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Archival letters helped author write complete book on Caronport airbase

Jason G. Antonio - Moose Jaw Express

Growing up in Caronport and playing near the former airbase’s historic buildings instilled a desire in Joel From to write a book about the base’s interesting — but short-lived — life.

From grew up in Caronport in the 1960s and became familiar with the base’s structures since his father helped maintain and operate the buildings, while he himself helped repair them and played hockey in an arena erected in one of the hangars. He became interested in the buildings’ history and the thinking that went into their design, especially as the structures began to slowly disappear.

“In 2009, as I was watching them dismantle our large hangar, it occurred to me that although I knew the buildings, I knew very little about what happened here during the war (and) the story behind this base,” he explained. “And because the college moved here after the war, there’s no one around (who knows anything). Even the oldest people have no idea what went on here during the war.

“So it’s a big black hole in our history,” he laughed.

Thus began a 10-year journey to chronicle what happened at the No. 33 Royal Air Force base, which trained pilots on 81 hectares (200 acres) of land that had been expropriated from bankrupt farmers in the late 1930s. During the base’s short existence — it operated from January 1942 to January 1944 — it turned out 1,837 graduates.

Based on interviews, published sources

and research in Canada and overseas, From has written In Plain Site: A Biography of the RAF Airbase at Caron, Saskatchewan, which focuses on the complete lifespan of the training centre.

Since he recorded every name he came across during his research, From ended up with an 84-page document listing those names, which can be found on the book’s website at www.caronairbase.com. The book can be purchased online or from the Western Development Museum.

The book provides a comprehensive look at Caron’s selection and development, the air training operations, a big focus on the after-hours activities, the struggles of the English personnel to make sense of the Canadian prairies, and the hundreds of civilian contractors from British Columbia who operated the base for 18 months.

The book likely wouldn’t have been as comprehensive if From hadn’t learned about a trove of letters written by one of the base’s clerks. From — a professor at Briercrest College — was conducting research when a colleague told him about a cache of letters in the Saskatchewan Archives written by Vernon Peters, who worked at the base for 18 months.

The letters had somehow made their way to New Jersey before the Saskatchewan Archives learned about them and acquired them.

“When I read those letters, they’re beautifully composed and extremely detailed about the after-hours activities,” said From. “I thought, ‘Well, maybe this could

Joel From is a professor at Briercrest College and recently finished a book about the complete history of the Caronport airbase. Photo courtesy Joel From

A cover of the book, In Plain Site: A Biography of the RAF Airbase at Caron, Saskatchewan. Photo courtesy Joel From

become something more than just a little bit about air force buildings ...’ The availability of those letters made it possible to do something more broadly.”

Peters wrote more than 100 letters to his new bride, Vera, who was still living in England at the time. Some of the letters were three pages typed, describing in rich detail the “vivacious” after-hours social life of base personnel and the sports they played. Peters worked at the base from January 1942 to June 1943.

From discovered the airmen participated in 16 sports in Moose Jaw which, in the 1940s, was the most British city in Western Canada. The airmen likely fit into the

community very well.

The airmen believed that everyone should be responsible for organizing the entertainment and not wait for others to do it, From added. This attitude persisted into the 1960s when From grew up at the airbase.

“Peters is our authority, an apt chronicler of Anglo and Canadian cultures as they intermixed at Caron ...,” From added. “His description of hockey games is a comedic gem. He really comes alive in these letters. It’s a wonderful narrative.”

From met Peters’ daughter, Sylvia, while conducting research in England. She was completely unaware of her father’s wartime service or the letters he had written.

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One in every eight farmers feels burned out by job demands

By Ron Walter - For Agri-Mart Express



For some city dwellers farming is considered a lucrative, somewhat leisurely and coveted lifestyle but a mental health survey of farmers indicates otherwise.

The online survey of 1,100 Canadian farmers showed one in eight farmers feels burned out by the occupation and the demands of needing to be an expert in management, sales and marketing, as well as animal care and crop production.

Two per cent of survey participants feel disengaged while one in five feels over-extended by emotional exhaustion.

One in four feels ineffective while only 41 per cent feel engaged and comfortable with their livelihood.

Farmers start out engaged then become ineffective, over-extended, disengaged and eventually burned out.

The survey in 2015-2016 by researcher Andria Jones-Britton from the University of Guelph points to farmer risk of developing mental health conditions and chronic

ic diseases.

Burnout has links to diseases such as diabetes, respiratory disease and gastro-intestinal disease.

Mental health impacts from burnout include depression and insomnia.

Jones-Britton says burnout is associated with lower efficiency on the job, declining job satisfaction and lower productivity.

Not all farmers experienced issues, with those volunteering or in sports or faith groups feeling better. Couples with good communications worked well together and made life concerns easier to bear.

Jones-Britton believes more farm help to lessen work pressures would help but shortages of labour and high turnover prevent that option.

Better social supports will help improve mental health among farmers.

She has lobbied extensively, including with Parliament, for a national farm mental health strategy.

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