



A Pilot Called "Moose"

by Herb Kugel

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Robert Carl 'Moose' Fumerton was a hefty, six-foot plus, ice hockey playing woodsman. He became Canada's top World War Two night-fighter ace. He earned his 'Moose' nickname because he regularly had to shove and squeeze his large body into the cockpit of any fighter he flew. However, once in the cockpit, Fumerton regularly showed himself to be an aggressive and skillful pilot. On one occasion, fellow pilot George Sutherland complained about his Bristol Beaufighter: "The plane, with its two powerful Hercules engines, had earned a reputation for being unforgiving with any but the most competent pilots." Fumerton volunteered to fly Sutherland's plane, doing this with Sutherland standing in the well behind the pilot's seat. The Beaufighter behaved perfectly under Fumerton's touch. "I don't see much wrong with this machine," Fumerton said, then put the Beaufighter into a flawlessly executed slow roll.

Sutherland commented on this incident: "God, that

A fine file photograph of a Bristol Beaufighter Mk IC, seen flying over a cold English countryside, circa 1941. At the time, this aircraft coded PN - B, Serial Number (S/N) R2198 was assigned to No. 252 Squadron of the Royal Air Force. The squadron, which can trace its history back to 1918, was reformed on 21 November 1940, as the RAF Coastal Command's first Beaufighter unit. No. 252 Squadron operated extensively throughout the Mediterranean Theater during World War Two, and was finally disbanded on 1 December 1946.

roll was smooth...as a baby's bottom. And I thought to myself, 'Jesus, he's a better pilot than I am.'"

Fumerton was born in rural Western Quebec at Fort Coulonge on 20 (or 21?) March 1913. Leaving high school in 1931, during the Great Depression, he managed to obtain employment as a bush and timber worker. However, he contracted diphtheria and received orders to rest. He refused to take time to recuperate; instead, he demonstrated the independence and tenacity that would remain with him his entire life by tramping and slogging his way through Canada's North-West Territories and Yukon for the next seven years. He obtained work as a surveyor, mapmaker, prospector and gold miner. He, also, earned a bush pilot's license in 1938. When World War Two started in September 1939, he volunteered for pilot duty and enlisted in the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) in November of that year. He was among the first to complete wartime training at No. 1 Service Flying Training School (SFTS) at Camp Borden, Ontario, where, on 23 May 1940, his wings were



pinned over his left breast by the legendary World War One Canadian air ace Billy Bishop.

After completing his training, Flying Officer Fumerton went to England in August 1940, with RCAF No. 112 Squadron, the first Canadian unit to arrive in England. Reaching England at a critical time when the British were desperate for pilots, Fumerton volunteered, and transferred to Royal Air Force (RAF) No. 32 Squadron, where, flying a Hawker Hurricane, he fought in the final days of the Battle of Britain. A second transfer followed to RCAF No. 1 Squadron, and then a third transfer in June 1941, brought him to the RCAF's first night fighter unit, the Bristol Beaufighter-equipped No. 406 Squadron.

By the time of Fumerton's posting to the No. 406, Beaufighter night interception had become a sophisticated skill requiring close cooperation between ground controllers and the two-man Beaufighter crews. Using radar ground stations, a controller would direct a Beaufighter to the point from which its airborne radar could zero in on the target. Then the Beaufighter's Airborne-Interception (A/I) radar/radio operator-navigator would guide the pilot to a position from which the for-

Wing Commander Robert Carl "Moose" Fumerton, then commanding officer of No. 406 Squadron, a Canadian night fighter unit. When this photo was taken Fumerton held the Distinguished Flying Cross, with Bar, and had thirteen enemy aircraft to his credit.

midable Beaufighter could strike with its four Hispano 20 mm cannon mounted in the ventral bay, and six .303-inch Browning wing-mounted machine guns. This interdependent type of flying made the relationship between the two Beaufighter fliers critical; each man's life depended on the other. Fumerton was lucky in meeting Sergeant Leslie "Pat" Bing at No. 406 Squadron. The two men liked and respected each other. Bing said he admired Fumerton's calmness and optimism, and he became Fumerton's radar/radio operator-navigator. He recalled that, while flying, Fumerton liked to tell stories and sing at the top of his lungs. He reported one of Fumerton's favorite tunes was: "They are moving father's grave to dig a sewer."

