

Gander's First Mayor

(by Robert G Pelley, 2202-07-04)

bobsganderhistory.com

Before going on with this story, thanks must be given to Mr Darrell Hillier, MA (history), former resident of Gander and now living in St John's. He was the person who spotted this obscure item while doing an online archive search. He is by the way the expert of all things Ferry Command and has written an excellent book about it. (*North Atlantic Crossroads: The Royal Air Force Ferry Command Gander Unit, 1940–1946*, printed 04 July 2021, available notably on Amazon.)

Mr. Tom Cleary, at 131 Elizabeth Drive, had the first house in the new town in 1952. But Gander didn't become a proper town until 1959. During that period Gander was organised as a "Local Improvement District". In 1959 a first town council was created and a mayor took over the reins of the town. The arrival of Jack Robertson as mayor should have been the end of the story.

But not quite! Another chap figured he was the first mayor of Gander.

His first name was Michael. Or maybe it wasn't. His full name was Michael Patrick Ryan Efferson. Sometimes not.

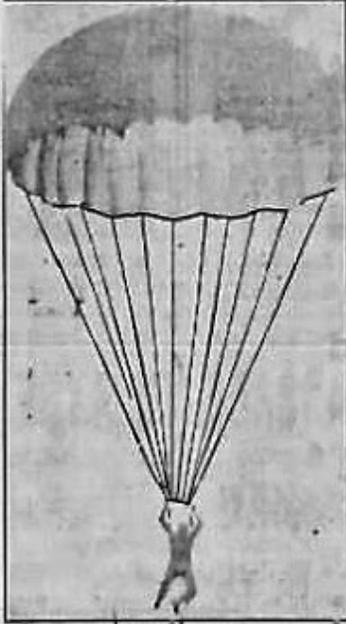
The first mention we have of Michael (or perhaps Micky) dates from 12 November 1927, in the "The News Journal" of Wilmington, Delaware, USA. This article refers at an earlier time when Mickey, as a parachutist, went up a biplane to 24000 feet. He admitted to being scared to death but, shamed by the pilot, decided to do it. He suffered terribly on the way down, a 42-minute free-fall that left him 56 miles from the intended drop zone.

He also recalled a previous jump from a plane over the Potomac River near Washington when the plane suddenly broke into flames. From the back seat, he held the plane steady so the pilot could jump out first, lined the plane so it would fall into the river and then jumped himself.

In his last jump of 1927, something went terribly wrong. His arm got caught in the wires of the plane's tail. The pilot lost control of the plane, constantly descending.

At 300 feet, Mickey released his parachute which pulled him free – and broke his arm.

Parachute Jump
THANKSGIVING
Del-Mar-Va Airport
"Weather Permitting"



Mickey Efferson
Will make a live jump dropping 1500 feet
before **OPENING PARACHUTE**
(Added Attraction)
Mickey will hang by his toes from the landing gear while the plane flies over the field.

The fine print at the bottom of the ad is enlarged below:

Mickey will hang by his toes from the landing gear while the plane flies over the field.

In between parachute jumps, his standard amusement was wing-walking and transferring from one plane to another in mid-air.

He was described in one newspaper as a former friend of Charles Lindberg (though the adjective “former” was not explained). His bio below was extracted from the Delmar Historical and Art Society (Delmar, Delaware).

He was sometimes called “Bat” Efferson. In the ads of the Ivan R Gates Flying Circus with whom he performed since 1919, he was called El Diavalo (the Devil). Ivan Gates would prepare advance posters for each town they would be visiting. The posters would name the star stunt man and in a period of a year several of them died performing, which meant the posters had to be reprinted with a loss of money. Gates decide whoever the stuntman might be, he would be called El Diavolo and that way, he would not have to reprint posters if they died on him.

Efferson worked for the Tampa Tribune in the 1930s under the name Mike Ryan. But in 1942 he joined the RAF Ferry Command. His official assignment card shows him to be a junior dispatcher in Dorval for part of March and April of 1942. From 21 May to 21 November, he is listed as a junior dispatcher in Gander.

As of 24 November 1942, he was on leave without pay. Not having reported back for duty at the appropriate time, on 03 May 1943, he was released from Ferry Command. But lo and behold, on 08 May, he was back in Gander as a dispatcher (and not as a junior this time). In August he joined the USAAF.

D JAN. | FEB. | MAR. | APRIL | MAY | JUNE | JULY | AUG. | SEPT. | OCT. | NOV. | DEC.

