. Appendix to *History of the First Sea Search Attack Group*.

⁸¹ Luis W. Alvarez, *Alvarez: Adventures of a Physicist* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1987), 84; Robert Buder, *The Invention that Changed the World* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), 46.

⁸² Historical Officer, *History of the First*, 3-6,

recommended the adoption of devices found necessary for such operations. In a way, Dolan was a “radar middleman, bridging the gap between production and theatre use.” At Langley, the sandy haired, fiery Dolan developed a reputation as an antisubmarine tactician, forever scouting ways and means of battle-testing the equipment himself.⁸³ “I won’t ask my men to do anything I can’t do,” he remarked. “Although insistent upon care in detail,” records the First Sea-Search Attack Group history, he was “more clearly a leader of men than a technician; an officer with driving enthusiasm and that talent for slashing red-tape and the intelligent delegation of authority which is so necessary ... He is a young man to have reached the silver eagles of a Colonel but experienced and wily in the broad science of aerial military strategy.” A hard worker, he frequently spent twenty-four hours at a stretch at his desk.⁸⁴

Over time, Colonel Dolan built his attack group into an efficient, enthusiastic, team-minded organization. His manner and approach was that of reason and patience. “He could understand mistakes and forgive them freely,” explained the attack group historian, but would tolerate any mistake once but not twice. “When he knows what to say, he says it fast and nervously. When he doesn’t, he thinks it out. Sometimes he seems to do both at once.” Dolan believed in personal contact, approaching his subordinates rather than summoning them.⁸⁵ During its existence, Dolan’s First Sea-Search Attack Group helped develop or test the absolute altimeter, used to determine an aircraft’s exact altitude, the radio sonic buoy, an effective depth bomb with shallow fuse settings, LORAN (long-

⁸³ Dexter Masters, editor, “Radar Middleman,” *Radar*, Headquarters Army Air Forces, Washington, publication date and issue unknown, 27.

⁸⁴ Historical Officer, *History of the First*, no page.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

range aid to navigation) and the magnetic anomaly detector (MAD), which operated by sensing a change in the earth's magnetic field. The steel hull of a submarine could produce such an anomaly.⁸⁶ Perhaps its most important task, however, was to develop techniques using the ASV detection sets installed in their B-18s, and later B-24 Liberators.

In April 1944, the First Sea-Search Attack Group disbanded. Dolan next became Deputy Base Commander and Director of Training and Operations at Langley Field.⁸⁷ His next assignment in August 1944 found him in Britain as director of Operational Analysis and Training with the U.S. Eighth Air Force, which was tasked with daylight bombing operations in Western Europe. His office was located at Eighth Air Force Headquarters, codenamed "Pinetree," thirty miles northwest of London in the temporarily commandeered Wycombe Abbey School.⁸⁸

An advocate for higher resolution radar, Dolan began untying the complex problems associated with high altitude bombing by radar. "He felt handicapped because he hadn't flown combat over Germany," one writer put it, and argued his case until permission was forthcoming.⁸⁹ For two weeks early in January 1945, Dolan was authorized to participate in an unlimited number of operational missions with bombardment groups of the 2nd Combat Bomb Wing, then operating B-24 Liberators.⁹⁰ By unofficial count, he completed

⁸⁶ Historical Officer, *History of the First*, 21-23, 42; Timothy Warnock, *The Battle Against the U-boats in the American Theatre* (Centre for Air Force History, 1994), 23.

⁸⁷ "Former Base Deputy," 1; "Radar Middleman," 27.

⁸⁸ McArthur, Charles W. *Operations Analysis in the U.S. Army Eighth Air Force in World War II* (American Mathematical Society, 1990), 208; Bill Dolan, email message to author, 1 February 2007.

⁸⁹ "Radar Middleman," 27.

⁹⁰ Brigadier General Francis Griswold, Chief of Staff, Headquarters 2nd Air Division, Operations Orders, 5 January 1945, DFC.

sixteen combat missions with the Eighth Air Force before being summoned back to the U.S.⁹¹

On 15 January 1945, Lieutenant General Jimmy Doolittle, Commanding General of the Eighth Air Force, authorized Dolan to return to Washington, D.C. and report to Brigadier General Mervin E. Gross, Office of Commitments and Requirements.⁹² He departed Eighth Air Force Headquarters by rail on 16 January and at an undisclosed location departed the United Kingdom by air, arriving at Washington the following day.⁹³ There, on 25 January, Dolan received fifteen-day temporary duty travel orders to expedite the Eighth Air Force Eagle Program. Issued by command of General Arnold, Dolan's orders were to proceed from Washington to Boston, Massachusetts, Ohio's Wright Field, Tucson, Arizona, and Boca Raton, Florida, and upon completion return to Washington for further temporary duty.⁹⁴ He departed Washington for Boston by rail on 28 January, presumably to consult with MIT radiation laboratory staff, and returned by rail on 2 February. Orders were subject to change and it would seem that Dolan did not visit Wright Field, Tucson, or Boca Raton as per the 25 January travel orders.⁹⁵

On 3 February, air force headquarters in Washington issued a second set of temporary duty travel orders that Dolan proceed for approximately twelve days to Langley Field, Virginia, where his wife and children lived, and Boca Raton, Florida, site

⁹¹ "Radar Middleman," 27.

⁹² Major F.E. Lankston, Headquarters, Eighth Air Force, Office of the Commanding General, Orders for Colonel William C. Dolan, 15 January 1945, DFC.

⁹³ Voucher for Per Diem and/or Reimbursement of Expenses Incident to Official Travel, 15 January 1945 to 6 February 1945, DFC.

⁹⁴ Major F.J. Lorenz, Chief, Orders Section, Headquarters, Army Air Forces, Washington, Temporary Duty Travel Orders for Colonel William C. Dolan, 25 January 1945, DFC.

⁹⁵ Travel Voucher, DFC.

of the USAAF's only wartime radar training station.⁹⁶ It may be that personal reasons brought him to Langley as his wife Inez was recovering in hospital after a major operation.⁹⁷ Dolan departed Washington by rail on 4 February, arrived at Richmond, Virginia, and traveled by government vehicle to Langley Field. Whether he proceeded to Boca Raton as per his travel orders is unclear.⁹⁸ A week passed; then on 11 February, a newly manufactured and specially modified B-24M Liberator bomber arrived at Langley, likely at the hands of an ATC factory ferry crew. The four-engine aircraft had been earmarked under the Eagle Program for Dolan to take overseas.

Liberator No. 44-42169 went through the production lines at the Consolidated plant in San Diego, California, late in 1944.⁹⁹ Fitted with ten .50 calibre machine guns, two in each of the top, belly, tail and nose turrets, and two in the waist positions, this, the "M" model, was the last large-scale production version of the B-24.¹⁰⁰ Liberator 44-42169 next arrived in Arizona at a Tucson modification center where it was inspected and taken on the USAAF inventory. On 2 February 1945, the aircraft began its journey eastward across the U.S., departing Tucson and overnighing at Memphis, Tennessee, because of weather and mechanical trouble. The next stop on 6 February was Boca Raton, Florida,

⁹⁶ Captain P.M. Bassoff, Asst. Chief, Orders Sec., Headquarters, Army Air Forces, Washington, Temporary Duty Travel Orders for Colonel William C. Dolan, 3 February 1945, DFC; Sally J. Ling, *Small Town, Big Secrets: Inside the Boca Raton Army Air Field during World War II* (Charleston: The History Press, 2005), 89.

⁹⁷ Bill Dolan, email message to author, 18 October 2007.

⁹⁸ Travel Voucher, DFC.

⁹⁹ Individual Aircraft Record Card, B-24 Liberator No. 44-42169, Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, Archives Division.

¹⁰⁰ Stephen Ambrose, *The Wild Blue: The Men and Boys Who Flew the B-24s Over Germany 1944-45* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 2001), 79.

where weather kept 44-42169 grounded for several days; then it was on to Langley on 11 February for a 12 February departure.¹⁰¹

The night before leaving Langley the colonel gave his nine-year-old son William (Bill) a photograph of a B-29 Superfortress, telling him with some foresight, recalled Bill, “that this aircraft would end the war.” Distinctly visible on the B-29 between the bomb bays was a hemispherical radome housing the radar antenna. Much like his command days with the First Sea Search Attack Group, the colonel was always thinking “radar” and its seemingly limitless possibilities. His current mission was no different. The next day, his wife and son, having been picked up at the base hospital, parked their car alongside the fence on the flight line. Bill watched as ground personnel rolled out his father’s B-24.¹⁰² With that, his father and the ferry crew boarded the bomber. The four Pratt and Whitney R-1830-65 engines roared to life. The Liberator taxied to the takeoff runway and was soon airborne, gaining altitude as it crossed Chesapeake Bay on its way to Mitchel Field, New York, three hundred miles to the northeast.

At Mitchel Field, a nine-man combat replacement crew, recently finished training at Westover Field in Springfield, Massachusetts, awaited to relieve the factory ferry crew and accompany Dolan to their posting in the United Kingdom. Inclement weather had delayed them at Mitchel for several weeks while they awaited a flight overseas. The Westover crew, their average age twenty-two, had assembled individually at Westover late in 1944 for heavy bombardment training on B-24 Liberators. In all probability, they

¹⁰¹ Individual Aircraft Record Card, B-24 Liberator No. 44-42169, Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, Archives Division.

¹⁰² Bill Dolan, email message to author, 18 October 2007. The B-29 Superfortress dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

would not have known one another prior to arrival, most having carried out their respective training at different times and locations throughout the U.S. At Westover, each man likely found his name posted on a board as assigned to a particular crew. Handshakes and introductions followed.

Their pilot, twenty-three year old Texan John S. Barry, was the son of Alice and John Sr., a geologist who in the First World War served with the Army Chemical Warfare Service. Following graduation from Austin High School in El Paso, John took up studies as a history major at the College of Mines (later University of Texas at El Paso) where his father was college president in the 1930s.¹⁰³ In 1941, several months before America entered the war, John enrolled in the government-funded Civilian Pilot Training Program (CPTP), identifying a flying career in the air force as his future preference.¹⁰⁴ The program, brought into law when President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Civilian Pilot Training Act in 1939, helped strengthen national defence in the pre-war years by creating a manpower pool upon which to draw in the event of an emergency. Flight schools and educational institutions, like the College of Mines, participated in the CPTP as sponsors, while trainees completed a prescribed number of hours in ground school and on flight instruction.¹⁰⁵ John followed through on his CPTP application preference and enlisted in

¹⁰³ "Lt. Barry Is Reported Missing," *The El Paso Times*, 22 February 1945, 1.; University of Texas at El Paso Library, Special Collection Department, Civilian Pilot Training records for John S. Barry, Individual Student Application; John Gerald Barry biography, UTEP Encyclopedia, accessed at http://encyclopedia.utep.edu/index.php/John_Gerald_Barry, accessed 17 May 2015.

¹⁰⁴ Civilian Pilot Training records for John S. Barry, Individual Student Application, University of Texas at El Paso Library, Special Collection Department.

¹⁰⁵ Theresa L. Kraus, "The CAA Helps America Prepare for World War II," Federal Aviation Administration, accessed at http://www.faa.gov/about/history/milestones/media/The_CAA_Helps_America_Prepare_for_World_WarII.pdf, accessed 17 May 2015,

the air force at Lubbock, Texas, in February 1943.¹⁰⁶ He trained mostly in his home state, first at a technical school squadron at Sheppard Field, Wichita Falls, for basic, and then at preflight school at the San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center. His Texas training regimen continued with stops at Jones Field, Majors Field, and Blackland Army Air Field near Waco, where he received his wings in May 1944. Late 1944 found now commissioned 2nd Lieutenant Barry at Westover Field.¹⁰⁷ The tall, dark haired Texan was not long finding a girlfriend. Her name was Betty Ellen Cass, a senior at nearby Mount Holyoke College majoring in Art Criticism and History of Art, and minoring in Romance Languages.¹⁰⁸ Her friends called her Becky. The romance blossomed and she and John were soon engaged.¹⁰⁹

John's co-pilot, twenty-two year old 2nd Lieutenant Charles E. Topham Jr., grew up in Chester, Pennsylvania, on the Delaware River. As a teen, he was active in young peoples' work at St. Paul's Church and played basketball in the church league. A graduate of Chester High School, he apprenticed as a patternmaker at the Wetherill Plant of the Sun Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company before entering the service late in 1942. He completed basic training at Miami Beach, Florida, and then entered the Aircrew College Training Program at Marietta College in Ohio.¹¹⁰ The washout rate among potential

¹⁰⁶ John S. Barry Enlistment Record, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington (NARA). Enlistment records database accessed at <http://aad.archives.gov/aad/series-description.jsp?s=3360>.

¹⁰⁷ Untitled, *El Paso Herald-Post*, 6 March 1943, 5; "Eight El Pasoans Train as Pilots," *El Paso Herald-Post*, 8 September 1943, 2; "Lt. Barry Is Reported Missing," *The El Paso Times*, 22 February 1945, 1; "Lieut. Barry Will Be Buried Here," *El Paso Herald-Post*, 28 November 1947, 1; "Lieut. J.S. Barry To Visit Mother," *El Paso Herald-Post*, 5 September 1944, 6.

¹⁰⁸ "The Gadabout," *The El Paso Herald-Post*, 1 August 1945, 6.

¹⁰⁹ William Cass, unpublished biography of Betty Ellen Cass, 1924-1971.

¹¹⁰ "Chester Flier Killed in Crash of Liberator," *Chester Times*, 2 May 1945, 1-2; Charles E. Topham Jr. Enlistment Record, NARA.

aviation cadets had been increasing and the air force pointed to academic deficiency as the reason. In response, the Army created the Aircrew College Training Program with colleges like Marietta contracted to provide specialized education. The program likewise served to hold a backlog of aircrew candidates, awaiting on inactive enlisted reserve “simply because the training facilities hadn’t expanded fast enough to process them.”¹¹¹

At Marietta, Charles began dating a local girl, Cherrie Shoop. Aviation cadet training took him to Nashville, Tennessee, Decatur and Courtland in Alabama, and finally Freeman Field in Seymour, Indiana.¹¹² His parents, Charles Sr. and Sarah, travelled to Seymour to see their son presented his wings in May 1944 as a graduate of class 44-E. Following a short furlough at home with Cherrie, Charles reported to Dodge City Army Air Field in Kansas for transition training on the B-26 Marauder medium bomber.¹¹³ Westover Field was the next stop where in short order he had adopted the nickname “Topy” among his crewmates, but Cherrie called him “Chick.” The *Chester Times* carried their engagement announcement and a photograph of Cherrie in December 1944.¹¹⁴

Twenty-six year old 2nd Lieutenant Edmund Breschini, oldest of the Westover crew, was the second child and only son of Mary and Caesar Breschini. His parents had

¹¹¹ Charles A. Watry, *Washout!: The Aviation Cadet Story* (Carlsbad: California Aero Press, 1983) 13; William F. Cass, *The Last Flight of Liberator 41-1133: The Lives, Times, Training & Loss Of The Bomber Crew Which Crashed On Trail Pass At Philmont Scout Ranch* (West Chester, Pennsylvania: The Winds Aloft Press, 1996) 144; Craven and Crates, editors, *The Army Air Forces in World War II, Vol. VI, Men and Planes*, 562.

¹¹² “Chester Flier Killed in Crash of Liberator,” *Chester Times*, 2 May 1945, 1-2; Charles E. Topham Jr. Enlistment Record, NARA.

¹¹³ *Chester Times*, 29 May 1944, 7; List of Graduates, Army Air Forces, Eastern Flying Training Command, Freeman Field, Class 44-E, 23 May 1944, Indiana Military Organization, accessed at, <http://www.indianamilitary.org/FreemanAAF/SoThinkMenu/FreemanSTART.htm>, accessed 18 May 2015.

¹¹⁴ *Chester Times*, 22 December 1944, 14.

emigrated from Switzerland to California early in the century. Growing up in San Jose, Edmund showed a love and understanding for animals and farm life. He knew livestock too, spending summers on his father's ranch learning about dairy cows. In the late 1930s, he began racing pigeons, winning numerous trophies and earning accolades in the local *San Jose Evening News*. Following graduation from Los Gatos High School, he attended the University of Santa Clara and then San Jose State College where he completed a degree in commerce in 1940.

Edmund's interest in travel saw him explore his home state and visit the 1939 New York World's Fair. He also attended some World Series baseball games and played baseball and tennis in high school and varsity basketball. His future seemed certain, following in his father's footsteps as a rancher. However, early in 1941, the first peacetime conscription in U.S. history saw his name called for drafting. At the time, he was on the ranch, having begun his ranching career. The U.S. was not then at war, so Edmund could complete the required twelve months training and return home. All this changed in December 1941 when Japan attacked Pearl Harbour and America entered the war.

As an enlisted man, Edmund served with the 7th and 99th Infantry Divisions and then transferred to the Air Corps for pilot training.¹¹⁵ "Start calling me Aviation Cadet Breschini," he told his sister June, writing from Mississippi in January 1943. "I'll be trained as a pilot for bombers ... I prefer the bombers anyway; sure would be nice winging it across Berlin with a few blockbusters or something," he quipped.¹¹⁶ Some

¹¹⁵ Unpublished biography of Edmund Hughes Breschini, 1946. Breschini family collection (BFC).

¹¹⁶ Edmund Breschini, letter to June Breschini, 15 January 1943, BFC.

forty percent of cadets washed out of the flight training program.¹¹⁷ Edmund was among that percentage so instead went to navigation school, graduating with a commission and silver wings at San Marcos Army Air Field in Texas in September 1944.¹¹⁸ After a short furlough at home, he proceeded to Westover Field as per his orders. One day that October, Edmund and a fellow navigator wandered into town and into the officer's lounge. The place was empty so they decided to return later. Their timing was fortuitous. It happened that Dorothy Cruickshank, Dottie to friends and family, and her sister Barbara were taking their weekly turn as volunteer hostesses at the lounge. Barbara approached Dorothy with the two airmen in tow. Edmund and Dorothy chatted for several hours. Later he called for a date, and then another, and before long they were engaged.¹¹⁹

Rounding out the remaining crew were the enlisted men. Nineteen-year-old engineer/gunner Corporal Charles J. Parsons Jr. was the only son of Charles and Nell and a native of Sabraton, West Virginia.¹²⁰ In July 1943, Charles enlisted at Clarksburg, West Virginia, thirty miles southwest of his hometown.¹²¹ He and his fiancée Dorris were married in a chapel at Westover Field in November 1944 with his crewmates present.¹²² Another of the crew's married personnel was twenty-two year old Corporal Nicholas Brando. A native of New York City's Brooklyn Borough, Nicholas grew up in a predominately Italian neighbourhood. Almost two years to the day of his enlistment he found himself preparing to depart overseas as Colonel Dolan's radio operator/gunner,

¹¹⁷ William F. Cass, *The Last Flight*, 148.

¹¹⁸ Undated newspaper clipping, BFC.

¹¹⁹ Dorothy Cruickshank, letter to Breschini family, 16 April 1945, BFC.

¹²⁰ "Charles Parsons, 67, Dies," *The Morgantown Post*, 24 October 1964, 1.

¹²¹ Charles J. Parsons Jr. Enlistment Record, NARA.

¹²² Dorris Parsons, letter to Mary Breschini, 17 May 1945, BFC.

leaving behind a bride of six months.¹²³ A wartime friend described Nicholas as being “such fun, always joking and laughing.” He would sing the “Trolley Song,” made famous by Judy Garland in the film “Meet Me in St. Louis,” and mimic all the motions.¹²⁴

Twenty-three year old armourer-gunner Private Harry J. Karpick enlisted in his hometown of Buffalo, New York, in March 1942.¹²⁵ Harry entered the Aviation Cadet program, but “failed to make the grade,” acknowledged his brother John, so “he pursued various phases of air crew training.”¹²⁶ He attended a specialized training program and learned about an aircraft’s guns and mechanical bombing systems. As his crew’s armament specialist, Harry was in charge of all guns, loading them with ammo and reporting them serviceable. Maintenance of the bombing system was also his responsibility. Fitted underneath the B-24 Liberator heavy bomber on which Harry would train at Westover was a small, retractable ball turret. The operator had to be physically small enough to squeeze inside the cramped, confined space with its twin .50 calibre machine guns and ammunition. At 114 lbs, five-foot-three and a quarter, Harry fit the bill.¹²⁷

One month shy of his nineteenth birthday and youngest of the crew, mid-upper gunner Corporal John E. Baker Jr. came from Greensburg, Pennsylvania, where he attended Greensburg Junior High and Greensburg High. The son of John and Martha and

¹²³ NA Form 13164, Nicholas Brando, National Personnel Records Center, Military Personnel Records, St. Louis, Missouri; Mary Brando, letter to Mary Breschini, 16 May 1945, BFC.

¹²⁴ Leslie Hanscom, “Girl, 19, Ask Santa to Send Her One Page From the Phone Book,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 20 December 1951, 1.

¹²⁵ Harry J. Karpick Enlistment Record, NARA.

¹²⁶ John A. Karpick, letter to Senator J. Mead, 4 April 1945, Individual Deceased Personnel File (IDPF), Karpick.

¹²⁷ “Case History of Unknowns,” Identification Section, Repatriation Records Branch, Memorial Division, 7 January 1947, IDPF, Karpick.

twin to a brother James, then serving in the Navy in the South Pacific, John Jr. enlisted in April 1944, leaving his job in the engineering department at the Walworth company foundry in South Greensburg.¹²⁸ Before arriving at Westover Field, he trained at Keesler Field in Biloxi, Mississippi, and attended flexible gunnery school at Tyndall Field, Panama City, Florida.¹²⁹

Twenty-four year old nose gunner, Iowa-born Private Mark G. Lantz, was an only child of Glenn and Bertha Lantz. The family later moved from Iowa to Ogden City, Utah, ten miles east of Great Salt Lake and north of Salt Lake City, where Mark graduated high school. A member of St. Joseph's Catholic Church, Mark completed a year of college and worked as a machinist for two years at Hill Field, an air force maintenance and supply base near Ogden.¹³⁰ In December 1943, one year after his enlistment at Salt Lake City, he returned home on leave from training in North Carolina and was married.¹³¹ The marriage ended in divorce four months later.¹³² Like future crewmate John Baker, Mark went on to complete flexible gunnery school at Tyndall Field, Florida, and arrived at Westover Field late in 1944, immediately following graduation.¹³³ While Private Lantz occupied the nose gunner's position behind the twin .50 calibre machine guns, Corporal John Warren

¹²⁸ *Greensburg Morning Review*, 24 November 1947, 12.

¹²⁹ NA Form 13164, John E. Baker, National Personnel Records Center, Military Personnel Records, St. Louis, Missouri; *Greensburg Morning Review*, 24 November 1947, 12.

¹³⁰ Mark G. Lantz Enlistment Record, NARA; "Deaths: Pfc. Mark G. Lantz," *The Ogden Standard-Examiner*, 12 November 1947, 15.

¹³¹ Mark G. Lantz Enlistment Record, NARA; "Miss Beth Asbury Becomes Bride Of Mark G. Lantz," *The Ogden Standard-Examiner*, 19 December 1943, 22.

¹³² "Divorces Allowed In Seven Cases," *The Ogden Standard-Examiner*, 25 April 1944, 9.

