

MacDonald, Ralph Nelson
Flying Officer
Royal Canadian Air Force
439 Squadron
J/21003



Fangs of Death- 'Slagtanden van de Dood'



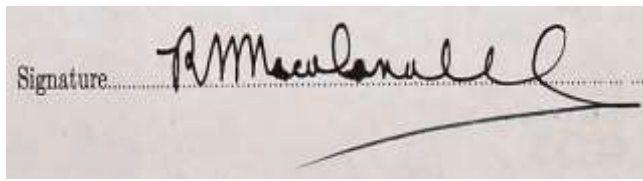
Ralph Nelson MacDonald was born on Tuesday, March 13, 1923, in Glace Bay, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, Canada, the son of John Nelson MacDonald and Ethel Matilda McPherson-MacDonald. The family resided at 52 Blakett Street in Glace Bay, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. The family belonged to the United Church. Father John worked at Sydney and Louisbourg Railway. The train company transported coal from various mines to the ports of Sydney and Louisbourg and operated in the eastern part of Cape Breton County, Nova Scotia.

Ralph received his primary education from 1927 to 1937 and then attended Glace Bay High School at 201 Reserve Street. In 1940, after graduating from high school, he started working as a salesman for a newspaper, the Halifax Chronicle. Then, on January 27, 1941, Ralph began to work at the Canadian Bank of Commerce in Glace Bay.

He had dark brown hair and brown eyes, was 1.89 m (6 feet 2.5 inches) tall, and weighed 85 kg. (187 pounds). He wore glasses to prevent eye strain when watching a movie and the like, and he had frequently suffered from sore throats and earaches in his youth.

Ralph played baseball, ice hockey, bowling, and football. His hobbies were photography, collecting stamps, reading, and building model airplanes. Occasionally he also practiced target shooting. He smoked five to ten cigarettes a day and did not drink alcohol.

On November 6, 1941, Ralph Nelson MacDonald enlisted in the Canadian



Royal Air Force in Halifax, Nova Scotia. They thought he was very suitable as a pilot or as an observer. In addition, he was rated as having a "beautiful

physique, highest motivation, Christian background, above average intelligence (senior matriculation age 16), polite and courteous: a superior quality candidate".

After the war, he would like to enter civil aviation. So, on Sunday morning, December 7, 1941, as the Japanese made a surprise attack on the American base at Pearl Harbor, Ralph went to Technical Training School in Saint Thomas, Ontario. He was given the rank of Aircraftsman 2nd Class.



The training school was located in the Ontario Psychiatric Hospital complex in Saint Thomas and was equipped to train more than two thousand students. Two months later, on February 14, 1942, Ralph entered Toronto's #6 Technical Training School. He received the rank of LAC-Leading Aircraftsman on April 10, 1942, after which he was allowed on leave the next day until April 25, 1942.

Ralph MacDonald on the left and Harry Hardy in Toronto

On May 23, 1942, he followed further training with the No 4 E.F.T.S. - Elementary Flying Training School at Windsor Mills, Quebec. There, Ralph received fifty hours of basic flight instruction on a simple trainer such as the Tiger Moth or the Fleet Finch.

Suitable pilot candidates went on to further training at a Service Flying Training School; so did Ralph MacDonald, who attended the No 13 Service Flying Training School in Saint Hubert, Quebec, where training took place in the AVRO Anson. The school was part of the No 3 Training Command Royal Canadian Air Force, British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (BCATP). Ralph graduated from the latter school with honours. On November 20, 1942, he received his Aviation Badge.



On December 4, 1942, he was posted to No.123 Squadron, Royal Canadian Air Force in Debert, Nova Scotia. On October 12, 1943, Ralph MacDonald went overseas to England, arriving on October 20 at the Royal Air Force Station Bournemouth, County Dorset. The coastal town welcomed thousands of aircrew and was home to the No 3 Personnel Reception Centre. On January 1, 1944, Ralph MacDonald was posted to No. 439 squadron in Digby, Lincolnshire. No 123 Squadron, where he previously served, was renamed No 439 (fighter-bomber squadron) on New Year's Day, 1944.



The squadron flew the Hawker Hurricane Mark IV and the Hawker Typhoon Mark IB. Hawker Aircraft Limited made both aircraft. However, from April 1944, only the Hawker Typhoon Mark IB was used.

No. 439 Squadron moved to Ayr, Scotland, on 8 January 1944 and to Hurn, South West England, on 18 March.

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The squadron was part of No 143 Wing Royal Canadian Air Force; it performed strike missions on V-1 launch sites. German bases and communication targets were also attacked in preparation for the Normandy landings on 6 June.

During this period, the squadron moved to Funtington, Chichester, West Sussex, England, on 2 April. The squadron returned to Hurn on 19 April, moved to Hutton Cranswick, East Riding of Yorkshire, on 11 May, and finally returned to Hurn on 20 May.

After the Normandy landings, the squadron was moved to Advanced Landing Ground Lantheuil on 27 June to provide close air support to the Allied forces. The Allies needed control of the skies for D-Day and the Battle of Normandy to succeed. That is why airports were established in France to allow aircraft to operate closer to the front line. Ralph MacDonald was loaned to the 84 Group Support Unit on August 16, 1944, due to overloading that Unit. The 84 Group Support Unit was based at Aston Down, Gloucestershire, and later at Thruxton and Lasham. On August 23, 1944, Ralph returned to No. 439 Squadron.



