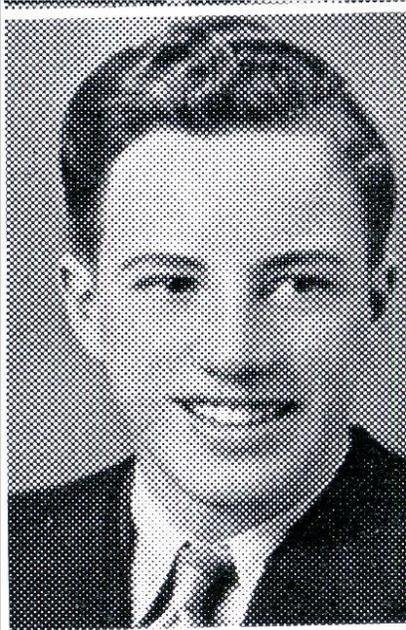


Lieutenant Arthur William Sutton, O-71310



Lieutenant Bud Sutton. Photo: *The Greystone 1939*, University of Saskatchewan

- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Saskatoon SK, 27 August 1920**
- **Enlisted: Saskatoon Division RCNVR, 22 September 1939**
- **Civilian Occupation: Student**
- **Death: Killed in Action while serving in HMS Illustrious on 24 January 1945**
- **Mention in Despatches**
- **Commemorated: Jakarta War Cemetery, 3. D. 18; Sutton Lake (59° 54' N 107°23'W) in Northern Saskatchewan**

Arthur William Sutton, known as Bud, was the only child born to Elsie (nee Gent) and Charles Sutton on 27 August 1920 in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Charles was born in 1888 in the United States and came to Nova Scotia for the purpose of enlisting in the Canadian Army at the outset of the First World War. As a result, he joined the 112th Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force. Authorized in 1915, the battalion formed and trained in Windsor, Nova Scotia and sailed to Britain in July 1916. Elsie was born in Buxton, Derbyshire, England in 1900. She and Charles were married there in August 1919. Shortly after, Charles came to Saskatoon and found a job and a house to rent. Elsie joined him shortly after. By 1922, the family was living in a home they purchased in a modest neighbourhood on the northern outskirts of the city. Charles had found steady employment with the Post Office, first as a helper, then a letter carrier and, finally, as a clerk, until his retirement in 1948. Elsie kept house. Bud appears to have had a stable childhood. There were no disruptive moves or periods of financial difficulties brought on by uncertain employment as so many other families experienced during the Great Depression. He attended the same schools, Wilson Public School, for grades 1 to 8, and then City Park Collegiate Institute for grades 9 to 12. Upon graduation he enrolled in the College of Engineering at the University of Saskatchewan successfully completing the first year in the spring of 1939. There is no evidence that he ever had civilian employment.

On 22 September 1939, Bud was sworn in at the Saskatoon Division (HMCS *Unicorn*) of the Royal Canadian Navy Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR) as an Ordinary Seaman (Temporary) by Lieutenant Commander Harold Balfour. (Lieutenant Commander Balfour would go on to become the Captain of the Port of St. John's and be appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire

for his service). Upon enrollment Bud was single, 5 feet 11 ¾ inches tall and weighed 142 pounds. He had brown hair, brown eyes and a fair complexion and was in excellent condition.

Bud remained in *Unicorn* until 3 August 1940. At this early point in the War the Navy had not yet established centralized training establishments to any great extent. During that time Bud attended to appointments and took some training on “Divisional Strength”. He passed the Educational Test 1 in November making him eligible for promotion to Petty Officer; completed the “Disciplinary Course” and studied Wireless & Telephony resulting in his reclassification to Ordinary Telegraphist. He also expressed an interest in being commissioned into the Executive Branch (the equivalent of the present-day Naval Warfare Officer classification). A report written by *Unicorn’s* Commanding Officer in that regard stated that “(Bud) has full educational qualifications which includes...Differential and Integral Calculus...and trigonometry. General-Very good appearance-neat and clean, learns fast...He is very keen about the opportunity to qualify as an Executive Officer...”

On 4 August Bud was drafted to HMCS *Naden* in Esquimalt, British Columbia. Within days that draft was cancelled, and Bud found himself on a train headed for Halifax, Nova Scotia and HMCS *Stadacona*. His application for commissioning had been accepted. In *Stadacona* he was further interviewed and medically examined. As a result of this process, his application for officer training was accepted but modified. Instead of pursuing a commission as an Executive Officer in the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve, Bud was approved to pursue a commission in the Fleet Air Arm and serve on loan in the Royal Navy. By mid-September Bud was in HMS *Raleigh*, the Royal Navy’s shore establishment in Torpoint, Cornwall which served as a basic training and new entry training facility.