¹³³ *The Ogden Standard-Examiner*, 6 September 1944, 5; *The Ogden Standard-Examiner*, 7 November 1944, 5. This article also announced Lantz's promotion at Westover Field from private to corporal. However, all records thereafter give his rank as private. Whether the promotion was reported in error or he was subsequently demoted for some reason is unclear.

Tarpey (he preferred to use his middle name) took up similar duties in the tail. A native of Lowell, Massachusetts, and a graduate of Lowell High School, twenty-year-old Warren worked for a time at the *Lowell Sun* newspaper. He enlisted at Fort Devens in his home state in December 1943 and trained at Scott Field, Illinois. His brother Robert also joined the air force, serving with the ATC.¹³⁴

Combat crews generally carried out training in three supervised phases. The same likely applied at Westover, although the air force occasionally modified and expanded training standards. The first phase focussed primarily on individual training in navigation, bombing, aerial gunnery, instrument flying and night flying.¹³⁵ This might include physical training and time on the Link Trainer for pilots. For some trainees, flying a B-24 loaded with guns, ammunition, turrets and practice bombs was a departure from the previous routine. The added weight alone required adjustment, especially for pilots used to flying B-24s stripped of such equipment. Under an instructor's guidance, pilots like John Barry might shoot a number of landings, some with either one or two engines out, and carry out several night flights. If all went well, the instructor would authorize a pilot to take his crew up by himself. They soon learned that command meant more than issuing orders. Pilots might well be held responsible for their men showing up on time for classes and training.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ John W. Tarpey Enlistment Record, NARA; "Lowell Sailor and Soldier Lose Lives," *The Lowell Sun*, 27 March 1945, 1, 8.

¹³⁵ Jerry White, *Combat Crew and Unit Training in the AAF, 1939-1945*, AAF Historical Study 61, (Maxwell AFB, AL: USAF Historical Division, Archives Branch, August 1949), 27-28.

¹³⁶ Memoirs of 1st Lt. Clair B. Alexander Jr., Army Air Forces forum, accessed at <http://www.armyairforces.com/B24-crew-training-m154975.aspx>, accessed 20 May 2015.

The second heavy bombardment phase emphasised the development of teamwork and included extensive training in bombing and gunnery operations, instrument flying and formation flying.¹³⁷ During aerial bomb training, a crewman occupied an open hatch and with camera in hand, photographed each hit. The bombs contained explosive charges and emitted a small puff of smoke upon contact with the ground. An instructor would view the photographs for accuracy and comment accordingly. Pilots might also take a turn at dropping bombs to better understand a bombardier's role. Conversely, some crewmen spent time in the pilot's seat learning the basics in the event that both pilots became incapacitated during combat and the aircraft was still flyable.¹³⁸

The third and final training phase included high-altitude formation flying, long-range navigation, target identification, and simulated combat missions.¹³⁹ With the men dressed in electrically heated, fleece lined flying suits, pilots might take their aircraft to twenty thousand feet where the air was bitterly cold. At this altitude moisture condensed on the inside of oxygen masks and icicles formed on the exhaust ports, "making us look like bearded monsters from the Arctic regions," described one B-24 pilot. With the crew shivering in their positions, a faster aircraft towed a target at which the gunners took aim with their .50 calibre machine guns. Upon returning to base, the gunners went posthaste to the tow plane area to count the holes in the target.¹⁴⁰

Simulated bombing missions might see B-24s in box formation converging at high altitude on a selected target, perhaps with real fighters making mock attacks. As in actual

¹³⁷ White, *Combat Crew*, 28.

¹³⁸ Memoirs, Alexander.

¹³⁹ White, *Combat Crew*, 28.

¹⁴⁰ Memoirs, Alexander.

combat, only the lead aircraft bombardier used the bombsight. During such missions, each plane might carry a combat experienced instructor as co-pilot. Air-to-ground gunnery missions on dummy aircraft gave all gunners the opportunity to fire their .50s at low altitude. It was noisy business and “their combined recoils shook the whole bomber.” Navigators practised and perfected their skills during long distance flights, some upwards of one thousand miles. Flying hours were frequent and irregular, explained one B-24 trainee. Added to this the regular class hours, and the frantic pace “took a lot out of us and six hours sleep became a luxury.”¹⁴¹

Upon conclusion of the three training phases, combat “crews were expected to have developed teamwork both within and between crews to such an extent as to permit highly effective unit operation,” recorded the U.S. Air Force Air Historical Office.¹⁴² The nine combat crewmen waiting at Mitchel seem to have blended well while at Westover. They quickly became friends and spoke highly of one another in letters and phone calls home. “When they talked to each other they said some terrible things,” admitted the wife of Corporal Charles Parsons, but it was all in jest and “just the way they acted. They would have done anything in the world for each other.”¹⁴³

By late January 1945, all but one of the Westover crew was at Mitchel Field waiting to go overseas. Conspicuous by his absence was one very important combat crewmember - the bombardier. Assigned in this capacity at Westover was 2nd Lieutenant Robert E. Billings, a graduate of bombardier school at Midland Army Air Field, Texas, in

¹⁴¹ Memoirs, Alexander.

¹⁴² White, *Combat Crew*, 28.

¹⁴³ Dorris Parsons, letter to Mary Breschini, 17 May 1945, BFC.

September 1944. He had been transferred prior to his crew's leaving for Mitchel and would not make the trip overseas.¹⁴⁴

For two weeks in February, the nine crewmen took in the sights and sounds of wartime New York, accompanied at times by their girlfriends or wives. Edmund and Dorothy took in Radio City Music Hall and Madison Square Garden where Norwegian figure skater and Hollywood actress Sonja Henie was performing. The couple also went on some double dates with John Barry and his fiancée Becky.¹⁴⁵ The crew took in the Hollywood movie "Keys of the Kingdom" in which Gregory Peck played a Catholic priest. The boys "all raved about it."¹⁴⁶ Edmund also travelled from New York to the adjoining state of Pennsylvania, spending time with Charles Topham and his family in Chester. "We played pinochle for several hours," recalled Charles' father. He "urged them to be careful on the way over, and was assured by them that not a thing could happen."¹⁴⁷ Being from Brooklyn, Nicholas Brando need only cover less than twenty miles from Mitchel Field to see his mother on Powers Street.

The last weekend in New York, 10-11 February, was a whirlwind of activity with the three officers and their girls spending time together and with one another. They went as a group one evening to see the Johnny Long Orchestra, while Edmund, Dorothy, Charles Topham and his girl Cherrie spent an afternoon walking through Central Park taking pictures. That evening, the last day for the girls in New York, they went to see comedian

¹⁴⁴ Army Air Forces forum, accessed at <http://www.armyairforces.com/Lt-Robert-E-Billings-m140929.aspx>, accessed 21 May 2015; Dorothy Cruickshank, letter to Breschini family, 1 March 1945, BFC.

¹⁴⁵ Dorothy Cruickshank, letter to Mary Breschini, 31 January 1945, BFC.

¹⁴⁶ Dorothy Cruickshank, letter to Eleanor Breschini, 16 March 1945, BFC.

¹⁴⁷ Charles Topham, letter to Mrs. Martin, 14 June 1945, BFC.

Milton Berle, who had “us really rocking in our seats,” Dorothy later wrote. Later that evening Cherrie left for Ohio and Dorothy boarded a train for Springfield. Edmund, there to see Dorothy off, stayed on the passenger railcar until the “all aboard” signal, at which time he exited by the back door.¹⁴⁸ Charles Parsons’ wife Dorris, affectionately nicknamed “Duchess” by the crew, was also in New York that February to see her husband off. They parted ways at Penn Station with Dorris returning to West Virginia. Some of Charles’ crewmates were there, too. “We all looked pretty sad,” Dorris admitted, when Edmund spoke up in an encouraging voice saying, “don’t worry Duchess we’ll take care of him for you,” referring to her husband Charles.¹⁴⁹

Finally, after months and years of hard work and training, and weeks in New York grounded by bad weather, which Edmund’s fiancée happily described as “our good luck piece,”¹⁵⁰ the boys received word of a 13 February departure. Farewells and final phone calls followed. Harry Karpick telephoned his parents, Andrew and Agnes, in Buffalo. He spoke of how much he liked his crewmates and how he wished to visit them once the war was over.¹⁵¹ Edmund Breschini, calling on a bad connection from one end of the country, awoke his parents in San Jose with “the not so good news of” his departure.¹⁵² Warren Tarpey’s mother and sister both travelled to New York from Lowell, meeting some of the crew at Mitchel Field. On the morning of 12 February outside the Garden City Hotel a

¹⁴⁸ Dorothy Cruickshank, letter to Breschini family, 24 February 1945, BFC.

¹⁴⁹ Dorris Parsons, letter to Mary Breschini, 17 May 1945, BFC.

¹⁵⁰ Dorothy Cruickshank, letter to Mary Breschini, 31 January 1945, BFC.

¹⁵¹ Agnes Karpick, letter to Mary Breschini, 15 May 1945, BFC.

¹⁵² Mary Breschini, letter to Edmund Breschini, 13 February 1945, BFC.

couple miles from the field, Warren and his mother stood together for one last photograph. At a Long Island train station, they bid him farewell.¹⁵³

¹⁵³ Mrs. Patrick Tarpey, letter to Mary Breschini, 22 April 1945, BFC.

Chapter 4

A Missing Plane

On 13 February, with little time for familiarization or introductions between the recently arrived Colonel Dolan and his nine young accompanying crewmen, B-24M No. 44-42169 departed Mitchel for Grenier Field in Manchester, New Hampshire. At Grenier, Dolan and navigator Breschini filed a flight plan to Gander. They would navigate by radio range, using as alternates Presque Isle, Maine, and Goose Bay, Labrador. They calculated distance, course, air speeds, wind correction angle, headings, and elapsed time in minutes between each range for an estimated time of arrival of four hours and thirty-six minutes.¹⁵⁴ The forecast for Gander given at Grenier showed broken to overcast cumulus cloud at 1,500-2000 feet, visibility at four to eight miles with snow, and a surface wind west at eighteen miles per hour.¹⁵⁵ At 1930 GMT, they departed Grenier with Colonel Dolan at the controls.¹⁵⁶

Dolan's mission that February night was to deliver his aircraft, but more importantly its confidential equipment to the Eighth Air Force. The nine-man combat replacement crew would part ways with Dolan on arrival and proceed to their posting. The specifics of that posting were likely unknown at departure. Many such replacement crews received sealed assignment orders, opened upon leaving American air space. Presumably, this crew was no different. The experience for replacement crews differed. Some received orders to proceed directly to an assigned bomb group, others first to a Combat Crew

¹⁵⁴ "North Atlantic Wing, ATC, Flight Plan," Army Air Forces, Report of Major Accident, B-24M No. 44-42169 (Accident Report, 44-42169), AFHRA.

¹⁵⁵ "Section K, Weather," Accident Report, 44-42169.

¹⁵⁶ "Section M, Description of the Accident," Accident Report, 44-42169.

Replacement Centre for orientation and theatre training and then assignment.¹⁵⁷ For all intents and purposes, these nine young men were earning passage overseas by delivering an aircraft. They would refuel at Gander for the long, non-stop flight across the North Atlantic.

Leaving Grenier, the Liberator soon crossed into the state of Maine, picking up the radio range at Portland, Augusta, and then Bangor. From Bangor, the aircraft steered a course of sixty-three degrees, crossing the Canadian border and hitting the Blissville range in the province of New Brunswick. Another slight course change brought them over the Moncton range, also in New Brunswick. Flying eastward, the aircraft soon picked up the Charlottetown range on Prince Edward Island and some forty minutes later the range in Sydney, Nova Scotia. Here began the final and longest leg of the trip as Dolan set a course of fifty-three degrees, crossing the Cabot Strait and arriving over Newfoundland's south coast some 150 miles from Gander.¹⁵⁸

Since leaving Grenier, the weather at Gander had deteriorated with gusty winds, snow and blowing snow, and visibility down to one quarter to one mile.¹⁵⁹ The worsening conditions had forced the diversion of twenty-eight inbound ATC aircraft to Maine. Weather also contributed to an accident involving an RCAF B-24 after the aircraft mistook the approach lights for the runway lights and landed short of the runway.¹⁶⁰ At

¹⁵⁷ Army Air Forces forum, accessed at <http://www.armyairforces.com/Combat-Replacement-Crew-m126139.aspx> and <http://www.armyairforces.com/Overseas-postingsassignment-orders-m143887.aspx>, accessed 25 May 2015.

¹⁵⁸ "North Atlantic Wing, ATC, Flight Plan," Accident Report, 44-42169.

¹⁵⁹ "Section K, Weather," Accident Report, 44-42169.

¹⁶⁰ SCO's Office Diary, RAF Transport Command, entry for 13 February 1945, B-9-3, Box 1, Gander Airport, The Rooms.

0039 GMT on 14 February, thirty minutes past Dolan's estimated time of arrival, Presque Isle contacted 44-42169 and advised the pilot to proceed there due to Gander's weather. Dolan requested and received Gander's weather and advised Presque Isle that he held a Green Instrument Card and was continuing on to Gander, being only fifteen miles from the station.¹⁶¹ Such a card authorized a pilot to take-off and land in any type weather. To receive this card, one had to have completed an instrument flying course and compiled no less than 1,500 hours as a pilot, with one hundred of those hours flying manually in actual instrument weather conditions.¹⁶² The veteran Dolan had long since met these qualifications. Indeed, by this date his total flying time neared nine thousand hours.¹⁶³

Gander Approach Control first contacted Dolan at 0108 GMT and in light of existing weather conditions they too asked if he intended to land or return to Presque Isle. Dolan repeated his intention to land and again advised that he held a Green Instrument Card. On instructions from Gander's director of operations, Approach Control cleared Dolan for "one standard instrument approach down to authorized minimums and if unable to land he was to return to Presque Isle." Thirty-five minutes later, Approach Control cleared the aircraft to the tower radio frequency for further verbal instructions. Instead, the aircraft tried calling the tower on the Approach Control frequency, so the operator again advised the aircraft to contact the tower direct. The tower meantime called the aircraft many times but never established contact.

¹⁶¹ "Section M, Description of the Accident," Accident Report, 44-42169.

¹⁶² *Pilots' Information File*, November 1944, Headquarters, Army Air Forces, Washington, accessed at <http://aafcollection.info/items/documents/view.php?file=000148-01-00.pdf>, accessed 25 May 2015.

¹⁶³ "Section D, Operator's Flying Experience," Accident Report, 44-42169.

Dolan crossed the field at low altitude, flying west to east. Canadian personnel one mile east of the field at No. 19 Radio Unit plotted the aircraft on radar into Gander and back and forth on the northeast and southwest legs on the beam. Two minutes after taking the last plot, unit personnel briefly spotted the aircraft in the night sky as it passed over the radar building on a heading of about seventy degrees. Radar and IFF (Identification Friend or Foe) radio contact was lost within a few miles of the base at 0156 GMT and 2000 GMT, respectively, with little change in bearing. Minutes after losing IFF contact a C-54 transport moving westward over the station witnessed a terrific explosion to the northeast. The Liberator did not reappear over Gander and all attempts thereafter to contact Dolan by radio went unanswered.¹⁶⁴

The ground search for Dolan's missing B-24 began immediately, although high winds, snow, and drifting snow restricted visibility and made travelling extremely difficult. Gander also advised all passing aircraft to keep a watchful eye.¹⁶⁵ Members of Gander's American search and rescue unit led the search effort. The unit did not lack in search experience due to a number of unfortunate aircraft accidents the year previous. Until January 1944, after organizational orders arrived from North Atlantic Wing headquarters, ATC, the U.S. had no such structured, permanent unit at Gander. Prior search and rescue was often a cooperative effort using available Canadian, British, and American resources in both manpower and aircraft. This cooperation would nevertheless continue even after the creation of a permanent search and rescue unit.

¹⁶⁴ "Section M, Description of the Accident," Accident Report, 44-42169; No. 19 Radio Unit Daily Diary, RCAF, Gander, entry for 14 February 1945, C-12384, LAC.

¹⁶⁵ "Section M, Description of the Accident," Accident Report, 44-42169.

Initially, the new unit consisted of one officer, ten non-commissioned officers, and one hundred enlisted men from various squadrons. Running the unit was the officers' principal duty, while the enlisted men trained with the unit one week at a time. "In this way," reasoned the base historian, "a nucleus of permanent personnel was formed enabling each man of permanent status to be the leader of a search and rescue squad." A week's training included special rescue instructions and overnight marches and bivouacs in mid-winter. In the event of a downed aircraft, a ski- or float-equipped UC-64 Norseman, AT-11, or L4B would land the rescue party as close as possible. The ground party would then proceed overland on foot, maintaining radio contact with the drop aircraft and guided by direct liaison to their target.¹⁶⁶ Sled dogs provided the most practical means of wintertime transportation in the Newfoundland wilderness, but the unit would have to wait almost a year from its formation date to be so equipped.

Although rarely called upon during the first half of 1944, unit personnel did salvage engine parts and machine guns from a B-17 that crashed in December 1943, taking ten lives.¹⁶⁷ The unit presumably assisted early in August when a second B-17 went down on take-off, also carrying ten airmen. Witnesses saw the aircraft pull up sharply and then suddenly veer off in a steep bank, crashing and exploding in heavy timber. The terrain, thick woods, and tangled underbrush around Gander often challenged first responders. Indeed, it took nearly an hour for the medical officer and crash crew to reach the second B-17 crash, despite being adjacent the airfield. The twenty airmen from both crashes were

¹⁶⁶ Captain Donald H. Agnew, post historian, 1387th AAFBU, post history for 1 Oct 1943-30 April 1944, 4-5, microfilm A0163, AFHRA.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 5.

buried at Gander's post cemetery. Two weeks after the August B-17 crash, several passing C-54 transports reported seeing wreckage north and west of the field. The unit's pontoon-equipped UC-64 took flight carrying Major W. Howard Lang with operations, and Intelligence and Security officer Captain Donald H. Agnew. They found no trace of wreckage and concluded that the transports had spotted a previously reported downed RCAF Hurricane fighter.¹⁶⁸ Such sightings were not uncommon, as the RCAF, RAF Ferry Command, and USAAF had lost a number of aircraft around the airfield dating back to 1941. Two more heavy bombers would be lost before year's end, both on the south side of Gander Lake, resulting in the loss of ten more American personnel.¹⁶⁹

The need for war dogs at Gander came under review when a Lt. Benno Stein arrived on tour in September 1944. Stein pointed out that the nearest settlement was some twenty miles away with no connecting roads from the airfield to this or any other settlement. Moreover, the wooded and boggy terrain made it difficult to approach the field overland from the outside. Access to the field was limited to plane or railway, both carefully controlled, he assured. Regardless, Stein's review was specific to defence considerations, not search and rescue, and his observations led him to recommend against sending war dogs for base protection.¹⁷⁰ The augmentation of the search and rescue unit using war dogs would have to wait, but not for long. In December, Gander welcomed two full teams of huskies, eighteen dogs in all, with sled driver Staff Sergeant David W. Armstrong in charge of the search and rescue dog kennels. During January 1945, Armstrong took the

¹⁶⁸ Beaupre, 1387th AAFBU, post history for August 1944, 2-4, 10.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., post history for October 1944, 3, and post history for December 1944, 17, 21.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., post history for September 1944, 7.

teams out daily for arduous training runs. The purpose being, in the prophetic words of Gander's post historian, "to ensure peak conditioning for any exploits which the exigencies of February might call upon them to perform."¹⁷¹

February indeed brought such demands with the disappearance of Colonel Dolan's B-24; however, it happened that Gander's search and rescue huskies had only days before been sent overseas for service in the European Theatre of Operations. Their departure was linked to the German Ardennes offensive that began in December 1944, later known as the Battle of the Bulge. In January 1945, Lieutenant Colonel Norman Vaughan, Arctic search and rescue specialist with the North Atlantic Division, ATC, headquartered at Grenier Field, proposed using sled dogs to evacuate the wounded. This method, Vaughan suggested, would be quicker and more efficient. Washington approved the plan and Vaughan sent out orders for 209 sled dogs and seventeen drivers.¹⁷²

Vaughan's order meant that Gander's dog men, Staff Sergeant Armstrong and Sergeant Lawrence Morrie, would soon go overseas. First alert of the impending mission came by cable on 20 January, followed by special orders identifying their eighteen dogs by name and service number. The following day, Armstrong and Morrie boarded a C-47 with their canines and flew to Harmon Field, a U.S. ATC base on Newfoundland's west coast. A disappointing, last-minute change of orders saw Armstrong and Morrie return to Gander, dogless. The search and rescue unit at Harmon, on the other hand, lost its drivers and twenty-seven dogs. Standard procedure for dogs about to take flight was to run them

¹⁷¹ Ibid., post history for January 1944, 32-33.

¹⁷² Norman D. Vaughan with Cecil B Murphey, *My Life of Adventure* (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 1995), 209-210.

for a few hours beforehand. By flight time, the tired animals were generally ready to sleep. Five teams of dogs from both Gander and Harmon and a like number of freight sleds and toboggans went aboard four C-54s assigned to the project and flown to Orly Field in Paris.¹⁷³

Armstrong and Morrie were now dog men without dogs, having only empty kennels to watch over. Their conundrum, and a recent spate of poor weather, gave cause for a lighter moment when the post historian quipped about “the rescue dogs going to the front, and the weather front going to the dogs.”¹⁷⁴ In any event, dogs or not, Armstrong and Morrie prepared to search for Dolan’s missing B-24. They first spoke to personnel at a Canadian radar site who were certain the aircraft lay within three miles of the airfield. Armstrong received further information that men at a Canadian army site on the outskirts of Gander had spotted a fire to the northeast. After speaking with the army witnesses and getting a general direction of the fire, Armstrong and Morrie set out on snowshoes. They searched until daylight and returned to their shack to eat and catch a couple hours sleep. They resumed the search using two Allis-Chalmers M7 snow tractors.¹⁷⁵ The M7 was a halftrack with the front axle interchangeable to either wheels or skis. It was powered by a 4-cylinder, liquid cooled, Willys model MB gasoline engine and manoeuvred by an automotive-type steering gear connected to the front wheels or skis. The two machines arrived several months previous, along with M19 snow trailers. The M19 trailer was

¹⁷³ Beaupre, 1387th AAFBU, post history for February 1945, 31-33; Captain C.E. Cooke, Special Order No. 28, 1388th AAFBU (Harmon), 2 February 1945, microfilm A0164, AFHRA; Historical officer, 1388th AAFBU, post history for February 1945, 12-13, microfilm A0164, AFHRA.

¹⁷⁴ Beaupre, 1387th AAFBU, post history for February 1945, 1.

