

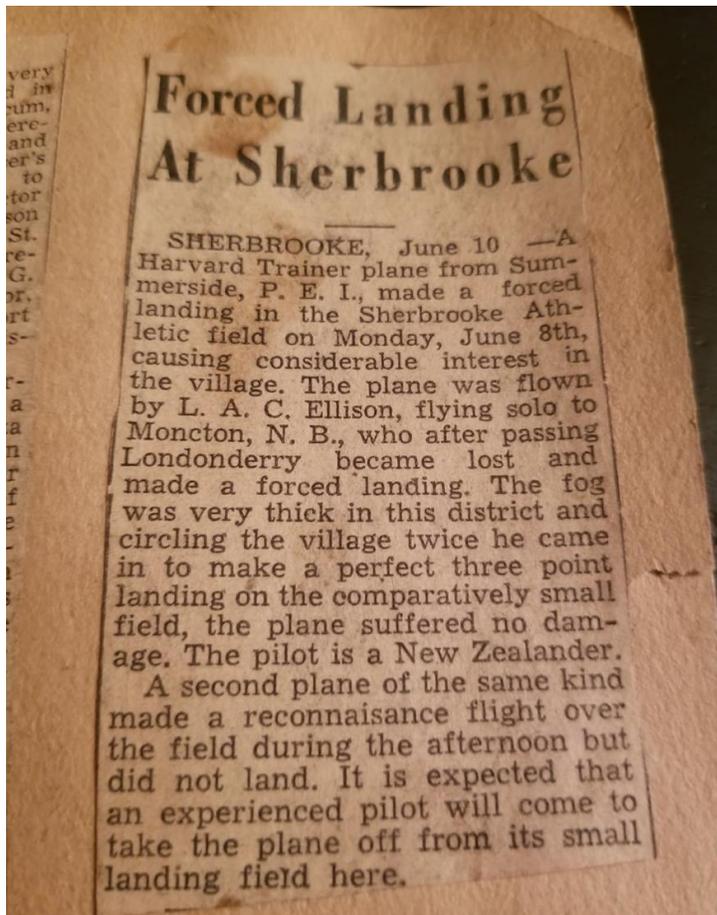
“Sometimes the Little Stories; Are the Ones Worth Finding.”

by Gerry Madigan

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My most recent article concerning Guysborough County's war on the Homefront, "Sometimes the Story You Want; Is Not the Story You Are Going to Get" was published in the Guysborough Journal back in April 2020. It was a piece highlighting the service of a young New Zealand pilot, in training out of Summerside, PEI, who became lost, and who landed his aircraft at the Sherbrooke race track in June 1942. It was also the tale of the attempts to identify him.



*Antigonish Casket" 10 June 1942*

The story itself was based on an archived Casket article from June 1942. There was some basic information to start with.

The Antigonish Casket gave the young New Zealander's rank and family name as LAC Ellison, Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF), but little else. His surname or initials would have helped to track the young aviator's flying career and fate. It was a source of continuing frustration in my search that went unrewarded for a time.

Amongst other clues received though was the photograph of Harvard Trainer, numbered Serial AK 2533, sent separately by Bruce Macdonald, noted

Guysborough County historian. This photograph came from the family archive of Winn Campbell. The photograph led to a remarkably interesting, yet an incomplete story as the pieces of the puzzle were difficult to trace and put together.



*With permission Winn Campbell, family archives, Sherbrooke airplane photo, March 2020 (Harvard Trainer Serial AK 2533)*

Many details were obtained though by tracking the various sources. In time, a picture was built that led to the recounting of the lives of many of New Zealand's young sons who either trained here in Canada, or who were lost on operations overseas.

The many appeals while seeking help to identify the young "Ellison" were rewarding in and of themselves. They led to new contacts, stories, and sources, but all wound up as a dead end.

One more effort, a Hail Mary if you will, was made to identify which Ellison trained at Summerside PEI, to the administrators of the Auckland War Memorial Museum.