On completion on 5 January 1941, Bud was promoted to Acting Leading Airman and drafted to HMS *St. Vincent* in Gosport, Hampshire. There he completed ten weeks at the Initial Training School with courses covering such topics as academics, basic air navigation, meteorology, principles of flight, engineering, and Morse code. Because it was a naval establishment such courses as fire-fighting/damage control, ship recognition and seamanship were also included. The Royal Navy took great pains to emphasize that the Fleet Air Arm was just one branch of the Navy: in the words of aviation historian Stuart Soward, “One aim of *St Vincent* was to instill in all Royal Navy aircrew the over-riding doctrine that an airman is first and last a seaman.”

About ten weeks later Bud was drafted to RAF Luton No. 14 Elementary Flying Training School (EFTS) in Bedfordshire for about eight weeks of training which included about 50 hours of flying time in a de Havilland Tiger Moth aircraft. In the course he learned basic manoeuvring — taking off, horizontal flight, approach and landing with engine on or off, and simple aerobatics. An EFTS student pilot was expected to go solo around the eight-to-ten-hour mark of dual instruction.

In the spring of 1941 Bud was drafted to No. 31 Service Flying Training School (SFTS) operated by the Royal Air Force near Kingston, Ontario. SFTS courses provided advanced pilot training over a period of from 16 to 19 weeks leading the qualifying student to receive his wings. No. 31 SFTS at this early stage of the War was burdened with the Fairey Battle T as its principal training aircraft. They were totally



Fairey Battle T. Photo: Wikipedia

unsuitable for the purpose. They had been designed as a light bomber in the mid-1930s with great expectations. However, in the early stages of the War they were driven from the skies by the Luftwaffe and, subsequently, placed in the training role. (The Fairey T had dual controls and was used for pilot training while the other models were used for air gunnery and bomb aimer training as well as towing targets.)

Regardless of the model, they presented the pilot with blind spots below and ahead, and behind, their engines and brakes were unreliable, their flying characteristics were inherently unforgiving, and there was a severe shortage of spare parts. The school's Commanding Officer reported in March 1941 that serviceable aircraft totaled: 39 Battles and 6 Yales; unserviceable: 51 Battles and 2 Yales. As well, trainees flooded the school in large numbers placing further demand on aircraft time. As a result, the target of 16 to 19 weeks training time to complete the course became elusive. Nevertheless, Bud graduated on 5 October 1941 and was commissioned as a Sub-Lieutenant, RCNVR, effective 31 December 1940.

Following graduation from Service Flying Training School Bud was administratively posted to HMS *Daedalus*, also known as RNAS Lee-on-Solent in Hampshire and ordered to report to the Royal Navy Barracks there on arrival in the United Kingdom.

Given that he was likely entitled to leave and would certainly need to wait for a trans-Atlantic passage, Bud did not arrive in the United Kingdom until late November. On 1 December 1941, Bud arrived via *Daedalus* at HMS *Heron* housed at the Royal Naval Air Station Yeovilton, a few miles north of Yeovilton, Somerset and was enrolled in the Naval Air Fighter School. The station accommodated aerial gunnery and part of one of the runways was painted to simulate the flight deck for Aerodrome Dummy Deck Landing (ADDL) training. Bud remained at Yeovilton until 9 March 1942.

On 10 March Bud was appointed to HMS *Kestrel* located on Royal Naval Air Station Worthy Down near Winchester, Hampshire. There he joined 757 Squadron which was designated as the Telegraphist Air Gunner Training Squadron. The squadron provided pilots and Blackburn Skua aircraft for the purpose. The Skua had been withdrawn for front-line service but given its rear gun turret, was ideally suited for aerial gunnery training. Bud left Worthy Down on 7 May 1942.

Bud's next appointment from 8 May to 23 September 1942 was to Royal Naval Air Station Afrikander located on the extreme southwest tip of Africa near Simonstown, South Africa. In July the station became HMS *Malagas*. One of *Malagas'* roles was the formation and work-up of



Grumman F4F Martlet/Wildcat.
Photo: World War Photos.info

Grumman F4F Martlet squadrons. Bud undertook training on the Martlet which, at the time, was an advanced fighter aircraft, thus preparing him for his next appointment.