¹⁷⁵ David W. Armstrong, *Camp Rimini and Beyond: WWII Memoirs* (Self-published, 1997 and 2008), 203.

likewise interchangeable to wheels or skis. The body was wooden with an insulated (and removable) canopy and canopy support system. It had a load capacity of 2,000 pounds and could accommodate cold weather heating equipment for aircraft engines. More importantly for Gander's ground search personnel, they could use the M19 as a heated litter conveyance.¹⁷⁶

Nevertheless, the absence of dog teams complicated ground search efforts. The situation required immediate action. Sergeant Carl "Lew" Wheeler flew in seven dogs from Presque Isle. "None of these dogs was a trained leader," Armstrong recalled years later, "and one supposedly had a bad heart."¹⁷⁷ So desperate was the shortage of dogs remaining in the division that the base commanding officer at Presque Isle had to surrender his own pet husky. A second group, the remaining team of eighteen pups at Harmon Field, also went to Gander.¹⁷⁸ Using dog teams and M7 snow tractors, ground parties began searching within a twenty-five mile radius of the field. When FBI investigators showed up at Gander, Armstrong knew this was no ordinary search. This was further confirmed when the chief operations officer quietly "took us aside and told us that if we found the crash to destroy any and all papers as he believed the colonel was carrying battle orders."¹⁷⁹ An organized air search likewise commenced using RAF

¹⁷⁶ *War Department Technical Manual TM 9774, Snow Tractor M7 and 1-Ton Snow Trailer M19*, War Department, Washington, 31 January 1944, 9, 20; Armstrong, *Camp Rimini*, 196.

¹⁷⁷ Armstrong, *Camp Rimini*, 205. It may be that this dog team came from the 1382nd AAFBU at Mingan, Quebec, rather than Presque Isle. On 17 February 1945, Presque Isle sent special orders to Mingan requesting that Cpl. James Laughy and seven army war dogs proceed to Gander on temporary duty to carry out a search and rescue mission. 1st Lt. Walter W. Sears, Special Orders No. 19, 1382nd AAFBU (Mingan), 17 February 1945, microfilm A0160, AFHRA.

¹⁷⁸ Pfc. Dalton E. Nelson, "Search and Rescue," *Harmoneer*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (Manchester, N.H.: Granite States Press, December 1945), 11; Historical officer, 1388th AAFBU, post history for February 1945, 13.

¹⁷⁹ Armstrong, *Camp Rimini*, 204.

Transport Command (formerly RAF Ferry Command), RCAF, and USAAF aircraft. Twice during the next week, No. 19 Radio Unit attempted to obtain a fix on search aircraft that reported sighting wreckage. In each case, it turned out to be wreckage from a previously known crash.¹⁸⁰ On one day, eighteen B-17s took to the air but found nothing. An RCAF Norseman pilot spotted a B-24 wreck north of Gander and believed he had found the missing aircraft. It turned out that the aircraft had gone down two years previous.¹⁸¹

In addition to the ground and air searches, a ski-plane landed Technical Sergeant Norbert Vander Bloomen and Newfoundland civilian Hugh Pelley at Gander Bay on 19 February. They travelled the area between Carmanville and Lewisporte, contacting woodsmen, trappers, hunters, and fishermen for clues to Dolan's missing aircraft. "No definite leads were obtained," accident investigators reported, "but everyone was alerted to contact the U.S. Army at Gander" should they find the aircraft or obtain information useful to searchers.¹⁸²

On the same day that Bloomen and Pelly were airlifted to Gander Bay, ten Western Union telegrams were addressed to the missing airmen's next of kin. Although five days had passed since their disappearance, this was the first notification. "The Secretary of War desires me to express his deep regret that your son Second Lieutenant Edmund H. Breschini has been reported missing ... in [the] American area," read the telegram

¹⁸⁰ No. 19 Radio Unit Daily Diary, entries for 16 and 20 February 1945.

¹⁸¹ RCAF Station Gander ORB Daily Diary, entries for 16 and 17 February 1945, C-12186, LAC. Postwar, known crash sites were marked with yellow paint to avoid confusion during similar searches.

¹⁸² Beaupre, 1387th AAFBU, post history for March 1945, 28; "Section M, Description of the Accident," Accident Report, 44-42169.

addressed to Mary Breschini from the War Department in Washington. “If further details or other information are received,” it concluded, “you will be promptly notified.”¹⁸³ The families, wives, and fiancées could do little at this point but wait and hope.

¹⁸³ Western Union Telegram, 19 February 1945, BFC.

Chapter 5

Hope and Rumour

Hope became an overriding theme over the ensuing weeks, reinforced at times by well-meaning informants sharing words of encouragement and optimism. However, informants often imbued such words with misinformation and rumour, then promptly disseminated by the receiver among anxiously awaiting family members and further buoying their hopes. Still, the familial experience under study was not unique to its participants. Indeed, the commonalities shared with others in similar circumstances went beyond hope and rumour to include the physical and psychological.

The fiancées of officers Breschini, Barry, and Topham maintained a close relationship while their men trained at Westover Field, and this relationship continued as they awaited the departure of the men in New York. Their interconnectedness took on added importance in February 1945. This shared bond, predicated on hope, courage, and ultimately personal loss, sustained the relationship in the days, weeks, and months to follow. The letters written by Dorothy Cruickshank to the Breschini family in California (despite having never met them) while her fiancé was missing, reveal the import of this mutually supportive and hope-based relationship, especially as a conduit for information sharing. Likewise do they illustrate how misinformation and rumour reinforced that hope. The letters also suggest that the fiancées had not established a similar communicative bond with the wives of crewmen Brando and Parsons, nor with anyone linked romantically to the remaining four crewmembers (bearing in mind that Colonel Dolan was not a member of this bombardment crew and his wife therefore unknown to them on

a personal level). The reason for this lay perhaps in the basic structure of combat crews, differentiated in the air force hierarchy as either officers or enlisted men and each with separate mess halls and barracks. Moreover, officers and enlisted men socialized on base at their respective clubs and often maintained that disconnect when socializing off base. By extension then, the fiancées would become part of that separateness.

When the dreaded Western Union telegram arrived at the Breschini residence on 19 February, Edmund's sister June telephoned Dorothy in Springfield with the bad news. Dorothy in turn called Charles Topham's girl Cherrie in Ohio and John Barry's girl Becky at Mount Holyoke College. Neither had heard anything. Five days later, ten since the aircraft had disappeared, Dorothy penned a letter to the Breschini family, her first since June's call. She told how Becky, upon receiving Dorothy's phone call, immediately contacted nearby Westover Field seeking more information. Those at the field had encouraging words to say about the boys and expressed their "absolute confidence in the crew's ability." They assured Becky, doubtless an attempt to assuage her worry, that the plane was fully equipped with parachutes, liferafts, and rations. John Barry's mother remained equally optimistic, Dorothy wrote, "feeling so sure that John and the boys will somehow get back safely." If anything, Dorothy's letter suggested an upbeat countenance as she reminisced in detail of hers and Becky's misadventures in New York, and prided in Edmund's positive qualities and his penchant for pranks. Hope, an ever-present theme, could be drawn from the reassuring words expressed by the crew's compatriot airmen at Westover Field, in the convictions of Cherrie Shoop, who kept "her chin and courage right up there on top," and in the spiritual acts of those anxiously "praying for Ed's safe

return,” Dorothy concluded.¹⁸⁴ Words of hope came from the South Pacific, too. “I can’t believe that anything has happened to Ed, and I won’t,” wrote a “misty-eyed” Ervin De Smet, a friend and neighbour of the Breschinis. “I still have lots of hope,” he declared, but “my ideas about life are changing each day that I’m out here,” shaped by “what I saw at Iwo Jima,” he added pragmatically.¹⁸⁵

Any positive news brought renewed optimism on the homefront. In her next letter on 1 March, Dorothy told how she got word from someone recently returned from the North Atlantic that many emergency landing fields dotted the region. Even so, word of their safe landing surely would have been communicated before now had they used such a field. This person went on to rightly explain that locating a downed aircraft on land could take time “due to the scarcity of population and the tremendous amount of snow” in northern regions. The North Atlantic was well-patrolled, assured her contact, and had they landed on the water they “would have an excellent chance of being picked up either by the Navy” or a fishing vessel.¹⁸⁶ Regardless, the odds were clearly against anyone attempting a water landing in the stormy North Atlantic, especially in wintertime. Moreover, the B-24’s structural design led to poor ditching characteristics. The flimsy bomb bay doors generally collapsed, causing the aft bomb bay bulkhead to fail. Typically, B-24s would break in two on impact and sink rapidly.¹⁸⁷ Surviving the landing was one thing; being

¹⁸⁴ Dorothy Cruickshank, letter to Breschini family, 24 February 1945, BFC.

¹⁸⁵ Ervin De Smet, letter to Breschini family, 18 March 1945, BFC.

¹⁸⁶ Dorothy Cruickshank, letter to Breschini family, 1 March 1945, BFC.

¹⁸⁷ Laura Hillenbrand, *Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption* (New York: Random House, 2010), 85.

found by a ship among that vast ocean swell was another. Such words, well-meaning perhaps and meant to allay fears, further reinforced optimism among the waiting.

Some details of the flight slowly began to emerge at Mitchel Field. Dorothy heard that a colonel, “expert in instrument flying,” had accompanied the boys. Her informant knew enough to correctly disclose that, “this Colonel must have had that special card [Green Instrument Card] entitling him to fly in any kind of weather.” Still, misinformation seeped through with Dorothy’s informant telling that the aircraft had departed Presque Isle, Maine, bound for Iceland. The aircraft’s last word, she wrote, came two hours after take-off.¹⁸⁸ The aircraft had in fact left from Grenier Field in New Hampshire, but with Gander as its destination and Presque Isle as an alternate. Due to poor weather conditions, Gander was unable to establish radio contact, but Presque Isle eventually did, at which time five hours had elapsed since take-off. By then, the aircraft was nearing its destination and shortly made radio contact with Gander Approach Control.¹⁸⁹ Such details, as well as Presque Isle’s wartime role as both North Atlantic Division headquarters for the ATC and another departure point for aircraft bound overseas, may have led to certain assumptions.

The tension of waiting revealed itself in some seemingly innocuous commentary as Dorothy told how she took up knitting which she had laid aside three years previous. Even the ringing of the phone induced jitters. Once, while in conversation with a visiting Becky, it rang several times, causing both girls much anxiety, “however, in time I found strength to answer it,” Dorothy admitted. It happened to be Cherrie, lonesome and calling

¹⁸⁸ Dorothy Cruickshank, letter to Breschini family, 1 March 1945, BFC.

¹⁸⁹ “Section M, Description of the Accident,” Accident Report, 44-42169.

from Marietta. She was splitting her time between home and Chester, Pennsylvania, with the Topham family, who were keeping contact with “Washington for further developments.” The waiting also took its toll on Dorothy’s work life. A passing remark praised her employer’s patience despite her absenteeism, “for at this point,” she added, “I am merely on their expense sheet.”¹⁹⁰ The nature of her employment made the waiting all the much harder. Dorothy worked in the claims department of an insurance company and regularly handled life insurance claims for deceased military personnel.

As February ended so too did the aerial search. For two weeks, some forty-five aircraft had flown 289 hours and covered over thirteen thousand square miles, but their efforts revealed nothing of the missing aircraft and crew. The ground search, equally unsuccessful, was discontinued on 3 March.¹⁹¹ Becky, for whom “this war has meant one heartache after another in her young life,” lamented Dorothy, turned twenty-one the next day, but there was little to celebrate.¹⁹² They tried nonetheless, with cake, candles, and presents. It pleased Dorothy to see Becky’s “face light up as she made her wish,” undoubtedly for her fiancé’s safe return.¹⁹³ Still, the reports trickling in gave reason for hope. Becky had secured another contact, a classmate whose father was an officer at Presque Isle. This officer’s friend, based at Gander, claimed to have done more flying than ever at the field. The officer knew of no other accident in the area so the news reassured the girls “that it must be Ed’s crew they are searching for.” The Air Corps “never gives up the search easily,” added their airmen friends at Westover Field. Never

¹⁹⁰ Dorothy Cruickshank, letter to Breschini family, 1 March 1945, BFC.

¹⁹¹ “Section M, Description of the Accident,” Accident Report, 44-42169.

¹⁹² Dorothy Cruickshank, letter to Breschini family, 1 March 1945, BFC.

¹⁹³ Dorothy Cruickshank, letter to Mary Breschini, 12 March 1945, BFC.

lose hope even if the news is bad, reminded the officer at Presque Isle, as “the government always tells the worst.” Besides, he continued, it was possible to survive on land even if the search proved unsuccessful. The area was vast and a thorough search therefore impossible. Had they encountered bad weather over the ocean, he surmised, they would continue no further and head west for Canada or Greenland. Even the improved weather “in this section” gave cause for optimism, as “it has no doubt been of great value in the search,” wrote Dorothy to June Breschini on 9 March, unaware that weather was no longer a factor as the air force had already suspended both the air and ground search.¹⁹⁴

Several days later, Dorothy wrote Edmund’s mother, praising her “tremendous faith and courage” and expressing confidence that, “being the kind of person he [Edmund] is, I’m sure he knows that we all know he is coming back to us.” Edmund had urged Dorothy to keep cheerful, whatever the circumstances. It was a struggle, but appeared to help, she said, for even as time passed without word, “I feel more and more that Ed is safe and that we will hear from him.”¹⁹⁵ She said as much in a letter to Edmund’s sister Eleanor, adding defiantly that, should the news prove otherwise “I would certainly not even give up then as the government does definitely make mistakes and always hands out the pessimistic angle.” Experience at the insurance company validated this perspective, as it was something Dorothy had occasion to witness.¹⁹⁶ There was still nothing to report when she wrote Eleanor again several days later, however, Dorothy now held the conviction

¹⁹⁴ Dorothy Cruickshank, letter to June Breschini, 9 March 1945, BFC.

¹⁹⁵ Dorothy Cruickshank, letter to Mary Breschini, 12 March 1945, BFC.

¹⁹⁶ Dorothy Cruickshank, letter to Eleanor Breschini, 12 March 1945, BFC.

that good news would arrive by Easter.¹⁹⁷ Following the weather reports became part of the daily routine, and even the “glorious” spring sunshine made her feel more hopeful for the boys. A “constant flow” of letters from Cherrie offered encouragement too; and they always ended with a reassuring, “keep your chin up.” Still, Cherrie’s decision to stay with the Topham family troubled Dorothy, as she did little but sit about the house and write letters. From Dorothy’s seemingly maternal perspective, this arrangement was the worst possible for someone so young and naïve to this type and degree of worry. Consequently, word that Cherrie was leaving and going home came as a relief.¹⁹⁸

The families, friends, wives, and fiancées naturally and understandably remained hopeful that searchers would find the boys alive, and each rumour or encouraging detail, however small, further sustained that hope. One can draw parallels with others in similar circumstances. “A mother will keep hoping long after it is unreasonable to hope,” writes Susan Sheehan in *A Missing Plane*, the story of a Second World War bomber found in New Guinea after nearly forty years. Most of the mothers of the twenty-two crew and passengers, Sheehan discovered, “harboured fantasies that their sons were alive” and living among natives in the jungle or on some tropical island. Some held this belief for their remaining lives, unwilling or unable to accept the finality of death. They preferred instead to think of their sons as having simply “gone away.” Indeed, in the days following the aircraft’s disappearance, one mother mailed her missing son a fruitcake. The box she

¹⁹⁷ Dorothy Cruickshank, letter to Eleanor Breschini, 16 March 1945, BFC.

¹⁹⁸ Dorothy Cruickshank, letter to June Breschini, 19 March 1945, BFC.

mailed it in came back empty. Proof, she surmised, that her son was alive and well. She continued writing him, giving the letters to another son to mail, but he never did.¹⁹⁹

In *With Wings as Eagles*, published several years after the war, Helen Chappell White provided one of the earliest, if not only, major accounts of a hopeful mother awaiting news of her missing aviator son. Such accounts are rare due to the private nature of the subject matter. With its theological underpinnings (her father was a minister), White's personal and forthright narrative was as much cathartic as it was an expression of her faith. Nevertheless, her experiences themselves during those dark days of nervous anticipation and uncertainty reveal commonalities with those awaiting news of the missing Dolan crew. White continued writing her son, but "carefully filed the letters away," awaiting his return so they could read them together.²⁰⁰ Intuition, on the other hand, told John Barry's mother in Texas that "she would feel it if anything was wrong with John." She likewise continued writing her son, waiting upon further word before mailing the letters.²⁰¹ Communication was key, and here too are there parallels in the familial experience. Information gathering became a quest of sorts, with inquiries frequently directed to the War Department in Washington. White likewise clung to any plausible survival scenario, or created her own when the news from Washington was uncertain. Indeed, when she wrote the families of the other crewmembers, most responded "with a frantic hopefulness to any theory I might dream up for survival."²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ Susan Sheehan, *A Missing Plane: The Dramatic Tragedy and Triumph of a Lost and Forgotten World War II Bomber* (New York: Berkley Books, 1986), 223-224.

²⁰⁰ Helen Chappell White, *With Wings as Eagles* (New York and Toronto: Rinehart and Company, Inc., 1953), 33, 35.

²⁰¹ Dorothy Cruickshank, letter to Mary Breschini, 12 March 1945, BFC.

²⁰² White, *With Wings*, 55.

The stress of waiting might also reveal itself both physically and psychologically. The mother of prewar Olympian Louis Zamperini whose bomber disappeared over the Pacific Ocean in 1943, cried and prayed, “consumed in anguish.” Soon, the stress revealed itself when “open sores broke out all over her hands.”²⁰³ For Helen Chappell White, the symptoms of anxiety and of living in acute suspense soon became recognizable: “the nagging nausea, the shivery stomach, the cold hands, [and] the strange aspect the world took on.”²⁰⁴ The worry eventually took its toll on Charles Topham’s mother Sarah, too. “I am having quite a time with my wife,” her husband lamented in a letter to Mary Breschini. “She has just lost all interest in everything,” he continued, “and the Doctor told me last week that her heart, bladder, and nerves had all given away at once.”²⁰⁵ Her emotional and physical condition may explain why her husband authored each letter to the Breschini family, while others came from the mothers, wives, and fiancées of the Westover crew.

Ultimately, hope and wishful thinking linked the families of missing service personnel; a hope sometimes buoyed by optimistic rumours. The social distress associated with wartime conditions fostered rumours, observed American social scientist Robert Knapp in 1944, his country then abuzz with morale and confidence impairing rumours. Facts become scarcer due to military secrecy and censorship, so rumours “fill in the gaps in our knowledge, and provide clandestine information.” His findings, applicable to those awaiting news of the missing, suggested that “rumour is created out of the impulse to

²⁰³ Hillenbrand, *Unbroken*, 139. When word came that her son was alive and coming home, the rash on her hands vanished, leaving no sign of a scar. *Ibid.*, 333.

²⁰⁴ White, *With Wings*, 37.

²⁰⁵ Charles E. Topham, letter to Mary Breschini, 27 May 1945, BFC.

interpret the world meaningfully,” and served to both satisfy an emotional need and defend against anxiety.²⁰⁶ Believers, whether military or civilian, disseminated rumours often thinking they were performing a helpful act by satisfying that emotional need.

In his assessment of wartime behaviour, historian Paul Fussell added that, “Rumour sustains hope and gives magical outcomes.”²⁰⁷ Alluding to Gestalt psychology, the study of the human mind, perception, and behaviour, psychology professor Ralph Rosnow argued that rumour can “assuage emotional discomfort by providing a fantasy outlet for catharsis.”²⁰⁸ Furthermore, and with emphasis on the fiancées and their experiences, rumours expressed “the wishes and hopes of those among whom they circulate.”²⁰⁹ For many loved ones caught in this chaotic and uncertain situation, the wait could be lengthy, if not endless, but for those of the Dolan crew the waiting was soon to end.

²⁰⁶ Robert H. Knapp, “A Psychology of Rumor,” *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 8, 1 (March 1944): 22-23, 31.

²⁰⁷ Fussell, *Wartime*, 36.

²⁰⁸ Ralph L. Rosnow, “Psychology of Rumor Reconsidered,” *Psychological Bulletin*, 87, 3 (1980): 579.

²⁰⁹ Knapp, “A Psychology of Rumor”: 23-24.

Chapter 6

We Regret To Inform You

In mid-March 1945, thirty-seven year old trapper Fred Ginn of Carmanville happened upon aircraft wreckage strewn for hundreds of feet through trees and deep snow, miles from the nearest town.²¹⁰ Identification cards found at the scene showed the crew to be American.²¹¹ Unable to break a trail to Gander with his dog team, Ginn made for the town of Benton, on the rail line eight miles east of the airfield. A telegraph from Benton's railway agent announcing Ginn's arrival found its way to the desk of Lieutenant Colonel Ronald C. McLaughlin, Commanding Officer of U.S. forces at Gander, designated the 1387th Army Air Forces Base Unit.²¹² An eleven-man ground party complete with M7 snow tractor and M19 trailer, dog teams, and sleds proceeded to Benton by rail and had Ginn guide them overland to the crash site. The men set about digging in the snow for anything that might identify the aircraft. The tail section, among the largest remaining parts, was uncovered to reveal the number 44-42169, thus confirming it as Colonel Dolan's aircraft.²¹³ By pushing rods down through the snow, the party located two frozen bodies, identified by wallets and other personal items as Corporals John Tarpey and John Baker.²¹⁴ The search party returned to Gander with their remains and on 24 March, presiding Catholic and Protestant chaplains, captains Laurence

²¹⁰ Beaupre, 1387th AAFBU, post history for March 1945, 28-29.

²¹¹ Captain Frank Collins, telegraph to commanding officer RCAF, 15 March 1945, microfilm A0163, AFHRA.

²¹² Collins, telegraph to commanding officer RCAF, 15 March 1945; Beaupre, 1387th AAFBU, post history for March 1945, 29.

²¹³ Beaupre, 1387th AAFBU, post history for March 1945, 31.

²¹⁴ Armstrong, *Camp Rimini*, 210; Beaupre, 1387th AAFBU, post history for March 1945, 31.

J. Lynch and John A. Turner, respectively, officiated a military funeral service for the entire crew, although eight were still unaccounted for.²¹⁵ Someone, presumably the chaplains, decided for practicality to have one as opposed to multiple services as searchers recovered others of the crew.

Following the return of the search team, Gander's Counter Intelligence Section reported that the military's extensive efforts had elicited a rumour at the airfield. In discussing the anxiety of authorities in finding the aircraft, word circulated that the B-24 carried over a quarter million dollars. The unsubstantiated rumour, thought to have originated among some Newfoundland civilians, was overheard expressed by a group of enlisted men in a mess hall.²¹⁶ The USAAF had lost four multi-engine heavy bombers around Gander prior to February 1945, but none had received this length of search attention. The reason is explainable. Search and rescue personnel had located these downed aircraft either immediately or within hours, identifiable by smoke and fire or the telltale wreckage-strewn swath through the forest. Additionally, between 1942 and 1944, no less than nine USAAF heavy bombers departed Gander and disappeared altogether. However, in these cases, Missing Air Crew Reports, filed within forty-eight hours of the time the air force declared an aircraft as officially missing, put last radio contact somewhere over the North Atlantic Ocean. The odds of survival in the frigid Atlantic were clearly miniscule, and without a defined last known position, officials at Gander

²¹⁵ Beaupre, 1387th AAFBU, post history for March 1945, 32, 35.

²¹⁶ Beaupre, Intelligence and Security Officer, Weekly Activity Report for Period Ending 25 March 1945, microfilm A0164, AFHRA.

more often limited the search effort to several days at most and simply asked other transatlantic-bound flight crews to keep a watchful eye.²¹⁷

To date, this writer has uncovered no evidence to suggest that searchers knew that Dolan's aircraft carried confidential equipment, and thus were more vigilant. Indeed, in the interests of confidentiality, officials had no reason disclose this information until such time that searchers found the aircraft. Ultimately, the exigencies of war dictated the level of effort and the amount of time expended searching for missing aircraft. The military's actions and perceived anxiety that February were nonetheless justifiable. Simply put, ten American personnel were missing, one a colonel, and the evidence pointed to the aircraft being down somewhere near the field.

