



DND Photo NAC AH-740-A

William Avery Bishop, VC.

THE INCOMPARABLE BILLY BISHOP: THE MAN AND THE MYTHS

by Lieutenant-Colonel David Bashow

Think of the *audace* of it.

Maurice Baring

So spoke the renowned British poet and diplomat, Maurice Baring, while serving as private secretary to Major General Hugh Trenchard at Royal Flying Corps Headquarters in France, upon hearing the news of Billy Bishop's daring dawn raid on a German airfield on 2 June 1917. Indeed, William Avery Bishop, Canada's first aerial Victoria Cross winner, was audacious. He was also an imperfect human being and a study in contradictions, frequently at odds with the perceptions of an adoring public. While often a proud, ambitious risk-taker and, occasionally, a self-absorbed embellisher of the truth, he was also a skilled, courageous and resourceful warrior who served his nation with great distinction in two world wars. During the Great War, he became the British Empire's highest scoring ace with 72 accredited aerial victories, and was a role model for emulation by many. During the Second World War, as an air marshal and Director of Recruiting for the Royal Canadian Air Force, he was an extraordinary booster of morale and a tireless campaigner for the nation and the war effort, again inspiring many citizens to service. Bishop would also make articulate and forceful entreaties for peace, while urging close international cooperation among nations for the post-war global development of civil aviation. As documented in his critically

acclaimed second book, *Winged Peace*, much of his vision was embodied in the United Nations International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) in 1947. However, all these achievements would occur long after he won his spurs in the skies over the Somme, the Douai Plain and Flanders in 1917 and 1918. There, he was the product of his circumstances: a war-weary Empire in need of a charismatic hero. His war record would eventually generate mountains of controversy, but only, for the most part, well after his death in 1956.

Billy Bishop was born in Owen Sound, Ontario, in 1894 of upper middle class parents. A "disinterested student with poor grades" who preferred solitary sports to team efforts, he was unable to meet the entrance requirements for the University of Toronto, and followed his older brother Worth to the Royal Military College at Kingston in 1911. However, unlike his sibling, he did not excel academically. Popular legend has it that he left RMC in the autumn of 1914 with the Damocles Sword of expulsion for cheating hanging over him. Actually, he had been 'rusticated,' or required to repeat his first year for relatively minor academic misconduct that certainly was not unheard of at the time, and did not qualify for expulsion. He repeated the year, followed by the uninspired completion of the second year of a three-year diploma course. In the autumn of

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1914, he was coming back for his final year as a cadet officer, implying that RMC had faith in him, but instead went to war because everybody else was doing so and he did not want to miss out on the “grand adventure”.¹ The truth of Bishop’s RMC experience is that he was a clown, a scamp, very popular, and demonstrated very little application, except perhaps for seeing how many young ladies he could chase.

After brief service in a Canadian cavalry regiment in 1915, the mud, drill and tedium drew him towards the flying services. He then used his natural brashness, charm and family connections to get into the Royal Flying Corps. He flew one combat tour in France as an observer in reconnaissance aircraft, was injured in a crash and repatriated back to England. This was a fortunate turn of events for young William, since he was spared the summer 1916 carnage of the Somme Offensive. He then pulled more strings to get trained as a pilot. A short air

squadron’s original eighteen pilots being shot down, along with seven replacements. However, the squadron scored 35 confirmed victories for the month, of which twelve were Bishop’s. For most of them, Bloody April was an exercise in survival. For Bishop, it was a target-rich environment.

How did he do it? He drove himself, flying all the normal formation patrols assigned, along with asking his commanding officer, Major Jack Scott, for a roving commission; permission to hunt on extra occasions alone behind the German lines. Scott was trying to inculcate General Trenchard’s offensive spirit — to relentlessly take the fight to the enemy whenever possible and by whatever means necessary. Therefore, he endorsed Bishop’s request and hoped the young Canadian’s aggressiveness would inspire others. During this period, weather permitting, Bishop usually flew squadron patrols each day and also conducted solo excursions behind enemy lines. His scoring ledger continued to mount, and he was awarded his first decorations. Socially, he was the squadron clown prince, keeping spirits high in the Mess after duty hours. In late April, he was promoted to captain and given command of a flight. Sometime thereafter, and unbeknownst to Bishop at the time, Jack Scott had recommended him for the Victoria Cross for prolonged gallantry. Higher headquarters denied the award at that time, approving a Distinguished Service Order instead.²

