

Chapter 16

“Nothing but rain, rain, rain”

ARNOLD AND AUDREY’S PLANS for Christmas and New Year’s were changed with the outbreak of war in the Pacific. Arnold reported to Rockcliffe, near Ottawa, on Jan. 1, 1942 for the formation of Number 14 Fighter Squadron (F).

Squadron Leader (S/L) Dal Russel, a veteran of the Battle of Britain, was sent home to Canada to lead the newly formed fighter squadron. Russel had been one of the first three Canadian officers to receive the DFC in the Second World War, and he had just completed a tour of duty in the European theatre. His task now was to train the pilots of No. 14(F) in the Kittyhawk MkII. The aircraft was manufactured in the United States, where it was known as the Curtiss P-40. Arnold wrote that they were about the same speed as a Spitfire and a little faster than a Hurricane, with a top speed of about 400 m.p.h. *“It is nice to get into something hot, after this long time. I like the squadron fine. It is what I have wanted all this time.”* The top speed of the Kittyhawk was actually 360 mph.



“Congratulations are in order! It’s a boy!” Arnold wrote in February 1942. When he got word that Audrey was in labour, *“I did manage to get there in time, even though I did have to catch a train in twenty minutes and leave AWOL (absent without leave).”*

Everything did turn out okay though.” After travelling 2,000 miles by train between Christmas and New Year’s, Arnold had left Audrey in Toronto with friends for the last month of her pregnancy. She had a hard labour, which the doctor attributed to fatigue from all the travel. But mother and baby were doing well, as was the new father.



In March, the squadron was posted to Sea Island near Vancouver, a trip that took three weeks. They had stopovers at Toronto, Detroit, Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul, Winnipeg, Regina and Lethbridge. Arnold managed to arrange an overnight flight for Audrey, to avoid a four-night trip on the train with the baby. He took a one-week leave and flew back to Calgary to meet her. *“We had a very pleasant and quiet visit.”* Erling was now driving a cab on a part-time basis. Ernest had just joined the Canadian army, where he was taking courses to become a motor mechanic. Anna lived close enough to visit Faye regularly, and she still saw her friends in Okotoks.



Ernest 1942



Upon their return to Vancouver in late April, Arnold and Audrey took up temporary residence at the Sylvia Court Hotel on English Bay. Housing was scarce, but they soon found a suite in a home on Dunbar Street, near the waterfront in Point Grey. The population of Vancouver had ballooned after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour. The military presence had increased dramatically, and American and Canadian construction workers moved to the West Coast to work on the upgrading of defence infrastructure.

After Pearl Harbour, the Japanese had advanced throughout the Pacific with breath-taking speed. Within weeks they had advanced as far south as New Guinea, just north of Australia. Their rapid advance made their victories seem even more dramatic. They were known as brutal victors. Tales of Japanese brutality in China in the late '30s were seared into the memory of Canadians, leaving them deeply shocked when Hong Kong fell and 1,700 Canadians were killed or taken prisoner. The thought of going to war with the Japanese was abhorrent.

On the west coast of British Columbia lived 23,000 Japanese-Canadians. Although they had suffered discrimination over the years, they had lived peacefully and contributed to the Canadian economy. Many Japanese men owned fishing boats and travelled coastal waters. Some owned radios, and the fear was that, among the Japanese fishermen, there might be spies. The other fear was that there might be some among them prepared to sabotage

such critical structures as railway bridges and harbours.

Following the attack on Pearl Harbour, the Canadian government seized Japanese homes and fishing boats, and swiftly started an evacuation program to remove their owners and families from coastal areas. The government offered these Japanese-owned homes and fishing boats for sale to the general public. While awaiting transfer to internment camps, the families were detained at the Pacific National Exhibition grounds in Vancouver. Such facilities were commonly transformed into living quarters in Canada during the Second World War. The Japanese were sent to internment camps scattered in remote mountainous country in the west and on the prairies.

After Japan invaded China in 1937, the United States and western countries had growing fears of Japanese aggression. When the United States placed an oil embargo on Japan in 1940, the Japanese were dismayed. With a growing mutual concern for the aggression of both the Japanese and the Germans, President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Prime Minister Mackenzie King had signed a plan for the joint defence of North America. After Pearl Harbour, the Permanent Board of Joint Defence came into operation, based on the agreement that laid the groundwork for co-operation between the two countries.