Ultimately, a unique situation dictated a unique response. Not surprisingly, it raised a few eyebrows, and wagged a few tongues. Historian Paul Fussell perhaps explains the rationale behind this rumour. In the context of the military establishment, he argues, soldiers often spread rumours out of boredom, for a psychological need, or simply for fun.²¹⁸ Significantly, he adds, they might substitute as compensation "during moments when clear explanations of purpose and significance seem especially unavailable."²¹⁹ In the end, the mess hall rumour was perhaps no more than an attempt to give some semblance of meaning to a misunderstood search effort; and the attention-grabbing

²¹⁷ No specific source exists for these figures. This is a cumulative conclusion, based on the writer's examination of base unit histories, operations record books, and daily diaries, both USAAF and RCAF and specific to Newfoundland and Labrador, and USAAF Missing Air Crew Reports and accident reports.

²¹⁸ Fussell, *Wartime*, 41 and 45.

²¹⁹ Fussell, *Wartime*, 35.

money angle added conveniently to the intrigue, ensuring its continued circulation around the airfield.

A second search and rescue party, headed by Finnish-born Warrant Officer Reino I. Kotilainen, officer-in-charge of the search and rescue unit at Harmon Field, got underway around 26 March, tasked with locating and recovering the remaining bodies. A ski-plane dropped the men three miles from the crash at Indian Bay Pond where they proceeded overland by foot.²²⁰ Newfoundland civilians Hugh Pelley and Robert Gillingham of Victoria Cove accompanied Kotilainen's party.²²¹ Dogman David Armstrong assisted. Acute observation helped find the bodies of Colonel Dolan and the co-pilot, presumably John Barry, some six hundred feet from the crash site. By looking at broken treetops, explained Armstrong, "we mentally drew an arc and started looking at its end. Both bodies were still strapped in their seats."²²² Their mission took on added importance when on 27 March a supply plane dropped an unexpected message to the men combing the wilderness. It gave strict orders to check carefully for the aircraft's confidential cargo, a new invention in bombing radar, destined for the Eighth Air Force in its fight against Nazi Germany.

The radar set carried aboard Dolan's aircraft was the brainchild of physicist Luis W. Alvarez. Late in 1940, with America neutral and the Battle of Britain at its peak, the twenty-nine year old Californian arrived at MIT's newly opened Radiation Laboratory to help with its microwave radar development program. Alvarez knew that the military

²²⁰ Beaupre, 1387th AAFBU, post history for March 1945, 35; Senior Control Officer's Daily Diary, RAF Transport Command, Gander, entry for 26 March 1945, The Rooms.

²²¹ Frank Tibbo, "Money on Board?," *Gander Beacon*, 10 September 2001.

²²² *Ibid.*, 211-212.

needed accurate targeting radars so he got his project moving. The result was Eagle, designated AN/APQ-7, a high-resolution radar for high altitude, precision blind bombing. Lab staff initially called the project EHIB, or Every House in Berlin, perhaps reflecting what they thought or hoped of its precision possibilities.²²³ The development phase took several years, but the design outcome was a sixteen-foot antenna, housed in an airfoil mounted beneath the fuselage and linked to the aircraft's Norden bombsight. For eleven months beginning in June 1943, an Eagle-equipped B-24 Liberator assigned to the Rad Lab flew 133 proving and performance flights from Westover Field, Massachusetts (coincidentally, the same field where the crew later carried out bombardment training). As the war progressed, the air forces' need for precision blind bombing equipment became more acute. Eagle development and engineering soon branched out to include Bell Telephone Laboratories and Western Electric. Both began rolling out preproduction sets during the summer and fall of 1944, while plants in Detroit and Brooklyn produced the antennas. The first Eagle set reached the Eighth Air Force in England late in 1944 in a B-17 named "Too Little, Too Late," but it never saw combat action in the European Theatre, instead making many trial flights. The second Eagle set would start over in February 1945 aboard Colonel Dolan's aircraft. Following VE-Day, attention turned to the Pacific where Eagle-equipped B-29 aircraft successfully bombed industrial targets on the island of Japan.²²⁴

²²³ Buder, *The Invention that Changed the World*, 134-136; Dexter Masters, editor, "The Eagle Story: How it all began," *Radar*, 10 (30 June 1945), 28-29.

²²⁴ Dexter Masters, editor, "The Eagle Strikes," *Radar*, 11 (10 September 1945), 42-43.

Luis Alvarez left MIT's Rad Lab in 1943, called away to work on the Manhattan Project, the development of the atomic bomb. He also flew as a scientific observer at the Hiroshima explosion and went on to develop a microwave early warning system and Ground Controlled Approach (GCA), a blind landing system that became invaluable in guiding aircraft to safe landing in adverse weather. Alvarez's work earned him the 1945 National Aeronautic Association's Robert J. Collier Trophy for the development of GCA, and later the Nobel Prize in Physics.²²⁵ The United States Army Air Forces brought Alvarez's blind landing GCA system to Gander on a trial basis during the summer of 1945, only months after the loss of Colonel Dolan's aircraft.²²⁶

The orders airdropped at the crash site that March directed searchers to bring surviving parts of Alvarez's invention to Gander for security storage in the station vault, but they found no trace of Eagle and assumed it had been destroyed. They did, however, eventually located the remains of Edmund Breschini, Mark Lantz and Charles Parsons, Nicholas Brando, Harry Karpick, and Charles Topham, and "we packed up and headed for home," says Armstrong.²²⁷ While theoretically accounted-for, personnel at Gander could not immediately identify the remains of the latter three.

The U.S. Army Air Forces Base Unit history for Gander records that the airmen's remains along with some personal effects were brought to Gander on 28 March and a military funeral held the following day.²²⁸ For reasons that are unclear, the chaplains later

²²⁵ Alvarez, *Alvarez: Adventures of a Physicist*, 95, 114-115, 143, 214; "Luis Alvarez Wins Collier Air Award," *New York Times*, 13 December 1946, 20.

²²⁶ Maloney, 1387th AAFBU, post history for July 1945, 28.

²²⁷ Beaupre, 1387th AAFBU, post history for March 1945, 35-36; Armstrong, *Camp Rimini*, 213.

²²⁸ Beaupre, 1387th AAFBU, post history for March 1945, 36.

advised family members that the burial took place on 27 March. Adding to the confusion, interment records filed by graves registration staff cite the burial date for each of the ten crewman as 24 March, even though eight were still unaccounted for on this date. It may be that staff wished to maintain administrative consistency, so simply chose the date of the initial funeral service and burials. In any event, Lieutenant Colonel McLaughlin and “his Staff and all the officers and enlisted men who could be spared from duty were in attendance,” wrote Chaplain Lynch. “After the Requiem Mass and the usual last blessing we marched under colours to the cemetery.” Their graves were “blessed, the volleys fired, and taps were blown.”²²⁹ A second Western Union telegram delivered to the families now amended their loved one’s status from missing to confirmed killed.

²²⁹ Captain Laurence J. Lynch, letter to Mary Breschini, 4 April 1945, BFC.

Chapter 7

An Orchid For Dorothy

Until now, the sharing of information had been between the fiancées (and their future in-laws), simply because they had become acquainted while their men trained at Westover Field. The parents of the crew, on the other hand, had corresponded little, if at all, until after the funeral and thus were unknown to one another on a personal level. Evidently, only after the crew was confirmed deceased did the War Department disseminate a list of mailing addresses to each family. It may be that they viewed the release of such information in the days immediately following the disappearance as unnecessary and premature, or perhaps even unwise as family members might interpret the gesture as the military's oblique way of expressing hopelessness for the crew's survival. On the other hand, the delay was perhaps equally attributable to the inherently cumbersome and overburdened wartime administrative process. In any event, the letters written in the weeks following the funeral at Gander suggest that the parents, both mothers and fathers, were anxious to communicate, to exchange photographs, and to share their respective experiences. Mostly, however, communication served to satisfy a need for clarity - at times clouded by rumour - amid the War Department's seemingly ambiguous and sometimes contradictory communiqués, which left parents mistrustful, confused, and uncertain.

Some letters reveal theological overtones with parents calling on their faith in God as a source of enduring strength. For others, their faith offered a way to legitimize and give meaning to their loss. Letters from the Tophams in particular to both the Breschini family

and the War Department reveal the extent of their spirituality and devotion to their religion, Episcopalianism. Indeed, circumstances saw them later share spiritual interpretations with the military in an unorthodox attempt to identify their son's remains. Likewise do the Tophams' letters characterise the frustrations and sadness experienced by other family members. Both the Breschini collection and the IDPFs show Charles Topham Sr. as the more prolific writer among the parents. Consequently, his letters contribute significantly, but not exclusively, to the following analysis. As a collective, the letters reveal other commonalities in the familial experience, more specifically, matters surrounding the immediate repatriation of the dead and the return of their personal belongings.

For John Baker's mother Martha, uncertainty led to suspicion over the contents of a condolatory letter received from Lieutenant Colonel McLaughlin at Gander. In time, he assured seven parents that their sons had been positively identified, but of the other three crewmen disclosed that, "only God will be able to distinguish between the mortal remains of each." His words were hardly reassuring to Martha Baker, whose son McLaughlin reported as identified. She now harboured doubts and wondered to Mary Breschini if all ten letters said the same thing, implying that the military was conspiring to conceal the names of the unidentified. "Please write and let me know what it said in your letter," she implored.²³⁰ Two weeks later, a presumably relieved Baker wrote again with their names, the information having eventually circulated her way.²³¹ The ambiguous Adjutant General's death notification telegram left Mary Breschini sceptical too. Charles

²³⁰ Martha Baker, letter to Mary Breschini, 3 May 1945, BFC.

²³¹ Martha Baker, letter to Mary Breschini, 18 May 1945, BFC.

Topham's telegram, she discovered, told how searchers, guided by a trapper, had located the crash after thirty-one miles of travel through the wilderness. "You did not tell me this," she complained to the Adjutant General's office in Washington. The oversight prompted her to question if indeed "my son's body has been found," and if so, "where the body is buried."²³²

That the military was forthcoming in naming the unidentified became painfully real for the Topham family. Still, the news, weeks in arriving, only worsened matters. The root cause lay perhaps with both the War Department's administrative process and its overburdened staff, and the well-intended phraseology of a letter from a chaplain in Gander. Early on, days after the funeral and weeks before learning that his son was among the unidentified, Charles Topham, anxious to communicate with other family members but having no complete mailing addresses, wrote the Breschinis in San Jose. He addressed their mail simply to, "Parents of Lt. Edmund Breschini." A note on the envelope reverse pleaded with the postmaster to help locate the family. In it, Topham shared some inaccurate information from an unnamed source on the aircraft's departure and refuelling locations, and told how his son had often praised Edmund as "one of the most expert navigators he had ever met in his training." The Tophams, being woefully uninformed at this early stage, could only empathize with the Breschinis "in the loss of such a good son," and, conversely, convey hopefulness that his life had been spared. "Whatever the answer," Topham resolved, "may our Heavenly Father be ever with you through it all"²³³

²³² Mary Breschini, letter to Adjutant General, 13 April 1945, IDPF, Breschini.

²³³ Charles Topham, letter to Mary Breschini, 4 April 1945, BFC.

Information from the War Department was slow arriving, “sent out,” Topham speculated, “in alphabetical order which makes us the last to receive them.” Telegrams to the families, he discovered, lacked consistency in detail and content. “It certainly looks to me,” he surmised, “as if they don’t want to give any more information on the crash than” necessary.²³⁴ Word from an informant only heightened curiosity and worsened the anxiety. En route to Italy, the man had landed at Gander around when searchers found the wreckage. He prodded for details but “they said it was a secret.” Nevertheless, “he found out a lot of things I would like to know,” but strict censorship regulations kept him silent.²³⁵ To circumvent the secrecy and delays, and because “it would be very difficult to get in touch with the trapper who located the crash,” Topham proposed writing the caretaker of the Gander cemetery.²³⁶

The anger and frustration came to a head with the eventual arrival of Lieutenant Colonel McLaughlin’s condolatory letter. In it, a candid McLaughlin divulged that 2nd Lieutenant Topham was among the three unidentified. The news “was another one of those shocks which we are receiving so often.” Moreover, Topham contended, it contradicted the information previously received from Captain John Turner, Gander’s Protestant chaplain. Whether by accident or design, Turner had told how each grave was marked with an appropriate marker, which suggested to Topham that each crewman had

²³⁴ Charles Topham, letter to Mary Breschini, 29 April 1945, BFC. In one instance, the timelines failed to add up. One parent left Topham believing that trapper Ginn had found the crash on 20th March. Then, according to the commanding officer, Ginn took two days to reach Gander to report it. In Topham’s estimation, hardly enough time remained for ground search to reach the crash, recover the bodies, and return to base for a 24th March burial as the chaplain reported. The burial date was erroneous, however, and the 20th March misinterpreted as the original discovery date, when it was the date Gander’s ground search first reached the crash, led by Ginn. See Charles Topham, letter to Mary Breschini, 27 May 1945, BFC.

²³⁵ Charles Topham, letter to Breschini, 22 April 1945, BFC.

²³⁶ Charles Topham, letter to Breschini, 29 April 1945, BFC.

been identified.²³⁷ Turner's words, albeit open to interpretation, were true. Each grave *was* marked with a white wooden cross, but the crosses of the three unidentified bore no stencilled names, only the alphanumerical markings X-1, X-2, and X-3; standard monikers used in accordance with Graves Registration Service regulations. It may be that Turner chose to spare the feelings of an already devastated family, although they would have surely found out in time. More plausible perhaps, is that such notifications were simply not his prerogative and a matter for someone in a position of authority, like the base commanding officer. Captain Lynch's letter to the Catholic families presents evidence suggestive of the limitations placed on chaplains when he admitted, "I am restrained from giving details of the accident."²³⁸ It seems too, that McLaughlin's letter furthered the confusion by misnaming the remaining two unidentified as Brando and Tarpey, when the latter was actually Karpick. With this latest news, Topham did not hide his feelings. Tired of the inconsistencies, grief-stricken, and mistrusting the military, he tersely remarked, "So much contradiction you can't believe any of them, and it just keeps you upset all the time ... Our lives have just been ruined by the loss of this grand boy."²³⁹ His wife was in especially poor shape, having "lost everything in the world she was interested in."²⁴⁰ Living adjacent the Pennsylvania Military College did little to lessen their despondency. Indeed, the sight of young men training for service merely reminded them daily of their loss.²⁴¹

²³⁷ Charles Topham, letter to Breschini, 27 May 1945, BFC.

²³⁸ Captain Laurence J. Lynch, letter to Mary Breschini, 4 April 1945, BFC.

²³⁹ Charles Topham, letter to Mary Breschini, 27 May 1945, BFC.

²⁴⁰ Charles Topham, letter to Mrs. Martin, 14 June 1945, BFC.

²⁴¹ Charles Topham, letter to Mary Breschini, 29 April 1945, BFC.

“Loss and the grief that attends it are intrinsic to the experience of war,” writes historian Carol Acton in her study of grief in wartime.²⁴² Yet privacy often veiled a family’s grief over such loss, and as writer Helen Chappell White discovered while struggling to adjust to the death of her aviator son, “self-help” and psychological books largely ignored the topic, and “I wondered discouragingly if the reason was that nobody had an answer.”²⁴³ Rarely did the bereaved share their experiences publicly or in published print form, which creates challenges for researchers of the subject, but it might nonetheless find expression in the privacy of a letter. Still, the wartime culture frowned upon such communicative expressions. In the interests of morale, says Judy Litoff and David Smith in their study of mail and morale in Second World War America, magazine articles expounded the virtues of good letter writing. Writers were encouraged to accentuate the positive and to convey bad news cautiously.²⁴⁴ Charles Topham’s writings hardly conformed to this model, yet as part of the collective, they qualify as the exception, not the rule. The father of John Barry wrote Mary Breschini of the suffering, “uncertainty, and grief,” but mostly as it applied to the general familial experience. His letters reveal little of his personal emotions.²⁴⁵ Such expressions, while sometimes overt, were more likely to remain unspoken, or articulated obliquely, compelling the scholar to consent to the idiom that they “read between the lines.” Strictly speaking, what is hidden is as important to a more complete understanding of the lived experience as what is not hidden. Mary Brando’s letters for example, say nothing explicitly revealing of her private

²⁴² Acton, *Grief in Wartime*, 1.

²⁴³ White, *With Wings as Eagles*, 141.

²⁴⁴ Litoff and Smith, ““Will He Get My Letter?””: 24-26.

²⁴⁵ John G. Barry, letter to Mary Breschini, 1 June 1945, BFC.

pain. Instead, in a more subtle approach, she expressed her innate feeling “that my son will walk in some day.” Frustrated, she spoke too of the many complications surrounding the accident, so many so “that I don’t know what to believe.”²⁴⁶ Dorris Parsons, wife of Charles Parsons and friends with all the boys, found it hard to believe that “they won’t come wandering in like they used to.”²⁴⁷ In a few succinct words, John Barry’s mother Alice perhaps summed up the collective sentiment, lamenting, “Nothing will ever be the same again,” but adding optimistically, “we can only try to carry on as our boys would wish.”²⁴⁸ Agnes Karpick’s closely mirrored remarks give credence to this shared similarity in emotion and mindset, but without any outward expression of grief. “Nothing will ever be the same again with Harry gone,” she wrote, “but we will have to carry on the best we can and try to make this world a better one so there will be no further wars for the children of tomorrow.”²⁴⁹

This tempered, if not prosaic syntax is perhaps a product of a wartime culture that created and actuated narratives to control behaviour and emotions of bereavement among women, mothers in particular. Their reticence, support of the war effort and apparent willingness to sacrifice their children, likewise suggests elements of the cultural archetype of the patriotic mother as identified by Ana Garner and Karen Slattery. Moreover, just as cultural archetypes carried over from the first war, so too did rhetoric on combatant death, revealing itself in official military correspondence using the conventional language of heroism and sacrifice, thus reinforcing the narrative of the “good death.” Official

²⁴⁶ Mary Brando, letter to Mary Breschini, 16 May 1945, BFC.

²⁴⁷ Dorris Parsons, letter to Mary Breschini, 17 May 1945, BFC.

²⁴⁸ Alice Barry, letter to Mary Breschini, 6 May 1945, BFC.

²⁴⁹ Agnes Karpick, letter to Mary Breschini, 15 May 1945, BFC.

platitudes as it were; a state narrative giving meaning to death. Government reinforced this narrative by symbolically honouring the mothers of America's soldier dead by awarding them gold star medals and flags. Mary Brando told of having received her service flag, usually displayed in a window at the family's residence. "A very nice flag," she claimed admiringly, "to which all families who had lost a boy were entitled."²⁵⁰ Again, because the wartime culture controlled her mourning, public expectations held that mothers accept these honours in silence.

Ultimately, asserts Doris Weatherford in her study of American women in the Second World War, mothers faced much greater odds of loss "and were most likely to feel alone and ignored," yet the literature on combat death, albeit scant, is aimed mostly at widows. Widows were the more romantic and hopeful subjects, Weatherford contends. For them, life could go on. "For mothers, however, life was closer to over."²⁵¹ Among the forgotten in such works are the fiancées and girlfriends. Indeed, even obituaries failed to acknowledge them. In her study of the private aspect of women at war, D'Ann Campbell argues that fiancées had not amassed "the psychological interdependence that grows with marriage," and therefore experienced less loneliness than wives as they waited for their men to return.²⁵² Presumably then, when faced with death, life for them could go on as well. Yet the experiences of John Barry's fiancée Betty "Becky" Cass would suggest otherwise.

²⁵⁰ Charles Topham, letter to Mrs. Martin, 14 June 1945, BFC. Indeed, Karen Slattery's own grandmother had two sons in the service during the Second World War, both serving in the Pacific. Her letters to them were always upbeat, but privately she cried herself to sleep at night. Karen Slattery, email message to author, 22 February 2015.

²⁵¹ Weatherford, *American Women*, 299.

²⁵² D'Ann Campbell, *Women at War With America: Private Lives in a Patriotic Era* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1984), 193-194.

Betty Cass was acutely aware of the risk and uncertainty associated with wartime military service, and regrettably, no stranger to grief. Six months previous, an aircraft accident in New York State claimed her older brother Bill, an air force pilot. His loss, and that of John Barry soon after their engagement, had a “major impact on Betty,” says her nephew William Cass. She and Bill were close, growing up in a household with a severely alcoholic mother and a father who drank heavily. Their parents fought constantly. Still, letters to her father and widowed sister-in-law during that time suggest a positive and optimistic person. That, Cass believes, “was the outside of Betty, but inside it was probably a very different matter.” In Cass’ estimation, the “grief and sadness bottled up inside” as a result of “losing the two men closest to her, along with the dreams of what might have been,” doomed her later marriage.²⁵³ Her silence, like that of the grieving mothers, is perhaps a corollary of the societal narratives created to control behavior and emotions of bereavement. Moreover, for American women, the Second World War witnessed significant change as they revolutionized the workforce and entered the armed services in larger than ever numbers. War work took precedence over mourning and official rhetoric encouraged the silencing of private pain.

In light of this shared but generally unspoken grief, for some the very process of writing and receiving letters held positive, even cathartic qualities. “It’s so good to write other mothers of the boys,” admitted Martha Baker.²⁵⁴ John Tarpey’s mother likewise found that writing “helped a lot” while anxiously awaiting news, as did Chaplain Lynch’s letter with its description of the Requiem Mass, burial service, and cemetery. Lynch also

²⁵³ William Cass, unpublished biography of Betty Ellen Cass, 1924-1971.

²⁵⁴ Martha Baker, letter to Mary Breschini, 18 May 1945, BFC.

enclosed photos of the services and “medals I placed on the marker of his [John Tarpey] grave and blessed.”²⁵⁵ Colonel McLaughlin likewise described the “Christian burial” and Gander’s beautiful cemetery, a fitting “resting place ... set amongst the spruce and birch woods of the Newfoundland forest, and not far from the waters of Gander Lake.” He assured the bereaved that the military had carried out an extensive and concentrated search effort, for which “I, myself, joined in ... every day for ten days.”²⁵⁶ Such letters of condolence, writes military author David P. Colley, “brought the families closer to their sons, brothers, and husbands in their last moments and gave the families some sense that their dead had been well cared for.”²⁵⁷ However, for one bereaved wartime mother, such euphemisms found in the Christian conception, like the notion of the grave as an “eternal resting place,” were nothing less than distasteful.²⁵⁸

For other family members, letters and phone calls were not enough. They needed personal contact. In April 1945, the parents and wife of Charles Parsons travelled from West Virginia to Greensburg, Pennsylvania, to visit John Baker’s parents. “We had so much in common to talk about,” wrote Martha Baker to Mary Breschini, adding, “We would love to meet you,” too.²⁵⁹ In Chester, Pennsylvania, the Tophams received the mother and widow of Nicholas Brando. They spoke at length about “the letters each has

²⁵⁵ Mrs. Patrick Tarpey, letter to Mary Breschini, 22 April 1945, BFC; Captain Laurence J. Lynch, letter to Mary Breschini, 4 April 1945, BFC. According to Michael Sledge, in *World War Two*, “photographs of graves were not to be sent to the family because” of the temporary nature of burial sites. The argument held that the newness of the graves and cemeteries would not provide an aesthetically satisfying background. It may be that this policy applied more to battle areas as the families of the crew were not denied such images. Michael Sledge, *Soldier Dead: How We Recover, Identify, Bury And Honor Our Military Fallen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005) 218.