His ‘press on’ spirit proved to be a tremendously stabilizing force and an example for others. However, he was so obsessed with scoring that he was probably not a particularly good flight commander. He did not normally take the time to bring subordinates along in their combat evolutions, and on at least two occasions he abandoned his escort duties, once disastrously, to hare off after prey on his own. However, this was probably due more to lapses in judgment than anything else. Also, his propensity for bragging, his ‘lone wolf’ tactics and his blood-thirstiness rankled some of his comrades’ British public school attitudes of contrived modesty, teamwork and limited displays of emotion, and undoubtedly made him some enemies. That said, Bishop had joined the war effort to kill Germans, not to bake cookies for them. Some of his contemporaries were probably frustrated with their own inability to score, and were therefore jealous of his successes.

And why was he so successful? First and foremost was his willingness to go into harm’s way. He was simply flying much more than his colleagues, which in turn presented him with more scoring opportunities. Second, he was an excellent, dynamic shooter who successfully transferred game hunting skills to aerial combat. Third, he used the element of surprise to maximum benefit, utilizing ‘hit and run’ tactics whenever possible. Although more vulnerable when alone, he also had more tactical flexibility. Fourth, he had a higher likelihood of combat encounters behind German lines. Enemy scouts on patrol in formation would often avoid Allied formations if the odds and attack parameters did not suit them. Bishop would also have been exposed to individual German aircraft behind the lines in transit, or on individual training missions or maintenance air tests. Lastly, he had superb eyesight, and simply spotted more targets than did others.

Utterly exhausted from his first six weeks with 60 Squadron, Bishop took leave in England in early May. Here, he got a great deal of adulation and pampering. Bishop enjoyed his new-found popularity, and returned to duty later



Painting by Stephen P. Quick

Billy Bishop's infamous dawn raid of 2 June 1917.

defence tour flying large, cumbersome BE12s convinced him that he really wanted to be a fighter pilot. In the middle of March 1917, he got his wish and was posted to 60 Squadron at Filescamp Farm near Arras, flying the skittish and already-obsolete Nieuport 17. After a rather shaky start adjusting to this new aircraft, he had a number of early successes and started actually leading flights. And then along came Bloody April 1917, one of the two worst months for the Empire flying services during the war. Throughout this period, the average life span of an RFC pilot was 45 days, and 60 Squadron suffered even worse — a 110 percent casualty rate, with thirteen of the

that month bound and determined to become the Empire's highest scoring ace. The reigning ace, Captain Albert Ball, had been killed on 7 May, and Bishop, with 19 confirmed claims at the time, was the *de facto* new leader, but far behind Ball's final tally of 44. Around the end of May, he added a few more victories, and then decided to make the daring dawn raid on a German aerodrome. In the Officer's Mess on the night of 1 June, he discussed his plan with his contemporaries and his commanding officer, and then solicited their accompaniment. They thought it was too dangerous, but Scott approved the mission, since it was in line with Trenchard's exhortations to carry the fight to the enemy. At 3:00 a.m. on 2 June, for one last time, Bishop asked his Deputy Flight Commander, Willy Fry, with whom he shared a hut, to accompany him, but Fry rolled over and went back to sleep.³ At precisely 3:57 a.m., Bishop took off and flew first over an airfield near Cambrai, where no activity was observed, and then over a second field, where he saw and attacked six Albatros DIII scouts and one two-seater on the ground. After Bishop's initial strafing pass, the Germans took off to engage him. He later claimed to have shot down three of them, two very close to the ground in the take-off environment, and then headed westward towards the front lines and sanctuary. Enroute, he successfully evaded a German flying patrol and returned to Filescamp Farm with a lot of battle damage to his aircraft after being airborne for 1 hour and 43 minutes.

