Spy in the Sky

Milton Newton Pegg, a resident of Greenwood, enlisted in the air force in 1917 at the age of 23. Milton’s twin roles as artillery observer and reconnaissance pilot was arguably the most important function of the air force in the war.

The Pickering Museum Village would like to thank the following for their contributions to this exhibit: Joseph Pegg, John Sabean, Ann Baun, Jan Cobden, Karen Emmink and the PMV Woodwrights Guild.
Aviation in WW1:

The Royal Flying Corps was created on May 13, 1912, only 9 years after the invention of the aeroplane! The War Office in Britain held trials on Salisbury Plain to test and determine which machines would be used in the Corps. Both French and English inventors demonstrated their machines, but in the end, a British two-seater bi-plane was chosen. Designed by Geoffrey de Havilland and labelled the BE2, it had the engine in the front and a fabric covered fuselage. These planes had an open cockpit and were armed with a single machine gun bolted to the fabric wing. They did not have parachutes.
At the start of WW1, Britain had approximately 113 aircraft in military service. Their primary objective was reconnaissance and artillery observation.
The Battle of the Somme, in July 1916, saw 27 Squadrons with 420 aircraft and those numbers increased as the war went on. Towards the end of the War, in 1918, the RFC was providing squadrons for home defence against German Zeppelin raids and the later Gotha raids.

German Zeppelin Airship.
On April 1, 1918 the Royal Flying Corps and the Royal Naval Air Service combined to become the Royal Air Force.

From the beginning, high ranking military personnel recognized the tremendous advantage of aircraft in war time. In the words of General Sir James Grierson “So long as hostile aircraft are hovering over one’s troops all movements are liable to be seen and reported, and therefore the first steps in war will be to get rid of the hostile aircraft. He who does this first, or who keeps the last airplane a float, will win.”

With technology in its infancy and pilot’s training rudimentary, it was estimated that 1 in 4 aircrew were killed or 200 pilots a month. Life expectancy for a member of the RFC was eleven days.
Milton N. Pegg ~ Early Years

Milton Newton Pegg was born November 1, 1894 in North Dakota to Andrew and Essie Pegg. The family moved to a farm in Greenwood, Ontario (what is now the Claremont Conservation Area) on Westney Road, north of Highway 7, when Milton was 16.

He attended Whitby High School and went on to attend the Agricultural College in Guelph. After a nasty illness, Milton changed paths to become a teacher, graduating from the Toronto Normal School (Teacher’s College) in 1916. He taught at Spencer Public School (grades 1-8) and worked on the family farm during the summer.
These photographs from Milton’s album show him at Toronto Normal School (left) and on the family farm (below).
In Training

The story goes that while working on the farm one day, Milton saw a bi-winged airplane fly overhead and was inspired to join the Royal Flying Corps that was recruiting in Toronto. He enlisted in October 1917 and was sent to Camp Borden for training. From there he was sent to Fort Worth, Texas, where he trained on the Curtiss JN-4. Training was dangerous affair; in 1918, 28 pilots died in Texas during training. In a letter written to Miss May Brown dated February 2, 1918, Milton speaks of the crashes:

“..I have enjoyed my flying fine so far; it may be different when I have to hold the joystick alone. Some of the fellows have three or four crashes and still make good fliers. I could never do that, so hope for no crashes. It is amusing to see “Hungry Lizzie” the Ford ambulance dash out across the ‘drome when a crash occurs, also the “Gold Dust Twins”, two men on a motorcycle, to help extricate the aviator. They often get there about as soon as the machine touches the ground, although they have anywhere from a mile to travel. They are called out about six times a day but usually the aviator only has a scratched face, broken nose or some similar minor injury”. 
“Barracksroom at Camp Everman, my bed was second from this end.”

“Lt. Bolderick, My Instructor”
Milton was transferred to Beamville, ON to the School of Aerial Gunnery where he graduated as a second Lieutenant and received his wings.
In May 1918, Milton was sent for further training in combat and surveillance in England. He was posted to the Artillery Observation Training School in Wettering, Lincolnshire to train on DH 6s, BE2Es and RE8s. He was involved in two crashes during this time, but received no serious injury.

“This was taken the 23rd of May, notice papa in the doorway.”
Milton then went on to the School of Infantry and Artillery Co-operation in Winchester, England, flying RE8s.