²⁵⁶ Lieutenant Colonel Ronald C. McLaughlin, letter to Mary Breschini, 20 April 1945, BFC.

²⁵⁷ David P. Colley, *Safely Rest*, (New York: The Berkley Publishing Group, 2004), 185.

²⁵⁸ White, *With Wings as Eagles*, 175.

²⁵⁹ Martha Baker, letter to Mary Breschini, 3 May 1945, BFC.

received and their many interesting experiences with the various bureaus and agencies.”²⁶⁰ Dorothy Cruickshank travelled to San Jose to see the Breschinis, but not before quitting her job. She had intended to stay until Edmund’s return, but change “I think is good for most anyone at some time in their life,” she reasoned, “and it looks as if now is the time for me.”²⁶¹ Becky left for to El Paso to spend time with the Barry family. Becky Cass, the “beautiful eastern” girl, gushed the *El Paso Herald-Post* newspaper, was the toast of the local socialite scene, widely feted during her six-week stay. Media accounts revealed nothing of her private grief. Instead, it was a happy affair, a whirlwind of social courtesies, marked daily “with one or more parties in her honor” and prettily appointed tables adorned with “summer flowers in pastel shades.”²⁶²

Still, as much as interpersonal communications satisfied certain needs, it served too, as a conduit for disseminating misinformation, which by virtue of its widespread transmission, authorlessness, and unverifiability, became what social scientists define as rumour. In the immediate post-discovery days, parents shared rumours of the aircraft’s departure and refuelling locations, but they needed and demanded more. Their sons were dead, buried in a foreign country, and answers from the War Department were either vague, contradictory, or rarely forthcoming. In desperation, and without discretion, distraught and inquisitive family members reached out to any potential informant. Whether that informant believed or cared to believe their own information is uncertain, while evidence suggests the occasional fabrication. Ultimately, as with the fiancées, the

²⁶⁰ Charles Topham, letter to Mrs. Martin, 14 June 1945, BFC.

²⁶¹ Dorothy Cruickshank, letter to Breschini family, 16 April 1945, BFC.

²⁶² “Visitor Widely Feted,” *El Paso Herald-Post* (El Paso, Texas), 10 July 1945, 6.

opportunity to perform a helpful act by satisfying an emotional need was perhaps an informant's singular motivation.

The search for answers was not a fleeting obsession. Collected rumours circulated for weeks, months, and even years thereafter. The “not knowing,” writes rumour researcher Pamela Donovan, was “an intrinsic part of the appeal and spread” of such rumours.²⁶³ They became believable, argues American psychologists Floyd Allport and Milton Lepkin in their 1945 publication on wartime rumour, because they simplified matters, put two-and-two together, making sense out of puzzling questions.²⁶⁴ Early on, Martha Baker's informant told how their boys were taking Colonel Dolan overseas on a “secret mission” and that the colonel took command of the aircraft in Maine.²⁶⁵ Two years after the accident, the parents of crewman Mark Lantz visited Chaplain Lynch, now a dean at Loyola University in Chicago. Of the special mission, Lynch, witness from the control tower that night he said, alleged that the crew was “carrying secret papers from Roosevelt to Stalin in Russia, and that's where they were going,” with Dolan as the messenger.²⁶⁶ After the war, a soldier based in Gander when the accident occurred visited Martha Baker's Mace Street home in Greensburg with the same story.²⁶⁷ It may be then, that this rumour circulated around the airfield. Wartime psychologist Robert Knapp might therefore categorize this as a “successful rumour,” its distortion and exaggeration turning

²⁶³ Pamela Donovan, “How Idle is Idle Talk? One Hundred Years of Rumor Research,” *Diogenes*, 54, 1 (Feb 2007): 77.

²⁶⁴ Floyd H. Allport and Milton Lepkin, “Wartime Rumors of Waste and Special Privilege: Why Some People Believe Them,” *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 40, 1 (Jan 1945): 8.

²⁶⁵ Charles Topham, letter to Mary Breschini, 22 April 1945, BFC.

²⁶⁶ Bertha Lantz, letter to Mary Breschini, February 1947, BFC.

²⁶⁷ Martha Baker, letter to Agnes Karpick, date unknown, KFC.

it into a “good story.”²⁶⁸ As it stands, the secret mission *was* the aircraft, and this more a case of the boys accompanying Dolan as his flight crew. Still, it makes sense that in light of the confidential nature of the on-board radar, Dolan’s crew came handpicked and recommended. Charles Topham took the gossip further, telling how a pilot friend of the crew, “who was at Mitchel Field the same time as our boys,” heard that Dolan was the son-in-law of U.S. Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson.²⁶⁹ Topham did not question the veracity of this pilot’s information, as “everything else he told us has always been very straight.”²⁷⁰ The Dolan family quickly dispelled this rumour when asked of any possible family connection.²⁷¹ Interestingly, Topham later dropped Dolan’s name in a letter to the War Department. Unlike his previous letters, this one he addressed directly to Henry Stimson, presumably to catch the secretary’s attention in hopes of getting a favourable response.²⁷²

A contact of Charles Parsons’ father in Washington alleged that the aircraft approached Gander “from the wrong side” and was radioed instructions to circle “and land from the other side ... and in so doing crashed into a mountain.” There was no mountain, and no wrong side as such. An aircraft can approach from any direction until such time that the flight crew contacts local ground control for instructions, as did Dolan. Current weather conditions determine the active runway for air traffic. Consequently, inbound aircraft follow prescribed landing patterns, which may require circling to line up

²⁶⁸ Knapp, “A Psychology of Rumor,” 29.

²⁶⁹ Charles Topham, letter to Mary Breschini, 22 April 1945, BFC.

²⁷⁰ Charles Topham, letter to Mrs. Martin, 14 June 1945, BFC.

²⁷¹ Bill Dolan, email message to author, 18 July 2008.

²⁷² Charles Topham, letter to Honourable Henry L. Stimson, 3 May 1945, IDPF, Topham.

for approach. Parsons' informant, well-intentioned perhaps, but hardly reliable, added erroneously, "Their bodies were all found inside the plane which did not burn;" a comment likely meant to assuage a family's grief.²⁷³ This logic surly applies to certain information Martha Baker's young soldier visitor shared. Being from the same town, he took more interest in her eighteen-year-old son, readying his remains for burial with new clothing, corporal's stripes, and airman's wings. They treated all the crew in a like manner, he said, and "the boys had the best caskets." The bodies of the unidentified, he added, "including your son," Baker relayed to Agnes Karpick, were not mangled, but simply found with no identifying documentation.²⁷⁴ Their post-mortem IDPFs tell a different story as the condition of their remains, wrapped in but a sheet, indeed delayed immediate identification, while John Baker wore no uniform; it was merely laid over his body.²⁷⁵ In the end, the young soldier's carefully chosen words perhaps mirror those he would wish his own mother told under similar circumstances. The caring attention afforded Martha Baker's son is perhaps explainable too in that "soldiers feel honour bound to take care of the bodies of their buddies by recovering, cleaning, restoring some semblance of order to, and then buying them," writes Michael Sledge in his study of America's soldier dead.²⁷⁶ The chaplains too, were hardly innocent of deception. Photos of the funeral service distributed to family members show a row of ten caskets fronting a stage, likely at Gander's American theatre or recreational building. However, by this date

²⁷³ Charles Topham, letter to Mary Breschini, 22 April 1945, BFC.

²⁷⁴ Martha Baker, letter to Agnes Karpick, date unknown, KFC.

²⁷⁵ Disinterment Directives, IDPFs, Charles Topham, Harry Karpick, Nicholas Brando, and John Baker.

²⁷⁶ Michael Sledge, *Soldier Dead*, 19.

searchers had recovered only two bodies. The remaining eight caskets were empty, Chaplain Lynch later admitted, and just for show.²⁷⁷

Naturally, the news had come as a painful blow to family members. Hope had turned to despair. It was the worst possible outcome, yet for some at least, the initial reaction was to defer acceptance of their loss, or at the very least, and in light of apparent War Department contradictions, view the news with suspicion. Moreover, there were no physical remains to view or touch for authentication, and a telegram hardly sufficed as concrete, verifiable proof. “I can’t and won’t be able to believe the news until I have absolute proof of it,” wrote a steadfast Dorothy. Nor was Becky accepting of such “indefinite information as final.”²⁷⁸ Letters by Mary Brando to the Army Effects Bureau suggest uncertainty, phrased to reference a son “suppose” to have lost his life in Newfoundland, and “suppose” to be buried at Gander. His returned personal belongings consisted of six photographs, but not the wallet in which he kept them. Therefore, “I am not satisfied with this proof,” she declared emphatically, and questioned whether the bureau had actually received the photos “from Newfoundland or from some other base.”²⁷⁹

Indeed, the absence of a body, buried in a foreign country at that, meant that the return of personal belongings took on singular and paramount meaning. The War

²⁷⁷ Bertha Lantz, letter to Mary Breschini, February 1947, BFC. Nor is there consistency in the photographs themselves. Typical for the period, Gander’s photo section personnel stencilled the date, location, and subject matter at the bottom of each printed photo of the funeral services, duplicates of which the chaplains sent to each family. The set sent to the Breschini family was dated stamped 24 March 1945, and the Dolan family set 27 March 1945.

²⁷⁸ Dorothy Cruickshank, letter to Breschini family, 30 March 1945, BFC.

²⁷⁹ Mary Brando, letter to War Department, 6 and 27 June 1945, IDPF, Brando.

Department's inability to repatriate the remains of the fallen "until after the cessation of hostilities only emphasized the urgency of ensuring a prompt recovery of all personal effects of the dead," explained Edward Steere in his history of the Graves Registration Service (GRS) in the Second World War. Therefore, he added, "Delivery of these precious relics became a token of good faith."²⁸⁰ This developed as a common theme within the familial experience, as evidenced in each airman's IDPF and in the immediate post-funeral correspondence between family members. For them, "personal effects are the last tangible evidence of their loved one," writes Sledge. They affirm their son's humanity and existence, and are symbolic of their loss, marking "a point in time when they were killed."²⁸¹ They belonged with the families, not in some forlorn, far away wilderness, or worse yet, in the hands of a stranger.

Evidently, the military treated belongings recovered at Gander as per instructions outlined in War Department Field Manual 10-63 for Graves Registration. The GRS, organized within the U.S. Army's Quartermaster Corps (QMC), functioned to select, acquire, and care for temporary cemeteries; to bury the dead; and to ensure that gravesites were properly marked, recorded, and registered. The Americans had no need to select a cemetery site at Gander as the Canadians had done so in 1941; so instead, the two countries arranged to share the location. Graves registration personnel also handled the "receipt, collection, and disposition of all personal effects found on the dead."²⁸² Captain

²⁸⁰ Edward Steere, *The Graves Registration Service in World War II*, QMC Historical Studies No. 21 (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1951) 28.

²⁸¹ Sledge, *Soldier Dead*, 227-228.

²⁸² *Graves Registration*, War Department Field Manual FM 10-63, (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, January 1945) 2-3.

David Hoffman and 1st Lieutenant E.W. Anderson, GRS officers, completed and forwarded to their GRS superiors the required report of interment citing grave location, next of kin, and recovered personal effects.²⁸³ Captain Clement Maloney, in his assigned capacity at Gander as the summary court officer, and in accordance with field manual regulations, inventoried all recovered personal effects on WD AGO Form 54 (War Department, Adjutant General's Office, Form 54), one for each airmen, if applicable, made out in quadruplicate.²⁸⁴ Each original form was placed in an effects bag with an identification card attached to the outside, and all bags placed in a waterproof canvas pouch, locked, sealed, and labelled. The pouch or pouches were then shipped to the Army Effects Bureau at the Kansas City Quartermaster Depot in Missouri.²⁸⁵ There, staff inspected and again inventoried the contents of each bag, removing government-issue articles and noting items damaged, burned, or otherwise mutilated.²⁸⁶ Writing in respect to a fire-damaged religious medal, the assistant effects quartermaster explained to Colonel Dolan's wife and legal heir that the bureau desired to "refrain from sending any article which would be distressing," but nor did they wish to remove anything without her consent.²⁸⁷ The bureau likewise notified John Barry's mother of a torn and damaged wallet.²⁸⁸ Both chose to accept the items.

²⁸³ QMC Form No.1-GRS, Report of Interment, IDPFs, Dolan, Breschini, Brando, et al.

²⁸⁴ Captain Clement Maloney, WD AGO Form 54, Inventory of Effects, 4 April 1945, IDPFs, Dolan, Brando, Barry, Baker, and Lantz.

²⁸⁵ *Graves Registration*, 42-43, 54.

²⁸⁶ Graves Registration, Quartermaster Review-May/June 1946, accessed at http://www.qmfound.com/graves_registration.htm, accessed 22 September 2015.

²⁸⁷ Major W.F. Hehman, QMC, Asst. Effects Quartermaster, letter to Inez Dolan, 11 May 1945, IDPF, Dolan.

²⁸⁸ 1st Lieutenant R.T. Brown, QMC, letter to John Barry, 28 June 1945, IDPF, Barry.

As unfortunate as this may seem, some families received little or nothing. Martha Baker received her son's pocketbook, keys, fingernail file, and high school class ring, but none of the ten to fifteen dollars he carried, and "we know our son had more pictures and little things," she told Mary Breschini.²⁸⁹ Typical amid the delays, the letter from the Army Effects Bureau accompanying her son's returned belongings asked that she "act as gratuitous bailee ... pending the return of the owner, who has been reported missing in action."²⁹⁰ The letter to Bertha Lantz said as much.²⁹¹ Baker's response was to inquire only of the missing items and "cloths that he bought with his own money."²⁹² Mary Brando received but six photographs and voiced her dissatisfaction in writing to the Army Effects Bureau.²⁹³ While not a matter for the effects bureau, she also expressed concerns over the Army Post Office's return of unread mail, written to her son during the weeks of hopeful anticipation. The privacy of a letter between mother and son is sacrosanct; its words meant for no other (save the censor). Brando wrote their son every day until the Adjutant General's telegram arrived; some fifteen letters she figured, and she wanted them back.²⁹⁴

In a letter to bureau staff, Alice Barry found it "strange" that missing among the returned items was her son's watch, Blackland Airfield graduation ring, and "medals and

²⁸⁹ Martha Baker, letter to Mary Breschini, 18 May 1945, BFC; WD AGO Form 54, Inventory of Effects, 4 April 1945, IDPF, Baker.

²⁹⁰ 2nd Lieutenant P.L. Koob, QMC, Officer-in-Charge, letter to Martha Baker, 7 May 1945, IDPF, Baker.

²⁹¹ P.L. Koob, letter to Bertha Lantz, 3 May 1945, IDPF, Lantz.

²⁹² Martha Baker, letter to P.L. Koob, 20 May 1945, IDPF, Baker.

²⁹³ Mary Brando, letter to Army Effects Bureau, 6 June 1945, IDPF, Brando.

²⁹⁴ Mary Brando, letter to Mary Breschini, 16 May 1945, BFC.

keys which he wore around his neck with his identification tags.”²⁹⁵ In conversation with Martha Baker, the Parsons’ questioned the whereabouts of the twenty dollars their son had the night he left.²⁹⁶ Neither his IDPF, nor Edmund Breschini’s for that matter, contain inventory forms listing returned personal effects or letters of inquiry from either family. The Tophams received none of their son’s belongings, and were further perplexed because he wore dog tags and a name-engraved bracelet, and had all his clothing marked.²⁹⁷ Andrew Karpick, anxiously awaiting the return of his son’s possessions, and “to make checking of his effects easier,” listed for the effects quartermaster some things his son carried, from personalized items to cartons of cigarettes and toothpaste. “Probably after receiving some of his effects,” he reasoned, “it will be easier to believe that Harry will never return.”²⁹⁸ Subsequent inquiries met with a like response. Not only was his body unidentified, the bureau had received nothing of his personal effects.

Rumour told that the aircraft did not burn and lay relatively intact with the bodies inside. Naturally, this left parents mystified over the lack or complete absence of returned personal effects. In reality, the crash and explosion had destroyed and scattered the aircraft, along with many personal items, so any found property came mostly from the bodies. Moreover, deep snow covered the site in March 1945, making a ground search for possessions impractical, if not impossible. However, that spring when the woods cleared of snow, reported the U.S. intelligence and security officer at Gander, Warrant Officer

²⁹⁵ Alice Barry, letter to 1st Lieutenant R.T. Brown, QMC, Asst. To Chief, Adm. Division, 2 July 1945, IDPF, Barry.

²⁹⁶ Martha Baker, letter to Mary Breschini, 18 May 1945, BFC.

²⁹⁷ Charles Topham, letter to Mrs. Martin, 14 June 1945, BFC.

²⁹⁸ Andrew Karpick, letter to Effects Quartermaster, 30 April 1945, IDPF, Karpick.

Kotilainen and three enlisted men searched, examined, and photographed the crash site. Officials contemplated no salvage operations due to the condition of the wreckage. Kotilainen's team returned to Gander with only a few personal effects belonging to John Barry.²⁹⁹ What they found is unclear, nor does Barry's IDPF suggest that the family was notified and the items returned.

Just as parents and wives coveted personal items, so too did they desire the immediate return of their loved ones' remains. However, not all expressed this desire to the War Department. Some were perhaps aware of government's policy on the matter adopted early in the war. This policy, explained the QMC, required "that the remains of our military personnel who die outside the continental limits of the United States be interred locally until [the] cessation of hostilities."³⁰⁰ The reasons for this, explains Sledge, was that "shipping space was needed to support the war effort, there were not sufficient resources, and there was no military structure in place to accomplish these returns." The War Department, adds Sledge, later amended the original policy on returns to allow the "current return [as soon after death as possible] of remains 'from points on the North American Continent by commercial carrier transportation other than air or ocean or coastwise vessels.'"³⁰¹ The transportation restrictions themselves precluded any current returns from the island of Newfoundland or from the American base unit

²⁹⁹ Captain Clement Maloney, Intelligence and Security Officer, Weekly Activity Report for Period Ending 4 June 1945, microfilm A0164, AFHRA. The author can attest to the isolation and condition of the wreckage having visited the site twice by helicopter in the early 1990s, and on numerous subsequent occasions when woods roads provided ease of access. Recent fieldwork, headed by Dr. Michael Deal with MUN's Department of Archaeology, which included mapping of the debris field, further illustrates the widespread magnitude of disintegration.

³⁰⁰ Lieutenant Colonel James V. Hunt, QMC, Assistant, letter to Honourable James M. Mead, United States Senate, Washington, 19 May 1945, IDPF, Karpick.

³⁰¹ Sledge, *Soldier Dead*, 138-139.

operating at Goose Bay, Labrador, then accessible only by air or sea. In any event, of the families that did request for their loved ones' return in 1945, those of the unidentified represent the majority. This appears more coincidental as their requests came before the notification that their sons were unidentified. The notification itself, however, left them anxious for answers, the consequence of which was continued correspondence with the War Department.

Of the identified, the IDPFs suggest that only the mothers of John Barry and John Baker inquired with the War Department about the return of their sons. Alice Barry's came six months after the accident, Chaplain Turner having told her of the temporary nature of all overseas cemeteries and future repatriation plans. Her request was more preparative, however, in that she expressed to the War Department her desire to have his remains brought home when the time came.³⁰² In a brief letter to the GRS late in 1945, Martha Baker asked simply, "Could you inform me when I can have the remains brought home."³⁰³ The families of the unidentified, on the other hand, acted immediately. Upon receiving his son's March death notification, Charles Topham wrote the War Department, asking if they could "ship his remains to us at the earliest possible date."³⁰⁴ He made the same request several weeks later, and become more prolific in writing the War Department after Lieutenant Colonel McLaughlin's letter arrived early in May, telling how his son was among the unidentified. Topham's objective now was twofold: to have his son's remains both identified and repatriated. Knowing that the boys had been

³⁰² Alice Barry, letter to Graves Registration Office, War Department, 29 August 1945, IDPF, Barry.

³⁰³ Martha Baker, letter to Graves Registration Department, 14 December 1945, IDPF, Baker.

³⁰⁴ Charles Topham, letter to James A. Ulio, Adjutant General, 30 March 1945, IDPF, Topham.

fingerprinted upon enlistment, Topham even pleaded with Secretary of War Stimson to order that the bodies be exhumed and prints taken for comparison. Unbeknownst to Topham, where possible, graves registration personnel had taken prints prior to burial and sent them off to the FBI for analysis. “My boy ... was a perfect specimen,” he boasted, and “one of the proudest of boys when we went out to Freeman Field to see him get his wings and commission.” The anticipated affirmative reply, he concluded, will bring “some relief to our acheing [sic] hearts.” Besides, he stressed, pointing out government’s due diligence obligation, “I gave the country all I had, and I want his remains returned home as the country’s part of the bargain.”³⁰⁵ If the War Department viewed the return of personal items as a token of good faith, the Tophams hardly saw it that way. They had received nothing, no belongings, and no identified body to grieve over either at home or abroad.

The Brandos and the Karpicks fared no better. Mary Brando, aware that government denied such privileges due to the war, argued that Newfoundland was neither a battle area nor overseas, and thus wondered if her son’s remains could be “sent home so I could have a private burial.”³⁰⁶ At the time of writing, she was unaware that her son was unidentified. Still, even with this knowledge, Nicholas Brando’s widow made a like request several months later, compelled by the cessation of hostilities against Japan and a news story on the government’s proposed repatriation program.³⁰⁷ In Buffalo, John Karpick, brother of Harry, was likewise unaware of his sibling’s status when he took the political route,

³⁰⁵ Charles Topham, letter to Honourable Henry L. Stimson, 3 May 1945, IDPF, Topham.

³⁰⁶ Mary Brando, letter to James A. Ulio, Adjutant General, 23 April 1945, IDPF, Brando.

³⁰⁷ Anna Brando, letters to War Department, 13 September 1945 and 21 October 1945, IDPF, Brando.

writing New York Senator James Mead in Washington several days after the adjutant general's death notification telegram arrived. A copy of the letter he sent to Congressman Edward J. Elsaesser, representing the state of New York. Like Brando, Karpick argued that the accident occurred in the American area and not the European theatre, "so I believe it should be possible to do this small favor to the mother of a son who lost his life in his country's service."³⁰⁸ The response given the senator and congressman by the QMC reiterated government's policy on the return of remains. Karpick wrote Senator Mead again several months later, anxious for details on proposed plans to create "localized national cemeteries." He restated the family's position "that it is only proper that his body be laid to rest on American soil near his home," and thus bring comfort to "my bereaved mother."³⁰⁹ A like request from Agnes Karpick in November 1945 asked that the War Department return his body to Buffalo "where I could tend to his grave."³¹⁰

Charles Topham's persistent efforts brought him in contact with Mary Brando and Agnes Karpick. Their shared common objective moved Topham to write Major General James A. Ulio, Adjutant General, reiterating each family's wish for their son's return. However, in this and a later letter, Topham appealed specifically for the remains marked as X-2 "to care for as our own."³¹¹ The unorthodox rationale behind this selection came from "dreams, visions, and spiritualistic predictions," he explained, believing "that we

³⁰⁸ John A. Karpick, letter to Senator James Mead, 4 April 1945, IDPF, Karpick.