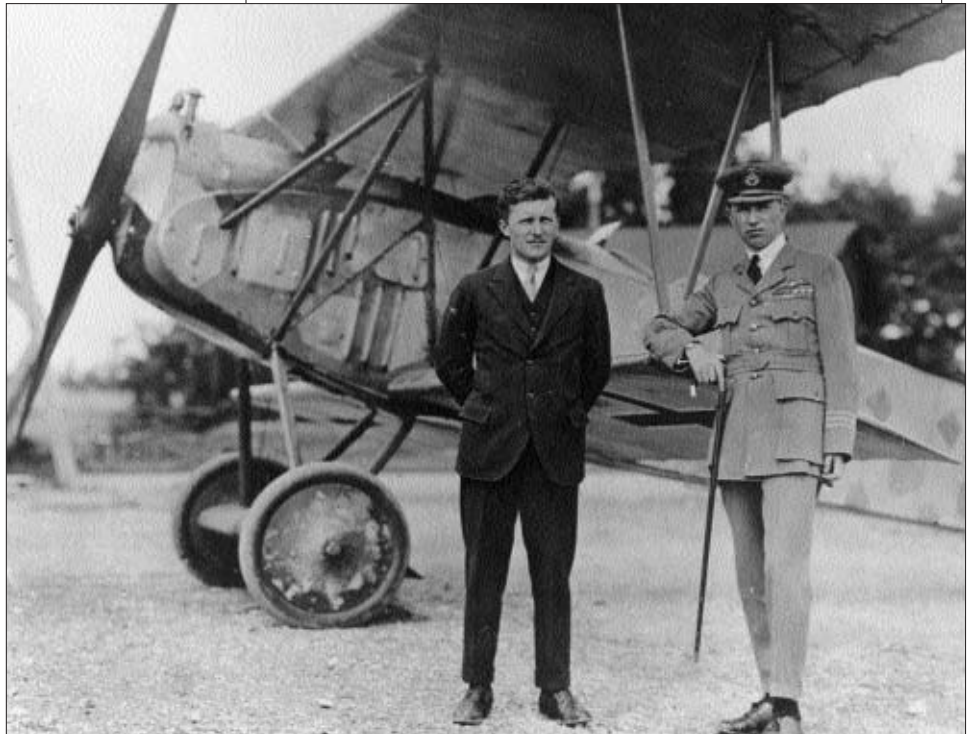
Now Bishop was famous. Scott again sought the Victoria Cross for him, and, after nine weeks of staffing, it was gazetted on 11 August 1917. Meanwhile, Bishop continued to score. Some of the claims were endorsed by Jack Scott, even though there were no immediate witnesses. Thus, Scott annotated the claims as "decisive" based only upon Bishop's word. As it turned out, there apparently were a number of witnesses from other sources, but the perception of preferential treatment created animosity amongst some squadron members.⁴ He was still tremendously popular with most of them, but some now saw Bishop as being too personally ambitious. However, his frenetic pace had exhausted him once again, and General Trenchard and others in authority were afraid he would suffer Ball's fate. On 16 August 1917, with 47 victory claims and the then-undisputed title of Empire 'ace-of-aces', Bishop was pulled out of combat.

Festooned with even more decorations, Bishop returned to Canada as front-page news. To war-weary Canadians, he was a tonic. The nation was dealing with a looming conscription crisis, failing railways, increased deprivations, unrestricted submarine warfare, the imminent collapse of the Russians as a war ally, and a seeming-endless stream of casualty reports out of Ottawa. There was also very little in the way of offsetting successes on the battle fronts, other than the recent success of the Canadian Corps at Vimy Ridge. Under the watchful eyes of the Office of Public Information, the Department of Militia and Defence and interested publishers, he penned his autobi-

ography, *Winged Warfare*. There is little doubt that he was advised to embellish the truth⁵ to help stimulate recruitment. In the interim, Bishop married his childhood sweetheart, Margaret Burden, and then went on a series of very successful North American public relations tours.

In April 1918, he returned to England to commence his third operational flying tour. Bishop was promoted to major and given command of 85 Squadron, equipped with the excellent SE 5a scout. There were over 200 voluntary applications from pilots who wanted to join him. This would have been an unlikely turn of events were he considered a fraud.

Bishop's last wartime tour started on 22 May 1918 at Petite Synthe near Dunkirk over the Flanders front. Less than a month later, he was ordered out of combat for good. By now,



Postwar photo of Bishop with William Barker standing in front of their privately owned Fokker DVII.

those in power in Canada were really afraid they would lose him; they were especially concerned about the associated detrimental effect his demise would have on national morale. Bishop had scored a further 25 victories in just twelve days of combat, and this time, the victories were less contentious, having a better verification/confirmation rate.⁶ Again, he was a social lion, but not a very good commanding officer, since he was too self-absorbed with personal ambition. However, he was awarded the new Distinguished Flying Cross, promoted to lieutenant-colonel, and sent to England to help organize the embryonic Canadian Air Force overseas.

