

CAMEL MARKSMAN, SNIPE SNIPER

Lt George Roberts Howsam MC 70 Squadron RFC, 43 Squadron RAF

by Stewart K. Taylor

GEORGE ROBERTS HOWSAM was born in Port Perry, Ontario and educated in that town. His eleventh-hour decision to literally jump ship in Halifax harbour on the eve of the 182nd Battalion, CEF's 30 April 1917 embarkation for England and an almost immediate early May 1917 approval as a RFC flight cadet provided the RFC's Canadian training programme with a future pilot who would eventually prove that the money invested by the War Office in his training was worth it. His training, like all 3AM cadets in that spring and summer of 1917, comprised a system of routine experiences at two or three varied locations and with four or five different squadrons. For him that happened to be XCAS, Camp Mohawk, Deseronto, Ontario; 81 and 78 CTS, Camp Borden and ten days' worth of aerial gunnery at the same location. After a 16 August 1917 'Wings' presentation and one last three-day pre-overseas leave, he departed as a temporary 2Lt, leaving the Montreal docks on The Metagama at 04.00 on 20 August 1917. In addition to his 55 officer No.3 RFC overseas draft aboard, the vessel also carried thirty nurses, some civilians, and upwards of 100 or so man, also in uniform and representing the CAMC (Canadian Army Medical Corps), with several well qualified doctors amongst them.

With only 37hr solo on JN-4s – the fewest, he said, of his group – 2Lt Howsam had increased that to 57hr by the time he spent ten days, beginning 3 November 1917 at 1ASD, St Omer – the additional hours being accrued with 34 TS at Ternhill, comprising 1hr dual and 7hr solo on Avro 504Js, 7hr



When he removed, actually tore, this photograph out of an old passport and gave it to me for copying purposes, the retired AVM preferred I not use it if I planned to write his WWI biography at a later date. A vain man he prided himself he wore a perpetual smile in WWI and for that matter, all throughout life. The glum look is typical passport fashion, until more recently and actually disturbed Howsam.

: AVM G.R. Howsam via S K Taylor

led by 70 Squadron. On 26 December, before the season's first major snow carpeted Flanders to a depth of two inches, the Camels of C Flt caught some unprotected 'Schlachtstaffeln' strafing British Front line trenches and Quigley the squadron's fast rising Canadian star despatched one north west of Houthulst Forest. 2Lt Howsam, flying to Quigley's left, and a British Fourth Army wireless post on the ground confirmed the EA's ultimate fate.

solo on Bristol Scouts and 6 hours solo on the Sopwith Camel.

C Flight of 70 Squadron RFC, operating out of Poperinghe, saw the rather officious, not particularly likeable but 'damn enthusiastic', young pilot display some rash behaviour in his first months. His introduction to air warfare had moments of high drama but the development of his combat prowess had had the priceless assistance of 2Lt F.G. 'Quig' Quigley as an inspiration and real motivator. It would take roughly six weeks for his training to come to fruition and show what courage he could muster, given the right circumstances. The following paragraphs, provide evidence of his development as a combat pilot.

28 DECEMBER 1917

Drifting snow and high winds played havoc with the 11th Wing's patrols over the Ypres Salient. Poperinghe aerodrome, once a sodden field was now partially frozen and ice patches began to take their toll of the Camel's wooden and very vulnerable tail skids. Weather permitting, two-seaters of the Luftstreitkräfte provided the chief opposition for the Wing's fighter units,

Camp Borden August 1917. Two guards (their figures cropped) one on each end, bracket these 21 delinquent Canadian cadets. They all overstayed their week's leave by three days. Punishment: a night in the guard house and 14 days CB (confined to barracks). Cadet G.R. Howsam, sixteenth from left in this group would eventually become the only fighter pilot with downed EA to his credit.

: J.E. Sydie via S.K. Taylor