At the end of August, No. 439 Squadron flew from Advanced Landing Ground St-André de l'Eure. Tracking the Allied advance, the squadron operated from Amiens, the capital of the Somme department in France's Picardy region, in September. The airport was located 7 km east-southeast of Amiens, in Glisy. During the German occupation, the Luftwaffe used the airfield and was attacked several times in the spring of 1944 by the US Army Air Forces. Finally, in August 1944, it was liberated by the British Second Army.

On September 6, the squadron operated in Belgium from the airport in Melsbroek, close to Brussels. The new Fliegerhorst, or air base of Melsbroek, built by the Germans, had appeared where a windmill still stood in September 1940. In addition, there was one maintenance hangar, which the German occupiers had tried to camouflage as a row of houses.

No. 439 Squadron operated from 25 September 1944 in the Netherlands from Eindhoven; the airfield was captured by American paratroopers of the 101 Airborne Division during Operation Market Garden. Damage to the airfield was repaired, and it was used as an Advanced Landing Ground by both US and British forces under the designation B-78.

No. 439 Squadron remained there through the winter months, attacking communication targets and shipping in Germany during the war's final months.

On November 3, 1944, it was heavily clouded all day, with mist in the morning and cold drizzle in the evening. At around 09:45, Ralph MacDonald was assigned to perform an Airframe and Engine test by his Flight Commander in Typhoon 1-B JR 500. He took off at about ten o'clock to carry out this task.



At that time, Flying Officer Robert Harold Laurence was also in the air to make a test in his Typhoon MN869. He described the following:

On November 3, 1944, at about 10:20 a.m., I am flying in the air just north of the B.78 Airfield (Eindhoven) at 2,000 feet, conducting an engine and airframe flight test in Typhoon MN869. As I fly south, I see another plane approaching me from the southeast. As the plane approaches, I change course, immediately turn to port, and make a series of steep turns with the plane, which I now recognize as a Typhoon, on my tail. At that point, we fly in a northerly direction. The aircraft in front of me then makes a wide turn to the left, and I slowly follow it. My airspeed during this turn is about 160 miles per hour. We've turned about 180 degrees when I see the plane in front of me put its nose down and dive steeply as if to pick up speed. At that point, our altitude is about 2,100 feet, just below the cloud base, and I notice that the dive angle of the other plane is dangerously steep for this altitude, so I decide not to follow it. As I look at the other plane, it seems to turn on its back and gives me the impression that it is out of control. It momentarily straightens as it approaches the ground, and the pilot appears to retreat as large trails of vapor emerge from the wingtips and tailplane. The port wing then drops, and he falls onto his back, crashing through the roof of a large house and catching fire.

Flying Officer Ralph MacDonald, "Mac", went down around 10:45 a.m., hit the roof of a house, and crashed at 39 Stuiverstraat in Eindhoven. Several civilians were injured, and MacDonald died at the age of 21.

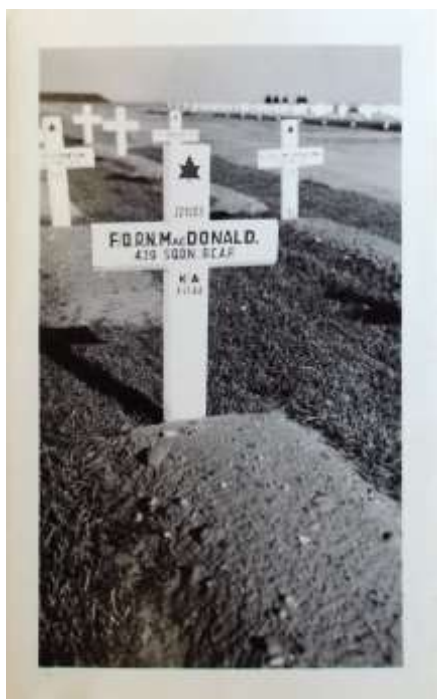
He had flown a total of forty-one missions with a total flight time of forty-two hours and ten minutes.

The chaplain of No. 439 Squadron wrote of him: *He was admired for his extraordinary courage and generosity of spirit. He asked so little for himself and did so much for others.*

A fellow pilot: *He was a great flier, well-trying in battle, and never failed to hold his place, no matter how much stuff they threw at him. Everyone liked him and would willingly follow him on an operation.*

Ralph Nelson MacDonald was buried in the afternoon of November 5, 1944, at the general cemetery in Woensel (Eindhoven), grave SS.1.1., by army chaplain Ashford.

He was reburied on 12 November 1945 at the Canadian War Cemetery in Groesbeek, grave reference **XV. D. 15.**



The grave in those first days, in 1954 the crosses were replaced by tombstones. The family could enter a text.

On his tombstone is the text:

THE LORD SHALL PRESERVE
THY GOING OUT
AND THY COMING IN...
EVEN FOR EVERMORE



photo <http://lestweforget1945.org/>

Ralph Nelson MacDonald's awards:

- 1939-1945 Star
- Aircrew Europe Star with Clasp
- Defence Medal
- Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with Clasp
- War Medal 1939-1945



Life story: Gijs Krist, Research Team Faces To Graves.

Sources:

Commonwealth War Graves

Library and Archives Canada

www.aircrewremembered.com

With courtesy of Anne Gafiuk / Typhoon Project