

TIME TRAVELLER'S DIARY: Wings of an Angel

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Lloyd Chadburn, the first Auroran to earn his wings in the Second World War, would have turned 99 this past Tuesday. His time in the Royal Canadian Air Force (R.C.A.F) was remarkable.

Graduating flight school in 1940, Chadburn quickly rose through the ranks eventually achieving the position of Wing Commander in June of 1943. His military record was impressive. On top of high personal scores for air and naval crafts damaged and destroyed, Chadburn was also one of the most decorated R.C.A.F officers during the war, receiving several awards for his skill and leadership. He was one of only three R.C.A.F. officers to be made a Chevalier (Knight) of the French Legion d'Honneur and the only officer to be awarded the Croix De Guerre avec Palme.

Nicknamed 'The Angel', Chadburn's legacy is not just one of military achievement but one of character and leadership, too.

The nickname 'Angel' was given to Chadburn by an American bomber crew for his success in leading squadrons on escort missions. In addition to his courage and skill, Chadburn used his warm personality to guide his leadership style. Chadburn relied on his quiet confidence to lead which in turn inspired love and devotion from those under his command. He formed strong connections with his fellow airmen; learning their first names and engaging in personal conversations. Despite being the youngest air leader to serve, Chadburn earned the respect of not just the Allied Air Forces but also of those supporting him back home in Aurora.

Born in Montreal, Chadburn lived in Oshawa before moving to Aurora. During the war, stories of Chadburn's service were published in the Banner and the decorated Auroran was celebrated by the community he had left behind. There was, however, one person who celebrated Chadburn long before his military service.

While attending Northern Vocational School in Toronto, Chadburn went to live with friends of the family, the Hunters. While boarding with them, Chadburn made a tremendous impression on a six-year-old Richard Hunter. The then teenage Chadburn would tie his long, blonde hair back and take Richard for drives around North Toronto in his Ford convertible. The relationship developed and Richard came to adore his new hero.

When Chadburn left to join the R.C.A.F., Richard set out to create a scrapbook dedicated to his idol (this scrapbook is part of the Aurora Museum & Archives' collection). With photos and newspaper clippings, the scrapbook chronicles and celebrates the life and achievements of Richard's friend and idol. Sadly, this testament to Richard's (and Canada's) hero ends with a pamphlet for a memorial service at Trinity Anglican Church in June of 1944.

Chadburn was killed in action on June 13th, 1944 when his plane collided with another over Normandy while on patrol as part of the D-Day operations. The decorated serviceman was laid to rest in Ranville, France. He was 24 years of age.

On the anniversary of his birth, let us all remember 'The Angel' not just for his military accomplishments but for his character and personality. Remember him as the skilled R.C.A.F. leader but also as the long-haired teenager who befriended a six-year-old boy and became a hero long before he sat in a cockpit.