In a letter dated August 19, 1918, Milton observes:

“The fact that there is a war on is very vividly impressed upon one as he travels into London. Freight trains are moving in and out loaded with bombs, huge mines to float in the sea and big guns, while above all floats half a dozen big Zeppelins or dirigible balloons, with here a few fast scouts and there a huge Handley Page capable of carrying a score of people. Even down here one can hear the drone of an airplane’s engine almost any time day or night. At night the sky over London and over all towns in eastern England is lighted up by a myriad of powerful search lights. They look like great fingers reaching here and there through the sky.”
The RE-8 “Harry Tate”
The Royal Aircraft Factory R.E.8 was a British two-seat biplane reconnaissance and bomber aircraft designed by John Kenworthy at the Royal Aircraft Factory. It entered service in Autumn 1916: 4,099 machines were built. It was nicknamed the “Harry Tate” after an English comedian of that name who was popular in both music halls and in films.

RE-8 Duran, 1918
Pegg Collection
Pickering Museum Village
Royal Aircraft Factory R.E. 8
Specifications:
Engine: 4 speed, 12 cylinder, air cooled, inline V, 150 horse power.
Wing Span: 42 feet, 7 inches (12.8 m)
Length: 27 feet, 10.5 inches (8.5 m)
Height: 11 feet, 5 inches (3.47 m)
Gross Weight: 2.678 lb (1, 215 kg)
Max Speed: 103 mph at 5000 ft
Ceiling: 13, 500 ft
Endurance: 4 hours and 15 minutes
Crew: 2
Armament: 2-3 Machine Guns, 260 lb of bombs

“Cock Pit of R.E.8 showing controls, gun sight & instrument panel. Vickers gun was mounted down on left side.”
Pegg Collection. Pickering Museum Village
In September 1918, Milton joined the 12th Squadron in France and flew reconnaissance missions from then until the end of the war.

“Landed in a field near Winchester to get these two pictures of the ship (RE8) which I was going to use soon in France.”
Reconnaissance:
Reconnaissance missions were carried out by a crew of two; a pilot and an observer.
Types of missions included Artillery Observation which involved identifying your assigned battery and the intended target. Messages would be transmitted ordering the battery to fire. Any corrections to the battery were simple: “Over”, “Short”, “Left” and “Right”.

Adjustments were made with the help of a map divided into grid squares with identifying letters and numbers. 12 o’clock was due north distance to the target. Enemy artillery battery was quoted using concentric circles drawn at 50 yard intervals on maps. If the observers transmitter was malfunctioning, they would resort to dropping target information to their troops in a message roll, such as the one displayed here.

**Message Roll and Compass.**
Pegg Collection.
Pickering Museum Village.
Map of the Trenches in France.

Used by Milton on aerial trips from October 10 1918- November 1, 1918.

Linen backed paper with mapped area, gridlines delineated with letters and numbers.

Handwritten colored lines indicate trenches, allied and enemy positions and well as supply locations and gunner locations.

Pegg Collection.
Pickering Museum Village
As the war progressed, glass plate cameras replaced the sketches which observers had scribbled on maps on their knee.

These pictures were assembled into mosaic strips by a photographic unit and then analysed. They showed details of the enemy’s front line dispositions, information that the cavalry could never have obtained. The smallest adjustments to trench patterns could indicate the position of a new machine gun post. Fresh digging indicated new trenches. New spreads of barbed wire were visible as well as images of assembled soldiers and trains bringing more men to the front.
Milton was the pilot on their missions, while Douglas Vernon Hoskins was his observer. Hoskins had a machine gun, as did Milton (although his was fired through the moving propeller!). In simple terms, they were to fly over enemy lines, take pictures of gun placements, radio back the positions of the guns with a telegraph key and shoot down enemy observer balloons.
D.V. Hoskins & M.N. Pegg 1918
The Western Front

Another letter from Milton to May Brown, sent from France, November 7, 1918 describes the atmosphere just days prior to the armistice:

“The cold, rainy, wet weather of fall has been with us for some time but our men keep going ahead wonderfully in spite of stiff resistance and obstacles which the public do not realize fully. Now every country has given up except Germany. The terms of Austria’s surrender were published yesterday and last night German representatives crossed the line under a white flag to consider our armistice terms with Foch. Tomorrow we may hear that an armistice has been signed with Germany. No one seems to realize it yet. How much depends upon the moments of today and tomorrow- the lives of thousands and thousands- the future history of the world- how anxiously everyone is waiting to hear.”

