

## A Soldier Behind the Fiddle

Music and war—many would not think the two would go hand in hand. For my great uncle, however, it was different. Full of colour, hard-working, and musical, Robert W. Baldwin was born on January 13<sup>th</sup>, 1925 into a very large and happy family consisting of eight boys and six girls. He lived his early childhood years tending to a farm with his family. At only eighteen years of age in 1943, Robert Baldwin enlisted in the military. Bob did things for our country that required immense amounts of courage and deserved to be shared, including the training he went through, his posting overseas, and his life after the war.

On November 11th, 1943, Robert Baldwin left for Edmonton, as he had enlisted in the military. He stayed at Number 3 Manning Depot until January of 1944 for standard training. Refresher courses took place in Winnipeg. Bob was shipped to Number 3 Bombing and Gunnery in early spring of 1944 in MacDonald, Manitoba, where he graduated with his newly acquired wings. Three months of commando course took place in Trois-Rivières, Quebec, and his fitness and survival skills were put to the test in a number of activities—specifically, climbing cliffs and crossing rivers. After a short while in Lachine, Quebec, Robert Baldwin got posted to Nassau, which was located in the Bahamas, where he took part in ground and flight training with fellow crew members from August to November. December of 1944 marked the day when he would finally travel overseas.

### Wings Presented

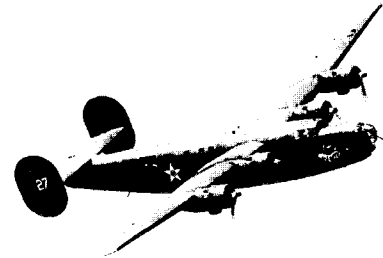
(Special)—“You have but stay on your training,” Wing Commander R. F. Gross told an air gunner class graduating Friday afternoon when he presented wings for the first time since leaving from eastern Canada to MacDonald, Manitoba, in 1943.

Wing Commander Gross, who was in command of the class, presented wings to Robert Baldwin, Warren;

Robert Baldwin sailed in the *Mauritania*, a cruise boat, across the Atlantic. After many days at sea, the boat finally docked in Liverpool, England, and the troops on board made their way to Bournemouth shortly thereafter. Bob was sent to Northern Ireland to a base in Ballykelly a month or two later, then Londonderry, and then Limavady—a town near the base. At this time, Robert Baldwin had officially been transferred into the Royal Air Force. His role was very



important; air patrolling required a keen eye, as they only used their eyes and maybe binoculars when spotting German U-Boats and submarines, which could appear at any time. Bob was always at the ready with a gun, donned no harness whatsoever, and patrolled



twelve to fourteen hours a day with breaks and ground schooling in between. He also aided his allies by escorting (air support) convoys loaded with supplies such as guns, tanks, and gasoline that were sailing across the Atlantic. As an air gunner, Robert Baldwin flew in planes such as the Liberator with gunnery in the front, rear, or sides, and was a member of the Royal Air Force (RAF) Number 59—or “Broken Wheel,” as he liked to call it—Squadron. The war finally ended on September 2nd, 1945, and he sailed to New York City on the *Queen Elizabeth* out of Brighton, England. In 1946, when he was finally discharged having fulfilled his duty as an air gunner, Robert Baldwin made his way to Manitoba, where his life after the war began.

When Robert Baldwin returned to Warren, he lived on his family farm for many years, spending his time grain farming and tending to cattle, chicken, and pigs. In 1953, eight years after World War II ended, Robert Baldwin married Eileen, the love of his life. They built a house on property they had recently purchased and had four children together—all who are successful today. Bob worked as a truck driver delivering gas and oil until he was hired as an aircraft mechanic at



Standard Aero Engines, all while continuing to farm. He had many talents, such as woodworking and carpentry. His love and passion for music were obvious; he played the fiddle, guitar, piano, banjo, and he would never pass up the opportunity to play music with his friends and family. His legacy as a musician lives on in his sons, daughters, and grandchildren. In 2001, his wife passed away, and he remained on the farm until 2008 when he moved to a personal care home in Stonewall called Lions Manor. His contribution to the freedom of our country during World War II will forever be remembered by everyone who knew him.

It takes a lot of courage for such a young man to join the military and move thousands of miles from home to defend his country and fight for the freedom that we take for granted today. Robert Baldwin, at the age of eighteen, did just that. From his enlistment to his discharge, Bob stayed true to his country during World War II. His training, duty overseas, and life after the war played a huge role in his life as an air gunner, a citizen of Canada, and a member of the Baldwin family. On July 28th, 2010,

Robert Baldwin passed away peacefully. His story will be passed on through generations and generations for all the years to come.

*Robert W. Baldwin*  
*1925 - 2010*

