

A PENETANGUISHENE WARTIME TRAGEDY OF A DIFFERENT KIND

How World War 2 Changed The Life of Phil Marchildon

By Bob Bald

Penetanguishene Sports Hall of Fame

Babe, The Peerless Pitcher from Penetanguishene, Penetang Phil, Fidgety Phil. If you were around back in the 1930's, 40's and even the 50's, all you had to do was hear one of those nicknames and you knew who people were talking about. Even today the townsfolk still recognize the monikers.

Phil Marchildon was most probably Penetanguishene's most recognizable citizen of those times. He had rocketed from a home-town hero in the 30's to a major league baseball star in the 40's, to a dedicated Canadian Airman in 1944. From then and there he literally plummeted to being a captured prisoner of war, to a physically and psychologically damaged man who struggled to regain the form that he had previously enjoyed prior to the global conflict. He eventually and begrudgingly retired from baseball as a different person; one who had endured rigorous hardships and struggles that he had difficulty in overcoming. This is his story.

FROM A YOUNG LAD TO A YOUNG MAN

Phillip Joseph Marchildon was born October 25, 1913, the 4th of 7 children-4 girls and 3 boys-in Penetanguishene to his parents Oliver and Elizabeth (nee Lavereau). A large family for sure, and that seemed to grow even larger during the years to come, considering the hard times of the Great Depression.

His father was a plumber and a tinsmith as well as being a volunteer fireman. His father worked hard at his trades, mostly for the cottagers from Toronto. The jobs became even tougher because of the fact that local tradesmen were often taken advantage of by the people who hired them by non-payments or not being paid on agreed fees for their services. The kids had to chip in by getting part-time jobs just so the family could survive. Phil chose to deliver Toronto Star newspapers to earn money to help pay for food on the table.

Phil described his mother as a wonderful woman who provided the laughter and harmony in the household. She was known as Liza to her friends, and she herself would take on washing clothes of other families to earn extra cash.

Phil was an active young lad, who enjoyed skiing and tobogganing down Robert Street to Main Street in the winter time. By the time he got to high school, he became very interested in the sports that were now more available to him i.e. basketball, lacrosse, hockey to name a few. Hockey soon became his favourite because the opportunity was there to play on the bay as long as one could stand it. His love for hockey then was the same as any kid has today.

Phil was also very good at track and field, as well as football. He actually even earned a scholarship at St. Michael's Catholic School in Toronto, when his school team was playing a home-and-home series against them. The coach of St. Mike's was a priest, who offered him a spot on the team if he would attend Grade 12 at this private school. Apparently the opportunity to go to school in the big city was too good to pass up and it saved his parents money as everything was paid for, including meals. Even though he later expressed this venture to be a rewarding one, his football experience didn't turn out quite like he had planned. St. Mike's had an extremely strong squad and Phil sat on the bench more than he played, and he soon became bored. He did however get to play with future Canadian Football great Johnny Metras, who was their star player and who later, went on to coach the University of Western Mustangs to several college championships. The capping moment of his football career was that Phil played his final game at Maple Leaf Stadium, home of the baseball Leafs of the International league. Little did Phil know that this would not be the last time he'd be playing there, albeit in a different sport. St. Michael's discontinued their football program the following year and Babe came back home to Penetanguishene.

THE LONG AND WINDING ROAD TO PHILADELPHIA

Phil was quite aware of the town's North Simcoe League's Intermediate 'B' baseball team entry and their recent successes. The team was made up of some of his relatives namely Jim and Marius Bald, and many of his childhood friends and acquaintances such as Bob and Hal Crippin, Fred Devillers, Joe Hale, Chuck Sheppard to name a few. There were even some out-of town additions like Cy Richardson and Stan Swain. The club was dominant as it was, but Phil decided to try out for the club even though he had only taken up the art of pitching only 2 years earlier in high school.

In Brian Kendall's book 'Ace', an autobiography of Phil's life, Phil talked about how hard he could throw for a slightly built fellow with a 5'11" 175 pound frame. However at the same time, he openly admitted that he had literally no idea what he was doing on the mound. Yet with his built-in competitive nature, he was determined to be as best as he could as a pitcher. He practiced at every opportunity. He even drew a target on his father's garage door until he began to destroy it and had to take his practice sessions elsewhere on his father's orders. Phil was friends with Andy Vaillancourt., who worked at a barber shop on the Main Street in town, and when things were slow and there were no heads to cut, they would go in the alley behind the shop where Andy would catch for Phil at every opportunity that presented itself.