Bud travelled about 2,500 miles northeast of Simonstown to Royal Naval Air Station MacKinnon Road (HMS *Kipanga*) near Mombasa, Kenya, East Africa to his next appointment commencing on 24 September 1943. There he joined 795 Squadron which operated F4F Martlets and was referred to as a second line "fleet fighter pool squadron." Its purpose was to maintain the proficiency of newly trained fighter pilots until either new first line squadrons were formed or positions on existing

first line squadrons became vacant as a result of attrition.

The F4F was referred to as the Martlet by the Royal Navy and the Wildcat by the United States Navy. Eventually, as joint operations between the two navies became common, the name Martlet was dropped. The rugged single seat fighter was first introduced into the Royal Navy in 1942. The Wildcat continued to be built throughout the remainder of the War to serve on escort carriers, where larger and heavier aircraft like the Hellcat and Corsair were not ideal. By 1945 about 1,200 had been acquired by the Royal Navy.

Bud remained in Kenya until 5 February 1943 when the loan agreement which covered his service in the Royal Navy expired and he returned to Canada. In three-and-one-half years he had served in eleven establishments on three continents in both hemispheres.

He arrived in Halifax on 1 March and was promoted to Lieutenant on 5 March 1943. He then went on leave until 5 May when he was again loaned to the Royal Navy. Via a number of administrative steps, Bud was posted to 1830 Squadron, a front-line squadron, being formed at US Naval Air Station Quonset Point, Rhode Island in early June.

The purpose of 1830 Squadron's presence in Quonset Point was to take delivery of and receive training on the new Corsair FU4 Mk1 fighter - ten of which were initially issued. The Royal Navy planned to use them on aircraft carriers. Because of the FU4s' idiosyncrasies, the United States Navy (USN) initially was not convinced of their suitability for carrier use and issued them to United States Marine Corps squadrons operating from land bases only.

To explain the USN's reluctance, let's examine in a very general way how a World War Two



aircraft carrier borne fighter aircraft landed on board. The aircraft was fitted with an arrestor hook on the underside of the aircraft. This apparatus was primarily a long metal rod-up to 6 feet long. The forward end of the rod was attached to the aircraft on a swivel and a hook was attached to the after end. When deployed by the pilot the after end of the rod rotated down and away from the fuselage to about a 45–85-degree angle. It was maintained in that position by either compressed air or hydraulics. The aircraft carrier had four to eight arrestor wires or cables strung across the flight deck toward

the after area at about twenty-foot intervals. Each was connected to a mechanism which paid out the wire under tension when caught by the arrestor hook thus rapidly decelerating the aircraft to a stop. When landing, the pilot approached the carrier from astern with flaps, landing gear, and arrestor hook down and the nose up with enough power to keep the aircraft from stalling. This manoeuvre was performed by the pilot taking visual signals from the Landing Signal Officer (LSO) – a pilot himself- stationed on the port side of the flight deck near the arrestor wires using brightly coloured paddles to pass signals conveying altitude, attitude and speed corrections to the pilot. Once the aircraft was nearly over the arrestor wires the LSO signaled to the pilot to cut power and the aircraft rapidly sank to the deck and hooked a cable.

The F4U Corsair initially had serious problems related to carrier landings. The first was visibility. The Corsair's cockpit was so far back in its fuselage that it was difficult for the pilot to see the LSO's signals. This was solved in a number of ways. The "birdcage" mullioned canopy was replaced with a frameless clear "bubble." The additional head room allowed the pilot's seat to be raised by eight inches. The cowling flaps at the top of the cowling were permanently closed to

deflect oil and exhaust away from the windscreen. But most importantly the practice of approaching the aircraft carrier used by the Royal Navy was universally adopted. This involved approaching the carrier in a shallow ninety-degree left-hand turn commencing some distance off the aircraft carrier's port quarter. The bank involved in the turn allowed the pilot to keep the carrier's deck and the LSO in view over the dipped left wing until the last few seconds before touch down.

The second problem was the tendency of the left wing to stall as the air speed bled off during the final stages of the approach. This caused the Corsair to roll abruptly to port. Ramming the throttle



forward in an attempt to regain speed exacerbated the problem. The sudden torque unleashed from the fighter's powerful R-2800 engine and its 13-foot, 4-inch propeller promptly flipped the aircraft onto its back. The solution was to diminish the airflow over the starboard wing causing the Corsair's wings to lose lift simultaneously and symmetrically. This was accomplished by affixing a simple triangular spoiler about six inches long and three inches wide to the leading edge of the starboard wing.