On 1 September 1941, while Fumerton and Bing were

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RCAF No. 406 Squadron

“We Kill By Night”

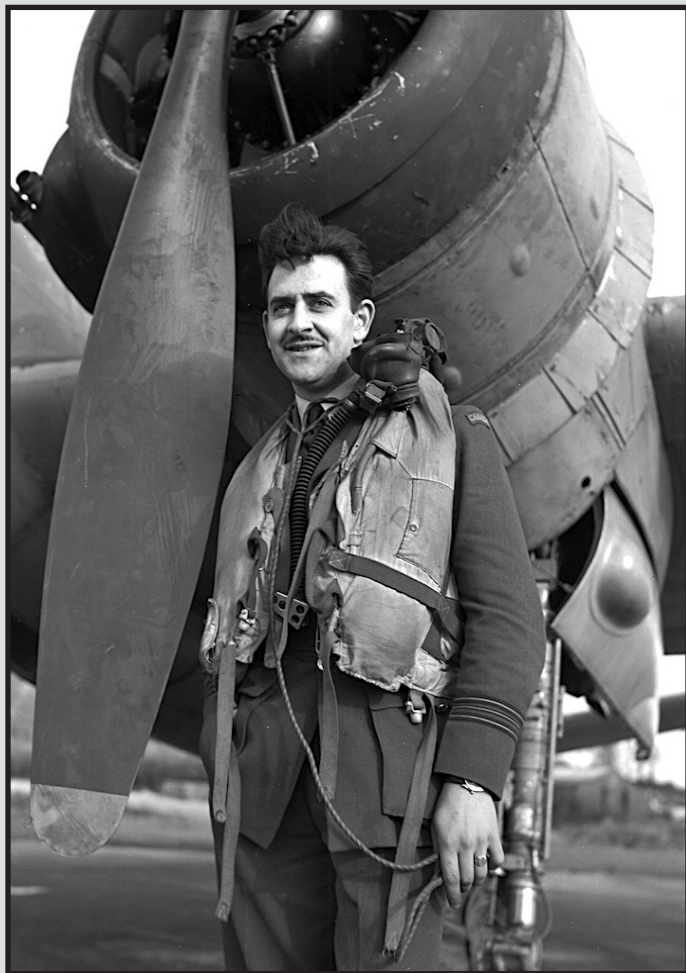
The Royal Canadian Air Force's (RCAF) first dedicated night fighter squadron, and indeed the RCAF's fifth overseas squadron overall, No. 406 Squadron was formed on 10 May 1941, at Acklington, England. With a primary mission of nocturnal air defense, No. 406 Squadron operated Bristol Blenheims and Beaufighters, and later the de Havilland Mosquito. In November 1944, there was a mission change to that of an intruder squadron, and offensive missions were now operated over occupied Europe.

When the squadron was disbanded on 1 September 1945, at Predannack, Cornwall, its air crews had amassed a viable record, one that saw the unit designated as the top intruder squadron in both the RCAF and the Royal Air Force (RAF). Statistics include: 1,835 operational sorties, totaling some 4,552 flight hours. Overall, 64 aircraft were downed, with an additional seven probable and 47 damaged. During ground attack sorties, No. 406 Squadron destroyed 88 locomotives. Unfortunately, the squadron lost 11 of its own

aircraft, with 20 aircrew lost and two becoming prisoners of war.

