

Colonel Peter Graham Howe was responsible for NATO air planning for Europe

BY NOREEN SHANAHAN

Colonel Peter Graham Howe achieved victory in Canada's longest war, but he fought against the Allies and only in mock battles.

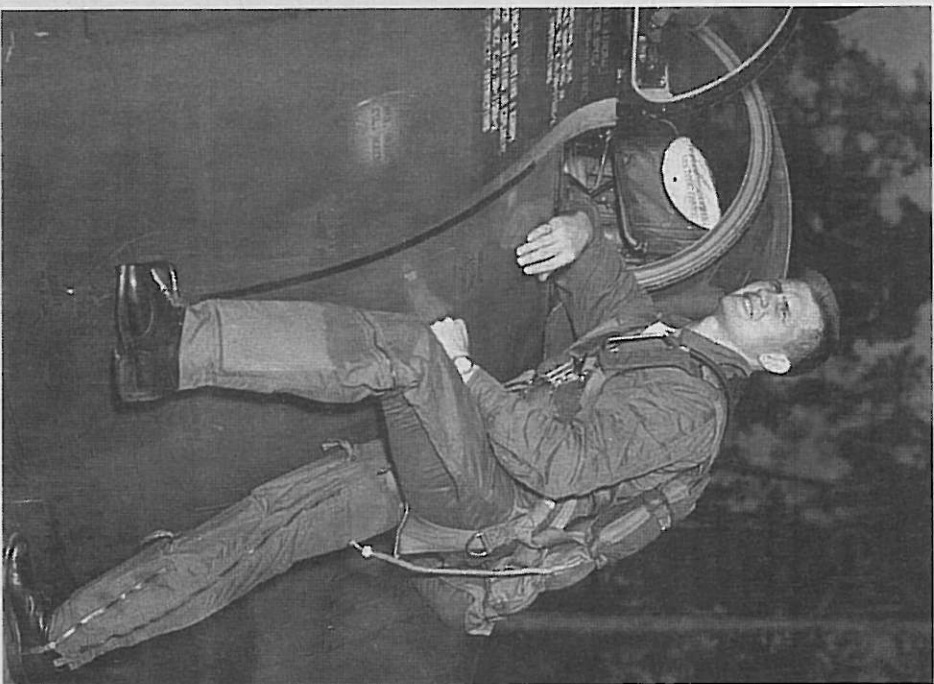
In a single-seat F-86 Sabre jet, Mr. Howe fought dogfights over Germany with other NATO teams.

Instead of shooting each other down, they had a camera indicate whether or not they'd actually be shot down if they were in real air battle.

"We practised against each other; there were big exercises against other air forces," said fellow pilot Paul Hayes. "We'd have a huge exercise where we'd invade England. They came before us, on the continent, and we'd intercept them... It was a very serious business. It was the Cold War, and we knew who was on the other side of the Iron Curtain and what their capabilities were."

About a third of the squadron had flown fighters in the Second World War. Younger pilots learned their style but perhaps more important, they learned about camaraderie.

"This was where all the spirit came from ... looking out for your friends and the people you worked with," said Mr.



Colonel Peter Howe was the one who remembered to order flowers for Diana, Princess of Wales, when she turned 22 on a royal tour.

Hayes. "You can go to the best schools in the world and you'll never learn that."

Mr. Howe logged thousands of hours as a jet pilot and successfully led his squadrons in international competitions during his 30 years with the air force.

Short of starting a war, these exercises allowed them to maintain combat readiness. Later in his career, Mr. Howe was responsible for NATO air planning for Europe, reporting to former U.S. Secretary of State General Alexander Haig, who was then Supreme Allied Commander in Europe.

As a small boy growing up in Hamilton, Peter's eyes were fixed on the controls. On Sunday evenings during the war, he and his brother Mike listened to a radio show called *L for Lanly*, featuring the Lancaster bomber. While tuned to the radio, the boys sliced through cereal boxes to create cockpit instrument panels. They flew missions over Germany, were wounded each time, but still won the war. Peter attended Westdale High School, where he excelled athletically and academically, winning alpine skiing trophies, football championships, and was even wooed by the

Hamilton Tiger Cats.

His parents, Elsie and Glover Howe, thought these events swelled his head so they sent him to the Royal Military College hoping to shrink it down with discipline. In 1955, he got his wings. He graduated three years later and went on to study chemical engineering at Queen's University. After graduation, he joined the RCAF, first as a fighter pilot posted in Baden-Söllingen, Germany.

In 1958 he married his high-school sweetheart, Olga Petrak. They moved to a base in Moose Jaw, and started a family, while Mr. Howe instructed fliers on the Harvard aircraft, the mainstay of RCAF training. In the early seventies, he became Commander of the 434 squadron of CF-5 fighters in Cold Lake, Alta. His last post was CFB North Bay, where he was base commander.

While at North Bay, Mr. Howe fell in love with Laurie Magee. In 1989, once his divorce came through, they were married.

He retired from the Air Force in 1982, but not before successfully tending to one final duty. That year, he was in charge of logistics for Prince Charles and Diana's royal tour. As the story goes, at the last

moment Mr. Howe noticed there were no flowers for Diana's 22nd birthday the next day. He discussed this matter with palace authorities and was authorized to purchase the bouquet.

"I'm not sure that the Prince had not forgotten her birthday but ... it seems that he may not have thought of flowers," said Laurie Howe. "Buckingham Palace subsequently reimbursed him."

In 1983, Mr. Howe became senior manager at Eastern Provincial Airways [later part of Canadian Pacific] and a few years later moved with the airline to Vancouver, as director of corporate safety. Mr. Howe retired from Canadian Airlines in 2000 and started a consulting business, dealing in safety and energy management. He permanently retired in 2006 and moved with Laurie from Vancouver to Brighton, Ont.

PETER HOWE

Peter Graham Howe was born Feb. 7, 1935, in Hamilton. He died Feb. 25, 2009, in Brighton, Ont. He has one son, two daughters, leaves wife Laurie, children Tim and Mary Kapitza, stepchildren Marc and Daniel Magee and grandchildren Bryton, Raine, Aidan and Michael.