



A Wainwright Warrior

WWI ace – Captain Conrad Tolendal Lally – an early mayor of Wainwright

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Submitted Article

Most, if not all, who read this article will have no idea who Conrad Lally is; yet in the early years of the 20th Century he was one of Wainwright's leading citizens. Conrad was born in Toronto in 1882, the only child of Conrad Colthurst Whitley Lally and Lucy Fedora Wells. He received his education at private schools and prestigious Upper Canada College. His eventual employment with the Imperial Bank of Canada took him West to Banff in 1906, where he opened and managed the company's first branch. In 1908 he left the banking business, moved to Wainwright, and set up a general store in partnership with a Mr. S.E. Betts.

Conrad is descended from French nobility. His forbear, Count de Lally Tolendal was a General in the French Army. He was sent to India and fought with distinction against the English. After the war he returned to France and was beheaded on a charge which was later proved to be false. His son, Thomas Arthur Lally, (Conrad's grandfather) served in the Royal Navy and fought with the fleet in the three wars with China. When he retired from the navy he emigrated to Canada. It necessarily followed that Conrad would answer his country's call at the outbreak of World War I when he applied for duty with the Royal Flying Corps. In December 1915, Conrad received his orders to report to Reading University in England to commence pilot training.

Conrad was the mayor of Wainwright when he departed on December 25, 1915 for St. John, New Brunswick and boarded the RMS Metagama for the ten day trip to England. From the time he left Wainwright, until he returned to Canada, he would maintain a diary on all his activities.

His flying training commenced on 14 January 1916 with a 13 minute dual instruction flight, and after flying in some of England's worst winter weather, he graduated on 24 June 1916, with a total of 22 hours and 4 minutes flying time, and granted the rank of 2nd Lieutenant. Conrad was a natural at flying and a born leader which resulted in his posting to 24 Flying Training Squadron at Gosport as an instructor. Here he remained for the next eight months accumulating 329 hours of instructional flying. His memorabilia contains two letters from grateful students thanking him for his patience, understanding, and unselfish dedication to their cause.

On 7 April 1917, Conrad is promoted to Captain and transferred to 25 Bomber & Reconnaissance Squadron in France flying the flimsy FE-2b aircraft on bombing and photo reconnaissance missions over enemy territory. On 7 June 1917, he and his gunner/observer, 2Lt L.F. Williams of Fort Frances, Ontario, engage two enemy Albatross D111 fighter aircraft west of Lille. His modest log book entry states, "fight with Huns, got one and probably two." The outcome should have been different. The destruction of two of Germany's fastest fighter aircraft against one lumbering British bomber certainly attests to Lally's flying skills and his gunner's coolness and accuracy.

During the next twelve months, Lally and his gunner will succeed in destroying four more enemy aircraft while flying the new de Havilland DH4 day and night bomber, but will not get credit for one of them because it was not confirmed. In one confrontation with five German Albatross fighters, Lally and his gunner Lt. Cole

are both wounded. Lally is hit in the back by a "spent bullet" but succeeds in getting his aircraft safely back to base. He is evacuated to England and will spend the next ten days in hospital before being returned to duty.

On 29 November 1917 Conrad traveled to London to be invested with the Military Cross, which was at that time, the second highest award to officers for bravery. His citation in part reads; "... for 32 raids and 42 recce sorties... when ordered to bomb a position he spent one and one-half hours looking for it, then returned for more petrol and at the second attempt dropped a bomb on it, and with another set a dump on fire, under the most difficult of weather conditions." A month later he is awarded a 2nd Military Cross (bar). Once again the citation reads; "For conspicuous gallantry and

devo- tion to duty. Flying over and above the clouds, he released his bombs over his objective, well behind the enemy lines at a height of 500 feet, under heavy fire. On two later occasions he carried out photographic reconnaissance of hostile airdromes under very bad weather conditions, on account of which several other machines had to give up their journey. He has shown himself to be a most determines leader; his example of courage and skill being of great advantage to his squadron." This decoration is quickly followed by the French Croix de Guerre with Palm Leaves.

On the occasion of his birthday on 3 June 1918, King George V introduced two new medals for the Royal Air Force; the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Force Cross. Sixty-six of the 600 AFC's are awarded to Canadians; Conrad T. Lally is one of the original recipients. However, it is not until March 1921 that Conrad is presented his medal at Wainwright by Alberta's

the Air Force section of The Military Museums located at 4520 Crowchild Trail, SW, Calgary.

In Lally's diary, there are references of Conrad receiving issues of *The Wainwright Star*, keeping up with what was happening at home during the war. Conrad's daughter, Joyce Lally is 84 years old and lives in Calgary.

Donald M. Norrie served in the Army and Air Force for 35 years, retiring as a Lt. Col. in 1989. Norrie made many trips to Wainwright over the years while in the military, including being stationed in Wainwright in 1950. Norrie now volunteers with The Military Museums in Calgary.



Conrad Lally at the Strand in England, circa June 1916, soon after he earned his pilot wings.



The strain of war showed on Conrad's face in this photo, in France, circa 1918.

Lt. Governor, The Honorable Dr. Robert G. Brett.

Captain C.T. Lally was honourably discharged from the RAF on 10 January 1920. He returned to Wainwright and eventually became one of the town's first Postmasters in 1923, a position he held until his death on 3 August 1941 at the age of 59 years. In 1924 he married the former Mary Beryl (Molly) Rodden of Chauvin. They had one daughter. Conrad is buried in the Wainwright cemetery beside his wife and mother. His is a simple headstone with basic personal information. Nothing is inscribed to indicate his status as a veteran of the Great War of 1914-1919, or his many contributions to community, province and country.