His persistent practicing combined with the tutoring of manager Jim Shaw regarding the finer points of the position such as holding runners, the pick-off moves etc. paid off in spades. Soon Phil was a dominant force, and more so after developing a nasty curveball, he was regularly striking out 10 to 15 batters a game. It didn't hurt that he was also one of the clubs best hitters to help his own cause. The Penetanguishene Spencer Foundry Rangers won the Northern Division of the Province and faced off against the Chatham Colored Stars club for the provincial championship. Unfortunately they came up short losing to the Chatham club 2 games to one, with

one game tied. Phil did most of the pitching in that series, and literally succumbed to a tired arm from overuse.

However, family economics came into play and Phil was always concerned about their well-being and he actively pursued a full-time job. He obtained one, albeit in Northern Ontario in the mines located in Creighton, a small community just outside of Sudbury. He found out about this position from a member of the St. Mary's senior team, who had come to town to play an exhibition game against the Penetanguishene Spencer Foundry Rangers. Kitch Jeffers was their catcher, who had signed on to play for the Creighton Mines Cubs as well as obtaining a job in the mines. He was impressed so much with Phil as a pitcher, he recommended him to his new bosses and the ball club. The club played in the Nickel Belt Senior League, one step up from the Intermediate League that the Rangers played in. So Phil landed a full time position in the mines as well as moving up to a higher calibre of baseball at the same time. He played there for 3 seasons literally dominating the Senior League and registered 275 strikeouts in 25 regularly scheduled games and made it to the Ontario Senior League finals before succumbing to a team from Strathroy 2 games to 1.

In July of 1938, Phil received a phone call from his former manager Jim Shaw. Shaw apparently was a fishing buddy of Dan Howley, the manager of the Toronto Maple Leafs of the International League and Shaw had been promoting Phil to Howley telling him that Phil was worth having a look at. After a lot of urging Shaw convinced Phil to attend a Leafs tryout camp being held in Barrie even though Phil doubted his own abilities, in that his accomplishments were against teams with only 2 or 3 decent hitters. At the same time, Phil was 24 years old and he felt that it was kind of late to be starting out in pursuing a professional baseball career.

After having what he thought was a pretty good camp in Barrie (he struck out the 6 hitters he faced), no one said a word to him on what they thought of his tryout. He stuck around for a bit then left figuring they didn't like his stuff. A couple of days later, Howley personally showed up in Creighton wondering what had happened to him. Howley convinced him he had the tools, though he would need some polishing of his skills and told him that the arm that he had was a rare gift. Howley offered Phil a \$500 signing bonus (which he never did get) as well as an invitation to the Leafs training camp in Florida the next spring, which he accepted.

So Phil reported to Avon Park, a small town in central Florida. Howley had moved upstairs to become the general manager, and the new Leafs manager was Jack Burns, who actually was a playing manager as a slick fielding first baseman who had spent most of his career with the old St. Louis Browns. Burns taught him a few things about pitching, which was the only coaching he got. There were a few veterans on the club, but they were there trying to stretch out their careers and saw Phil as a threat to take their jobs, thus he received little help from them. Howley offered Phil a contract of \$350 a month which he jumped at. It was more than he was making in the mines in Creighton. He appeared in the first game of the season in a relief role, allowing 2 hits in 2 innings earning him a start in Baltimore though got knocked around in the 3 innings that he lasted. After losing his next start against Jersey City by a score of 1-0, Howley and Burns gave him the start in the home opener in

Toronto, wanting to showcase their home-grown Canadian rookie. A crowd of 8,500 were in attendance which included Phil's family and 100 or so friends and relatives, who were there thanks to some hometown businessmen who chartered some buses to go and see Phil pitch. He went 8 innings, losing 5-2, allowing 10 hits and 5 walks.

After a string of no-so-good starts, Phil was sent to Cornwall of the Canadian-American League, one notch down from the International League, to work on his control. Phil racked up 6 consecutive wins and was brought back to the Leafs. By then they had a new manager in Tony Lazzeri, a 2nd baseman formerly with the New York Yankees, who was an important part of the famous 'Murderers Row'. He had played on 5 championship teams with the Yanks and was a future Hall of Famer. The Leafs also added Heinie Manush, another future Hall of Fame member, who beat out Babe Ruth for the batting title in 1926 by knocking 6 hits in 9 at bats on the final day of the season in a doubleheader to finish with a .378 average compared to Ruth's .372. He also led the American League twice in hits and retired with a .330 lifetime average.

Phil finally won his first game as a Maple Leaf on July 1 in Toronto in front of a crowd of 10,000 fans against the Buffalo Bisons, winning by a score of 4-1. Despite the fact that Phil was still struggling with his control, he managed to tweak the interest in a couple of clubs with the powerful Yankees heading the list. However things didn't materialize and Phil remained a Leaf for the time being. On the global front, reports and rumblings circulated wildly that war was imminent. Phil was concerned about his future and especially his career as a professional baseball pitcher. He knew the minute if England joined in the fight, his baseball career could be in jeopardy.