He goes on to say:
“But still the war goes on without hesitation and never before has the allied army been better organized – or more fully equipped and ready for strong offensive warfare. As I write, I hear the noise of the never ending stream of transport- men-supplies-guns etc. on the way to the front along the big, main road which runs by the chateau. Day and night it goes on...”
Excerpt from a Letter by Milton Pegg to Miss May Brown.
Sent from France November 7, 1918 (Continued)

“You will be reading now about our push which started last Monday morning and has been so successful. I was up at earliest dawn, shortly after our barrage commenced and had a splendid view of what will perhaps prove to be one of the final, decisive battles of the war. I shall always be glad to think that I helped in it.”

“I was sent upon work which I have done especially well at and which I always get when a “show” is coming off, namely, to keep our guns ranged upon all the known enemy battery positions, range them afresh upon any new battery positions, watch the enemy batteries and let our batteries know when they are knocked out or cease fire and more. I had twenty to watch at once besides flying, watching for Huns, dodging “archie” so you can see how busy it keeps one. [...] During that time I had a go at an enemy balloon but it’s bravery in staying up made me suspicious because they sometimes put up dummy ones containing a huge amount of high explosive which would wreck my machine within half a mile at least. Of course I had a lot of shrapnel thrown up at me for my pains.”
The Army of the Occupation
After the armistice was signed November 11, 1918 and the war was officially over, British, French, Belgian and US troops remained in Germany until 1930. The details (including zones of occupation) were determined by French Marshal Foch, and their role was to ensure that Germany complied with the Treaty of Versailles.
British troops were assigned Cologne, Germany and the troops (Milton included) crossed into Germany December 2, 1918
“No. 12 Squadron in army of Occupation at Duran, Germany. Jan. 1918”
From Christmas 1918 to March 1919, Milton was billeted with the family of August Nietzard.

During this time, Milton speaks of the people’s kindness towards them and the outings and activities they take part in. He writes:

“My friends have been awfully good and the people here do everything they possibly can. They have fed me now for three days in spite of all protests. They have little enough food for themselves, and some of the dishes they make out of the things they have are really wonderful.”
These photographs from Milton’s album feature the store and family of August Nietzgard.

Milton was billeted with them from Christmas 1918 until March 1919.

Pegg Collection. Pickering Museum Village
Post War

Milton returned home to Canada in 1920. His dream was to own his own farm in Pickering. In order to do this, Milton took up teaching once again, this time to the children of the employees of Burwash Prison Farm near Sudbury, Ontario. It was there that he met his wife, Elizabeth Jenkins.

They were married on November 16, 1927 at the Jenkins farm house and then travelled to Milton’s home in Greenwood. They lived with his parents until Milton had purchased land and built a house.
The friendships forged in hard times can often last the longest. Milton’s observer, Vernon Hoskins, and his wife Dorothy, moved to Pickering 6 years after the war and he and Milton purchased farms adjacent to one another. They each purchased 100 acres of land from the James Birrell estate.

An excerpt submitted to The Pickering News had the following to say about the venture:

“The news that Messrs. M.N. Pegg and D.V. Hoskins have recently purchased the James Birrell estate and intend commencing farming operations at once brought universal pleasure and satisfaction throughout the community. [...] They have served their country during the war as brother officers in one of the most hazardous branches of the service, the Flying Corps, and their experiences together as Pilot and Observer in France formed the basis of the friendship which resulted in their partnership in business. We feel confident that in their efforts to serve their country still further by turning from the sword to the plough their success will be equally great.”
Pegg, Hoskins and another airman, Philip Townsend, remained friends for the rest of their lives.

From Left: Phil Townsend, M. Pegg, Vern Hoskins, Janet Hoskins, Betty Pegg, Dorothy Hoskins. 1943

From Left: D.V. Hoskins, Milton Pegg (middle), and Phil Townsend. 1980s
British War Medal

The British War Medal, established July 26th, 1919. The silver medal was awarded to officers and men of the British and Imperial Forces who either entered a theatre of war or entered service overseas between August 5th, 1914 and November 11th, 1918.

Awarded to Milton Pegg for his service. "2 LIEUT M.N. PEGG R.A.F" is inscribed on edge.

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Background music:
“Chanson Triste” performed by the Victor Herbert Orchestra in 1913.
“Spring Song” performed by the Victor Herbert Orchestra in 1909.

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