Conrad Tollendal Lally was a man for all seasons. His accomplishments were many. To name a few, he was twice mayor of Wainwright, president of the local board of trade, police magistrate, school board trustee, town auditor, master of the Masonic Lodge, Captain of the hockey team, and staunch adherent of the Anglican Church, all to which he gave freely of his time and energies.

Conrad Lally's medals and selected memorabilia are currently on display in



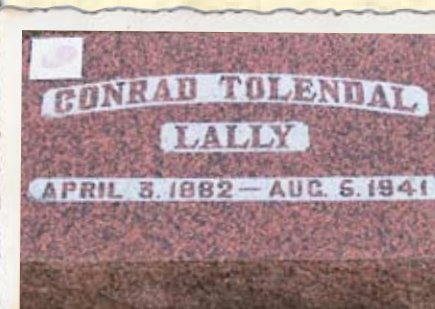
Conrad Lally, fourth from left, Flight Commander with 129 Training Squadron in Catterick, Yorkshire.



Flying biplanes during the first World War was dangerous business, with only basic controls and zero safety gear on board.



Conrad himself shot this photo of a "Hun machine photographed from our machine directly above." The German gunner and machine gun are clearly visible.



Conrad Lally's grave marker is in the Wainwright Cemetery, with little to note this man's importance to the community and his contribution to the Great War.



WWI flying ace, Conrad Lally in the cockpit of a Royal Aircraft Factory RE8.

Selected Excerpts from Conrad T. Lally's Flying Log Book

- Training - First as a student, then as an Instructor with 24 Squadron.
- 29 Mar 1916 - Had first flight with OC at 5:00 o'clock this afternoon.
- 30 May 1916 - Two men killed today.
- 31 May 1916 - Two men killed today.
- 02 Jun 1916 - ...Chamberlain took machine up after I landed and crashed down from 6,000 feet and was burned upon the ground. This afternoon a Moraine Saulnier Parasol (French built) turned over and burned two men to death. 8 men killed in four days now. Chamberlain a Canadian who came over at same time I did and was in same squadron.
- 05 Jul 1916 - ...very bad weather, had to fly by compass above clouds. North wind drifted me south. Shut-off (engine) to come below clouds and engine would not pick-up. Had bad crash on golf course. Machine badly wrecked.
- 08 Jul 1916 - ...While up with student yesterday, engine gave out, but managed to land safely. Some engine gave out tonight and had narrow escape getting down. Broke skid extensions and one skid. Watch torn off my wrist (he finds it the next day)
- 09 Jul 1916 - ...Had bad collision between 2 Short Horns (training aircraft) last night, and an Avro nose dived in this morning...
- 20 Jul 1916 - Just started engine and seated in machine with pupil when a Longhorn (training aircraft) flew into us. Completely smashed the Longhorn and carried away half of our machine. Pupil hurt, just touched on the leg myself.
- 22 Feb 1917 - Undercarriage fell off in air and crashed on landing.
- 18 Mar 1917 - Started in to train observers. An infantry officer by the name of Gray taken up for a joy ride by a friend of his named Morrison in my flight. Morrison tried some stunts and some way Gray fell out of the machine from about 1500 feet. The machine turned over and Morrison crashed to the ground. Both killed. This makes five deaths in three weeks
- COMBAT FLYING AT THE FRONT WITH 25 SQUADRON
- 20 Apr 1917 - Crashed taking-off.
- 21 Apr 1917 - line patrol Loos to Arras. Kept formation. Huns* around but did not attack us.
- 24 Apr 1917 - Photo escort over lines well "Archie"*** holes in machine and observer hit by splinter.
- 25 Apr 1917 - Fight with Hun and Archie
- 03 May 1917 - Heavy Archie, lots of holes in machine.
- 07 May 1917 - Heavy Archie, holes in wing and piece through side of (engine) nacelle.
- 12 May 1917 - Line patrol and brush with Hun but did not get him.
- 21 May 1917 - Line patrol. Archie poor, but still got a few holes in wing.
- 16 May 1917 - A few shots at Hun.
- 02 Jun 1917 - Main spar (wing) nearly cut through by Archie.
- 07 Jun 1917 - Fight with Huns, got one and probably two!
- 09 Jun 1917 - Nearly got Hun.
- 12 Jun 1917 - Shot at Hun.
- 14 Jun 1917 - Photo recce. Down to 500 feet over trenches.
- 07 Jul 1917 - Bombing. Fight with 5 Huns, shot one down and drove off another.
- 05 Aug 1917 - Bombing NE of Lille. Met two Huns shot one down.
- 22 Aug 1917 - Bombing. Fight with Hun but gun jammed.
- 02 Sep 1917 - Rudder controls shot away by Archie
- 03 Sep 1917 - Shot Hun.
- 03 Sep 1917 - Over Douai, chased two Huns and apparently got one.
- 09 Sep 1917 - Roving patrol. Fight with 4 Huns. Fight with 2 Huns.
- 16 Sep 1917 - Photo recce. Fight. Shot Hun observer (aircraft) but gun jammed.
- 19 Sep 1917 - Photo recce. Fight with Hun, gun jammed twice.
- 03 Sep 1918 - Crashed into tree. Two months in hospital.***

* Huns - the allied reference to the Germans.
** Archie was the acronym for Artillery that shot at over-flying aircraft.
*** Conrad was seriously injured in this crash. The left side of his face was badly smashed and his jaw fractured in three places. However, after many operations, and on 04 Nov 1918, he was back flying.