One of the highlights of his season with Toronto was a game versus the Montréal Royals, though the attendance was a paltry 500 fans. People stayed home to listen to the radio reports on the possibility of war. However, two hundred of these fans were proud Penetanguishene townspeople were in attendance as a pre-game ceremony was to be held in his honour highlighted by some of his former Spencer Foundry Rangers' team mates dressed in their ball uniforms lining the foul lines. Phil was presented with a beautiful travel bag. Phil pitched 7 innings of shutout ball before allowing 5 runs in the 8th, eventually losing 7-6 to the Royals.

His inaugural season was far from spectacular, going 5-7 and allowing 115 hits and 92 walks in 124 innings pitched. Despite his record, Phil was still regarded as one of the most promising pitching prospects in all of baseball.

CONNIE MACK COMES CALLING

One of the biggest deals the Leafs made in 1940 came off the field when they signed a working agreement with the Philadelphia Athletics of the American League. The deal was that the A's would supply the Leafs with several players in exchange for any 2 Toronto-owned players for \$7500 a pop.

Phil was having a fairly good year with the lowly Leafs ending up with a record of 10-11, despite not winning a game until early June. Phil figured he could have had 6

or 7 more wins with a better club. His new pitching coach in Toronto, Sad Sam Jones was one of his biggest supporters, calling Phil the best pitching prospect he had ever seen. In August, he was called in to GM Dan Howley's office who informed him that Mr. Mack wanted him to report to the A's at the end of the Leafs' season. Howley had to some advice to offer Phil, telling him "You've worked hard for this. To stay in the majors you're going to have to work even harder. Getting there isn't half as tough as staying." Phil said he never forgot those words.

Phil reported to the Phillies on September 15, 1940 in Cleveland where he was introduced to one Cornelius McGillicuddy, better known as Connie Mack, the owner and manager of the Philadelphia A's. Mack was a different sort, though highly respected in the baseball circles. He was referred to as 'Mr. Mack' by his employees. He was the last manager that allowed to wear civilian clothes in the dugout. He never left the dugout to argue calls or to go to the mound to make a pitching change. His son Earle would carry out those duties. The best description of Mack was written by Red Smith, a reporter with the Philadelphia Record at the time. He wrote: "He could be as tough as rawhide and as gentle as a mother, reasonable and obstinate beyond reason, and courtly, benevolent and fierce. He was kind-hearted and hard-fisted, drove a hard bargain and was suckered in a hundred deals. He was generous and thoughtful and autocratic and shy and independent and altogether loveable." Phil admitted Mack was all of those things but mostly saw him as a hard-fisted miser, which he felt overshadowed his better qualities. Phil always felt he was underpaid by Mack throughout his career in Philly.

Phil didn't play in his first game as a big-leaguer, but he did have a front row seat in watching a fellow by the name of Bob Feller ply his trade for the Indians. Bullet Bob or Rapid Robert retired the first 22 batters he faced that day, eventually settling for a two-hitter. Phil said after watching him pitch that he couldn't help but wonder whether he belonged in the same league.

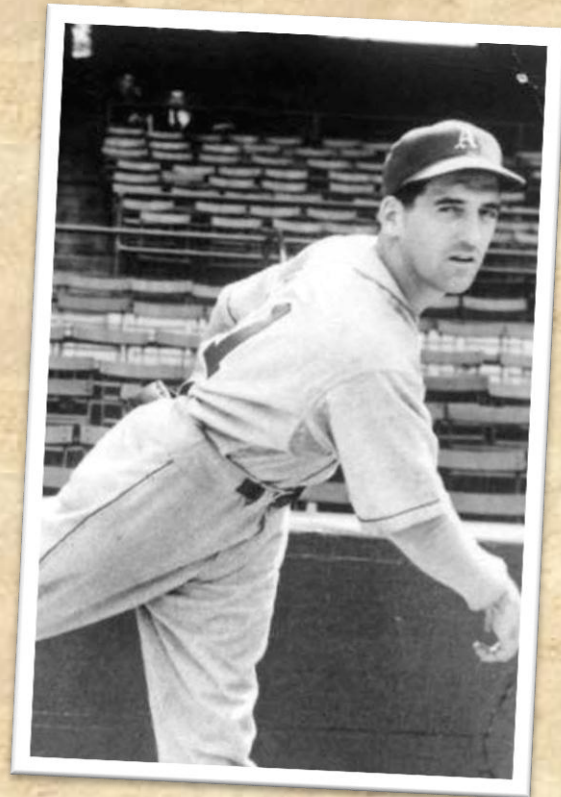
Phil got his first start at home in Shibe Park against the Washington Senators. He was in awe of the stadium, which was the first concrete and steel ballpark when it opened in 1909. He also noted that everything in the big leagues was bigger and better. The hotels, the travel, even the uniforms and equipment were better than they were in the minors. He went on to say that once you had a taste of life in the big leagues, you never wanted to play anywhere else. Phil didn't do so well in that start, giving up 6 runs and 7 hits over 3 innings, walking 3 along with 2 wild pitches. Phil said he was so wound up with tension that he never could get loose that day. He got one more start against the Red Sox on the final weekend of the season and even though he lost 4-1, he felt a lot more comfortable and relaxed as compared to his first start. The A's pitching coach, Earle Brucker told him he had figured out what needed to be corrected and when Phil asked what was wrong Brucker said: "No, I don't want you thinking about it all winter. Go home and relax. I know what we have to do."