So, why in recent years has there been so much controversy with respect to Bishop's First World War record? Upon close examination, none of the reasons are particularly mysterious. Most importantly, one must come to grips with the paradox inherent in both his writings and his personality. On the one hand, there was the terse, laconic, even understated nature of his combat reports, which formed the basis for his victory claims and awards. Far from embellishing the truth, he was renowned for tending not to claim categorical success,

leaving confirmation to corroborating witnesses, if they existed. On the other hand, there was the unadulterated exaggeration of his social writings and other ‘yarn-spinning’. The prototypical fighter pilot, he loved to regale audiences and family with ‘fishing tales’, a pastime which he freely admitted. This was notably true in *Winged Warfare* and in various 1920s and 1930s trade and adventure journals. In later life he was embarrassed by these embellishments. In an interview with the *Toronto Globe & Mail* published on 12 September 1956, just two days after his death, he is quoted as saying, “It is so terrible that I cannot read it today. It turns my stomach. It was headline stuff, whoop do doop, red-hot, hurray-for-our-side stuff. Yet the public loved it.” However, these stories should not be confused with his highly professional combat reports. There are several documented cases on record where he actually understated combat results that were later confirmed by others.⁷

During the Great War, Bishop indeed had a few detractors, but many more supporters. In fact, other than some confusion

- His Lewis gun was supposedly missing after the raid; and
- German records made no mention of the raid.

Part of the problem is that, for a long time, interested parties were attributing the raid to the wrong airfield. This is because the raid’s location had been reported by Arthur Bishop in *The Courage of the Early Morning*, and reinforced by others thereafter, to be at Estourmel, four miles north of its believed location at Esnes. Arthur Bishop’s error may well have occurred because Estourmel was the only established fighter base in the immediate area at the time, and because Esnes, due to its proximity, certainly qualified as being in the Estourmel area, which was relatively thinly populated farming country.⁸

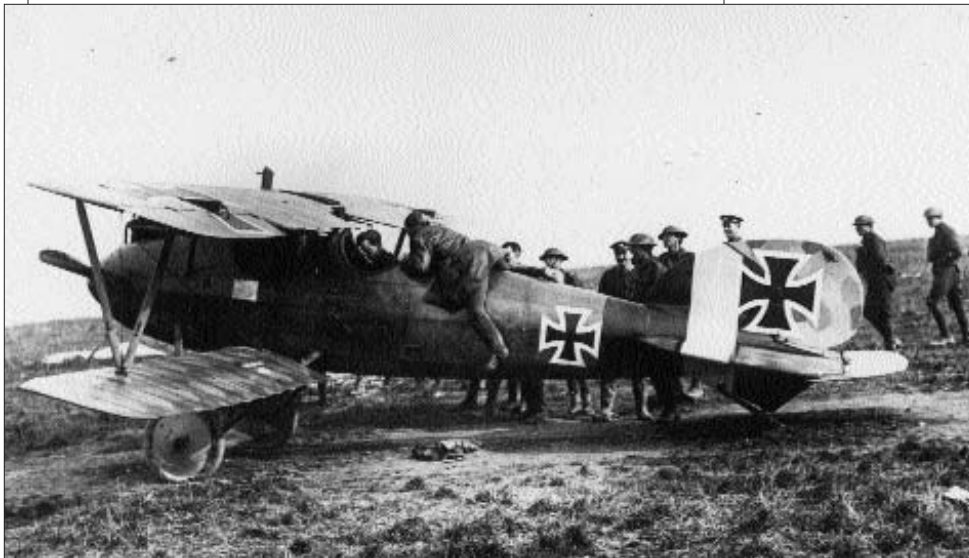
With respect to the Nieuport 17’s endurance, distinguished Canadian engineer and historian Philip Markham proved that the mission duration of 1 hour, 43 minutes was certainly within the capabilities of the aircraft, given the flight profile reported, which included altitudes ranging from fifty feet to 7000 feet. Markham also stated that the aircraft’s endurance

was as high as 2.4 hours under certain flight profiles.⁹ As to the landing, Bishop freely admitted to being very stressed and disoriented after the airfield attack. If he landed, and even that is questionable, he probably needed the momentary comfort of being earthbound to regain his composure. He could well have been suffering from what today would be referred to as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, something unrecognized in 1917. He also may have needed to ask for directions, as he was rather unsure of his exact location by this time. With respect to shooting up his own aircraft to enhance his credibility, this is quite simply a ludicrous supposition. In June 1917, Nieuport 17s were falling out of sky with alarming regularity due to structural failures of the lower wings that were

