



Hank R. Wambolt: 'Your Majesty, I'm Pleased to Meet You'

CANADA'S NATIVE SON, FSL HARRY EDMOND WAMBOLT 1 WING & 3 NAVAL SQUADRON

by Stewart K. Taylor



Some individuals are born to stand out in a crowd. Unquestionably Harry Redmond Wambolt qualified. Short-changed only by an effete sounding, high-pitched feminine voice, insufficient to carry his firm convictions; honesty his valour blended with an air of simplistic innocence – often gullible to a fact – young Wambolt still managed to fascinate and intrigue anyone who made his acquaintance.

Young Harry acquired the trust so associated with that of his Mi'kmaq roots, his forebears on the male side from one of the native Indian peoples that inhabited the Maritimes for more than 3,600 years.

His parents were residents of Dartmouth, living on Portland Street at the time of his 8 April 1892 birth. A sister Margaret, in 1967, provided the author with some old newspaper clippings, mainly from the *Halifax Herald*, and gave her assurance what they reported was for all intent and purposes quite reasonably correct.

Recognising his brightness Harry's parents saved enough money to send him to the Halifax Academy. Almost at once he became a popular student and while Harry was a natural to fall victim of many a practical student joke, his innate youthfulness remained surprisingly stoic whenever this happened. It was as a member of the Academy Rifle Team where he really shone. During a competition in Toronto, which included representatives from the British Empire, his coolness and eye-hand coordination assisted the Academy in capturing the King's Cup. A great team player, he also enjoyed people. Just being around them gave Harry a boost. When the motion picture craze swept through North America Harry became a proprietor of the 'Buzz' theatre in Halifax. He later operated a 'flickers' business in his hometown of Dartmouth. But any allegiance to this fledgling amusement industry could not stand up to the lure of flying. Frightfully patriotic, this was the avenue of pursuance he opted to tread in order to join the war. That would not be easy.

The only entry into the RNAS or RFC for a Canadian had to be gained through the Curtiss School in Toronto or, if they were overcrowded, private schools in the US were the only other recourse. A 1915 advertisement in the *Montreal Daily Mail*, placed by the Admiralty to attract RNAS volunteers, caught his attention and invigorated interest. Harry's troubles had only just begun.

Once Wambolt decided to try for a commission in the RNAS he accordingly sold his business and applied to the Special Service Headquarters in Ottawa. They directed him to appear for an interview before the Captain Superintendent of the Canadian Royal Naval College, Halifax. Right after the interview he was told to take his pilot's certificate, the Federation Aeronautique Internationale (FAI) privately. But the only training facility in Canada was full. Schools in the US were his only hope. He later expressed his tortured troubles to Major General W.G. Gwatkin, Chief of the General Staff in Ottawa, from St Leonard, Point aux Trembles, Quebec, in a letter dated 30 October 1915:

I wish to state my experience since I left Halifax, Friday August 27th 1915, to get into an aviation school for the purpose of obtaining my aero certificate to get to the front.

I arrived in New York, went to the Aero Club of America, asked Mr Woodhouse if he would recommend a school in which I could get a good course. After naming several schools he says 'Mr George A. Gray has arrived in Mineola, Long Island, with a Wright machine. He is a good aviator. I think he could put you through very nicely'.

I went to Mineola, had a talk with Mr Gray. He says 'Even if everything goes well, I'll have you through in nine days. hell I want you to pay your tuition in advance'.

The nine days arrived, and I had forty-two minutes flying time when the motor went bad and would not turn up enough to carry two. Every time I would get on the machine with him it would not carry, so I asked him to refund me my money so I could get my course elsewhere, but he told me new pistons would be here in the course of a few days and the machine would carry all right then. The pistons arrived but still she would not carry, but he would not refund me my money. For five weeks he was waiting in Mineola without giving me another lesson.

About three weeks ago he came to me and said 'Wambolt, I know you have had hard luck and I also know my machine won't carry two, that is the reason I have only given you forty-two minutes flying in the six weeks you have been with me, but I am going to

Montreal. The manager of the Montreal School of Flying was at the Aero Club of America today and has offered me \$75 a week if I take my machine up there and teach school for him. My machine will not carry two, but they have two other machines there and I will give you your course on one of them'. I said I



Flight Sub Lieutenant Harry Redmond Wambolt in a photograph taken at Eastbourne during January 1916. This was his favourite photograph of himself.

:Margaret Carter (sister) via S.K.T.