As a member of the Philadelphia A's

1941-BASEBALL'S MOST LEGENDARY SEASON

This is a season that may never be equalled. It was also a year that a couple of baseball legends came to the forefront. The Yankees' Joe DiMaggio, also known as the "Yankee Clipper" or "Joltin' Joe", dominated American League pitching for 56 consecutive games with his amazing hitting streak. Then there was Ted Williams, who Phil called the greatest hitter he had ever seen. "Teddy Ballgame" or the "Splendid Splinter" who went 6 for 8 in a double header on the final day of the season to end up hitting .406 even though the Red Sox slugger could have sat out and would have still have hit .400. Both of those records still stand today and baseball purists maintain that both records will never be equalled again.

For Phil, it was time to prove to Connie Mack that he truly belonged in the majors. His career was on the line, and Phil ended up in the middle of these iconic athletes' accomplishments. The other lingering matter was front and centre was the possibility of having to go to war. The Germans were creating havoc in Eastern Europe and North Africa and Phil knew there was a distinct possibility that he could be called to service. Pitching coach Earle Brucker started working with Phil on his delivery in spring training, noting that he wasn't following through properly, thus putting him off balance and contributing to his wildness. By the time the season got going, Phil felt a lot more comfortable



As the year rolled along, so did DiMaggio's hitting streak. It was the talk of the sports world on a daily basis. Phil actually started in game 46 of the streak; however the Yankee centre fielder doused any thoughts of a Canadian boy putting an end to the streak by slamming out a home run in his first at bat.

Williams in the meantime continued his incredible pace and actually was hitting .401 going into the final series of the year versus the A's. Red Sox manager Joe Cronin offered Ted the weekend off thus ensuring his .400 average but he refused saying : "If I'm going to be a four hundred hitter, I'm going to earn it all of the way.", which he did like only Ted Williams could.

Phil ended up with a 10-15 record that year, not great in his mind but good enough to stick with the A's. His control remained an issue allowing 118 walks in 204 innings, averaging 5.2 walks per 9 innings along with 75 strikeouts. He did though throw 14 complete games and finished with a respectable E.R.A. of a 3.57 in 27 starts and 3 relief appearances. Phil had earned his keep and solidified his spot with the A's.

1942-OFF TO WAR

This was a season that Phil rose to the top and plummeted to the bottom. It was what he always thought his best ever. He won 17 games for a team that lost 9 more games than the previous year's last place version of the A's. The Philadelphia press were calling him 'Connie's Crack Canadian Curver' or the 'Fiery Frenchman'. He had become a National Hero in Canada, and was especially recognized for his accomplishments in Toronto. He had risen to be the ace of the pitching staff for Philadelphia.

Pearl Harbour had been bombed by the Japanese on December 7, 1941. There was an uncertainty as to whether there would even be baseball with a World War going on. Baseball's Commissioner Kennesaw Mountain Landis contacted then President Franklin Delano Roosevelt as to about the status of professional baseball and said they would do whatever the government thought best, which included shutting down operations for the duration of the war. Roosevelt responded to Landis on January 16, 1942 in writing which was later dubbed 'the Green Light Letter' stating that he felt that "it would be best for the country to keep baseball going." However Phil noted that baseball wasn't the same as almost 60% of pre-war big leaguers were enlisted in the armed services.

Phil had just finished recording his 8th win of the season when he received the dreaded telegram that he had long-feared finally arrived. He was to report for immediate duty in the Canadian Army. He had trouble understanding why they wanted him right away. Luckily for him, the team was on its way to Washington for a series with the Senators. He took the opportunity to visit the Canadian Embassy to plead his case as he contested the 'immediate' portion of his orders, on the grounds that he was supporting his family back home financially. His appeal was initially denied but after a lot of discussion and negotiation, the embassy official finally agreed to postpone the order until the end of September.