not yet totally understood. In fact, there had been five such accidents on Bishop’s squadron alone, several of which had proven fatal.¹⁰ Any contention that a pilot would intentionally weaken an airframe with known structural defects defies logic. Additionally, the Nieuport 17 had neither wheel brakes nor a parking brake, and combined with the high and unpredictable idling speed of the 120 horsepower Le Rhone rotary engine, this would have required the pilot to shut down the aircraft in order to disembark and shoot it up.¹¹ As well, the Nieuport did not have a self-starting capability, which meant that Bishop would have probably have had to invite a witness or witnesses to fraud, since someone would have had to swing the propeller through for the engine start. The battle damage is readily explained by small arms fire encountered at Esnes airfield, and flak over the lines, which Bishop claimed he experienced on his return flight.¹² The location of the damage on the aircraft is well documented. Most of it was in the trailing bays of the lower wings and the elevators, and is thus inconsistent with the ‘self-damage’ theory, which would have resulted in lateral damage to the aircraft, such as in the fuselage and the rudder.¹³ However, the wing, elevator and fuselage damage is not inconsistent with what could be expected from ground fire. Bishop’s mechanic, Sergeant Nicod, also

precipitated by the Bishop biography, *Courage of the Early Morning*, written by his son Arthur in 1965, it was not until 1982 that his First World War record was seriously challenged. That year, the National Film Board released the pseudo-drama, “The Kid Who Couldn’t Miss,” a meld of fact and fiction that suggested portions of Bishop’s combat career were fabricated. Special attention was paid to the airfield raid, and a suggestion was made that he landed behind Allied lines on the return trip and shot up his own aircraft to simulate battle damage. A subsequent Senate investigation proved inconclusive because of a lack of hard evidence to counter the hypotheses in the film. In it, the airfield raid was doubted, based upon the following speculative points:

- Bishop could not have conducted the mission for the duration specified at the altitudes specified. The raid exceeded the capabilities of the aircraft;
- He supposedly landed behind Allied lines before returning to home airfield at Filescamp Farm and shot up his Nieuport with his own Lewis gun, which he subsequently abandoned;
- Some of the battle damage was closely grouped, suggesting self-damage;



Canadian troops examining a captured German Albatros D.Va.

National Aviation Museum Photo 70001

made a point of specifically noting, in writing, “both machine gun and heavier anti-aircraft damage,” as well as stating the exact location of the damage on the aircraft.¹⁴

Then there is the matter of the missing Lewis gun. According to Willy Fry in his book *Air of Battle*, published in 1974, Bishop told him that he got stymied in an attempt to install a fresh drum of ammunition on the way home. The gun got jammed in the down position and obstructed both his vision and his freedom of movement. However, it was easy to jettison since it was now useless to him. Bob Bradford, the Associate Director of the National Aviation Museum, wrote a very thorough letter of explanation to Senator Marshall and his investigating committee on how easy this would have been to accomplish.¹⁵ Of note, other than Fry’s word on this subject and Arthur Bishop writing in *Courage of the Early Morning* that his father had jettisoned the Lewis gun because it was dead weight, the supposedly-missing gun was never observed upon by others, nor did Billy Bishop ever mention it himself. Also, there is no record of a missing Lewis gun from 60 Squadron in the weekly routine machine gun accountability report from RFC Headquarters France to higher headquarters. Furthermore, the only place the landing behind Allied lines has been mentioned is in Fry’s *Air of Battle*. There, Fry claimed Bishop told him he had become lost and landed in the French sector to ask directions of farmhands.¹⁶ Billy Bishop never said anything about an interim landing, nor did his son Arthur.

The most enduring challenge to the dawn attack’s legitimacy has therefore been the lack of an attributed target for Bishop’s attentions that morning in German records. However, a highly reputable source who studied surviving German records¹⁷ confirmed that there was apparently a transiting unit — the last of three flights of *Jagdstaffel 20* — at a temporary airfield at Esnes¹⁸ that day. The relatively short legs of the shuttle north were probably designed to provide an ample reserve for inclement weather, which had recently been an issue, or for combat, should the need have arisen. The unit was transiting from Second German Army in the French sector to Fourth German Army in Flanders.¹⁹ “Either Esnes or Awoingt” (another airfield approximately four miles southwest of Estourmel) is where Bishop, in his combat report, said the event occurred. Also, the number of enemy aircraft he reported — their types, and the circumstances encountered²⁰ — are all consistent with known facts, allowing for small but understandable and reasonable irregularities under the circumstances.²¹