In reply, I received a generous note and lead from Madison Pine, a volunteer with the Museum, stating "....I look(ed) through our database ....came across a Hugh Graham Ellison record ..., who embarked for Canada on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March 1942, disembarking around April ..., who is recorded at the Royal Canadian Air Force, 9 Service Flying Training School at Summerside, Prince Edward Island - I think this could be the LAC Ellison who force landed at Sherbrooke." Needless to say I was tickle pink!

This information was cross checked with my original work and the facts correlate very closely. In fact the time bracket of this man's training confirms that the unidentified Ellison was indeed "Hugh Graham Ellison". From this information we can piece together a brief history and sketch of Warrant Officer (WO) Hugh Ellison's career and life.

#### [A Sketch Hugh Graham Ellison NZ415304](#)

Hugh Graham Ellison born on 4 Nov 1921 at Auckland, NZ, was 20 years old when he enlisted in the Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF), 28 September 1941. He was based for a time at Levin as an untrained airman.<sup>1</sup>

Hugh Graham Ellison was subsequently posted and received his elementary flight training at home in New Zealand. He trained at No. 4 Service Flying Training School, RNZAF Station Whenuapai. He graduated as a pilot on course 25D, B Flight, 21 December 1941.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [Hugh Graham ELLISON NZ 415304 \(rafcommands.com\)](#)

Accessed: 15 Jan 2021 , 4 Sep 2017 post 2:

<sup>2</sup> Auckland War Memorial Museum. (n.d). Hugh Graham Ellison. <https://www.aucklandmuseum.com/war-memorial/online-cenotaph/record/92308>, (M. Pine, personal communication ENQ16800, January 15, 2021)



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

P02739.005

(Auckland War Memorial Museum with permission photo dated 21 December 1941,

<https://fotoweb.airforcemuseum.co.nz/fotoweb/archives/5003-Search-the-Collection/Collection/HbH481.jpg.info> )

Upon completion of his elementary training in New Zealand in December 1941, LAC Hugh Ellison was sent to Canada for advance and initial operational training. Disembarking around April 1942, presumably on Canada's west Coast, he was likely held in a reception/holding centre for a time, before receiving marching orders to Summerside later that year.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> ibid M. Pine, personal communication ENQ16800, January 15, 2021

LAC Hugh Ellison's presence was clearly recorded at Royal Canadian Air Force, 9 Service Flying Training School, Summerside, Prince Edward Island. He was on site May/June 1942, at a point where he began to receive advanced training.

Placing LAC Hugh Ellison at Summerside at this time alone, is strong enough to suggest that he was the member involved in the "Forced Landing at Sherbrooke", 10 June 1942. In fact young Hugh remained at Summerside for a considerable time. He finally graduated from Summerside PEI on Course 1: Class 53, 3 January 1943. This ironically was some 79 years later, on or about the same time in January 2021, when I sent my additional request for assistance. <sup>4</sup>

LAC Hugh Ellison's training dates at Summerside, bracket the timeframe perfectly. Fate must have had a hand when I sent that Hail Mary in early January. That is strong enough evidence to confirm he was our man!

LAC Hugh Ellison must have been too good a pilot as well. Unlike many of his peers, he was not immediately posted overseas. He was held back in Canada for a time. Young Ellison was posted to RCAF, 1 Flying Instructor School, Trenton, Ontario immediately following graduation January 1943. He was soon made an instructor upon completing that training.<sup>5</sup>

It must have been irksome for a young man chomping at the bit for combat. He was now relegated to training others because it was what was needed, and that he was amongst the best of the best. That was the lot of many instructors who pleaded, cajoled, or begged for a posting overseas on active service. We do not know what machinations or route Hugh Ellison took in getting overseas, but he did, eventually.

By this time, a Warrant Officer (WO), Hugh Graham Ellison was finally posted to England. He spent some time at No. 55 O.T.U. where he upgraded his skills with familiarization on Spitfire Mk XVI's, and training for actual combat operations. He was eventually posted to No. 602 Squadron (RAF) 4th August 1944.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> ibid M. Pine, personal communication ENQ16800, January 15, 2021

<sup>5</sup> ibid M. Pine, personal communication ENQ16800, January 15, 2021

<sup>6</sup> [Hugh Graham ELLISON NZ 415304 \(rafcommands.com\)](https://www.rafcommands.com/415304)



Significantly, the young Ellison was either behind enemy or very near the front lines, from 26 August to 1 September. He was very lucky to have evaded capture on what was an extremely active, dangerous, and an open battlefield, having evaded the enemy for 6 days in total!