Phil had a tough time for the remainder of the season trying not to think about what the future held for him, however he managed to finish the season with a record of 17-14 and had become one of the best pitchers in baseball. One thing he really had difficulty with though was that Connie Mack never said a word to him before he left for combat. I know for a fact that he was forever bitter towards Mack for his lack of sensitivity that he displayed.

As a member of the RCAF

Phil joined the Armed Forces at the same day as Roy Conacher, a star forward with the Boston Bruins N.H.L. hockey club amidst a bunch of publicity around these two high-profile athletes entering the armed forces. The process of joining the armed forces was that you were automatically in the Army on enlistment unless you applied for and were granted a transfer to the Air Force or the Navy. Even though Phil chose the Air Force, he was offered a position as a fitness instructor and could have stayed in Canada playing ball for Air Force squads, without ever leaving the country, but turned it down. He didn't want people to think the big league ball player had taken the easy way out. Phil chose the Air Force in hopes of becoming a pilot. In doing so, it left him vulnerable to being sent anywhere as well as being given their choice of your duty.

The process began quickly and he was soon transferred to a base in Souris, Manitoba where he was made a gunner. When he asked why a gunner, he was told it was because of his keen eyesight and depth perception plus the fact he was a little old to be starting out as a pilot. He was soon transferred to Halifax for further training in July of 1943. Before he left, he received his commission as a pilot officer. With that, he stopped in Toronto and went to a tailor's shop on Younge Street and put in a rush order for 2 new officer's uniforms. On return to his hotel, he bumped into a fellow gunner by the name of Ken Patience who he had met in Souris. He was sitting having a coffee with a stunning brunette, who turned out to be Ken's sister Irene. Impressed as he was, he asked her if they could meet for coffee the next day, and ended up spending the rest of his leave with her. He even overstayed his leave by a couple of days and ended up receiving a reprimand on his arrival in Halifax. Phil and Irene had agreed to write each other in hopes of developing something more permanent in the future. He soon got word he was to be posted in England for further training and eventual combat duty. Soon he found himself on the Queen Mary of the Cunard White-Star Lines, which had been converted to transport several thousand soldiers and airmen to Bournemouth England to await assignments to training units.



Phil quickly got a taste of what war was about. While walking the streets of Bournemouth, he saw a German Me-103 come out of the clouds, which he recognized from his training, and it swept out of the sky and began strafing the street a couple of blocks ahead of him. Pedestrians scrambled for cover and he

realized this was for real. He luckily ducked into a doorway as bullets hit the sidewalk right where he had been walking.

In December of 1943, Phil was assigned to his permanent air crew. It was made up of Captain Wynn Morgan from Winnipeg, Scotty Moffat from Toronto was the midship bubble gunner, George Gill was the navigator who also hailed from Hogtown, the wireless operator Courtney Stewart from North Bay, flight engineer Bob Young, who was on loan from the RAF, and Jacques Clerc, a Swiss-born university professor was the bombardier, and of course Phil. They began training on how to actually fly the plane they were going to use, which was a Handley Page Halifax bomber, rather large and slow box-like craft that has been referred to by some in later years as 'a dangerous, dangerous airplane'. It was however a key piece of the Air Force that flew over 70,000 missions, 40,000 by Canadians. Their first mission in January of 1944 was a short jaunt over France to drop leaflets, a common drill for new crews. It was deemed a relatively safe assignment however they did witness some short bursts of flac come at them from German batteries. They were deemed ready to fly real live missions versus the enemy by May and were assigned to Squadron 433 known as the 'Porcupine Squadron' based just northwest of the city of York. They were now under the command of the RCAF, completely separate from the RAF. Their earlier missions were described as 'softening up' strikes on French targets for the invasion of the continent that everybody knew was coming soon. They were not informed that the invasion of Normandy was on; however they knew something was up when on June 5 1944, Bomber command put every plane that was available into the air to hit targets in northern France. Phil stated in his book that he looked down from his turret position while over the English Channel and saw the invasion taking shape. He stated: "I don't think anyone has ever seen a more awesome sight. There were so many transports, destroyers, battleships, barges, corvettes and other ships that you almost couldn't see the water between them. I called out through my headset to the other guys to have a look at history in the making."

The missions carried on following the Normandy invasion. On June 10 it was the Versailles-Matelots railway junction. On June 12, during an attack on Arras, 6 out of 89 planes were shot down by the Germans. Phil had made a notation in his log book that the Germans were now employing powerful searchlights to detect enemy aircraft, which made their sorties even more dangerous than they had been. Then there was Sautrecourt on June 16, where the launch sites of the infamous secret weapon V-1 better known as 'buzz bombs' were located. On July 18 during the dawn raid on Caen, they were hit and Phil said he could hear the shrapnel thudding into their aircraft, and then felt the plane shudder, yet somehow they managed to make it back across the Channel. Once back at the base they counted more than 30 shrapnel holes and a large gash on the wing that had just missed the fuel tank. That was the shudder he felt. Phil's nerves were pretty much shattered by then. Then there was the bombing of a synthetic oil plant in Wesseling, and submarine pens in Boulogne, then Hamburg, then after that the Caen-Falaise area. The crew had now completed 25 missions. The benchmark was 30 completed missions, which would earn them a ticket home. They avoided talking about the possibility of reaching their goal much like ballplayers avoid talking about a no-hitter in progress for fear of jinxing their pitcher. Phil tried not to think about it, but he said that was impossible.