The event probably did not appear in German records because, according to Stewart K. Taylor and others, *Jagdstaffel 20* was still en route to its new location and, by German policy, was not required to report.²² It would in fact have been unusual to keep records under the circumstances, except in the *Jasta* war diary (destroyed by Allied bombing during the Second World War), which would have been moved with the ground echelon. German record keeping of the period, contrary to popular beliefs, was actually very selective. They tended not to report bad news unless they were absolutely required procedurally to do so. In addition, they were inconsistent in recording the names of vanquished airmen who were only wounded or escaped an action unscathed, and were also tentative in reporting material damage to aircraft.²³

The reader should recall that Bishop repeatedly asked for accompaniment on the raid. Those about to commit fraud do

not normally invite witnesses to the event. There is a plethora of circumstantial evidence to strongly support that the raid took place, such as POW reports, and the testimonials of Allied airmen and an observation balloonist,²⁴ and no empirical evidence whatsoever to refute it.²⁵ This writer contends that enough circumstantial evidence acquires a certain legitimacy of its own.

There was another possible reason for the Germans not making news of the raid broadly known. At the time, *Jagdstaffel 5* at Estourmel, responsible for the air defence of that entire sector of the front, was under the command of *Leutnant* Werner Voss, the second-highest scoring German ace of the period and a real public relations asset. This audacious attack could well have cast the young hero in an unfavourable light, and providing negative images of its warriors to the German and world press was not policy. Also, there may well have been concern that confirmation would have generated ‘copycat’ performances by other Allied airmen.²⁶ Finally, in 1928 in Berlin, Bishop became the only non-German inducted into the First World War German Aces Association. With their known respect for courage under fire, even when exhibited by adversaries, it seems most unlikely that they would have inducted a known fraud into their membership. Whether Bishop got one, two, three, or even a half-dozen victories on the raid is immaterial. Its mere prosecution was an incredibly dangerous, highly courageous and inspirational act. At a very bad time during the war, it served as a model for others to emulate, and from which to derive inspiration and strength. And therein lies its true value.

The real travesty is that the NFB production managed to cast doubt on the rest of Bishop’s claims. In fact, within the confines of the British claim/accreditation system of the day — which was admittedly the least demanding of all the combatants — Bishop enjoys a very high confirmation rate amongst the Empire aces, in as much as German records permit confirmation for all of them. Of the three highest Empire aces who were granted roving commissions — Albert Ball, James McCudden and Billy Bishop — only McCudden has garnered a higher verification rate. This is because Ball and Bishop fought deep behind the German lines, which made confirmations of success more difficult. McCudden’s prey-of-choice were two-seaters, which worked directly over the lines, and many of these combats were accordingly witnessed. Of Bishop’s 72 accredited claims, 38 can either be paired with specific German crew names,²⁷ or were verified by witnesses. Actual names have been assigned to at least 22 of these cases.²⁸ By comparison, Ball has twelve names attached to 44 confirmed victories, five of which are indefinite. In relation to the other great Empire aces, if the assignment of names to victims were a requirement, Mick Mannock would rate 21 of 61, George McElroy, one of 46, Anthony Beauchamp-Proctor, three of 54, Ira Jones (a famous Mannock fan and detractor of Bishop), two of 37,²⁹ and so on. Thus, Bishop’s claims, in spite of all the innuendo, enjoy a formidable degree of verification, given the circumstances of his preferred methods and locales of engagement, the paucity of German records, their record keeping practices, and the potential for misinterpretation. The British rules of the day for claims certification were admittedly lenient. However, within those confines, as distinguished Canadian historian Sydney Wise has attested, “A very high proportion of Bishop’s kills, so-called, were in fact verified as a result of corroborative testimony. The allegation that there is fraudulence in the Bishop record I find without foundation

whatsoever, and I believe I can say that authoritatively, having examined the whole record.”³⁰

Bishop was certainly not the greatest leader amongst the Canadians in the Royal Flying Corps; he was too self-absorbed for that. But he was a skilled, resourceful warrior, possessed of

uncommon valour. He served with great distinction, and provided inspiration during very trying times. His bravery and example truly were Napoleon’s “Courage of the Early Morning.”