Young Ellison was not the only New Zealander to have undergone such an ordeal. His fellow countryman and contemporary, L.T. Menzies (NZ411016), also of 602 Squadron force-landed, but luckily behind allied lines on the same day, 26 August.<sup>9</sup> The loss of two aircraft on the same day, suggest the intensity of the battle and the inherent dangers of the operations of the Tactical Air Force.<sup>10</sup>

By the time WO Hugh Ellison was repatriated to England, sometime in September 1944, No 602 Squadron was recalled to the UK. The unit was subsequently tasked to take part in a campaign against V-2 rockets.<sup>11</sup>

No. 602 Squadron returned from its farthest point of advance, Antwerp. After its move back to the UK that September, it was based at RAF Coltishall, flying Spitfire XVIs, to carry out operations against V2 sites in the Netherlands.

The unit was given a wide-ranging area to patrol as it sought to seek, locate, and destroy V-2 Sites. Their patrol line spanned from The Hook to Den Helder, until the end of the war. The unit was very quickly disbanded on 15 May 1945 at Coltishall, one week after VE Day.<sup>12</sup>

WO Hugh Ellison's records provide little detail beyond September 1944. Presumably, he rejoined his unit and fought with them until the end of the war engaging the enemy's V-2 sites and operations.

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<sup>9</sup> [Hugh Graham ELLISON NZ 415304 \(rafcommands.com\)](https://www.rafcommands.com/rafcmds/rafcmds.asp?unit=602&year=1944)

<sup>10</sup> [Hugh Graham ELLISON NZ 415304 \(rafcommands.com\)](https://www.rafcommands.com/rafcmds/rafcmds.asp?unit=602&year=1944)

<sup>11</sup> HistoryOfWar.org, **Article No. 602 Squadron (RAF): Second World War**, 2021  
Source: [No. 602 Squadron \(RAF\) during the Second World War \(historyofwar.org\)](https://www.historyofwar.org/articles/602_Squadron_RAF_during_the_Second_World_War.html)  
Accessed: 16 Jan 2021

<sup>12</sup> [No. 602 Squadron RAF - Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/No._602_Squadron_RAF)

Accessed: 16 Jan 2021

## Post War

Little is known about Hugh Graham Ellison's life post war. We do know that he retained a reserve status in the RNZAF for a time. He like many veterans of his generation just wanted to get on with life. The one bit we do know comes from a 1981 electoral roll. It states that he was a manager living at Kaikohe, New Zealand.

Hugh Graham Ellison died 24 Apr 2001. His extraordinary service is marked on New Zealand's War Memorial, and that of many others. These can be found online at: [Home - Auckland War Memorial Museum \(aucklandmuseum.com\)](http://aucklandmuseum.com).

In closing, noted Canadian historian, Professor Jack Granatstein recently published, **Canada at War – Conscription, Diplomacy, and Politics** (University of Toronto Press, 2020). In his final chapter, he lamented on the current state of Canadian history that is being taught to our younger generation. "I suddenly realized that political and public policy, or what I called national history, was on the verge of disappearing... History by snippet, history by object lesson, was the new rule, and the memory of a past to which Canadians, ....., could relate was fast disappearing... ". Granatstein's following summation is a solitary warning to us all that "Canadians need to understand their national and their local history...".<sup>13</sup>

If the situation is to improve, it is our duty to remember and preserve those times in our lives and community before they are lost to time forever. And sometimes it may take the form of the little stories, like this one, that are truly "the Ones Worth Finding."

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<sup>13</sup> J.L. Granatstein, **Canada at War – Conscription, Diplomacy, and Politics**, University of Toronto Press, 2020, pg. 316