No. 406 Squadron was reformed on 1 April 1947, at Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, as an Auxiliary Tactical Bomber unit, flying mainly the North American B-25 Mitchell medium bomber. Now known as No. 406 City of Saskatoon Squadron (Auxiliary), the unit's mission was changed on March 1958, to that of a light transport and emergency rescue squadron, now flying the Beech CT-128 (C-45) Expediter and the de Havilland Canada DHC-3 Otter. On 1 April 1964, No. 406 Squadron was again disbanded.

On 12 July 1972, No. 406 Squadron was reformed, based at Canadian Forces Base (CFB) Shearwater, Nova Scotia. The mission was changed to that of a maritime operational training unit, training of pilots, navigators, observers and technicians. Oriented on antisubmarine and anti-ship warfare, No. 406 Squadron operated the de Havilland CP-121 Tracker, the Canadian-built Grumman S-2 Tracker, and the Sikorsky CH-124 (SH-3) Sea King. In the summer of 1981, the Tracker component of was transferred to CFB Summerside, Prince Edward Island, leaving only the Sea King training mission, a mission that continues today



Left: When this photo was taken in February 1944, D.J. Williams, of Vancouver, British Columbia, had just scored his second aerial victory with No. 406 Squadron.

Above: Pilot Officer A. Read, from Drumheller, Alberta served as a navigator with No. 406 Squadron.

More No. 406 Squadron Night Fighter Aircrews

Left: Quite happy after shooting down two "Hun" raiders in the span of eleven minutes over southwest England, Squadron Leader D. J. "Blackie" Williams (left), of Vancouver, stands with navigator Flying Officer Kirkpatrick, a native of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

Below, Left: Another No. 406 Squadron night fighter pilot, Flying Officer R.A. McKay, of Calgary, Alberta.

Below, Right: Key to the Beaufighter aircrew team was the navigator. Seen here is Flying Officer V.G. Shail, who hailed from Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan.

Note the perforated flame dampening exhaust pipes on the Bristol Beaufighter, which were common on most night fighter aircraft.



on a practice flight, Fumerton spotted a German twin-engine Junkers Ju 88 bomber silhouetted in the moonlight over Acklington, a Northumberland village, inland from the North Sea coast. At the time, their Beaufighter's radar was not functioning properly. However, Fumerton closed to within 50 yards (46 meters) of the Junkers and opened fire, setting the bomber's starboard engine ablaze. He



followed with a second attack during which the Junkers broke into pieces and crashed near Morpeth in North-East England. It was No. 406 Squadron's first night victory. The squadron's crest depicted a lynx jumping for the kill and Fumerton had just made the squadron's motto "We Kill by Night" a true statement. Fumerton and Bing spent most of the next day working a heavy cutter and hacking away the section of wing containing the Iron Cross insignia. They dragged the cross back to their base where they were photographed with it, and then proudly put it on display in the squadrons' newly created crew room. Six days later Fumerton and Bing intercepted a twin-engine Heinkel He 111 medium bomber. Fumerton fired two bursts, scoring hits, but the bomber escaped into cloud.

In February 1941, the first of a large contingent of German troops arrived in North Africa and Britain was soon fighting a desperate and critically important defense of Egypt and the Suez Canal. A hasty transfer on 19 October 1941, sent Fumerton and Bing to Alexandria, Egypt, and to the RAF's Beaufighter-flying No. 89 Squadron. By December 1941, the squadron was flying out of Abu Seuir, Egypt, mainly to protect the Suez Canal.

On the night of 2 March 1942, Fumerton and Bing, ordered to the Suez Canal Zone to intercept a German raider, found their target, a Heinkel He 111. What followed was a danger-filled moonlight pursuit with Fumerton's Beaufighter closing to within one hundred yards (91 meters) of the Heinkel. Fumerton fired, scoring several hits, but the German gunners returned accurate fire. Enemy bullets struck Fumerton's right leg at the same time the Beaufighter's starboard engine and reflector gun sight suddenly ceased working. Nevertheless, Fumerton attacked again in spite