U. I. C. #409 U. I. REG. CERTIFICATE [REDACTED]

DATE OF BIRTH [REDACTED]

NAME IN FULL **EFFERSON, Michael**

No. [REDACTED] PLACE OF BIRTH [REDACTED] MARITAL STATUS [REDACTED]

R. A. F. 53 1M-10-41 NATIONALITY [REDACTED] FILE No. **E-47**

EFFECTIVE			OCCUPATION	DEPARTMENT	PLACE	RATE	FORM SUBMITTED		APPROVED		REMARKS
DAY	MONTH	YEAR									
20	Mar.	42	Jr. Despatcher	Field Operations	Dorval	\$200. Mo.	23 Mar.	14 Apr.			✓
7	April	42	Released a/c	sickness.	(Lond)		13 April	14 Apr.			✓
17	April	42	Jr. Despatcher	Field Operations	Dorval	\$200. Mo.	20 April	23 Apr.			✓ 1-5
21	May	42	" "	" "	Gander	\$200. & \$30. LA	8/June	15 June			✓
21	Nov	42	" "	Field Ops.	Dorval	\$200.	1 Dec.	3 Dec.			✓
24	Nov	42	l.o.a. without pay				1 Dec.	2 Dec.			✓
3	Mar	43	Released - overstaying leave.				5 March	5 March			✓
8	May	43	Dispatcher	Field Ops	Gander	\$200. \$30. LA	17 May	18 May			✓
22 Sept 43			Resigned to join U.S. Army 22 Sept 43								
19 Aug 43			Air Forces.								

It was in 1942 that Efferson named himself Mayor of Gander. He did such a good job putting on his show that he got coverage in the US newspapers, notably the Wilmington "News Journal" of 25 July 1942. The headline read:

Mickey Efferson 'Takes Over' Newfoundland Ferry Airdrome



Former Wilmington Aviator and Parachute Jumper Is One-Man Chamber of Commerce; Gives The Boys the 'Thumbs Up' Salute

(EDITOR'S NOTE: In the 1930s, Mickey Efferson, native of Texas, was Wilmington's No. 1 aviator and daredevil parachute jumper. In 1932, he was injured in a 100 foot fall—an accident which peeved him not because his pelvis was fractured but rather because it was such a picayune drop. Again, in 1935, while he was flying upside-down, his safety belt broke and he fell hitting the tail of his ship, breaking an arm, his back, hip, and right leg. Mickey is one of the few old-time barnstormers who lived to retail his experiences. And here he is now—"Mayor" of Newfoundland Airdrome. Don Whitehead, Wide World correspondent, tells about him in the last of a series of articles, "High Road to Britain."

The story was written by Don Whitehead, a very well-known American combat reporter who did a number of articles on Ferry Command in Gander, including going over and back on ferry flights. He goes on to say in part:

"AN AIR BASE SOMEWHERE IN NEWFOUNDLAND, July 25, (Wide World). Newfoundland never had seen anyone quite like Michael Patrick Ryan Efferson, a self-appointed ambassador of good will for the United States.

He sort of dropped in unannounced on this remote outpost on the transatlantic ferry route, looked the situation over and proclaimed himself the mayor and president of the Chamber of Commerce, of which he is the only member."

Whitehead went on to say:

Officially, the red-faced, blue-eyed aviator with a battered canvas hat over his thinning hair, holds an important position in the Royal Air Force Ferry Command.

A plane seldom leaves the field for the long hop to England that he doesn't see it off and give the boys a "thumbs up."

"And I ain't lost a ship yet that I've given the old thumb," Mickey boasts.

Speech of Welcome

He greets all visitors with a speech of welcome and presents them with the key to the city—which he promptly takes away from them to be autographed. The names of Molotov, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr., Col. Bill Donovan, Lord and Lady Halifax and others are thick on his key.

The Newfoundlanders still can't figure out the shrewd, good-natured Mickey. They see him hobnob with cooks, laborers, truck drivers and the lowliest of the workmen. Five minutes later he'll be chatting with a visiting ambassador or an English lord.

Efferson came here only a few weeks ago, but already he knows most of the people by their first names. If there ever is an election, Mickey could win hands down.

"These are right nice folks up here," Mickey says, rattling a pair of battered dice. "They don't know much about crap shooting but they sho' are eager to learn. And I'm just the man, as mayor of this fair city, to teach my constituents this old American pastime."

The Newfoundlanders gather around in droves to listen to Mickey talk to the dice and they see an old master in action—for the mayor has been known to make five passes in a row.

Biggest Asset

Mickey is one of the Ferry Command's biggest assets at this remote spot, for he never loses his good humor.

Michael Micky Bat El Diavalo Patrick Ryan Efferson fought in the First World War and lost his pilot's license for flying under the Golden Gate and Bay Bridges of San Francisco. He got married once in a 6-seat airplane over Wilmington, in 1930. He remarried in 1949 but died a few weeks later.

Efferson says he was born in Brady, Texas. His marriage certificate of 1930 says he was born in Syracuse, New York. His burial site is unknown.

One can wonder where he started life and where it ended. One might also wonder what would have happened if this devil-may-care fellow, afraid of nothing, was in Gander when a real mayor was chosen in 1959!