³⁰⁹ John A. Karpick, letter to Senator James Mead, 20 August 1945, IDPF, Karpick.

³¹⁰ Agnes Karpick, letter to War Department, 4 November 1945, IDPF, Karpick. She also acknowledged that her son was among the unidentified, yet, oddly, went on to say that his grave was marked X-3 to distinguish it from the others. How she came to this conclusion is unclear.

³¹¹ Charles Topham, letter to Major General James A. Ulio, Adjutant General, 19 August 1945, IDPF, Karpick.

have been guided to the right one.” The Tophams made their intentions and expectations perfectly clear to the War Department by purchasing a local cemetery plot and a memorial stone engraved with their son’s name.³¹² The QMC’s response did little to satisfy Topham. The possibility now existed that if graves registration was unable to establish individual identification, the remains of all three might be returned and buried as a group in a national cemetery.³¹³ In June 1946, Topham reiterated his wishes in a letter to Pennsylvania Senator Francis J. Myers. Still determined to have his son’s body identified, Topham asked that the medical examiners be given fingerprints and dental charts, “because our boy had a perfect set of teeth.” He was “a real light blonde,” Topham added, “the only light haired one in the crew.”³¹⁴ Several months later he had the rector of St. Paul’s Church in Chester write the War Department with similar potentially identifying information, including a notation that Lieutenant Topham’s left arm had been broken twice.³¹⁵ However, unbeknownst to the Topham, Karpick, and Brando families and their respective benefactors, disinterment orders had been issued by now with personnel from the QMC’s Memorial Division, responsible postwar for mortuary functions, working to establish positive identifications.

Michael Sledge points out that stressful wartime conditions, resource shortages, and “pressure from enemy or environmental forces,” sometimes inhibited efforts to establish

³¹² Charles Topham, letter to War Department, 3 April 1946, IDPF, Topham.

³¹³ 1st Lieutenant William B. Christensen, QMC, Assistant, letter to Charles Topham, 22 May 1946, IDPF, Topham.

³¹⁴ Charles Topham, letter to Senator Francis J. Myers, 2 June 1946, IDPF, Topham.

³¹⁵ Stanley V. Wilcox, Rector, letter to Adjutant General, War Department, 30 September 1946, IDPF, Topham.

identity at the time of death.³¹⁶ Therefore, many cases had to await the cessation of hostilities, and those at Gander were but three among thousands of wartime casualties throughout the various military theatres awaiting identification by GRS units. Furthermore, fingerprint analysis and the process of gathering dental records and other identification data took time, leaving families waiting and wanting, with no closure. Carol Acton points out that, “Once that concrete evidence is in front of them, the family can now allow itself to grieve spontaneously.” In their search for closure, she adds, the single most common mourning behaviour was visiting the war graves, what Acton defines as the concrete “site of mourning.”³¹⁷ As it now stood, that concrete evidence still eluded families of the unidentified, while the creation of a concrete mourning site still depended on the return of the bodies, prohibited under current wartime policy. Nevertheless, neither this nor the temporary nature of the Gander cemetery gave cause to preclude or dissuade interest among loved ones of other deceased personnel in travelling to Newfoundland. In July 1945, for example, nine months after a B-24 accident claimed the lives of 1st Lieutenant James Cozzens and his co-pilot, Flight Officer John Thompson, their wives journeyed to Gander from the U.S. and together visited their husbands’ graves.³¹⁸ They were the first Americans to visit the graves of relatives at the base, reported the post historian, having travelled to Montreal and North Sydney by rail, by boat to Port aux

³¹⁶ Sledge, *Soldier Dead*, 119.

³¹⁷ Acton, *Grief in Wartime*, 44-45.

³¹⁸ Captain Clement Maloney, Intelligence and Security Officer, Weekly Activity Report for Period Ending 29 July 1945, microfilm A0164, AFHRA.

Basques, and then by rail to Gander, through arrangements by the American air force and the Canadian and Newfoundland Governments.³¹⁹

In the First World War, historian Jonathan Vance points out, the Western Front became a veritable Holy Land, its soldier dead characterized as martyrs and Christian crusaders, and their deaths spoken of and depicted in print media, and later symbolized in war memorials, as actualizations of Christ's suffering and resurrection. "Just as Christ's crucifixion had been followed by his resurrection," explains Vance, so too was the death of a soldier "understood as his elevation to immortality." In keeping with this canon, peacetime European battlefields became places of pilgrimage for family members and curious tourists to pay their respects. Thousands of Britons, Canadians, and Americans made the journey in the years prior to 1939.³²⁰ However, for those with loved ones buried in Newfoundland during the next war and struggling to accept their loss, journeying to Gander was perhaps more about finding closure than an act of theological want or expectation. Indeed, the urge among some family members of the subject crew was immediate. There was no desire to await either an armistice or a promised repatriation program. Having just received the Adjutant General's telegram confirming her son's death, Sarah Topham's only letter to the War Department asked for particulars on the burial location, "so that I and my husband could visit the grave this summer."³²¹ Three months after the funeral, Mary Brando and her widowed daughter-in-law asked the War

³¹⁹ Captain Clement Maloney, post historian, 1387th AAFBU, post history for July 1945, 18-19, microfilm A0163, AFHRA.

³²⁰ Jonathan Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), 44, 56-57.

³²¹ Sarah Topham, letter to Effects Quartermaster, 4 April 1945, IDPF, Topham.

Department for permission to visit the grave in Gander, “so that our minds will be at rest.”³²² The IDPFs and other correspondence contain no evidence to suggest that either family made the journey. Agnes and Andrew Karpick, on the other hand, travelled from Buffalo to Newfoundland in the summer of 1947. Prior to their arrival, however, and further discussed in the subsequent chapter, the GRS had relocated the remains of all American personnel buried at Gander to the Post Cemetery at Fort Pepperrell near St. John’s.³²³ A photograph taken at Fort Pepperrell shows the Karpicks standing forlorn alongside three temporary wooden grave markers, still identified as X-1, X-2, and X-3.

In the aftermath of death, and amid a public discourse that held that death was the price of victory, families struggled to attach some semblance of meaning to their loss. Some found expression using religious and patriotic inferences, while others yielded to the conventional public discourse. John Barry, for example, characterized his son’s loss as “one of the exigencies of war,” comforting himself and Mary Breschini with the thought “that they did their very best and gave their all.”³²⁴ Charles Topham, at a “loss to know why such things happen,” reasoned that, “God must have a better home for them,” and added encouragingly, “we shall have to abide in that faith until we meet them again face to face in glory.”³²⁵ The mother of John Tarpey likewise looked to her faith for meaning, resolved that, “God in his wisdom must have known it was best to take our boys now rather than have them go through a lot of fighting.”³²⁶ Mary Brando pointed to the

³²² Anna and Mary Brando, letter to War Department, 27 June 1945, IDPF, Brando.

³²³ Major General T.B. Larkin, The Quartermaster General, letter to Caesar Breschini, 13 February 1947, IDPF, Breschini.

³²⁴ John Barry, letter to Mary Breschini, 1 June 1945, BFC.

³²⁵ Charles Topham, letter to Mary Breschini, 22 April 1945, BFC.

³²⁶ Mrs. Patrick Tarpey, letter to Mary Breschini, 22 April 1945, BFC.

common axiom that such tragic occurrences were the will of God, but still, “it does seem so unfair,” she maintained.³²⁷ The church and military upheld the state narrative on the “good death,” with platitudes coming from both the American base commander and Catholic chaplain at Gander. “May God rest his soul,” wrote Chaplain Lynch to Mary Breschini, “and may he comfort you for the sacrifice which you and your son have made for our country.”³²⁸ Cloaked in the conventional military euphemistic vernacular, Lieutenant Colonel McLaughlin saluted the crew “as being of the heroic dead who have fallen in this struggle for decency.”³²⁹ Similar expressions of sympathy for the “heroic” and “honored” dead likewise appeared in correspondence from the QMC.

The numbing March 1945 death notification telegram obliged loved ones to manoeuver through a myriad of shared emotions, from grief and anger, to confusion, doubt, and disbelief. In their search for clarity, letters, phone calls, and even personal visits bridged the physical distance between family members, revealing commonalities in the familial experience, as did their interaction with the War Department and its various bureaus. Death had singularly united them, but in the aftermath, another shock yet awaited Edmund Breschini’s fiancée Dorothy. Three months had passed since Edmund’s death when her doorbell rang on the day of her birthday in May. At the door was a florist delivery boy carrying a bag containing the “most perfectly beautiful orchid,” admired Dorothy. Inside the accompanying envelope was a birthday note in Edmund’s

³²⁷ Mary Brando, letter to Mary Breschini, 16 May 1945, BFC.

³²⁸ Captain Laurence J. Lynch, letter to Mary Breschini, 4 April 1945, BFC.

³²⁹ Lieutenant Colonel Ronald C. McLaughlin, letter to Mary Breschini, 20 April 1945, BFC.

handwriting. He had left the order at the florist before departing for overseas, expecting to be in combat when Dorothy's birthday came around.³³⁰

³³⁰ Dorothy Cruickshank, letter to Breschini family, 20 May 1945, BFC.

Chapter 8

Tell Me About My Boy

In November 1945, in an effort to centralize its war dead “to a more suitable site where constant care of the grave can be assured by our Forces in the field,” explained the Quartermaster General, the remains of some fifty-five American servicemen buried at Gander were disinterred and then reinterred at the Post Cemetery at Fort Pepperrell. The War Department did not immediately notify all next of kin of the crew of this development, leading to further confusion and dismay. Martha Baker heard about the transfer only after she had a nursery in St. John’s prepare a Christmas wreath for the grave. Responding to her request, the florist unwittingly told of the convenience in laying wreaths at nearby Fort Pepperrell instead of shipping them to Gander.³³¹ Baker told Agnes Karpick this news and promptly wrote the War Department, requesting more information on the move and questioning why instead her son’s remains were not returned home as promised.³³² The wife of Colonel Dolan, disappointed with her four-month delayed notification, had Texas Congressman Paul J. Kilday contact the War Department on her behalf. Her chief concern, wrote Kilday, was “whether the rites of the Catholic Church were performed in connection with” her husband’s disinterment and reinterment.³³³ The QMC turned to the Chief of Chaplains to respond to the congressman, although Dolan’s QMC “Report of Interment” form suggests that the senior Canadian

³³¹ Martha Baker, letter to Agnes Karpick, date unknown, KFC. Families commonly used Waterford Nurseries. Initially, flowers and wreaths went by train to Gander, addressed to either chaplain with instructions to follow as per the family’s wishes.

³³² Martha Baker, letter to Grave Registration, War Department, 14 December 1945, IDPF, Baker.

³³³ Paul J. Kilday, letter to Lt. Colonel Lloyd G. Hanley, Office of the Quartermaster, War Department, 2 April 1946, IDPF, Dolan.

chaplain in Newfoundland, Major J.A. Sabourin, conducted Catholic burial rites for the colonel at Fort Pepperrell.³³⁴ Further, these forms suggest that Major Sabourin and Protestant chaplain 1st Lieutenant R.E. Pritchard carried out like services for all the identified in their respective faiths. For the three unidentified, however, they, along with Acting Rabbi E. Wilansky, conducted a group service of all faiths.³³⁵ Again, the process and timing of notifying families lacked consistency, but with over four hundred thousand war dead to administer, delays were unavoidable. Indeed, so behind was the War Department in its paperwork that early in 1946 they wrote family members with the latest interment information, still citing Gander cemetery as the burial location.

Still, the disturbance of their sons' graves was hardly comforting, less so that it meant other than direct repatriation to the U.S. As historian John Bodnar points out, families "who suffered immense personal losses" wrote the president, seeking government help to "visit the graves of loved ones abroad ... [S]uch requests implied how much those that grieved cared little for victory celebrations and longed for some form of reunion with those they lost."³³⁶ Reunion in the form of repatriation, on the other hand, would allow families to grieve at a concrete site of mourning and, above all, begin the process of creating new post death social identities for the fallen. As Sledge explains, "in order to achieve "closure," the living must "recognize and accept that the new physical

³³⁴ "Report of Interment," QMC form 1042, 26 February 1946, IDPF, Dolan.

³³⁵ "Report of Interment," QMC form 1042, 26 February 1946, IDPFs, Brando, Karpick, and Topham.

³³⁶ John Bodnar, *The "Good War" in American Memory* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2010), 102.

status is irreversible, hence, they must establish a new social identity.”³³⁷ In other words, a new way of remembering their deceased loved one.

In the fall of 1946, the QMC’s Identification Branch, Memorial Division, commenced efforts to identify individually the graves at Fort Pepperrell marked X-1, X-2, and X-3. The remains were again exhumed and based on comparative examination of each airman’s physical characteristics, proper identifications were made and the Topham, Brando, and Karpick families notified accordingly early in 1947.³³⁸ The Tophams spiritual predictions proved accurate as the remains of X-2 were determined to be indeed those of their son. Still, the experience had left Nicholas Brando’s widow sceptical and wanting for more information on her husband’s grave. “For the past two years, the Gov’t [sic] told me my husband was unidentified,” she wrote Chaplain Lynch, and “now after all this time, they expect me to believe they identified him. Is that possible?”³³⁹ Viewing the deceased, says Sledge, “helps the bereaved to accept both the reality and the finality of death,” but circumstances made this impractical and impermissible.³⁴⁰ Brando’s remains would eventually be returned to the U.S., “but somehow I’ll never be sure in my heart that it’s him,” his widow confessed. She ended by pleading with Lynch to confirm whether a grave really existed bearing her husband’s positive identification.³⁴¹

As it turned out, the move to Fort Pepperrell was temporary too. In 1946, a bill passed in Congress and signed by President Truman authorized the War Department to

³³⁷ Sledge, *Soldier Dead*, 21-22.

³³⁸ Case History of Unknowns, Identification Section, Repatriation Records Branch, Memorial Division, 7 January 1947, IDPF, Brando.

³³⁹ Anna Brando, letter to Chaplain Lynch, 26 April 1947, IDPF, Brando.

³⁴⁰ Sledge, *Soldier Dead*, 269.

³⁴¹ Anna Brando, letter to Chaplain Lynch, 26 April 1947, IDPF, Brando.

move forward with the anxiously awaited repatriation program, directed by the QMC. Also that year, the QMC produced a pamphlet entitled *Tell Me About My Boy*, outlining government's plans and addressing questions frequently asked by next of kin regarding the return and final burial of "these honored dead." Government provided next of kin with four options for final burial: in the U.S. or any possession or Territory thereof, for interment in a private cemetery; returned to a foreign country, the homeland of the deceased or the next of kin, for interment in a private cemetery; in a permanent U.S. cemetery overseas; or in the U.S. in a national cemetery.³⁴² "Generally speaking," summarized Bodnar, "if the soldier was married, the decision was left to his widow; if he was single, the decision was first left to his father and then to his mother."³⁴³

Correspondence from the QMC to the next of kin officially announcing the program came early in 1947. Final interment in the U.S. or abroad, the Quartermaster General advised each family, would be at Government expense and in compliance with the "feasible" wishes of the next of kin.³⁴⁴ The IDPFs show that each family shortly received from the Quartermaster General a follow-up letter and the pamphlets *Disposition of World War II Armed Forces Dead* and *American Cemeteries*, defining "next of kin" as it applied to the repatriation program, and identifying the burial options and services the government had made available. The QMC also enclosed the form, "Request for

³⁴² U.S. Army Quartermaster Foundation, *Tell Me About My Boy*, accessed at http://www.qmfound.com/about_my_boy.htm, accessed 4 February 2016.

³⁴³ Bodnar, *The "Good War,"* 99.

³⁴⁴ Major General T.B. Larkin, Quartermaster General, letter to Inez K. Dolan, 13 February 1947, IDPF, Dolan.

Disposition of Remains,” in which the family designate either identified the chosen final resting place or relinquished their rights to the next in line of kinship.

Next of kin of the ten crew buried at Fort Pepperrell unanimously chose to have the remains returned to the U.S., although their choice of final resting place differed. The option of burial overseas was in any event inapplicable, as the government had contemplated no permanent cemetery for Newfoundland or Labrador for American forces. Ultimately, three family designates settled on national cemeteries, identifying on the form the cemetery location. The remaining seven designates desired burial in private, hometown cemeteries, likewise identifying the cemetery location. It happened that the widow of Corporal Charles Parsons had since remarried. In accordance with War Department repatriation program procedures, she therefore relinquished kinship rights to his father.³⁴⁵ The QMC would eventually repatriate 61 percent of recovered remains from around the world.³⁴⁶

During July and August 1947, the GRS again disinterred the remains of the crew and all other American service personnel buried at Fort Pepperrell. Under the supervision of GRS Inspector Captain James R. Parker, QMC, the remains were prepared and placed in caskets and the caskets sealed, boxed, marked, and the shipping address verified.³⁴⁷ They were then “stored in temporary morgues to await ... shipment home.”³⁴⁸ In mid-October, trucks moved the caskets to the American Naval base at Argentia, on the east side of Placentia Bay some eighty miles by gravel road from St. John’s, for transshipment to the

³⁴⁵ “Request for Disposition of Remains” QMC form 345, 2 April 1947, IDPF, Parsons.

³⁴⁶ Sledge, *Soldier Dead*, 151.

³⁴⁷ As indicated in all IDPFs.

³⁴⁸ Sledge, *Soldier Dead*, 161.

U.S. “Dead bodies have symbolic and political power,” says Bodnar. “Encased in traditional images and patriotic slogans, they can help sustain the authority of states.”³⁴⁹ Strict military protocol therefore governed the repatriation process, ensuring that the departure of America’s soldier dead, and homecoming it turned out, was marked with conventional ceremonial reverence. “As a dull grey sky and depressing weather settled over” Argentia and adjacent Fort McAndrew, reported the St. John’s *Daily News*, eight pallbearers from the Marine Corps, Army, and Navy carried the body of an Unknown Soldier to the pier. A U.S. Marine band played funeral music as Marine Corps and Navy personnel stood at attention. Pallbearers placed the casket at a pre-arranged location on the dock and chaplains representing the army and navy carried out religious services. “A Marine bugler then stepped forward to sound the poignant notes of “Taps” over the flag-draped casket.” At the completion of “Taps,” a firing party consisting of seven riflemen fired three volleys of shots. A hoist then lifted the body aboard the U.S. Army Transport ship *Joseph V. Connolly*. Total repatriations from the northern bases, specifically Greenland, Iceland, Labrador, and Newfoundland, numbered approximately six hundred. After three days at Argentia, the *Connolly* set sail for New York.³⁵⁰

When the army transport entered New York Harbour on 26 October 1947, its four holds contained the remains of more than six thousand war dead, the first returns from the cemeteries of Europe, Iceland, Greenland, Newfoundland, and Labrador.³⁵¹ The

³⁴⁹ Bodnar, *The “Good War,”* 99.

³⁵⁰ “U.S. Takes War Dead Back From Newfoundland,” *Daily News*, 17 October 1947, 3. The cemetery from which this Unknown Soldier came is unclear. A plot plan for Fort Pepperrell cemetery from 1945 shows ten unknowns, all from the Panamanian tanker *J.H. Senior*, which carried merchant seamen and U.S. Navy guards. The cemeteries at St. Lawrence and Argentia also contained unknowns from the Pollux and Truxtun disaster of February 1942.

³⁵¹ “Transport Docks With 6,248 Coffins,” *New York Times*, 27 October 1947, 2.

Connolly, escorted by the destroyers *Bristol* and *Beatty*, a Coast Guard vessel, city fireboats and other small craft, was the second ship to arrive in the U.S. that month bringing war dead from overseas. The Army Transport *Honda Knot* had arrived at San Francisco on 10 October with more than three thousand war dead from the Pacific Theatre.³⁵²

With the harbour “steeped in Sabbath stillness,”³⁵³ the *Connolly* tied up at pier sixty-one, her flag “at half-mast and her bridge and superstructure ... covered with blackened laurel leaves.” On the portside rested the coffin of an unidentified Congressional Medal of Honour winner, flanked by an honour guard of two Navy and four Army officers. “On the pier ... stood another honour guard of soldiers, sailors, and marines, a platoon of white-gloved military policemen and an Army band.” A military police officer led the honour guard aboard the ship where they carried the coffin to “the loft of the pier as the band played Chopin’s “Funeral March” and the military policemen presented arms. An elevator lowered the coffin to the main level of the pier where it was placed on a caisson” drawn by an armoured car.³⁵⁴

From the pier, the caisson “moved through the city’s streets to muffled drum beats and slow-cadenced marches.” Four hundred thousand New Yorkers lined the route in “reverent silence and unhidden tears” that ended at Central Park where an estimated 150,000 attended an outdoor memorial service. Following two minutes of silence and an artillery salute, “eight pallbearers lifted the coffin and bore it up on a ramp to the

³⁵² “400,000 in Silent Tribute as War Dead Come Home,” *New York Times*, 27 October 1947, 3; “Coffins of War Dead to go to 15 Centers,” *New York Times*, 27 October 1947, 2.

³⁵³ “400,000 in Silent Tribute as War Dead Come Home,” *New York Times*, 27 October 1947, 1.

³⁵⁴ “Transport Docks With 6,248 Coffins,” *New York Times*, 27 October 1947, 2.

catafalque.” A band played the National Anthem and chaplains of three faiths prayed for the soldier dead. “Their words,” reported the *New York Times*, “suspended in quivering, unseasonal heat, evoked women’s sobs and caught at men’s throats.” The service concluded with a West Point Bugler playing “Taps,” followed by “Nearer, My God, to Thee” by the West Point Band. The pallbearers gently set the flag-wrapped coffin back on the caisson. An honour guard followed behind as it moved “southward out of the park in the twilight with the United States Army Band sending after it the sweet melancholy of the dirge, “The Vanished Army.””³⁵⁵

From New York, the military sent the remains to fifteen distribution centers countrywide for shipment to next of kin. Coffins were transported by Army hearse to relatives within a short distance of the center, or by train for those further away.³⁵⁶ In either case, the remains did not go unaccompanied. Repatriation procedures held that a uniformed escort of the same or higher rank and branch of service accompany the casket and “render emotional support to the family.”³⁵⁷ In preparation for this duty, explains Bodnar, all such escorts “were required to watch a film called *Your Proudest Day*, which instructed them in how to help and comfort the bereaved.”³⁵⁸ The military also required that escorts wear a black mourning band at all times during the period of their temporary duty.³⁵⁹ Procedures tasked the escort with administrative duties too, and instructions “to

³⁵⁵ “400,000 in Silent Tribute as War Dead Come Home,” *New York Times*, 27 October 1947, 1, 3.

³⁵⁶ “Coffins of War Dead to go to 15 Centers,” *New York Times*, 27 October 1947, 2.

³⁵⁷ Sledge, *Soldier Dead*, 170.

³⁵⁸ Bodnar, *The “Good War,”* 102.