A file photo of a de Havilland Mosquito, in this case a B.IV, Series II aircraft. The Mosquito was a highly versatile aircraft, being produced as a bomber, a night fighter, and a photo-reconnaissance bird, among other variants. This particular aircraft - DK338 - was written off in a crash on 1 May 1943, having just departed RAF Marham, England.

of his wound and the damage to his plane. Using his tracer bullets as guides, his bullets and shells set the Heinkel on fire but, suddenly, his port engine stopped. Both engines were now dead. Fumerton, preparing to crash-land, had begun searching the blackness for a safe landing spot on the Nile Delta, when one engine restarted. Fumerton and Bing spent the next hour working the Beaufighter's radio in conjunction with ground signal lights to home in on a friendly aerodrome. They found one, but, as Fumerton prepared to land his crippled Beaufighter, he discovered the plane's undercarriage was badly damaged. Unable to lower the Beaufighter's wheels, he pancaked the plane onto its belly. Both Fumerton and Bing survived the crash-landing; Fumerton was only in the hospital a short time.

A little over a month after his injury, on the evening of 7 April, Fumerton was again in the air flying with Bing. The team shot down two Heinkel 111s within fifteen minutes of each other. Both pilots received the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) for this. This was Fumerton's first DFC. A second soon followed.

In June 1942, Fumerton and Bing were detached from No. 89 Squadron and ordered to the RAF base at the Maltese airfield at Luqa. German and Italian bombers were attacking freely, and without danger, from altitudes above 15,000 feet (4572 meters), because Malta's anti-aircraft fire was ineffective above that height.

However, the Beaufighters soon challenged the raiders' immunity because the fighter version of the plane possessed a service ceiling of 30,000 feet (9144 meters). It was a dark time for Malta, Britain's 'unsinkable aircraft carrier,' the descriptive name given to the island that conveyed its military importance. Britain was fighting to survive the Axis' 'Siege of Malta,' a brutal and continuing period of unceasing air raids that began in June 1940, when Italy declared war on Britain and France. Dozens of Italian planes and then hundreds of German and Italian planes, often attacking around the clock, fought to bomb Malta into submission. These massive raids were staged against an island with a total land area of 122 square miles (316 square kilometers). While Malta as real estate was militarily insignificant, its Mediterranean placement was not. Its location, 58 miles (93 kilometers) south of Sicily and 179 miles (288 kilometers) north of the African coast at Tunisia, made Malta an ideal British location for launching attacks against Axis ships carrying supplies to North Africa.

Fumerton and Bing, No. 89 Squadron's only Canadians, soon became the outstanding all-Canadian night-fighter team in World War Two. Flying out of Malta, they shot down a further nine enemy planes in just over two months. Fumerton's first kill of the Malta detachment came on the night of 24/25 June, when he shot down a Junkers Ju 87 dive-bomber. After landing, he ordered his Beaufighter refueled and rearmed, then immediately took to the air again. As dawn was breaking on the morning of the 25th, Fumerton downed a second Junkers Ju 88. On 28 June, he shot down two more Junkers Ju 88s, and then one Junker Ju 88 each on the nights of 1 July, 2 July, and 22 July.

On the night of 10 August, Fumerton and Bing were returning from a patrol over Sicily when suddenly and without warning both engines on their Beaufighter stopped. Fumerton struggled with the throttles in attempting a restart, but the levers would not budge. Sicily was home to some Italian planes and large Ger-

man squadrons. British and German night fighters constantly hunted each other through the blackness. While Fumerton always remained non-committal regarding his views about the Beaufighter being hit by gunfire, Bing later stated he believed the plane had been hit. No matter the cause, the Beaufighter was about thirty miles (48 kilometers) off the Italian coast and its thro-

tles wouldn't budge. Despite constant struggling, Fumerton, could not restart either engine and was facing the grim prospect of ditching into the Mediterranean Sea. As his plane neared the water, Fumerton, seeing that the waves were high, succeeded in making a surprisingly smooth landing crossways to them. Fumerton and Bing managed to scramble out of the sinking Beaufighter, this was an amazing feat in itself, given the Beaufighter's frightening reputation as a 'quick sinker.' Although Fumerton and Bing escaped the Beau-



fighter, their troubles were not over. Bing's dinghy did not inflate so he had to clamber into Fumerton's dinghy. The two large men, cramped in the dinghy, immediately set a course and began paddling toward what they hoped was Malta. They were lucky. By dawn, they had succeeded in paddling to within five miles (8 kilometers) of the island, where an air-sea rescue launch picked them up.