In March 1942, fear of Japanese invasion reached near hysterical heights. *The Vancouver Sun* ran a

series of inflammatory front-page editorials, condemning Canadian military and political leaders for their lack of initiative in planning for West Coast defence. The first editorial, on March 13, accused the politicians and military in Canada of inertia “almost beyond belief,” and of hiding behind a screen of censorship and propaganda. The newspaper accused the politicians and military of having prepared no defence against the Japanese. But military and political leaders, including the Allied Supreme Command, did not believe the Japanese capable of invading North America.

The second editorial was headed “Total Defence Means Total Determination.” The editorial advocated that citizens should be determined to die and to wreck their homes, towns and cities rather than surrender to the Japanese. They should “make the enemy pay in lives, hardship and starvation for every foot he advances.” Shortly after came another editorial in which was stated, “The *Vancouver Sun*’s recent analysis of preparations has caused a good deal of discussion in Ottawa, and in certain quarters this newspaper has been condemned for alarming the public . . . “

Bias in the press and reports of the treatment of Canadian prisoners of war heightened emotions on the West Coast. In May, the *Sun* reported that the Japanese were employing Canadian and Chinese prisoners of war in the docks at Hong Kong, where damaged Japanese ships were being repaired. The same day, the *Toronto Star* noted that Canadian prisoners and Chinese labourers were

employed by the Japanese in the construction of Kai Tak airdrome. Indignation at the treatment of Canadian war prisoners served to escalate racial discrimination against Japanese-Canadians.

In May, another *Vancouver Sun* headline reported the “Japs Plan to Fight Real Estate Sales.” A *Sun* editorial followed: “. . . It is nothing short of shocking to witness the continued activity of Japanese in this province trying to thwart the proper and well-considered designs of authorities regarding their affairs and properties These examples of Japanese effrontery are pretty hard to explain. Perhaps not so hard, in view of some of the despicable occurrences recently in Tokyo. They have gall enough for anything.”

In June the *Sun* reported that “all but 325 of the 1,250 Jap fishing boats impounded at the outbreak of war in the Pacific have been sold to fisherman of other nationalities, to fishing companies, or turned over to the army, navy or air force . . .”

Later, a *Sun* editorial commented, “Meantime, for the benefit of all concerned, the *Sun* is glad to record the fact that British Columbia is getting along very well without Japanese assistance or interference or domination in certain industrial fields.”



American defence of its Aleutian Islands near Alaska required transit through northwest Canada and Canadian coastal waters. In 1942, Canadians granted the United States the right to construct a highway through Canadian territory to Alaska, with an agreement that it would revert to Canadian own-

ership after the war ended. Canada had commenced work in 1935 on a string of airstrips from Edmonton to Alaska, and in 1942 granted the Americans the right to upgrade them to their standards. Ultimately, the most important route to Alaska during the war proved to be the rail-sea route via the Canadian National Railway to Prince Rupert, where the port facilities were also upgraded by the Americans. The Canadian government designated Prince Rupert a “port of embarkation” for the Americans to facilitate their transit through the port. The Alaska Highway was pushed through wilderness country at an amazing rate between the spring and fall of 1942, and the staging route of airstrips was upgraded during the same period.

The number of Americans working in the Canadian Northwest increased rapidly after Pearl Harbour. By December 1942, there were 15,000 Americans working in the Pacific Northwest, and six months later, in June 1943, there were 33,000. This was of great concern to the Canadian government, which feared that Canada would lose sovereignty over her lands when Americans claimed a vested interest in the developments after the war. To the credit of both countries, a great deal was accomplished and relations remained co-operative.



In the late spring of 1942, the war in Europe was at its lowest point. Most of Europe was under occupation by Germany and Italy. Several eastern European countries declared war on Russia, while Russia and Great Britain signed a non-aggression pact. German

and Italian armies invaded Greece, Yugoslavia, Egypt and other North African countries. The German army moved relentlessly deep into the heart of Russia. The rapid enemy advances in the world war were shocking to Canadians, with memories of the First World War still fresh in their minds. This gave rise to a general feeling of fear and disbelief that such a tragedy might happen again, this time with the Japanese bringing war to Canadian territory.