³⁵⁹ Captain William O. Davis, QMC, Letter Order No. AGRD 426 to 2nd Lt. Arval R. Coombs, 12 November 1947, IDPF, Breschini.

obtain the signature of the next of kin, funeral director, or other designated representative of next of kin, in receipt for the remains.”³⁶⁰

The remains of Colonel Dolan went from New York by rail to San Antonio Distribution Center 11 in Texas. From there, Air Corps Colonel Carol S. Miller took receipt of the remains and escorted them to Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery for burial on 18 November 1947, with “customary military honors and religious services.”³⁶¹ Repatriation procedures saw the remaining crewmembers treated in a similar manner that November and into early December. Edmund Breschini went by Southern Pacific Railroad from Distribution Center 13 in Oakland, escorted by 2nd Lieutenant Arval R. Coombs. A civilian funeral director accepted the remains at the Salinas station and conveyed them to a private mortuary for burial at the IOOF (Independent Order of Odd Fellows) Cemetery, not far from the family farm.³⁶² The creation of Edmund’s new social identity had begun when his sister remarked at the time, “He was a good son and brother and a good friend. He had so much to live for,” she added, “so much promise to fulfill, that his loss has been hard to accept. He wanted to live out his life fully and the world had need of his kind of man.”³⁶³

A motor transport conveyed the remains of Brooklyn native Nicholas Brando to the local distribution center for burial at Long Island National Cemetery, Farmingdale, New

³⁶⁰ *Disposition of World War II Armed Forces Dead*, War Department, Office of the Quartermaster General, 1946, 11.

³⁶¹ Colonel E.F. Wallender, commanding, San Antonio Distribution Depot, telegram to Inez Dolan, 24 October 1947 and Lt. Colonel S.H. Partridge, “Receipt of Remains,” QMC form 1193, 18 November 1947, IDPF, Dolan.

³⁶² Major Samuel G. O’Regan, “Receipt of Remains,” QMC form 1193, 18 November 1947, IDPF, Breschini.

³⁶³ Unpublished biography of Edmund Hughes Breschini, 1946, BFC.

York. Curiously, and contrary to repatriation program procedures, his escort was not of the same branch of service, but rather a member of the U.S. Navy, Chief Machinist Mate Walter D. Benson.³⁶⁴ The remains of John Barry arrived at the El Paso rail station escorted by air force Captain Gerald A. Duncan.³⁶⁵ A chaplain officiated the graveside ceremony at Fort Bliss National Cemetery in Texas, with close friends, all war veterans, as honorary pallbearers.³⁶⁶

John Baker's mother filed and signed the initial disposition form, requesting private interment at Hillview Cemetery in Greensburg. Her husband signed a subsequent form several months later, making a like request. Although unclear, it may be that the QMC rejected Martha Baker's form on the grounds that it failed to comply with procedures that gave the father first choice of burial location. From the time of death, the military had controlled their sons' bodies. Now, prepared to relinquish that control, the military had denied grieving and anxiously awaiting mothers the initial opportunity to make that choice. Such procedures were nevertheless necessary to simplify the process should the decision put the family at odds. The Memorial Division had indeed requested "clarification about who had the right of possession of remains," writes Sledge. No current U.S Federal law gave any particular person legal right over a body for the purposes of burial, responded the General Counsel, and "a gender preference was chosen" as a matter of expediency.³⁶⁷ In any event, from New York, John Baker's remains went by rail to a distribution center in Philadelphia and then by like transport to Greensburg,

³⁶⁴ No author, "Receipt of Remains," QMC form 1193, 12 November 1947, IDPF, Brando.

³⁶⁵ 1st Lt. Duane H. Hallett, "Receipt of Remains," QMC form 1193, 25 November 1947, IDPF, Barry.

³⁶⁶ "Lieut. Barry Will Be Buried Here," *El Paso Herald-Post*, 28 November 1947, 1.

³⁶⁷ Sledge, *Soldier Dead*, 142.

escorted by Technical Sergeant Charles J. Simon.³⁶⁸ Baker's remains were taken to his parent's home where friends and family were received. A pastor of the Church of the Brethren, of which John was a member, conducted the funeral service, while members of Greensburg veterans' organizations performed full military rites.³⁶⁹

Charles Parsons' father requested interment at East Oak Grove Cemetery in Morgantown, West Virginia. A private funeral director accepted the remains at the local railway station, the train having arrived from a distribution center in Columbus, Ohio, with escort Corporal Nicholas S. Lucyk.³⁷⁰ Distribution center number twelve happened to be Mark Lantz's hometown of Ogden, Utah. The center released his remains to a local mortuary for burial in the Ogden City Cemetery, with the American Legion in charge of the military service.³⁷¹ The family declined a military escort.³⁷² The reasoning behind this is unclear, but as Sledge points out, the QMC was concerned "that the family might resent the appearance of a healthy young man alongside the casket of their loved one," although, he adds, this was generally not the case.³⁷³ "I always looked to having some grandchildren," Bertha Lantz lamented of her only child, "but now that's gone forever."³⁷⁴

Escort T/5 Thomas V. Morris left New York on the New Haven Railroad, arriving at Lowell, Massachusetts, with the body of John Tarpey. A local funeral director accepted

³⁶⁸ Lt. Col. D.G. Pollard, "Receipt of Remains," QMC form 1193, 24 November 1947, IDPF, Baker.

³⁶⁹ *Greensburg Morning Review*, 24 November 1947, 12.

³⁷⁰ No author, "Receipt of Remains," QMC form 1193, 1 December 1947, IDPF, Parsons.

³⁷¹ Lt. Col. R.K. Blair, "Receipt of Remains," QMC form 1193, 12 November 1947, IDPF, Lantz; "Deaths, Pfc. Mark G. Lantz," *The Ogden (Utah) Standard-Examiner*, 12 November 1947, 15.

³⁷² Lt. Col. Robert K. Blair, letter to Mark G. Lantz, no date, IDPF, Lantz.

³⁷³ Sledge, *Soldier Dead*, 170.

³⁷⁴ Bertha Lantz, letter to Mary Breschini, February 1947, BFC.

the remains at the station for interment at St. Patrick Cemetery.³⁷⁵ The solemn military funeral services of “war hero” Tarpey, reported the *Lowell Sun* newspaper, was largely attended, with nine Gold Star mothers, a Legion honour guard and firing squad, members of veterans’ associations, postmasters, and city and state government representatives. The mass ended with the playing of the “Star Spangled Banner.”³⁷⁶ A distribution center in Schenectady, New York, temporarily housed the remains of Harry Karpick. From there, Staff Sergeant William J. Young escorted the body aboard the New York City Railroad to Buffalo, turning it over to a local funeral home director for burial at Mount Calvary Cemetery.³⁷⁷ The outspoken Charles Topham had little to say to the QMC after the repatriation program began. A train conveyed his son’s body from New York to a distribution center in their home state of Pennsylvania. A government hearse then took the remains, escorted by 1st Lieutenant John S. Templin, to a funeral home in Chester for burial at Chester Rural Cemetery.³⁷⁸ The family wanted no military funeral, reported the *Chester Times*.³⁷⁹ Almost three years since Charles’ death and the bitterness still lingered.

The repatriation program, with all its ceremonial veneration for the dead, provided some semblance of closure for the bereaved, but did obviate their grief. The QMC had identified the unknowns, but growing mistrust in the War Department left some harbouring doubts. Whether this anger or mistrust in the military influenced seven of the ten families to reject burial in a national cemetery is unclear. Only one family rejected an

³⁷⁵ No author, “Receipt of Remains,” QMC form 1193, 3 November 1947, IDPF, Tarpey.

³⁷⁶ “Military Rites for Corp. Tarpey,” *The Lowell Sun*, 5 November 1947, 32.

³⁷⁷ Lt. Col. R.D. Blanckhorn, “Receipt of Remains,” QMC form 1193, 14 November 1947, IDPF, Karpick.

³⁷⁸ Lt. Col. D.G. Pollard, “Receipt of Remains,” QMC form 1193, 17 November 1947, IDPF, Topham.

³⁷⁹ “Funeral Rites for Lt. Topham,” *Chester Times*, 15 November 1947, 2.

escort, while most, apart from the Tophams, were satisfied with a military funeral. The possible motivation then was simply to have their loved ones buried at home and near their families. Still, and more importantly perhaps, repatriation gave the bereaved of all ten families a long-anticipated concrete site of mourning.

Chapter 9

How We Remember: Markers, Monuments, and the Inherited Narrative

The Memorial Division's final act for the families involved the grave marker, but even this presumably simple task did not always transition smoothly. The QMC automatically provided a government-approved inscribed marker at no cost for those buried in national cemeteries.³⁸⁰ For inscription purposes, the QMC asked next of kin to provide the superintendent of their chosen national cemetery with the veteran's State of origin, preferred religious emblem, and the dates of birth and death.³⁸¹ Families choosing burial in a private cemetery applied to the Memorial Division for their preferred marker, either an upright marble headstone, a flat marble or granite marker, or a bronze marker. The latter selection came with certain restrictions, as we shall see. Next of kin likewise provided inscription information, as well as the cemetery name and location.

Immediately following his son's interment, Caesar Breschini requested a bronze marker, but government authorized these only for cemeteries that did not accept stone markers, advised the QMC. Edmund's cemetery accepted flat granite markers so the QMC denied his request.³⁸² Caesar Breschini asked that they take no action. He would get the bronze marker himself.³⁸³ The father of Mark Lantz applied for a government flat granite marker, but the QMC returned his application because his son's remains were then still in Newfoundland. They asked that he resubmit the application following repatriation

³⁸⁰ *Disposition of World War II Armed Forces Dead*, 15.

³⁸¹ As per IDPFs for Brando, Dolan, and Barry.

³⁸² G.L. Ruth, Memorial Division, letter to Caesar Breschini, 16 December 1947, IDPF, Breschini.

³⁸³ Ralph Muller, manager, The Muller Mortuary, letter to Quartermaster General, 26 November 1947, IDPF, Breschini.

and interment.³⁸⁴ There is no evidence in his son's IDPF to suggest that he did so, but a flat granite marker in the style offered by the Memorial Division presently identifies his gravesite. The QMC likewise rejected Andrew Karpick's application because the standard government flat granite marker did not conform to the rules governing flat markers at Buffalo's Mount Calvert Cemetery. The government marker was four inches too thin to meet cemetery requirements.³⁸⁵ An upright family headstone presently marks his son's grave. There is no evidence in either of the Baker, Parsons, or Tarpey files to suggest that next of kin applied to the Memorial Division for a marker. Presently however, a Memorial Division style flat marble marker identifies Parsons' gravesite while traditional, upright headstones mark the graves of Baker and Tarpey. Charles Topham on the other hand, had made his intentions known to the War Department almost two years previous when he privately purchased a memorial stone engraved with his son's name.

While this addressed, albeit sometimes unsuccessfully, memorialization on a smaller, individual level, it still left postwar America facing contentious questions surrounding memorialization on a broader, all-inclusive scale. In the first war, points out Andrew Shanken, assistant professor of art at Ohio's Oberlin College, the debate over postwar memorials remained a forbidden topic while the nation waged war and a matter for public discussion only after the armistice. In contrast, "hundreds of articles were written about memorials" during the second war with few questioning "the strangeness of the debate."³⁸⁶ As Bodnar explains, a strong argument "erupted over the type of monuments

³⁸⁴ G.L. Ruth, Memorial Division, letter to Glenn C. Lantz, 23 September 1947, IDPF, Lantz.

³⁸⁵ G.L. Ruth, Memorial Division, letter to Andrew Karpick, 24 December 1947, IDPF, Karpick.

³⁸⁶ Andrew M. Shanken, "Planning Memory: Living Memorials in the United States during World War II," *The Art Bulletin*, 84, 1 (March 2002): 132.

that would best serve local needs to remember or to forget.” Ultimately, “traditionalism and its abstract images remained prominent” in postwar monuments and memorials in the U.S. and overseas, and “the veneration of national sacrifice stood above reminders of personal loss.” Symbolism, whether traditional or modern, transformed “tragedy into honor and mass death into national pride.”³⁸⁷ Most of all, monuments failed to reflect the sadness that remained with family members long after 1945. The postwar memorial debate likewise saw increased interest in “living memorials” such as libraries, parks, highways, civic centres and other buildings; places that could honour the dead and serve the living. The aesthetic design of the National World War II Memorial, dedicated in Washington in 2004, again spurred much debate with journalist and architecture critic Inga Saffron caustically remarking that its “pompous style was also favoured by Hitler and Mussolini.”³⁸⁸ One memorial design concept incorporated a statue of a grieving mother. It was rejected, argues Bodnar, for being “simply too authentic.”³⁸⁹

Commemoration of the crew lost near Gander likewise saw expression either in monument or as living memorial. While national monuments honour the dead collectively, local commemorations were “more likely to be joined by the names of the dead.”³⁹⁰ Nicholas Brando, for example, is among the 11,500 remembered in name on the Brooklyn War Memorial, dedicated to the borough’s war dead in November 1951. The memorial’s “two massive exterior high relief figures ... depict a male warrior on the left and female with a child on the right – symbols of victory and family.” In typical postwar

³⁸⁷ Bodnar, *The “Good War,”* 85-86.

³⁸⁸ Inga Saffron, “Monument to Democracy,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 28 May 2004, E01.

³⁸⁹ Bodnar, *The “Good War,”* 92.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 107.

prose, its inscription tells of heroism, suffering, sacrifice, and universal peace.³⁹¹ A year after his death, Edmund Breschini's sister wrote a short biography of her brother, to be sealed in the cornerstone of the foundation of a planned memorial chapel at San Jose State College (now University). Dedicated in 1952 and "intended to represent the spiritual side of campus life," the chapel honours the two hundred students, nicknamed Spartans, killed during the Second World War.³⁹² The names of the fallen were recorded in a memorial book, presently framed and mounted on a wall adjacent the chapel altar.³⁹³ Mark Lantz had his name inscribed on a bronze tablet similar to those used after the First World War, reported the *Ogden Standard-Examiner* the same day that the *Joseph V. Connolly* arrived at New York. The tablet was placed in Ogden high school to "memorialize the names of graduates and former students who lost their lives in World War II."³⁹⁴

In recognition of his efforts in advancing radar and teaching others, the air force dedicated Dolan Hall at Keesler Air Force Base, Mississippi, to Colonel Dolan's memory in 1951. "When a man gives his life for something he believes in," eulogized Kessler's commander Major General James Powell at the dedication ceremony, "no honors that can be bestowed upon him will ever be adequate tribute for the sacrifice he has made."³⁹⁵ Dolan's teenage son Bill was present, front and center with air force dignitaries on the

³⁹¹ Cadman Plaza Park, Brooklyn War Memorial, accessed at <http://www.nycgovparks.org/parks/cadman-plaza-park-and-brooklyn-war-memorial/monuments/177>, accessed 4 February 2016.

³⁹² "Memorial Chapel Honors 200 Dead," *Spartan Daily*, San Jose State College, 31 March 1952, 1.

³⁹³ Rebecca Kohn, San Jose State University, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library, email message to author, 10 February 2016. Rebecca was also kind enough to photograph the chapel for the author.

³⁹⁴ "Lists Checked for Bronze Plates Honoring War Dead," *The Ogden Standard-Examiner*, 26 October 1947, 10.

³⁹⁵ Major General James Powell, Dolan Hall dedication speech, 1 September 1951, DFC.

reviewing stand, itself adorned in stars and stripes bunting, as American air power went on display with a precision formation flyover. Military aircraft assembled in-flight to form the letter “D” for Dolan. At the time, Keesler was operating as the largest technical training school in the U.S., with emphasis on radar and electronics training.³⁹⁶ Today, Dolan Hall, its walls adorned with “articles, painting, and pictures celebrating the life and accomplishments of” its namesake, plays host to air force information technology fundamentals courses.³⁹⁷

More recently, Charles Parsons’ name was etched in black granite on the West Virginia Veterans Memorial. Dedicated in 1995, the monument honours the more than ten thousand West Virginian soldier dead from the twentieth century.³⁹⁸ The proliferation of internet websites has also marked change in the way we remember and memorialize. The aforementioned West Virginia Veterans Memorial, for example, has a web-based searchable database listing the names of those the monument honours. Additionally, all ten crewmembers are remembered individually on the web-based National World War II Memorial, with its searchable registry, compiled from three official U.S. Government databases. The site also allows visitors to register an honouree and contribute photographs.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁶ Dolan Hall rededication ceremonial program, 2001, DFC.

³⁹⁷ Kessler Heritage: Spotlight on Dolan Hall, Kessler Air Force Base, accessed at <http://www.keesler.af.mil/News/Features/Display/tabid/1006/Article/609747/keesler-heritage-spotlight-on-dolan-hall.aspx>, accessed 5 February 2016.

³⁹⁸ West Virginia Archives and History, accessed at <http://www.wvculture.org/history/wvvets.html>, accessed 12 February 2016.

³⁹⁹ National WWII Memorial, Washington, D.C., accessed at <https://www.wwiimemorial.com/home.aspx>, accessed 4 February 2016.

While monuments recognized the collective efforts of America's soldier dead, their individual stories became each family's keepsake, or form of remembrance. As years passed, memories of the mishap at Gander and subsequent events, some clouded and distorted, became part of family lore. Professor Harold Goodall Jr. defines such stories as "narrative inheritances," given to children by and about family members. They can hold powerful implications he adds, especially if later determined to be invented for any number of surreptitious reasons, possibly revealing issues of family communications.⁴⁰⁰ A narrative inheritance may be incomplete, modified and rehearsed over time, or involve deliberately obscured secrets. The inheritance thus becomes what some scholars call an "absent memory." Indeed, some stories may never be shared. Sociologist Carol Smart characterizes memory as "chameleon in nature," changing over time and in significance. Human memory is filtered and selective. Memories with negative connotations may be retold as counter memories, constructing persons within the narrative in completely different ways.⁴⁰¹ Yet, despite its fallibility and the difficulty historians' face in interrogating it meaningfully, memory has become in recent decades "a familiar word in the vocabulary of academic history."⁴⁰² Just as inherited narratives are evidence *of* memory, source material as it were of remembered family narratives, so too are they evidence *about* memory, and thus may reveal something about how and why narratives are remembered or perhaps told the way they are.

⁴⁰⁰ H.L. Goodall Jr., "Narrative Inheritance: A Nuclear Family With Toxic Secrets," *Qualitative Inquiry*, 11, 4 (2005): 492.

⁴⁰¹ Carol Smart, "Families, Secrets and Memories," *Sociology*, 45, 4 (2011): 543-544.

⁴⁰² Joan Tumblety, editor, *Memory and History: Understanding Memory as Source and Subject*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 1.

These sociological theories may shed light on the evolution of present-day narrative inheritances, shared by family members with the author. More than sixty years after the accident, Second World War veteran Jack Martin, brother-in-law to Edmund Breschini, repeated a story told to Mary Breschini by Bertha Lantz in 1947. “We were told,” wrote Martin of the crew’s mission, “that they were delivering papers to Roosevelt at the Yalta Peace Conference.”⁴⁰³ The date of the crash roughly coincided with the conference date and may have led to some conjecture at the time. In any event, the story persisted over time; repeated but unmodified, becoming part of the Breschini family’s narrative inheritance.

In contrast, one narrative inherited by members of the Karpick family qualifies more as an invention, obscuring the truth, rightly or wrongly, with a constructed alternate plot twist that amounts to an amalgamation of fact and fiction. Some family members recalled that Harry Karpick was an air force captain, demoted to the rank of private after he got drunk and buzzed an airfield in England. Harry’s father and brother spent a long time trying unsuccessfully to reinstate his rank, so the story goes.⁴⁰⁴ Karpick’s pay records reveal that he had attained the rank of corporal, nothing higher. Yet, Harry Karpick was buried as a private. Furthermore, there is no evidence to suggest military service in England, and nor did he ever attain his pilot’s wings, despite it being his objective upon enlistment. Another family member recalled an alternate story that Harry “had been demoted for being AWOL [Absent Without Leave] over some holiday.”⁴⁰⁵ The answer

⁴⁰³ Jack Martin, email message to author, 29 May 2007.

⁴⁰⁴ Russ Karpick, email message to author, 17 April 2007; Ron Karpick, email message to author, 29 April 2007.

⁴⁰⁵ Russ Karpick, email message to author, 29 April 2007.

lay in Karpick's IDPF, which confirmed the latter narrative as accurate. In April 1945, days after Harry's burial at Gander, his brother John wrote New York Senator James Mead in Washington, explaining the circumstances surrounding the demotion. Harry had been three years training in the U.S. and "unable to visit his parents during any of the holidays." So, during Christmas 1944, knowing he was soon to "ship out" from Mitchel Field, he took a twenty-four hour extended leave without permission and was subsequently demoted. "He never issued any complaints," argued his brother, despite "knowing that politics ... play an important part in today's army." Lacking influential connections, he therefore "had to take the rap." He concluded by pleading with the senator to intervene and "rectify this injustice and clear his record for his parent's sake," thereby "bringing consolation to a sorrowing mother."⁴⁰⁶ A copy of his letter went to the War Department, which presumably frowned upon such insinuations towards the service. There is nothing in Karpick's file to suggest that the department responded to or even considered the request. Ultimately, the revised narrative of Karpick overseas, drunken and buzzing an English airfield, was decidedly tellable and captivating, and assuming this was the objective, presented itself as more appealing to the listener.

One narrative told to William Cass, nephew of Betty "Becky" Cass, and based on her letters to William's mother early in 1945, had John Barry as the pilot, ordered by his commanding officer to fly to "England so the latter could be among the first to arrive before his entire bomb group got there," and subsequently crashing into a mountain.⁴⁰⁷ It may be that misinformation filtered Becky's way putting Barry in the pilot's seat, or she

⁴⁰⁶ John A. Karpick, letter to Senator James Mead, 4 April 1945, IDPF, Karpick.

⁴⁰⁷ William Cass, email message to author, 11 June 2014.

simply assumed this because he had been his crew's pilot during training at Westover Field. For this flight, however, he took the co-pilot's seat and relinquished pilot duty to the senior officer, Colonel Dolan, who, although a director at Eighth Air Force Headquarters, held no such command with a bomb group. The latter and oft repeated report of the aircraft hitting a mountain is perhaps explainable as its origins lay in the letters and newspaper reports of the period. This information, received from an informant in Washington, circulated among family members in 1945, eventually going to print in local newspaper obituaries and burial announcements after the QMC repatriated each of the crew late in 1947. Essentially then, the ensuing years did little to modify a family narrative, skewed from the outset, that developed between 1945 and 1947.

The return of the dead likewise became part of each family's immediate postwar experience, and for some, its narrative inheritance. As the missive from the widow of Nicholas Brando to Chaplain Lynch suggests, families of the formerly unidentified were likely to have concerns about the process, despite the QMC's assertion in *Tell Me About My Boy*, that "there is absolutely no question of the positive identification of remains."⁴⁰⁸ Such claims, says Sledge, were "highly propagandized" and "patently false," but "consistent with the other politically influenced statements of that period." Still, he adds, the public was "probably trusting of the government's efforts to identify and return the dead and less likely to question results." Anna Brando hardly saw it that way, and the Tophams, bitter and frustrated, had more than once voiced mistrust in government and the military. Even so, says Sledge, "since the dead were not returned until at least two years

⁴⁰⁸ Quartermaster Foundation, *Tell Me About My Boy*, accessed 11 February 2016.

after the end of hostilities, it is likely that few, if any, caskets were open because of the condition of the contents.”⁴⁰⁹ However, one Karpick family narrative tells how Harry’s mother, anxious to be sure it was her son, “opened the casket only to find bones.”⁴¹⁰ The veracity of this narrative is difficult to determine. Presumably, the military escort would attempt to discourage this, but in light of identity concerns expressed by others, and the evidence presented in Karpick’s IDPF describing the condition of his remains, the narrative is conceivable. Then again, as Sledge points out, the QMC’s Memorial Division reported that in cases where traumatic death had occurred, preventing display of the deceased, hermetically sealed caskets were marked “not to be opened.” Furthermore, in such cases, the Memorial Division sent a letter to receiving funeral directors explaining the circumstances of death, the condition of the remains, and the establishment of identity, “with the goal of encouraging the family to accept the remains and identity without seeing for themselves.”⁴¹¹ It may nevertheless have taken much more to dissuade a grieving mother.