The captain of the launch offered the two drenched pilots brandy. Both men shook from the cold water, but instead of brandy, the excited captain grabbed the wrong bottle. He snapped up an iodine bottle rather than the brandy bottle. Fumerton tasted the liquid and quickly spit out the foul tasting iodine. He later noted laconically: "It helped clean my teeth, I suppose."

Fumerton was soon in the air again. He shot down an Italian Cantieri Z.1007 three-engine bomber on 14 August, then, on 28 August, he stalked and destroyed an unidentified enemy bomber landing at its home base in Sicily. In the inclusive period between 24 June, and 28 August 1942, Fumerton destroyed nine enemy planes and added a Bar to his DFC. Note: A Bar is an insign-

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Fumerton Combat Report

**Combat Report [In the Middle East, flying Beau-fighter X7635]:
2/3 March 1942.**

At approximately 04.15 hours on the night of March 2/3, I was airborne after being ordered to scramble. I went on to Channel D and called Roof Top, who ordered me to patrol base at 10,000 feet. I had reached 6,000 feet when I was told to go to Channel B and call Playboy, who gave me a vector of 040° and "Buster". I was then given various vectors on to a bandit flying at 12,000 feet which took us in a North Easterly direction from base; but the interception did not come off due I believe to the fact that we could not climb to the required height and still maintain enough speed for a successful chase.

We were then told to orbit at 15,000 feet. Sometime later I was told that a bandit was coming up from the South at I believe 8,000 feet, and was given a vector of 160° and "Buster". All this time I was being given bandit's range, and presently was told to do a rate one turn to port on to 10° which I did. I was then told to "Buster" and finally to "Gate". At this time we were losing height rapidly to gain speed, having been told that the bandit was about three miles ahead.

A few seconds later I was told to "Flash" and almost immediately got a contact. We were then travelling at 260 m.p.h. A.S.I, height 11,000 feet. My operator [Bing] gave me a range of 9,000 feet, the bandit being almost directly ahead, and "way down below"; then shortly after, a range of 8,000 feet; and a few small corrections, whereupon I throttled back to avoid overshooting, at the same time losing height in steps on orders of my operator. Presently I was told that we were getting too far over the bandit, so I dropped the flaps and reduced speed to 120 m.p.h. By this time we were down to a height of 7,000 feet, and holding the bandit at a range of 3-4,000 feet, the bandit being still well below us.

Much to my surprise the bandit's speed held at 120 m.p.h. for some time, which led me to believe that he had seen us and was dropping back. Suddenly I was told by my operator that we were getting out of range, at the same time giving me a range of 4,000 feet, so I lifted the flaps and dove the aircraft to gain speed, getting in to a range of 2,000 feet which we managed to hold, at the same time being told by my operator that we were just about level. I then got a visual at about 2,000 feet and told my operator I had seen it. I was not at full throttle and doing somewhat about 240 m.p.h.

We now gradually overtook the aircraft from well below,

as we believed that we had been spotted earlier on, and wanted to make the most of surprise. We drew up to about 100 yards range, at the same time recognising the aircraft as a Heinkel, throttled back to a corresponding speed, raised our aircraft to the same level as the bandit, and fired a 1 ½ second burst, which hit the enemy in numerous places.