A Handley Page Halifax Bomber similar to the one Phil was a tail gunner on

MISSION 26-A DREADFUL NUMBER

August 16, 1944. Their task on this sortie was to drop mines at the mouth of Kiel Harbour, as it was an important shipping route in Northern Germany near the Danish Border. The plan was to carry out their mission while a group of over 200 planes pounded the city at the same time. The crew had discussed this during their preparations and deemed it as a fairly routine outing. Apparently they were still 50 miles from their target when they were struck. Phil noted he saw no sign of the enemy though he did catch sight of flashes of tracer fire in the darkness. Then he heard a clang, felt the plane lurch and turned to see the starboard engine on fire. The next thing he heard was the voice of Captain Wynn Morgan: "Bail out" he ordered over the intercom, which then went dead. All Phil could think of was; "Keep this crate together for a few seconds more and give me a chance to get out of here." Phil figured they were 17,000 feet up and going about 180-90 miles per hour. He managed to don his parachute and kicked the turret door open. He immediately lost his hat and boots when he jumped and the wind forced his arm holding on to the ring for his chute away from his body, thus instantly opening his chute. Phil had no idea whether he was over land or water until he splashed into the Baltic Sea. He immediately managed to wrestle the harness of his parachute of his shoulders and rid himself of his electrical pants as he knew he may have a long swim ahead of him. He also had to blow up ½ of his Mae West, which was supposed to have inflated itself automatically, thus forcing him to rest to catch his wind. Out of the darkness Phil heard a voice calling for help. It was that of navigator George Gill. "Over here" Phil yelled back. "It's me Phil. Are you alright?" Phil knew George couldn't swim, so he told him to relax, and let the life jacket do the work and to keep his head back to avoid swallowing the salt water. In an article written by George's son telling of George's ordeal in the war that is posted on the internet, George credits Phil with

saving his life by keeping him calm. They tried swimming, but made little progress if any because of the strong current. Phil figured they were in the water 2 to 3 hours and were now numb from the cold. There certainly wasn't any sign of the rest of the crew. They were cold and exhausted and were just about ready to give up when they heard the drone of a motor boat. Phil began blowing his whistle attached to his life jacket and saw the boat coming towards him. He feared that it may be a German patrol boat, but continued tooting away regardless. They picked up George first and then came and got him. It turned out to be a Danish trawler with 2 fishermen. They wrapped them in blankets and gave them cigarettes. One of them patted Phil on the shoulder and smiled and said: "We are friends." These men, as Phil found out after the war, were members of the Danish Underground, and they said they had spotted their burning plane and had gone out to look for survivors. They also said that even though they were only ½ mile from shore when they picked them up, they never would have made it due to the strong currents. When they arrived at the pier in the town of Assens, they were met by 2 burly German soldiers. They were taken to hospital and examined by a doctor and from there taken to a jail and the next days were taken by train to a Luftwaffe interrogation centre in Oberursel, a town close to Frankfurt Germany where they were separated. George was sent to Stalag Luft 1 near Barth Germany.

That was the last Phil would see of George until 10 years after the war was over. Phil was housed in a cell for about 2 weeks which was about 4 feet wide with a solitary cot with a wafer-thin flea-infested mattress. Needless to say, sleeping was a difficult task. His diet consisted of 2 slices of dark bread in the morning and evening with bowl of tasteless soup for lunch. Phil said he lost 20 pounds during his stay and gained countless red welts from the flea bites. By the end of his stay he developed infections on his feet from the tight boots that were supplied to him by the Germans and also he had boils crop out on his face.

By mid-September, confirmation was received at home that he was now a resident of Stalag Luft III, one of the largest prison camps in Germany. The camp was located near Sagan, a small town that is now in Poland. It housed 10,300 allied airmen, and only 6 months before Phil's arrival it was the scene of the famous 'Great Escape.' There was another Penetanguishene native who was a resident at this camp, a former noted lawyer and District Attorney as well as having become Mayor of Penetanguishene in 1957. A.B. Thompson was a flier with the RAF which he joined in 1937, and during an early mission they developed engine trouble and had to bail out of their craft also. He was captured and became the 1st Canadian POW of WWII. Alf was actually a participant in the Great Escape, though he was soon captured after 2 days. It should be noted that 50 of the 76 escapees were shot to death by the Germans.

