

Hamilton Mountain Plays a Significant Role in Remembrance Day

In recent years, Mount Hope has become a focus of Remembrance Day. This aviation memorial plaque explains why. The proposal for the plaque came to the Hamilton Historical Board in 2004 from the Chairman of the Hamilton-Wentworth Heritage Association. His brief outline included lines from the beautiful poem "High Flight" by Pilot Officer John Gillespie Magee. He was an American, flying with the RCAF during the Battle of Britain and was killed in a mid-air collision in cloudy conditions over Tangmere airfield on the English Channel, shortly after writing the poem. The opening and closing lines of the poem are:

*"Oh, I have slipped the surly bonds of earth
And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings.
I've trod the high untrespassed sanctity of space,
Put out my hand, and touched the face of God."*

As a senior board member, my task was to format the required plaque wording illustrating the importance of the British Commonwealth Air Training Program (BCATP), one of Canada's greatest contributions to victory in WW II. The plaque is located on the edge of the cemetery behind St. Paul's Church on Highway 6, below the eastern runway approach to the airfield.

Selecting an appropriate title for a memorial plaque can be a challenge. In this case I suggested using the first line in the "High Flight" poem with its dual meaning: "learning to fly and the spiritual release to heaven".

The unveiling occurred in the autumn of 2005 after a memorial church service with many guests from overseas. The large contingent of the Mount Hope Air Cadet Squadron with their band participated. Cadets placed flowers on the graves and saluted as each name was read from the register. During the last post and minute of silence, a WW II training aircraft from Warplane Heritage poignantly flew over the line of graves. As it turned out, it was a serendipitous coincidence or as the presiding minister concluded, "an Act of God".

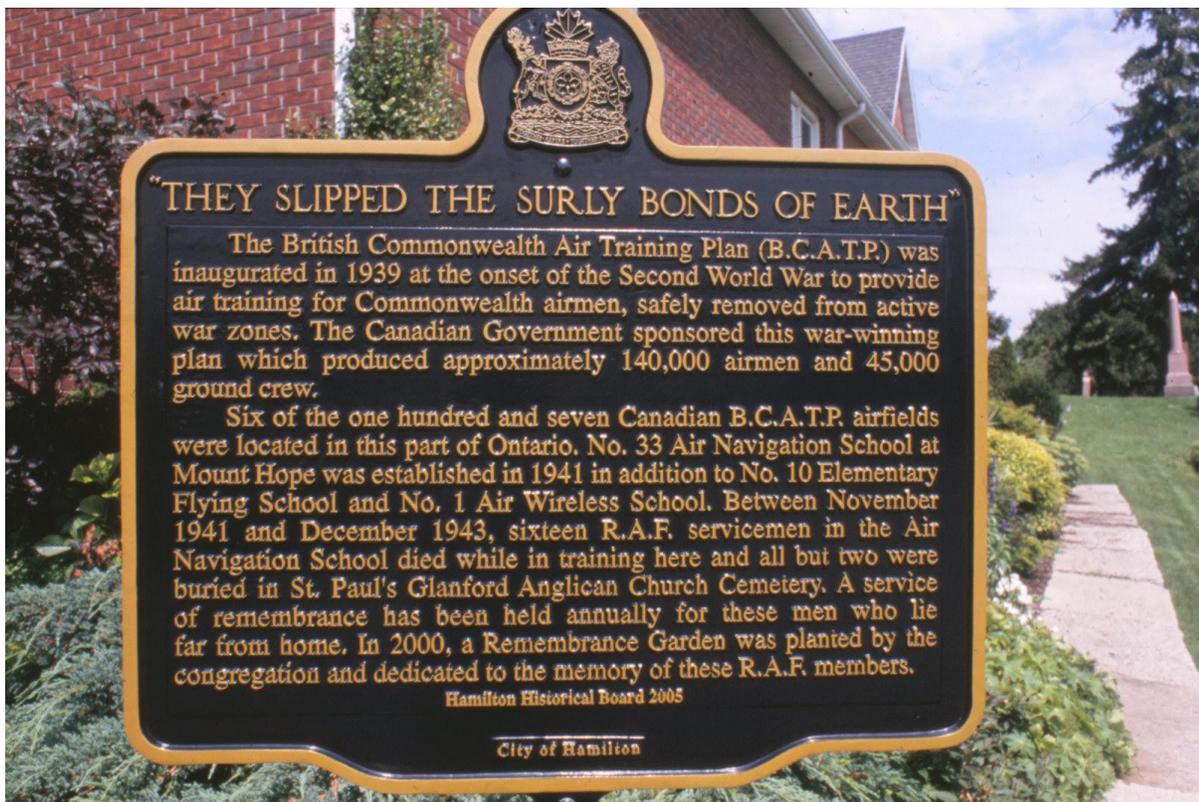


Photo by R. Williamson

Robert Williamson writes **Mountain Memories** for The Hamilton Mountain Heritage Society. **The War Years** is the subject of their November meeting. For more information on events and publications see their website www.hamiltonheritage.ca

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