

The Adventures of Ken Winfield - United Nations Spymaster

Ewelme News, Oct-Nov 2025

Ken was born in 1932 the son of Edgar and Rita Winfield of Winmill Farm. He attended Ewelme School and Wallingford Grammar where, as an Air Cadet, he became interested in gliding and obtained his pilot's licence at age 16! Ken's younger brother Cyril recently sent us a 1990 Canadian newspaper article from Woodstock, New Brunswick, recording his older brother's adventures.



As Ewelme could not contain Ken's restless spirit he left the grammar school early. In 1948 Fred Greenway and the Almshouse nurse Sister Heaney sponsored him to go to Canada to work on a farm owned by friends of Sister Heaney. At age 18 he signed up as a 2nd cook on a Scottish tramp steamer the 'Caledonian Monarch' sailing around North America. When they reached Vancouver, the Korean War had broken out (25th June 1950 involving 16 UN countries). Ken disembarked to join the Canadian Army as a glider pilot, a role that firstly involved parachute training in Manitoba before being assigned to the 1st battalion Royal Canadian Regiment. Men destined for the combat zone were first given a short home leave enabling Ken to return to Ewelme! RAF Abingdon, where he had obtained his pilot's licence, had become a parachute school, and the Canadian military attaché in London decided he was better utilised in an instructor's role at the Abingdon Parachute School, as at the time the Canadian and British parachutes differed. (Ken helped train Egyptian King Farouk's 12-man bodyguards. As encouragement he jumped first – the hesitant were pushed!)

Eventually Ken rejoined the Royal Canadian Regiment fighting in Korea as a front-line infantryman, but after 6 months he was injured by shrapnel. After recovering, he was selected for intelligence work at the UN HQ in Central Korea to be trained by the US Marines. He became knowledgeable in air photo interpretation, flying as an observer in a British Tiger Moth on reconnaissance sorties behind the North Korean/Communist Chinese lines to spot hills hiding enemy underground tunnels. Although only a 'lowly' Corporal, he had authority to order a squadron of allied planes to bomb his chosen target, even designating the type of weapon!

Ken's intelligence mission became more dangerous. He was assigned to help prepare native Chinese (from Taiwan) and North Koreans (recruited as double agents) as civilian spies, their disguise so thorough that even their underwear was authentic! Ken then escorted them from remote camps, often through minefields, to a safe entry point over enemy lines to spy on troop movements. He then

returned to meet them at a pre-arranged spot, days or sometimes weeks later, and report their findings. Ken was the only soldier assigned to that escort duty which he fulfilled for almost 2 years, but on one of his routine outings he was betrayed by a double agent, ambushed by Chinese soldiers and shot in both legs. Ken came round in a Communist Chinese field hospital undergoing surgery with no anaesthetic, his arms and legs strapped down and a bamboo pole shoved across his mouth. Although deliberately kept alive for the purpose his captors did not interrogate him, and after 6 months of great hardship as a POW he was released under the prisoner exchange Armistice Agreement in July 1953. Back in Ottawa Ken refused the request to stay in the army and join the Canadian Intelligence Corp or the Intelligence Reserve as he 'felt burnt out by the war'. He received a medal for his Korean War service - 25 years later!

His perilous adventures over, Ken attended McGill University Agricultural College in Montreal and eventually established a successful agricultural chemicals business on Canada's eastern seaboard, marrying twice and raising a family. He died in Woodstock in 1999.

Carol Sawbridge – Ewelme History Archive