It is unclear if they got to meet each other at Stalag Luft III, though it is thought that those captured after the escape were moved to another camp.

The prisoners in the camp had managed to construct a short-wave radio manufactured with parts obtained from the guards smuggled them into the camp in exchange for various Red Cross supplies such as cigarettes and chocolate. The captured could keep track of how the war was progressing and would actually post

written progress in the barracks for everyone to read. And the news began to get encouraging. There were reports the Allied Forces were making advances as well as the Russians were within 150 miles of their compound. Contact to the outside was minimal as Phil had received only one letter from Irene; however the content was what he wanted to hear. She told him she would be there waiting for him, which helped lift his spirits enormously. They could now hear the Russian guns in the east, which grew louder each and every day. The men wished and hoped that any day they expected the Russians to break through and set them free. Then without warning the prisoners were told to be ready to evacuate the camp in a ½ an hour and the infamous 'Death March' was in motion. It was the end of January and terribly cold. Men were collapsing as they were in no condition physically to endure the hardships of winter. They would march up to 30 miles in a day. And this continued into April. They were being kept from the allies as the Germans knew these men would be liberated and the potential of defeat was looming. Phil had developed a severe case of dysentery and was now 30 pounds below his normal weight. He was also very weak. Then on May 2, they got word that the Germans were surrendering. Their guards that had accompanied them during the march were gone. Then some British soldiers emerged from the forests and they knew they were going to make it.

They were returned to Bournemouth and that is when Phil learned that the remainder of his crew had all drowned after they bailed out. He had tremendous difficulty with the terrible news. Phil's nerves were already shot at this time and this just compounded things. He felt so lucky to be alive yet couldn't stop himself from lamenting the loss of his fellow crew members that he had grown so close to.

COMING HOME

Irene met Phil at Union Station in Toronto as she had promised. But Phil had difficulty adjusting to civilian life as he somewhat was expecting to happen. The noises, the hustle-bustle, the people moving about, the confusion, all made him tense and jumpy. He was being awakened by nightmares just about every night, waking up in a cold sweat. Phil and Irene went to Penetanguishene for a while to be with family and friends. Soon telegrams started arriving from Connie Mack urging him to rejoin the club. He ignored them until Mack personally telephoned him with the same message stating being with his team mates would do him some good. He finally agreed even though Irene begged him not to go. She could see the difficult time Phil was having in adjusting to life in general

Pitching Coach Earle Brucker could see that Phil was badly out of shape. Phil's arms and legs were weak and he was winded after only a couple of minutes of soft toss. Brucker told him it would be best to go slowly and build himself back up at an easy pace. His nerves continued to bother him. His hands trembled and he was constantly on edge. Phil said his biggest struggle was overcoming the fear that something terrible was going to happen. There were times when something would 'just grab at my nerves.' Phil said "I just felt like I wanted to grab a brick and throw it through a window."

In early August, Mack dropped his own bombshell. He told Phil they were going to have a night in his honour and he wanted Phil to start. His team mates thought it was way too soon, especially Phil. He figured he didn't have much choice in the matter and he also figured Mack was just trying to get a good night at the box office. When introducing Phil, the PA announcer went through his service and ball career. Phil could only think of his crew mates. "There I was receiving applause from 19,000 fans when I could just have easily died that night. It just didn't make a whole lot of sense." Phil went 5 innings of 2 hit ball that night before leaving with an injured leg. He felt good that his stuff was still there which left him encouraged. He was done for the year now, at least on the ball field. Off the field he somehow managed to screw up enough courage propose to Irene and she happily accepted right away. They were married November 16 in St. John's chapel in St. Michael's cathedral and split the winter between Toronto and Penetanguishene so Phil could build up his legs cross country skiing. When Irene told Phil she was expecting, Phil said he added a mile to his route.

Phil got a late start to his first full year after the war though he became embroiled in a contract squabble with the Old Man which he finally came out on the winning side of. He didn't get his 1st win of the season until June 7 and was only 4-7 at the All-Star break. Irene used the break to give birth to their first child Carol. His season was okay by his standards finishing with a record of 13-16 and an E.R.A. of 3.49. The big thing was that his arm felt good and his body was recovering from the ordeal of the war.