All across Canada, homes were hushed each evening as a young Lorne Greene delivered the latest war news on CBC Radio. His deep, baritone voice became familiar to all Canadians and earned him the title of the "Voice of Doom." From overseas, Matthew Halton delivered radio reports from the front lines, complete with booming explosions, whistling shells and chattering machine guns. The immediacy of radio news reports ushered in a new era for listeners, many of whom had come to own their first radio within the past ten years.



Once settled in Vancouver, the pilots of No. 14 Fighter Squadron rotated on "forty-eight-hour readiness," and continued their training in the Kittyhawk. Pilots were kept on standby, prepared to investigate any sightings of Japanese ships or aircraft in the coastal region. Practice in the Kittyhawk included flying to the 27,000-foot level with oxygen, air-to-air firing practice and wing formation flying.

In mid-May 1942, the United States intercepted a coded Japanese message revealing a

planned attack on Midway Island in the Pacific and on Dutch Harbour, the American air base under construction in the Aleutian Islands. Because the Americans had been at war for only six months, they had a limited number of experienced pilots. The American government made an urgent appeal to Canada for aerial assistance in Alaska, for the anticipated bombing of Dutch Harbour. In response, West Coast Command sent several RCAF squadrons to American air bases, including Annette Island near Prince Rupert and various air bases in Alaska. No. 111(F) advanced to Alaska, while No. 14(F) remained at Vancouver on West Coast defence.

The Japanese first bombed Dutch Harbour on June 3-4 as a diversion, and then attacked Midway on June 3-7. The American forces won a decisive victory at Midway, a victory that proved to be a turning point in the war in the Pacific. Following their defeat at Midway, the Japanese occupied two of the most westerly of the American Aleutian Islands. In order to save face with the Japanese public, their occupation forces established bases on Kiska and Attu, only 650 miles northwest of Japan. The alarmed Canadian and American public feared that the Japanese might use these islands as a base from which they could attack the west coast of North America.

On June 7, 1942, a Japanese submarine torpedoed and sank an American merchant ship, SS *Coast Trader*, at the southwest entrance to the Straits of Juan de Fuca. In the early hours of the 20th of June, a Japanese submarine torpedoed and badly

damaged the British SS *Fort Camosun*, and later that night shelled the lighthouse and radio station at Estevan Point, on the west coast of Vancouver Island. Although there were no further incidents of this type during the war, these events inflamed suspicions and fears.



“The weather has been horrible here, nothing but rain, rain, rain,” Audrey wrote to Agnes in July. *“But, regardless of the rain, we are having a very gay time here in Vancouver—partying, dancing and so on. It has been very exciting. But, oh boy, one gets rather tired after three or four nights of outing.”* Audrey lit up a room when she entered, with her engaging and sparkling smile, and her devilish and fun-loving personality. She was also very poised. She had a fertile mind for dreaming up antics, all in the aid of fun and laughter. But Audrey was also a deeply religious Roman Catholic and took her personal responsibilities seriously.

She wrote that Arnold had more patience than she did, and that father and son got along well together. *“He sure is a chip off the old block. Blue eyes like Arnold . . . he coos and laughs most of the time”* They had tried to get in touch with Gudrun’s two daughters when they visited with their grandparents in North Vancouver. They had managed to visit with the older daughter, and hoped to see the younger one when she came for a visit that summer.

Magnhild and Faye and their families drove out from Alberta to Trail again in the summer of 1942, bringing with them Anna and Erling. Ernest



Audrey, Gary Lee and Arnold

was not there in 1942, because he had joined the army. They had several days of visiting and the usual picnics.



“ . . . Even with the wet weather we like the city fine. We have enjoyed our stay out here very much,” Arnold wrote. Their social life was lively. Parties were a favourite pastime, but there were some limitations on parties. Each adult had a coupon for a monthly liquor ration, and liquor consumption was carefully planned in advance. Bootleggers snapped up any coupons they could locate and sold liquor at inflated prices. All liquor establishments were restricted in their hours of operation. Crocks used for making illegal home-

made beer sold in large numbers. A *Vancouver Sun* headline blazed, “Unguarded Liquor Rolls Through the City.” The mayor of New Westminster wanted trucking companies, rather than the city, to pay the cost of police escorts for liquor in transit through the city. He said it was cheap insurance for the company against possible hijacking.