About the same time the enemy gunner returned the fire, but I soon lost sight of everything as smoke from our cannons filled the cockpit. I turned away to starboard, at the same time getting a hit in my right leg, and my starboard motor stopping. The smoke then cleared, and I saw the enemy aircraft up ahead at a range of 230-300 yards. I swung the aircraft on to him, but found that my reflector sight had been shot out. However, I fired at him anyway and managed to guide the burst fairly well by the tracer, their top gunner at the same time firing back. In the middle of this, my remaining engine cut, and we began to drop away. As we started down I saw flames coming from the enemy aircraft's port motor.

Two "years" later our port motor came on intermittently, but we were losing height fast, so I switched on the landing lamp to land. At 100 feet the motor picked up and started running smoothly. I started to open the throttle to gain height, but the motor stopped again, so from then on I ignored the throttle. I then attempted to adjust the rudder bias, but it wasn't working either.

We then circled around at 200 feet, trying to get a fix, at the same time calling for homings. We saw that we were over the mouth of a river near the sea. At the same time my operator was trying to pick up a beacon.

We finally contacted "Lator" on Channel C. but could not make out any messages except a vector of 270°, which I took to mean that we were closer to Idku than to our own base, so we began to start for that field.

We managed to get up to 400 feet but still couldn't contact any stations. However, we did contact Pomade 37 and Pomade 16 who passed bearings to me from "Gardener", and had the beacon turned on at Idku.

At about 18 miles from Idku my operator contacted the beacon which took us in to the aerodrome.

The hydraulic system was not working, so we were forced to land without wheels or flaps at 06.20 hours, my operator remarking that he was going to church on Sunday.

I wish to point out that great credit is due to Sergeant Bing for the successful conclusion of a difficult type of interception, and for choosing to remain with the aircraft.

nia added to a medal which indicates the decoration has been won a second time. It is usually a bar placed across the medal's ribbon.

Fumerton and Bing returned to Canada shortly after this, but in July 1943, Fumerton, ordered back to England, went as a wing commander to assume command of his old unit, No. 406 Squadron. The squadron, then based at Manston, Kent was flying Britain's "Wooden Wonder," the de Havilland Mosquito. Fumerton took command of the No. 406 on 25 August 1943. His arrival was a tonic for the squadron's morale, his personality and skill described as: "...a breath of fresh air for the aircrews and his flying abilities were awe-inspiring,"

In the period before D-Day, the squadron roamed over occupied Europe, regularly attacking trains, gun emplacements and road convoys as well as enemy raiders which were flying to or from their bases to attack targets in Britain. On 14 May 1944, Fumerton, flying a Mosquito, shot down a Junkers Ju 88 over the English Channel. This was his 14th and last kill. Shortly after this, his squadron became the first night fighter unit on the Order of Battle list for the D-Day invasion on 6 June 1944. Beginning at dusk, they provided a standing patrol over the beachhead for the entire night.

Fumerton's independence was legendary. In the first of several interviews given when he was ninety-two years old, he said: "I have my own ideas. I have always had them."

Fumerton acted on his ideas and one led him into trouble when he flew a Beaufighter from England to North Africa. He had received no travel orders and had told no one he was going. He just went. The RCAF brass, evidently unimpressed by this behavior, quickly ordered Fumerton back to Canada. He returned in July, 1944, and in early August, took command of a Mosquito training unit, No. 7 Operational Training Unit (OTU) at Debert, Nova Scotia. Whatever the reason for his transfer back to Canada, Fumerton, did an excellent job as a training officer and earned the Air Force Cross for exemplary service.

Although Fumerton commanded No. 7 OTU until his discharge from the RCAF in July 1945, he was not through with flying after World War Two ended. After his discharge, he went into mining and prospecting, but in 1948, he traveled to China to organize and train a number of Mosquito squadrons for the Chinese Nationalists of Chiang (Chiang) Kai-shek who were fighting against the Communists of Mao Zedong (Tse-Tung). Fumerton's mission led nowhere; the communists triumphed by 1949. Fumerton returned to Canada the same year, and went on to build a successful career in real estate in

and around Toronto. Although he once claimed in an interview that he had no hobbies, he hunted, fished, taught himself to play the piano, guitar and violin.