The third issue was the bounce produced by the landing gear's oleos - similar to very large automotive shock absorbers. When the Corsair rapidly sank to the deck, the oleos fully

telescoped then quickly extended causing the aircraft to bounce back and up like on a pogo stick and bound over the arrestor wires out of control. This was solved by the installation of a valve in each oleo to dampen the air pressure thus reducing the bounce.

And finally, the last 8 inches of the wings were clipped so that the Corsair would fit in the hangar deck of Royal Navy aircraft carriers. This change in wingspan brought with it the unexpected bonus of an improved sink rate and partially eliminating the tendency of the aircraft to float during the final stage of landing. When the power was cut the Corsair now obediently dropped to the flight deck with its wings level.

The purpose of describing the idiosyncrasies of the early Corsairs is to demonstrate what Bud Sutton was faced with as a member of 1830 Squadron – one of the first Fleet Air Arm squadrons to be equipped with the aircraft.

Once settled at Quonset Point under the command of Lieutenant. Commander D. B. M. Fiddes, DSO RN, the Squadron began training in earnest. As well, Bud was named Senior Pilot. This largely involved a range of duties aimed at preserving the proficiency, morale, and discipline of junior pilots. Flying training included navigation exercises, low flying, formation flying and combat tactics, Aerodrome Dummy Deck Landing (ADDL) training and night flying. During this period accidents took their toll. Engine failure resulted in one crash. The pilot was uninjured. Three other accidents resulted in the loss of the pilots. In one of those incidents the aircraft crashed on take-off into a bomb storage site. The ensuing fire killed the pilot and injured 21 other personnel responding to the fire.

In August, Corsair Mark II aircraft were issued replacing the original Mark 1 before the Squadron moved to US Naval Air Station Brunswick, Maine on 21 September to continue their training. On completion they flew to Norfolk, Virginia to board the escort aircraft carrier, HMS *Slinger*, for

passage to Belfast, Northern Ireland in convoy. (The Squadron's aircraft together with forty-four others were slung onboard by crane.)

On 3 November, 1830, 1831, and 1833 squadron flew from Belfast to RNAS Stretton (HMS *Blackcap*) in Lancastershire where they formed the new 15th Naval Fighter Wing (15 Wing) for service in the Fleet Carrier HMS *Illustrious*. 1831 Squadron was disbanded, and its personnel and equipment divided between 1830 and 1833. As a result, each squadron had now 14 aircraft.

1830 flew out to join HMS *Illustrious* on 9 December, while 1833 moved temporarily to HMS *Landrail* in Argyllshire. Researchers point out that it is unclear whether or when 1830 and 1833 pilots undertook any deck landing training (DLT) which was normally carried out while in the United States using the training carrier USS *Charger* in the Chesapeake Bay area. Perhaps as a result of this omission, flying onto *Illustrious* resulted in four crashes and one fatality – the fatality being Lieutenant Commander Fiddes, the Commanding Officer. Bud did not escape. He missed the arrestor wires and collided with the island. (See photo).



Lieutenant Sutton Arriving.
Photo: royalnavyresearcharchive.org

After sorting themselves out, the remaining 10 aircraft were flown ashore to *Landrail* on 20 December, re-embarking three days later after receiving replacement aircraft and aircrew. In the interim 1833 squadron pilots were given Deck Landing Training prior to joining *Illustrious* without incident also on 23 December 1943.

HMS *Illustrious* with 15 Wing finally safely embarked with other squadrons sailed from the Clyde on 29 December 1943 to join the Eastern Fleet in the Pacific Ocean. Proceeding via the Suez



HMS Illustrious.
Photo: history.fandom.com/wiki/HMS_Illustrious_(87)

Canal *Illustrious* was the senior ship of a task force that eventually consisted of the maintenance aircraft carrier, HMS *Unicorn*, two battleships, one battlecruiser, and seven destroyers

Illustrious arrived in Trincomalee, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) on 29 January 1944. 15 Wing flew ashore to nearby RN Air Section China Bay which would become the Wing's usual home away from home when not embarked in *Illustrious*.