The Canadian government had enacted legislation under the War Measures Act to establish the Wartime Prices and Trade Board. The purpose was to prevent prices and wages from spiralling out of control. Scarce food items were strictly rationed. These included tea and coffee, meat, butter and sugar. Gasoline for cars was also rationed.

In early August, a shopkeeper in Vancouver heard the announcement of tea rationing on the radio. He proceeded to move eleven pounds of tea from his store shelves into the living quarters at the rear of the shop. An investigator from the Wartime Prices and Trade Board brought a charge against him, that he had accumulated tea beyond a reasonable amount required for a household. Because the shopkeeper was a disabled war veteran, the judge fined him only \$5 and costs. Investigators also watched for any inflated prices, and brought charges against any who were charging more than the usual cost prior to the legislation being enacted.

In late September, Arnold wrote, “*We are fully settled in our new home and like it very much. It is handier for me to go to my work also.*” Their new home was in the exclusive Shaughnessy district, just a block off Granville Street in a large, stately home.

Like many homes in Vancouver, it had been divided into suites in response to the housing shortage. Arnold could catch a streetcar south on Granville Street, towards the Sea Island airport where he was stationed. Very likely, it was Audrey who found their accommodation in this lovely residential area. With her outgoing personality, Audrey established social connections with great ease.

"It is almost impossible to get a place to live, and some of the rents they are asking, in spite of the rent controls, are outrageous. In our last apartment we were paying \$90 per month, paying extra for gas, light, phone, fuel and telephone. It wasn't a speck nicer than this place either." In October 1942, *The Sun* reported that Vancouver was facing the greatest shortage of housing in its history, with unprecedented overcrowding of homes, apartments and rooming houses. *The Sun* later reported that a "For Rent" sign was a "Signal for Mad Stampede . . . People learning of housing accommodation, be it ever so meagre, flock to the scene Any bedroom with a clothes closet converted for use as a kitchenette, with a gas or electric hot plate installed therein, is readily rentable Sharing the bath, having no running water in the room, these and a dozen other inconveniences are willingly endured for the sake of shelter."

In September 1942, Arnold purchased his first car, a 1929 Plymouth. The squadron had a farewell party for one of the pilots who had been transferred east: ". . . he sold it to me at the party for \$75. Cheap enough and it is in good running condition, licence and all. He bought it for \$150 and had it only two months."



On September 29, Group Captain G. R. McGregor, DFC, gave a lecture to the squadron on “the situation in Alaska.” McGregor had returned from Great Britain after being awarded the DFC the previous year for his role in the Battle of Britain. When Western Air Command sent several RCAF squadrons to Alaska in May and June, he was placed in command of these squadrons under a newly formed “X-Wing.” These RCAF squadrons flew under the operational command of the United States Army Air Force (USAAF) and McGregor co-operated with the USAAF in coordinating their duties.

In November, a rumour went around that the squadron would be moving to Alaska. The squadron diary noted that all pilots were granted two weeks leave “. . . to dispose of their wives.” Squadron Leader B. D. Dal Russel was posted back to duty in Europe, and was leaving at the end of November. The squadron diary notes that a “highly successful” farewell party was held for Russel at the home of Pilot Officer (P/O) Roseland. At the end of November, Squadron Leader (S/L) Brad Walker took command of the squadron at Sea Island.

In December, P/O Roseland accompanied S/L Walker to a meeting of the Kiwanis Club of Vancouver, where Walker gave an address. In December, the squadron took part in a search for a missing Canadian Pacific Airlines plane, carrying ten passengers and three crew members. The aircraft had disappeared just fifteen minutes from Vancouver on a trip from Whitehorse.

On January 1, 1943, the squadron celebrated the first anniversary of the formation of No. 14 Fighter Squadron. Arnold and Audrey hosted the party at their home. Dignitaries in attendance included Air Vice Marshal L. F. Stevenson and Mrs. Stevenson, and Group Captain G. R. McGregor and Mrs. McGregor. The squadron diary noted, "A very delightful time was spent."