NOTES

1. J. Ross McKenzie, *The Real Case of No. 943: William Avery Bishop* (Kingston: Royal Military College of Canada, 1990).
2. RFC Headquarters may have been uncomfortable with a VC nomination for *prolonged* gallantry as opposed to a *specific* act, although the Cross would be so awarded later. Examples include the Irish ace Edward “Mick” Mannock, and Leonard Cheshire, of Second World War Bomber Command fame.
3. W.M. Fry, *Air of Battle* (London: William Kimber, 1974), p. 135.
4. At least two of these claims were supposedly witnessed by Allied aircrew from other units. Dan McCaffery, *Billy Bishop: Canadian Hero* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1988), p. 214.
5. The publisher’s preface to this exercise in hyperbole, which included a fight with von Richthofen that never occurred, makes the book’s intended purpose clear: To provide “...inspiration to every young man in the army ‘wings’ or who contemplates an army career.” W.A. Bishop, *Winged Warfare* (New York: George H. Doran, 1918), p. iv. In fact, objective, official histories of Canada’s role in the Great War did not really appear until the mid-1930s, and even then they were not popularly received. “By the mid-1930s, Canadians no longer had any need of an official story of the war, because by then they had crafted their own history.” Jonathan F. Vance, *Death so Noble—Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), p. 172.
6. Dan McCaffery, *Billy Bishop*, p. 207.
7. “Indeed, his combat reports were often very modest. There are numerous statements such as: ‘I fired the remainder of my drum from long range at it, but cannot say whether I hit it or not.’ Or, ‘He dived away and I fired about thirty shots at him with no apparent results.’ Or, ‘I engaged them and one double-seater went down in a nose-dive but I think partly under control.’” *Ibid.*, p. 137.
8. Also, the testimony of former British airman Lieutenant Philip B. Townsend, published in *Cross & Cockade* in 1985 and reiterated by journalist/historian Dan McCaffery in his Bishop book, appeared to confirm the raid’s location at Estourmel, rather than in the Estourmel area. It is an important distinction. David L. Bashow, *Knights of the Air* (Toronto: McArthur, 2000), p. 124.
9. Philip Markham, “The Early Morning of 2 June 1917,” *Over the Front* 10, 3 (1995), p. 240.
10. Yet another accident in this wing-shedding series would occur at 60 Squadron just five days after Bishop’s airfield raid, and it would also result in the pilot’s death. A.J.L. Scott, *Sixty Squadron RAF, 1916-1919* (London: Greenhill, 1990), p. 45.
11. Robert W. Bradford, Associate Director National Aviation Museum, letter to Senator Marshall of the Canadian Senate, 15 October 1987.
12. Arthur Bishop, *The Courage of the Early Morning* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1965), p. 103.
13. There was minor damage in these areas, but the bulk of the damage was to the bottoms of the lower wings and elevator.
14. A.A. Nicod, “Reunion Memories,” in *Popular Flying*, January 1936.
15. Robert W. Bradford, Associate Director National Aviation Museum, Letter to Senator Marshall of the Canadian Senate, 15 October 1987.
16. W.M. Fry, *Air of Battle*, p. 136.
17. That source is renowned Canadian aviation histori-

an Stewart K. Taylor, winner of the prestigious Thornton Hooper Award for Excellence in Aviation History. Also, reputable British historians Norman Franks, Frank Bailey, Russell Guest, and Rick Duiven have noted that *Jasta 20* had a change of strength from 2nd Army to 4th Army during this period, and substantiated Taylor’s claim that *Jasta 20* fought its last engagement as part of 2nd Army on 24 May 1917. Norman Franks, Frank Bailey, Russell Guest and Rick Duiven, *The Jasta War Chronology* (London: Grub Street, 1998) pp. 54, 62 and 65. As a related source, Philip Markham has confirmed that there was a German aerodrome just to the north of Esnes village, in addition to the late-1918 airfield to the south. Philip Markham, “The Early Morning,” p. 256.- 18. On the 1st of May 1985, Group Captain (RCAF Ret’d) A.J. Bauer, Chairman of the Billy Bishop Heritage Museum in Owen Sound, was on a ‘taxi tour’ of the Great War airfield sites around Cambrai, Esnes, Awoingt and Estourmel. He had that day previously visited 60 Squadron’s wartime home at Filescamps Farm/Izel les Hameau. After enjoying a quiet meal at the *Hotel Mouton Blanc*, Bauer went for a walk, stopped at a local pub full of May Day revellers for a refreshment, and took that opportunity to consolidate his notes for his daily journal entry. This would include (verbatim), “Coup was encounter with the Meuniers, Gaston and Phillipe, in the pub late night. Gaston (no English, very drunk) shared my tiny table. Phillipe (Gaston’s son) joined us. I talked of my task (B.B.). Turned out that Gaston as a 12-year-old had witnessed the raid back at Esnes!! Left my card (P.C.) and 50 ff. to cover postage with Phillipe. He will write. Will return for interview (Gaston) (he’s 81).” Phillipe Meunier also told Bauer that his father was still in proud possession of a copy of the 4 October 1917 *La Guerre Aerienne Illustre* article detailing the Bishop raid, and to which the Germans felt obliged to issue a qualified denial. However, before Group Captain Bauer could document this intriguing occurrence further, he received a death notice from Phillipe in August saying that his father had passed away. Having received this news, Bauer recalled the older man saying through his son that, as a boy, he had watched the raid on 2 June 1917. Specifically, Gaston Meunier recalled hearing the Nieuport fire, presumably at ground targets, and he noted the British tricolour roundel on the Nieuport as it passed his vantage point. Shortly thereafter, he recalled seeing two aircraft shot down; one within the aerodrome boundary and another just outside of it. Of note, Bauer’s encounter with the Meuniers precedes Stewart K. Taylor’s debut of the theory of Esnes being the field attacked by Bishop rather than Estourmel by months. Taylor so testified to the Senate Sub-Committee on 17 October 1985. H. Clifford Chadderton, *Hanging a Legend: The NFB’s Shameful Attempt to Discredit Billy Bishop, VC* (Ottawa: The War Amputations of Canada, 1986), p. 189, and A.J. Bauer, letter to and telephone conversation with author, 13 May 2002.
- 19. *Jasta 20* was only one of many German scout units that located north into 4th Army territory in Flanders over the period. Between 17 May 1917 and 1 July 1917, 4th Army’s complement of *Jastas* swelled from four to fourteen attached units, and the majority of them came from armies south of the 6th Army portion of the front over which Bishop was operating. This movement renders the establishment of a temporary staging base in the Esnes area during the period all the more logical.