Over the next twelve months *Illustrious*, with Bud embarked, accompanied by an assortment of ships from Australia, France, the Netherlands, New Zealand, and the United States as well as

three additional Royal Navy Fleet aircraft carriers and their screening forces, operated together in various combinations in eleven major operations against the enemy spread over about 1 million square miles. Most operations involved targets on the Japanese occupied Indonesian Islands of

Sumatra and Java. (Indonesia was also referred to as the Dutch East Indies before 1949). The apparent operational tempo was even more pronounced when one takes into account the three-month refit *Illustrious* underwent from August to October in Simonstown, South Africa.

Of these operations two have particular significance to Bud's story. The first was Operation CRIMSON 22-27 July 1944. This operation involved naval bombardment and aerial strikes on Japanese airfields and naval installations near the Indonesian cities of Sabang, Lhoknga and Kutaraja on the Island of Sumatra. Carrier aircraft suppressed the airfields and provided air cover for the bombarding force. Together HM Ships *Illustrious* and *Victorious* launched 96 aircraft over the course of the morning of 25 July. Bud and his wingman engaged a Japanese A6M Zero fighter aircraft and shot it down. For his actions Bud was mentioned in dispatches:

"For outstanding courage, skill and determination in pressing home a successful attack on the Japanese airbase at Sabang."

The second was Operation MERIDIAN (organized into phases I and II). The objective of MERIDIAN I was the destruction of the major Pladjoe oil refining facilities near the city of Palembang on southern Sumatra Island in Indonesia together with three Japanese air bases at Palembang itself, and nearby Lembak, and Talegbetoetoe. The purpose of these airfields was to protect Pladjoe and they needed to be neutralized first. The oil refining facilities produced 75% of the aviation gasoline used by the Japanese armed forces.

The task force assembled to conduct the operation consisting of the four Fleet aircraft carriers HM Ships *Illustrious*, *Indefatigable*, *Indomitable*, and *Victorious* together with their screening force sailed from Trincomalee on 16 January 1945. Delayed by bad weather the task force reached its flying off position about 200 miles from the target area and commenced launching 140 aircraft on 24 January.

Bud's task was to strafe the airfield at Talegbetoetoe. Usually, one strafing run was conducted on a target. A second was more dangerous because anti-aircraft gunners have had time to refine their marksmanship. Bud pressed on for a third run. This time his Corsair was hit but remained airborne until it struck a hangar destroying it and numerous Japanese aircraft stored inside. Bud was killed.

As a result of his actions, Bud was recommended for the Victoria Cross. When reviewing a nomination for the Victoria Cross the panel members were required to assure themselves that the nominee went into a situation with the knowledge it was dangerous — and went ahead anyway. In Bud's case it could not be determined if Bud was alive after his aircraft was hit. It was possible that momentum, rather than Bud's inputs, simply carried the aircraft into the hangar. So, because they *"could not be assured that the action was deliberate,"* the panel turned down the recommendation and no alternative acknowledgment was awarded.

Lieutenant Robert Hampton Gray, who a few months later would be involved in a similar situation and be awarded the Victoria Cross posthumously, wrote to his parents saying:

"I know you will be sorry to hear that Bud Sutton, my friend from Saskatoon, has been killed in action. I have been looking forward to seeing him for a long time now, but I was too late. He died very gallantly. How I cannot tell you, but you might like to write his family. He was an only child, and I cannot think how badly they will feel about it."

Lieutenant Gray's empathy towards Bud's parents was prescient. After a number of letters between the Suttons and the Naval Secretary were exchanged concerning Bud's fate and whereabouts, Elsie Sutton wrote on 5 November 1945:

"his (Bud's) father and I are being as brave as possible under the circumstances...our home has been extremely empty since the sad news arrived. It will be a more satisfying relief if you can find out anything at all about him".

It was not until a letter was received from the War Office, London, dated 13 July 1950, stating that Bud's remains were located in the Palembang Dutch War Cemetery, did Elsie and William know for certain what had become of their son. His remains were later interred for the final time in the Jakarta War Cemetery, Jakarta, Indonesia. Additionally, Sutton Lake (59° 54' N 107°23'W) in Northern Saskatchewan is named in his memory.

For his service, Lieutenant (P) Arthur William (Bud) Sutton was awarded the 1939-45 Star, the Africa Star, the Pacific Star, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp, and the War Medal, and he was Mentioned in Dispatches. His mother, Mrs. Elsie Sutton, was awarded the Memorial Cross.

Prepared By:

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