In early January, Ernest wrote to his sister Agnes, thanking her for his Christmas present. He wrote, "*Mother was sure surprised when I walked in the house before Christmas . . . I was sure tired when I got back in camp after the long trip.*" Ernest had travelled out to Calgary and back again, from London, Ontario, to spend Christmas with Anna and Erling. Train travel was always crowded at holiday times during the war, and he may not have had very much sleep. He had started a diesel course as soon as he got back and was finding it most interesting. After the course was finished he expected to go to Camp Borden for more practice in work. Then, in the spring, he thought he might be going overseas with large group of maintenance men, who were due for overseas posting.



In Vancouver, the *Sun* was full of news about the new "dim out" regulations that would take effect on the 31st of January. "Homes, places of business, industries and institutions must all be dimmed out daily from one-half hour after sunset, to one-half hour before sunrise." Stores in the Vancouver area were swamped with orders for blinds. Lighting in

store windows was strictly limited, lighted neon signs were forbidden and the city's 8,000 street lights were dimmed. The top seven inches of the globe of the street lights was to be first dipped inside and out in white paint and then given black caps on the exterior, to eliminate "sky-glare." Every second street light was to be extinguished at midnight. Cars would be restricted to 20 to 25 miles per hour after dark, but because of the safety factor, headlights would not be dimmed.

In September 1942, the Provincial Civilian Protection Committee began distributing thousands of gas masks and respirators. "The masks are of the simplest design . . . but they are effective protection against war gas. In a 100 per cent concentration of poison gas, the civilian respirator will continue to filter out gas and permit only fresh air to reach the wearer for nearly three hours . . ." The Vancouver ARP (Air Raid Patrol) Committee recommended that a basement room of sufficient size for a family be chosen and prepared, in case of an enemy air raid attack. Two weeks later, the provincial ARP declared this recommendation invalid. "Basement rooms are not suitable, since some gases sink to the lowest level." But many Vancouver homeowners had already prepared emergency rooms in their basements.

The ARP was a body of civilians who assumed responsibilities for defence. Their tasks had to do with educating the public, planning for emergency situations and disaster planning. In early January 1943, Vancouver had its first city-wide ARP

rehearsal. The rehearsal had plenty of flaws. Eight empty ambulances showed up at St. Paul's Hospital instead of reporting to the points where the "casualties" occurred. The ARP recruited and trained 2,500 messengers. Children as young as twelve were trained as runners ". . . to keep an unbroken line of communication, so that if the telephone service should go out of operations, messages would be able to get through . . . "

On the 20th of January, the *Sun* reported, "Censorship restrictions placed upon newspaper weather reports and forecasts as a result of the war were lifted today." The province had suffered blizzards and record low temperatures for several days. City transportation systems were barely operable, and major highways and rail lines were closed from snowdrifts. Weather news was censored so that the enemy could not take any strategic advantage of adverse weather.

"Cold Snap Adds Beef Shortage to Fuel and Milk Famine," the *Sun* reported. Even before the cold spell, fuel had been in short supply. On the 13th of January the *Sun* had reported that "No Trespassing" signs were lifted from city-owned lots to permit citizens to help themselves to any fuel they could find. A later article was headlined, "10 Ways to Keep Warm Despite Fuel Shortage."



On the 25th of January, all leaves for the pilots were cancelled. The squadron diary noted, "All personnel preparing for the move. We don't know where we are going, but we hope to see some action soon."

On February 8, 1943, a light snowstorm delayed the planned departure of No. 14 Fighter Squadron from the Sea Island Airport. That night Arnold wrote his sister that he was leaving Vancouver in the morning, and he couldn't write much because he had a lot to do. *"Have quite a trip ahead of us—over 2,500 miles, which will take us west of Dutch Harbour. We will be under U.S. command, and they're so secretive that we don't know our own address as yet."* Audrey would let her know the new address and to please write her, as he knew she would be lonesome. He would appreciate a line, too, but *"Don't expect to hear from me very regularly though, as the mail service is pretty grim."* The squadron departed on February 11, 1943 for Dutch Harbour in the Aleutian Islands.



Number 14 Fighter Squadron RCAF, leaving for Alaska February 1943. Arnold is second from right.

Photo: Department of National Defence and Mr. David McDuff