- Norman Franks, Frank Bailey and Rick Duiven, *The Jasta War Chronology*, pp. 55, 63, 73, and 285.
20. Bishop reported seeing both sheds and hangars on the field he attacked. It would have been understandable, in the heat of combat, to mistake tent hangars for more permanent structures. As to the presence of sheds, they were very portable. As Philip Markham explains, “... it must be understood that the German organization for erecting and dismantling sheds and hangars was very efficient, and that the numbers of each on any particular aerodrome could change within days of a unit moving in or out.” Philip Markham, “The Early Morning...”, p. 251.
 21. Far too much has been made of the fact that Bishop *probably* identified incorrectly the sub-variant of Albatros scouts at Esnes, reported sheds as opposed to the more likely tent hangars, and counted only six instead of the actual seven enemy aircraft. There are good reasons for these honest errors, and they do not occur at any significant rate. When rolling in on an enemy airfield, under fire and at very low level, adrenaline flowing, Bishop would not have been worried about the endless parsing of armchair warriors and historians over such trivialities. Black crosses on wings would have been the only justification he needed to open fire. David L. Bashow, *Knights of the Air*, p. 123.
 22. Stewart K. Taylor’s testimony to The Senate of Canada. *Ibid.*, p. 189.
 23. *Ibid.*, pp. 126, 189.
 24. In relatively recent years, the testimony of the British balloonist Louis Alexander Weirter, who passed away in 1932, has been discounted on the grounds that he would have been too far away to see the action at Estourmel. However, the weather was actually quite good that morning in that area of the Front, particularly the visibility from above looking down. With the action occurring at Esnes and westward, Weirter would have been closer than previously thought, at approximately 10 miles range. On a clear day, a combat balloonist tethered at 4000 feet could see as far as 40 miles, and had a formidable array of optical equipment to enhance his vision. <http://www.wpafb.af.mil/museum/early_years/ey5a.htm>
 25. David L. Bashow, *Knights of the Air*, p. 124.
 26. In fact, it did. Almost immediately, emulating raids occurred during the Battle of Messines, less than a week later. H.A. Jones, *The War in the Air* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932), pp. 3, 130.
 27. While well intended, various historical researchers have categorically assigned German aircrew names to specific Allied flyers on a “most likely” basis, given conditions specified in their combat reports. These victories may in fact belong to someone else, but that unknown factor may work for or against an individual. On the whole, this writer feels Bishop would generally benefit from this condition, since he tended to have individual combats as opposed to majority participation in the large formation dogfights that were a particular characteristic of the air war in 1918.
 28. David L. Bashow, *Knights of the Air*, p. 126.
 29. Christopher Shores, Norman Franks and Russell Guest, *Above the Trenches: A Complete Record of the Fighter Aces and the Units of the British Empire Air Forces, 1915-1920* (London: Grub Street, 1990), pp. 69, 95, 151, 217.
 30. H. Clifford Chadderton, *Hanging a Legend...*, p. 192.