Phil called the season of 1947 his Magical Year. He beat the Yankees 6-1 on opening day in New York in front of over 39,000 fans. Phil said there wasn't a moment that he didn't feel like he was in full control of that game. Every pitch was working. The season was also monumental in another manner. The Los Angeles Dodgers had a new second baseman by the name of Jackie Robinson. He caused a stir because of the colour of his skin. A furor developed with some players saying they would refuse to play against him. National League President Ford Frick had to intervene and threatened players with lifetime suspensions if they made that choice. Robinson broke the colour barrier in the National League and Larry Doby followed suit with the Cleveland Indians in the American League that season. Phil was enjoying a successful season, collecting his 13th victory on August 3rd. One of the highlights for Phil came on August 26 in Cleveland. Phil had a perfect game going and had retired the first 2 hitters. With getting hitter Ken Keltner to a full count, Phil threw what he thought was strike 3, and had actually taken a couple of steps toward the dugout when he realized umpire Bill McKinley called ball four. Catcher Buddy Rosar and Phil couldn't believe it and argued vehemently to no avail. They were both fined by the league for their outbursts and Phil lost his no-hitter in the 9th. Phil ended up driving in the winning run in the 12th inning to earn the victory at least. The A's finished the season over .500 and ended up in 5th place. It was a successful season in their books, after being perennial cellar-dwellers for so long. Phil ended up with a record of 19-9 and was amongst the league leaders in most pitching categories. One other highlight for Phil was the day after winning his 19th game. It was Old-Timers Day at Yankee Stadium he got the opportunity to shake hands with an 80 year old Cy Young and it was the only time he got to see Babe Ruth. The Babe looked frail from

his losing battle with throat cancer and was difficult to understand him speaking into the microphone in a weak and raspy voice.

The season of 1948 proved to be more than a challenge for Phil. He did get a raise from Mr. Mack and also got the season opener for the 3rd and last time in his career and came out a winner in extra innings. In the 2nd game, they had a young right-hander starting by the name of Lou Brissie. He was posted in Italy in the war and had his lower leg almost blown off by an enemy shell. He begged the doctors not to amputate and after 23 operations and 40 blood transfusions, he was in the big leagues wearing a plastic shin guard protecting the scar tissue and exposed nerves above his ankle. In the 6th inning he took a line drive off the bat of Ted Williams just below the knee and just above the shin guard. 'Damn it Williams, pull the ball' he yelled while lying on the ground. Yet he managed to get on his feet and finished the game, winning 4-2. Phil had a scary moment working out with catcher Buddy Rosen. During a wind-up he suddenly felt dizzy and kind of numb, and then the ball felt like a dead weight in his hand. His arm and the rest of his body seemed drained of all of his strength, and he could barely throw 20 feet. He told Rosen to tell Mr. Mack he was going home. He still felt weak and his nerves were on edge. He found himself chain-smoking and was becoming increasingly irritable. The doctors thought he had a virus or that the dysentery had returned. He returned to the club and things seemed alright, though he still felt weak. The good news was that his arm felt fine. The sad news was that Babe Ruth died at the age of 53. 100,000 passed by his casket as he lay in state in the lobby of Yankee Stadium. Arthur Daley wrote in the New York Times after the service: "It rained that day. Even the skies wept for the Babe. Phil ended the season with a disappointing 9 victories. He decided to get checked out at Sunnybrook hospital in Toronto. The doctors discovered that he had controlled tension but the problem was that he couldn't control it. And when that occurred it played tricks on his body affecting the nerves in his head, stomach, eyes-all over. He even met with psychiatrists who concluded he was suffering hold-over effects from the war, a scene they had seen with countless former servicemen. He already started to feel better knowing what the problem was. I believe they call it Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder today.

In his 1st start of the '49 season he went 8 solid innings, and then couldn't find the plate, walking 3 hitters in a row. Mr. Mack pulled him and for the 1st time in his career he heard the boos from the Philly fans. Alarmingly the next day when he woke he felt a shooting pain in his arm and he couldn't raise his arm above his shoulder. He tried to pitch but couldn't do it. The doctors ordered rest. The A's weren't doing that well and Phil suddenly turned into A whipping boy. Fans continued to heckle him and hurl insulting comments at him. The fan reaction bothered Phil and he said he never would have been able to cope had it not been for Irene offering her support and encouragement. Phil was sold to Buffalo on the last day of spring training to the Buffalo Bisons of the International League, who released him after a short while. He had a brief tryout with Boston that didn't work out. Then he tried Toronto and was released without pitching a game. He even played for Guelph and Waterloo of the Intercounty League, not even pitching anymore.

Phil was inducted into the Canadian Sports Hall of Fame in 1976, the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame in 1983 and the Penetanguishene Sports Hall of Fame in 1987. Phil died at the age of 83 on January 10, 1997.

Phil Marchildon should be remembered as a Canadian War Hero that fought for our freedom and our country. He was self-admittedly fortunate to be able to return from the throes of war, unlike the many who did not and who gave the ultimate sacrifice for freedom and Canada.

Lest We Forget.

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