



49 SQUADRON'S FIRST DFC

Lt Herbert Leonard 'Roughie' Rough B Flight, 9.11.1917 to 9.6.1918

by S.K. Taylor



November weather in the northern hemisphere can be most inhospitable. Living up to its notoriously blemished reputation, Lincoln Station was wrapped in an almost impenetrable misty fog when I stepped off the train from London. The run had been delayed by weather conditions and was nearly an hour late but a young university student, going home for the weekend, offered to drive me to the address I sought: 'Littledigs', 42 Hykeham Road, Lincoln. 'Roughie' answered the door, ushered me in and in less than five minutes he was back in the past. For him it was 'home'!

I had heard from other veterans, who knew him in the RFC, of his shortness in height. Back then, when approaching his 23rd birthday and receiving a discharge from the Canadian Army on 16 May 1917, this was listed at 5ft 4 in. Looking at the eighty-year-old I would have bet my bottom dollar Roughie had lost a couple of inches in the intervening 55 years.

He was born on 27 October 1894, in Tunbridge Wells, Kent, the younger of two brothers. With the family in tow, his father, recently retired from the 'Corsteel' business, emigrated to Canada in 1910 and purchased a semi-improved fruit range in the Columbia River valley of British Columbia. Teenage Roughie obtained a job as a trapper guide in the Athabaskan 'North Country'. When the family could not make a go of it tending to the orchards they moved to Vancouver. *I started as a hotel bellboy and soon owned my own motor launch – used to race the other launches and most of the time win!*

Listing his occupation as auto driver and mechanic, young Herbert Rough, also a member of the 50th Highlanders of Canada Militia, signed up on 11 March 1915 in Victoria BC with the Eaton's Motor Machine Gun Brigade and transferred to the CASC a few months after his 10 July 1915 arrival in England, eventually proceeding to France with the Horse Transport Depot. He was, essentially, a glorified stable boy! Once in France, he served with the 2nd Canadian Ammunition Sub Park, helping to move shells up to batteries closest to the front. Slogging along, often in persistent rain, did little to comfort the mind of his imagination. Looking up, he had already witnessed the RFC at work almost from the

moment he reached the front in late March 1916. Private 430497 took it hard when admonished while at the front; the charge against him 'neglect of duty on motor lorry No 16208'. He had left the engine running and the lorry unattended in order to take 'a bathroom break'!

After persistent efforts to secure a discharge from the Canadian forces and obtain a transfer to the RFC, Pte Rough finally had his wish on 18 March 1917. On that date, notification arrived that he be posted to the RFC Depot, Farnborough pending transfer to the RFC Officers' Cadet Wing and posted to CASC Depot, Shorncliffe.

Absolutely overjoyed at the prospect of his future as a pilot, the 'Little Imp' added a real bounce to his walk. *I really felt like I was a six footer.* After ground training at Reading, before moving to Northolt and 2 RS, flying both 'Longhorn' and 'Shorthorn' Maurice Farmans for two hours before going solo, he then found himself as a DH4 pilot in training with 49 Squadron RFC, Swingate Downs, Dover.

By spring 1917, 49 Squadron was equipped with a miscellany of types, including Martinsyde Elephants and BE variants which gave preparatory training before its pilots were introduced to the DH4. Some pilots had received all their flight schooling at Dover, surrounded by high steep cliffs, the sea, Dover Castle and Royal Navy ships in the harbour.

Roughie, not one to wax lyrical over his surroundings, had to contend with the usual vagaries of this unique location for



The training machines used by 49 Sqn while working up included BE2c 2482 and Martinsyde G.100 7294. :CCI Archive

The most northerly pair of flight sheds at Dover (Swingate Down), shown here, was occupied by 49 Squadron. The others accommodated 62 TS and the 6th Wing ARS. :J.S. Zombathy via S.K.T.