Aviation played a role in Fumerton's marriage. He met his future wife, Madeline Reay while stationed in southern England. Reay was an RAF flight controller and their eldest son, Richard commented that: "They were fighting over directions. He liked the sound of her voice, so he looked her up after."

Fumerton's sense of duty was a powerful constant throughout his life. He nursed his wife by himself when she showed symptoms of Alzheimer's disease, even though he was then ninety.

On 31 August 2004, Fumerton, then ninety-one years old, was in Huntsville, Ontario; he was honored by the officers of his old squadron – now called the No. 406 Maritime Operational Training Squadron. It was based with No. 12 Wing Shearwater in Nova Scotia. A Sea King Helicopter carrying the honoring officers flew to Huntsville and landed in the back yard of the house where Fumerton was staying. A man at the ceremony described what he saw and how he reacted: "Moose... was presented with the Squadron's crest, baseball cap, and an inscribed break drum from the first ever Sea King helicopter. Family and friends were moved to tears as the presenting officer respectfully snapped to attention and saluted him after presenting him with these trophies. In that split second, to see the pride in Mr. Fumerton's eyes was worth the six-hour return drive to Huntsville."

The end of the ceremony was equally touching. When all but one officer boarded the helicopter for the flight home, the people on the ground: "...watched hypnotized as the [Sea King's]...blades whirled...An officer, who remained on the ground, then turned, came to attention, and gave a crisp goodbye salute to Mr. Fumerton, and boarded the aircraft quickly. The engines roared louder...and...lifted the [helicopter] into the sky... The pilot did a very low fly by, swaying the aircraft back and forth in a goodbye gesture, and turned his aircraft...for home."

On 20 December 1942, Fumerton and Bing arrived in Ottawa, returning from duty in Egypt and Malta. The two pilots, on leave and readying for Christmas with their families, encountered a group of reporters. The interview that followed was intriguing by what remained unsaid as well as by what Fumerton did say. Neither man would give details as to how they earned their decorations. "That's what the RAF called 'shooting the line,'" they said. "We're not going to do that." In the



RAF slang of the early 1940s, 'shooting a line' usually meant telling a generally frowned-upon story, often containing some bragging about oneself.

"What's the difference between day and night fighting?" A reporter asked.

"The difference between day and night," Fumerton replied curtly, absolutely refusing to go into further detail.

"What do you like best, day or night fighting?"

Fumerton's answer was brusque, "I don't care. I like any kind of fighting."

In an interview on 20 August 1944, upon his return from No. 406 Squadron, and before taking command of No. 7 OTU, Fumerton commented that he doubted he would get the chance for additional fighting in Europe because the Luftwaffe was rapidly fading, but he expressed hope that he would get the chance to fight against Japanese pilots in the Pacific. In an interview late in life, in looking back on the war, he told the interviewer: "Wouldn't have missed it for the world..." and as a fighter pilot, he felt "the beauty about the war was that no one was chasing the dollar."

In World War One, some in the media christened the

fighter pilots 'the Knights of the Air.' That label would have fitted Moose Fumerton.

Note: Moose Fumerton flew the majority of his combat flights with Pat Bing as his radar operator, radioman and navigator. Leslie Patrick Stanford Bing was born in July 1920, at Regina, Saskatchewan, and enlisted in the RCAF on 18 September 1939. During his service teamed up with Fumerton, Bing was commissioned on 20 April 1942. After both Fumerton and Bing returned to Canada, being attended flight training, pinning on his wings on 20 August 1943. After the war, he remained in the RCAF, was promoted to Squadron Leader on 1 January 1951, and went on to command No. 423 (All Weather) Squadron.

Above: "Moose" Fumerton, in a photo taken when he was in command of No. 406 squadron - 25 August 1943 to 26 July 1944.

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