Postwar commemoration of the crew and America’s soldier dead in general, came in sometimes controversial and debated forms, from a presumably simple but ultimately QMC regulated grave marker, to living memorials and elaborate state and national monuments. As Andrew Shanken points out in his study on the changing modes of commemoration of the Second World War, “Americans were quick to memorialize the war,” or the “Good War,” as the popularized euphemism later came to characterize the

⁴⁰⁹ Sledge, *Soldier Dead*, 124.

⁴¹⁰ Russ Karpick, email message to author, 17 April 2007.

⁴¹¹ Sledge, *Soldier Dead*, 122.

conflict. Still, adds Shanken, highly propagandized and ambiguous abstractions such as freedom and democracy, the nationalist ethos that trumpeted “The American Way of Life,” and above all, familial obligations, left Americans uncertain about what shape postwar memorials should take. At issue too, was how best to “memorialize the bodies that died in service to a state that justified the war in these terms. Round numbers,” argues Shanken, “derived from a disinterested technology like the calendar avoid this morbid way of thinking.” In keeping with the cultural norm for occasions deserving of recognition, the arbitrary nature of calendars likewise allowed dates set for remembrance to become cyclical, with significant events marked on their 50th or 100th year anniversaries. Hence, the 1990s witnessed various fiftieth anniversary celebrations, such as Pearl Harbour, D-Day, and VJ-Day, and the release of a series of Hollywood films related to the war, instigated “at the propitious moment just before the generation that fought it is gone.”⁴¹² Such commemorations therefore came to venerate the living as well as the dead, with “an almost feverish eagerness building” throughout the decade, says Professor Christopher Clausen, in documenting for posterity the living memories of those who witnessed these events.⁴¹³ “An arbitrary date had acquired social context and emotional meaning,” says Shanken, “because of the natural lifecycle, through dying bodies.”⁴¹⁴

Few are living who bore witness to the events under analysis. What typically remains of the familial experience is each family’s narrative inheritance, and perhaps some letters.

⁴¹² Andrew Shanken, “Keeping Time with the Good War,” *American Studies Journal*, 59 (2015): 1, 3-4, DOI 10.18422/59-02.

⁴¹³ Christopher Clausen, “Living Memory,” *The Wilson Quarterly*, 28, 4 (Autumn 2004): 28.

⁴¹⁴ Shanken, “Keeping Time”: 3.

However, for Bill Dolan, son of pilot Colonel William Dolan, the familial connection is strong. A retired aeronautical engineer, Bill managed and engineered programs in the defence and aerospace industries, including projects with the U.S. Army Missile Command and NASA Marshall Space Flight Center. He also inherited his father's wartime papers, researched and studied the incident from 1945, and in recent years visited Gander, the crash site, and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Cemetery where his father once rested. Although an emotional journey, it did resolve certain unanswered questions. For example, years back, Bill had inherited a photograph showing a largely intact and moderately damaged forward fuselage of a crashed B-24 Liberator, presumed to be his father's aircraft. "The photo was sent to my mom," recalled Bill, and "was classified," with all image captions and identifying markings on the aircraft redacted with black marker ink.⁴¹⁵ His site visit revealed that, clearly, the image showed an altogether different aircraft. While outside the scope of this study, the circumstances surrounding the accident and the inconclusiveness in the findings of the accident investigation have left Bill perplexed, unsettled, and inquisitive. So too has an ambiguous narrative, told to the colonel's widow soon after the accident. General James Doolittle "was a very close individual to my Dad," says Bill. They played poker in New York with General Nathan Twining and one or two other generals. Doolittle and Twining "assured my mom that the whole story would be known once the war was over," and "that she would be told the detail as to the [aircraft] factory where the problem started," suggesting to the family that

⁴¹⁵ Bill Dolan, email message to author, 21 January 2007.

the cause of the accident was technical.⁴¹⁶ However, ten years later, while enrolled in the cadet training program at Texas A and M University, a chance encounter with Twining at a military ball left the matter still unresolved and Bill further upset. The general now claimed that “I would never know what really happened, and that he was sorry, but nobody would get the true data.”⁴¹⁷ Bill continues to search for answers.

Mary McCosker, niece of Edmund Breschini, has kept her uncle’s memory alive by copying and sharing with family members the letters and documents from the war years. Among her own childhood memories is a visit to her grandparent’s home in San Jose and seeing a *Life* magazine her grandmother had from October 1947. Its cover photo showed the *Joseph V. Connolly* in New York Harbour, carrying the bodies of America’s repatriated soldier dead. The photo left her grandmother in tears. “That was almost 60 years ago but it has stayed with me.”⁴¹⁸ Indeed, witnessing the sadness of a mother’s devastating loss “makes me think of Iraq today,” she said, linking past memory with present circumstance.⁴¹⁹ Still, the generational gap of seventy years, and the absence of living memories, has left some family members devoid of any narrative inheritance, and others with vague knowledge of an uncle or great uncle killed overseas or in Newfoundland during the war. As Christopher Clausen points out, “once living memory has been lost, the event itself ... becomes irrevocably diminished.” Historical memory, on the other hand, goes on, but only “as long as its inheritors consider it important.”⁴²⁰

⁴¹⁶ Bill Dolan, self-interview, video recording, November 2007; Bill Dolan, email message to author, 21 January 2007.

⁴¹⁷ Bill Dolan, self-interview, video recording, November 2007.

⁴¹⁸ Mary McCosker, email message to author, 17 June 2015.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., 10 June 2007.

⁴²⁰ Clausen, “Living Memory”: 24-26, 28-30.

Chapter 10

Conclusion

The wartime experience of hope, loss, and grief, was of course not exclusive to the families of the ten crew lost at Gander; nor was the return of their soldier dead under the repatriation program. Four hundred thousand American homefront families lived this experience. Not all chose repatriation, but 171,000 did, at a total cost of 96.5 million by the conclusion of the program in December 1951.⁴²¹ The process of recovery, identification, and repatriation of America's more than 73,000 Second World War missing continues to this day, headed by the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, which formed in 2015 following the merger of the Defense POW/MIA Personnel Office, the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC), and the Life Sciences Equipment Laboratory.⁴²² In recent years, their work (pre-merger and then under the auspices of JPAC) has taken them to Botwood, Newfoundland, where two servicemen remain unaccounted for since a wartime aircraft crash in the Bay of Exploits. Their families still await closure.⁴²³

As ten among tens of thousands to choose repatriation, the families under analysis represent a minute fraction. As a collective, however, families of all returned soldier dead would have shared many experiences, especially those involving the repatriation process

⁴²¹ Sledge, *Soldier Dead*, 176.

⁴²² Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, "Our Transformation," accessed at <http://www.dpaa.mil/About/OurTransformation.aspx>, accessed 12 April 2016.

⁴²³ J.P. Antonacci, "Bringing the boys home," *Advertiser* (Grand Falls-Windsor), 15 September 2008, accessed at <http://www.gfwadvertiser.ca/News/2008-09-11/article-1404170/Bringing-the-boys-home/1>, accessed 12 April 2016.

itself, mostly because of its standardized procedures. The only inescapable was grief and sadness, and in the case of the missing, nervous anticipation and the physical and psychological symptoms that accompany it. Indeed, as author Wil Hylton points out in *Vanished*, a study on the search for World War Two's missing airmen, the special grief felt by such families "is little understood, and only a handful of researchers have ever focussed on the issue." Uncertainty, a lack of clear explanation, and the elusiveness of closure heightened the grief of MIA families. In the early 1970s, University of Wisconsin doctoral candidate Pauline Boss came to define this concept as "ambiguous loss." In recent years, Boss and others became "intrigued by the way MIA grief passed through families ... and that in many cases, a daughter, son or grandchild would become fixated on the loss of a man they had never known."⁴²⁴ Peter Boczar, for example, never knew his uncle Larry Grasha who disappeared en route to Brazil in March 1944, but he promised his grandmother, Larry's mother, that he would search for him. Intent on keeping that promise, Boczar has been more than ten years researching the story, connecting with other family of the crew, and has made several trips to the South American jungle in search of his uncle.⁴²⁵ "There's something about the pain of not knowing," says Boczar. "The loss of a loved one in any circumstance causes much hurt and grief. However, the difference is that a missing loved one also feeds a lifetime of painful wondering ...

⁴²⁴ Wil S. Hylton, *Vanished: The Sixty-Year Search for the Missing Men of World War II* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2013), 89-90.

⁴²⁵ Peter Boczar, email message to author, 13 September 2009. For several months in 1943-44, Boczar's uncle served under Colonel Dolan at Langley Field, Virginia. Evidence suggests that his uncle's missing aircraft also carried some type of confidential equipment. Boczar tells of his efforts in the recently published *Searching for Uncle Larry: A Missing Airplane Mystery*.

together with the hope these questions might be one day answered.”⁴²⁶ Although the label “ambiguous loss” as defined by Boss applied to families of the missing, its aspects were extendable to those left bereaved by events at Gander, specifically in that the circumstances of the flight and accident had lacked, and would for years thereafter, any clear explanation.

By focusing on these ten families, this analysis reveals common themes in the overall familial experience. When the initial telegram arrived reporting the crew as missing, hope and hope-based rumour became a shared and overriding theme, with well-intentioned informants at times fueling these hopes with misinformation and plausible survival scenarios. Rumours circulated among military personnel at Gander too, and continued between family members following the discovery and funeral. The bond or mutual support network that subsequently formed among the fiancées and between parents of the crew assured the continued transmission of these rumours as the bereaved searched for answers, endeavouring to make sense of their loss. Just as the pain of “not knowing” overwhelmed families of the missing, so too was “it an intrinsic part of the appeal and spread of rumour,” writes Pamela Donovan.⁴²⁷ “The more a rumour is told,” adds wartime social scientist Robert Knapp, “the greater is its plausibility,” and the further rumour is removed from confirmed fact, the more easily is it distorted when passed on. This, Knapp

⁴²⁶ Peter Boczar, “Missing airplanes: How “not knowing” can bring a lifetime of pain,” special to CNN, 25 March 2014, accessed at <http://www.cnn.com/2014/03/25/world/asia/malaysia-airlines-b24-mystery/>, accessed on 2 May 2016.

⁴²⁷ Donovan, “How Idle is Idle Talk?,” 77.

argues, is especially the case when a rumour “is kept entirely on the person-to-person level,” as was the case with the ten families under review.⁴²⁸

The IDPFs revealed other themes in the familial experience in their dealings and relationship with the War Department, especially the importance attached to the return of personal items. The relationship proved thorny at times as contradicting and ambiguous War Department communiques left many suspicious and mistrustful, and in the case of the outspoken Charles Topham, bitter and angry. Indeed, the fractured relationship with both the War Department and the QMC led some to take the political route, pressuring their senators or congressional representatives to advocate on their behalf. In lesser cases, desperate for closure, some desired to visit the graves in Newfoundland or to have their sons’ remains returned immediately. Repatriation was an only option, there being no plans for a permanent cemetery in Newfoundland. With the exception that families had two burial options within the U.S., and again, because of standardized procedures, their repatriation experiences evidently differed little. Few rejected the option of an escort and military funeral, although of the seven families opting for private burial only two accepted the government-approved inscribed grave marker. However, two families initially requested government markers but were denied because of cemetery or QMC regulations. Evidently, only Charles Topham stands out as wilfully cutting ties with the military, having purchased a private grave marker long before repatriation, and then later declining a military funeral.

⁴²⁸ Knapp, “A Psychology of Rumour,” 27, 30.

Just as making sense of their loss was important, so too was attaching some semblance of meaning to it. The military had done so in its correspondence, using the conventional language of honour, sacrifice, and heroism. In time, so too would postwar monuments and memorials, usurping reminders of personal loss by symbolically transforming tragedy into honour. For the same reason, to mitigate the negative, cemeteries assumed the euphemistic title “Fields of Honour,” and graves “resting places.” Military euphemisms persist. Graves Registration is now Mortuary Affairs, and in contemporary warfare, wayward bombs cause “collateral damage,” while troops killed or injured by their own are victims of “friendly fire.”⁴²⁹

In giving meaning to their loss, some parents ascribed to the conventional public discourse that death was price of victory and their sons’ service a patriotic necessity to make the world a better place. One can speculate that the mother of Charles Topham, distraught to the extent of physical illness and evidently unable or unwilling to communicate with other parents of the crew, hardly saw it that way. The notion of duty, the willingness “to obey your superior officers,”⁴³⁰ as Charles Topham put it, also came to be associated with the events of February 1945. Nor did family members fail to recognize that the flight itself, and theirs sons’ role in it, held some significance. Indeed, information eventually filtered Bertha Lantz’s way that at Mitchel Field Colonel Dolan was told “to pick out any crew he wanted to make the trip with him, and he choose the best crew there, our boys,” she proudly remarked.⁴³¹ Rumours abounded, but for

⁴²⁹ Sledge, *Soldier Dead*, 43-44, 180.

⁴³⁰ Charles Topham, letter to Honourable Henry L. Stimson, 3 May 1945, IDPF, Topham.

⁴³¹ Bertha Lantz, letter to Mary Breschini, February 1947, BFC.

confidentiality reasons Dolan's cargo was something the military could not disclose, so thereafter it remained unknown to many family members. Still, the most common rationalization was theological, exonerating anyone of blame by defining their loss simply as the will of God. Even wartime propaganda came to define death in combat as God's will. Couched in euphemism, *Life* magazine editorialized on "The American Purpose," which "lives in the hearts of those who have received the telegrams from the Adjutant General." Their sons, killed in action, had "gone over the Big Hill," and the telegram notifications signed by the Adjutant General, sent by God, "about His own boys, for His own reasons."⁴³² "Most who experienced loss during World War II," responded David Colley to the editorial, "would suggest that this was nonsense."⁴³³ Writing years after her son's disappearance over the Baltic Sea, Helen Chappell White shared Colley's view, disbelieving that such things were "meant to be" as God's will, or that it was "God's will for men to kill one another."⁴³⁴ For White, no longer constrained by wartime behavioural narratives, the years of reflection had perhaps changed the way she saw meaning in her loss.

The written correspondence revealed no overt aversion or resistance among mothers to their sons being in the service. Postwar however, the *El Paso Herald-Post* reported John Barry's mother Alice as a self-described pacifist, yet an advocate for compulsory military training.⁴³⁵ To what extent, if any, her own son's military career and death influenced this thinking is unclear. A popular social activist and executive secretary of the

⁴³² "The American Purpose," editorial, *Life*, 5 July 1943, 39.

⁴³³ Colley, *Safely Rest*, 143.

⁴³⁴ White, *With Wings*, 244.

⁴³⁵ "El Pasoans Have Their Own Ideas About Training," *El Paso Herald-Post*, 26 October 1946, 2.

El Paso Social Service Exchange, formed to assist social service agencies in the community, her name surfaced in 1947 as a potential candidate for Congress. Moreover, stressed one supporter, she “is a Gold Star Mother. She gave her son, her only child, to her country as many women did.” At the risk of assuming too much perhaps and marginalizing her grief, this supporter claimed, “Alice Barry did not sit down and cry and turn bitter. No, she smiled with tears in her eyes and a great hurt in heart and carried on.”⁴³⁶ In the end, Barry declined to run for Congress, citing financial reasons and the obligations of her job.⁴³⁷

The letters likewise reveal no overt expressions of grief among mothers, however, in the absence of memoirs or diaries, private thoughts remain hidden. In the wake of death, some mothers conveyed stoic optimism in the notion of carrying on as best as possible. For others, in their moment of shared but unspoken sadness and grief, the process of writing letters and communicating held cathartic qualities, while acting as a medium by which to share information. In keeping with government’s symbolically reinforced narrative of the “good death,” mothers like Mary Brando proudly told of receiving a service flag for display. A symbol of her loss, the flag obviated the need to speak of it. The families had shared their losses collectively during the war, but “afterwards grief became a solitary experience.”⁴³⁸ As Helen White observed of her own experience, “Women, especially, have a tendency to cling to grief; we don’t want to let it go, we

⁴³⁶ Renee H. Hibbs, “Thinking Out Loud: Mrs. Barry Is Her Candidate for Congress,” *El Paso Herald-Post*, 26 June 1947, 9.

⁴³⁷ “Mrs. Alice Barry Will Not Run for Congress,” *El Paso Herald-Post*, 22 July 1947, 1.

⁴³⁸ Colley, *Safely Rest*, 121.

almost fight to keep it.”⁴³⁹ The parents of Edmund Breschini “never got over his death,” recalled Mary McCosker, “and I can remember one time when my grandmother and I were looking at some photos and she began to cry, remembering Ed.”⁴⁴⁰ As Carol Acton asserts, “hiding behind the mask is necessary for daily survival,” and “the experience of wartime grief is thus often hidden until the cultural context post-war allows it to be revealed.”⁴⁴¹ For many families, writes David Colley, “the pain from loss in World War II still lurks just below the surface ... and belies the suffering of the bereaved and the myths that grow around the sacrifice and the glory of that war.”⁴⁴²

Public expectations may have held that mothers grieve in silence, but fathers, it appears, had even less to say. As a notable exception, Charles Topham hardly conformed to any wartime narrative controlling bereavement behaviour. Nor did he conform to the definition, should one exist, of the stoic patriotic father. Ultimately, this analysis revealed no obvious narrative (besides communicative passiveness) surrounding fathers, mostly because mothers represented the majority of letter writers.

While parents were likely never to fully negotiate their loss, young wives and fiancées did find the emotional strength to carry on, attributable perhaps to the resiliency of youth. Charles Parsons and seventeen-year-old Dorris had been married but a few months when the accident left her widowed. There was hardly time to shape, develop, and grow that psychological interdependence that came with marriage. Almost two years after the accident, her late husband still buried in Newfoundland, Dorris remarried. Sadly, her

⁴³⁹ White, *With Wings*, 191.

⁴⁴⁰ Mary McCosker, email message to author, 10 June 2015.

⁴⁴¹ Acton, *Grief in Wartime*, 56.

⁴⁴² Colley, *Safely Rest*, 247.

life was short-lived. At aged thirty-four, Dorris passed away due to rheumatic heart disease. Like her late husband Charles, she was buried at East Oak Grove Cemetery in her hometown of Morgantown, West Virginia.⁴⁴³

For the three fiancées, life did go on, but for one, what lay ahead proved anything but idyllic. Edmund Breschini's fiancée Dorothy, "hoping that some miracle would bring them back," tried to remain cheerful, finding comfort, she claimed, and perhaps some meaning, knowing that if such was their fate, "the boys did go off happy and with such confidence."⁴⁴⁴ Dorothy continued working in the insurance industry and eventually married a local Springfield man. Marriage and work took them to Connecticut, New Jersey, and Illinois, where she held an executive secretary position with a vice president of Sears, Roebuck and Company. Later in life, Dorothy entered the real estate industry, retiring in 2008, then in her mid-eighties.⁴⁴⁵ Still, the tragic events of 1945 had left an indelible mark, and fortified long-lasting friendships. Through the years, she never lost contact with Edmund's family in California. These links continued unbroken until her death in 2014 at age 92. Charles Topham's girl Cherrie Shoop met a U.S. Marine Corps corporal. They married in West Virginia in August 1947, several months before the repatriation program saw the return of her former fiancés' remains.⁴⁴⁶ Cherrie turned to

⁴⁴³ West Virginia Division of Culture and History, Marriage Record for Dorris Mackey Parsons and John Franklin Kercheval, and Death Record for Dorris June Kercheval, accessed at http://www.wvculture.org/vrr/va_view.aspx?Id=5588306&Type=Death and http://www.wvculture.org/vrr/va_view.aspx?Id=11352095&Type=Marriage, accessed 12 April 2016.

⁴⁴⁴ Dorothy Cruickshank, letter to Breschini family, 16 April 1945, BFC.

⁴⁴⁵ Legacy.com, Obituary for Dorothy C. Powers, accessed at <http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/theday/obituary.aspx?n=dorothy-c-powers&pid=170597665>, accessed 12 April 2016.

⁴⁴⁶ West Virginia Division of Culture and History, marriage record for Cherrie Shoop and Daniel Hamill, accessed at http://www.wvculture.org/vrr/va_view.aspx?Id=11248123&Type=Marriage, accessed 12 April 2016.

helping others, working as a nurse's aide and licensed practical nurse. She died in 2010.⁴⁴⁷

In peacetime, Betty "Becky" Cass reconnected with a childhood sweetheart, Jay, an airman and veteran of the Pacific war. Shot down over French Indo-China in 1943, Jay spent the remaining war years in a prisoner of war camp. They married in November 1945, but within a few years Jay had become an alcoholic, attributable perhaps to his two-year ordeal at the hands of the Japanese. He was abusive too, and the marriage soon ended. Betty, having lost a brother and fiancé to the war, sank into a world of drugs and alcohol and died in 1971 at age forty-seven. On her death certificate the medical examiner left blank the question, "cause of death," but family and friends quietly pointed to her addictions. Still, recalled William Cass of his aunt, her wartime and postwar letters to family members were consistently upbeat and loving. After the war, and into the early 1950s, he and his mother would visit Betty several times a year. "I remember her as still stunningly attractive, outgoing, positive, and certainly over-generous when it came to my birthday and Christmas." His mother tried to re-introduce Betty to one of their inner circle of wartime pilot friends, but "nothing ever came of it romantically which is an absolute tragedy because that could have been Betty's salvation," William sadly recalled. Instead, she became reclusive, calling her nephew by phone every few months.⁴⁴⁸ Her grief unspoken, she too, he insists, was a "collateral casualty of the war."⁴⁴⁹ Following her

⁴⁴⁷ *The Marietta Times*, Obituary for Cherrie Shoop Hamill, 15 April 2010, accessed at <http://www.mariettatimes.com/page/content.detail/id/521144/Cherrie-Shoop-Hamill.html>, accessed 12 April 2016.

⁴⁴⁸ William Cass, unpublished biography of Betty Ellen Cass, 1924-1971.

⁴⁴⁹ William Cass, email message to author, 7 November 2014.

death, William went with his mother to Betty's house to sort her belongings. Inside a small suitcase were all her memories of the John Barry days, including two jackets worn by him during the war years. William inherited both, along with John's silver pilot wings, miniature versions, "the type that would be worn on a formal dress uniform or given to a wife or fiancée."⁴⁵⁰ He later inherited the engagement ring John gave Betty and had it resized to fit his wife.⁴⁵¹ Each year, in late autumn and early spring, William still wears one of John's "beautiful leather" jacket's, now with its third lining and sporting sown cuff extensions on each sleeve, leading him to believe that Barry wore the jacket as a growing teenager.⁴⁵² Tangible reminders of a lost airman, and an aunt who dreamed of what could have been.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., 6 March 2016.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., 10 November 2014.

⁴⁵² Ibid., 7 November 2014 and 6 March 2016.

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