

[Stevens, Brayton Sykes]

LT. BRAYTON SYKES STEVENS IS KILLED

Auto Left Road Near Here and Strikes Tree

Young Bomber Pilot Was On Way to Potsdam
During Tuesday Evening's Peace Celebration

Canton's Tuesday evening celebration of the Japanese surrender was not without its tragic side, for on that evening at shortly after eleven one of Canton's best-known young men, Lieutenant Brayton Sykes met his death in an automobile accident near the Pierce farm on the Potsdam road. Brayton was spending a furlough here after having served overseas as the co-pilot of a B-29 bomber. The visit here had meant much to his mother, Mrs. Bing S. Stevens, who has been critically ill with heart trouble for several weeks.

Brayton had been downtown during the evening's celebration and taking a young Canadian soldier, Pvt. Thomas R. Spearing with him he started to drive to Potsdam. At a point near the Pierce place the sedan left the road, hurdled a culvert and struck a large maple tree.

When removed from the wreck Brayton was at first not believed to be in a critical condition, though he was unconscious, but there were no serious outward injuries to be seen. He was taken to the Potsdam hospital. Those at the Stevens' home were notified. In half an hour after entering the hospital the young officer died of hemorrhages resulting from a skull fracture. Other serious injuries and fractures were disclosed after he had reached the hospital.

The funeral services were Saturday afternoon from the Universalist Church with Dr. J. M. Atwood conducting the church service. The body was under escort of a color guard from the John C. Peggs Post, American Legion, and the bearers were veterans of the present war: Lt. Keith Mayhew, Lt. Ernest Veio, Lt. Everett Dona, Sgt. Ray Conclin, Sgt. Raymond Jubinville and Sgt. Rocci Segar. A military escort from the Pine Camp garrison accompanied the body to Fairview Cemetery where a military burial was held, Adjutant Hugh Williams of Peggs Post, delivering the ritual service and the military escort firing the salute.

This young officer was the son of Mrs. Lena Bray Stevens and the late Bing Sykes Stevens. As his name indicates, he came of two well-known Canton families, the Sykes family in particular dating well back into the early Canton days. On his father's side Lt. Stevens' ancestry dates back several generations to Heber Sykes, the first of that name to settle hereabouts. Through the Sykes connection came the relationship, as a cousin, with the late Richard Eddy Sykes, president of St. Lawrence University.

Lt. Stevens' paternal grandmother was Mary Sykes, wife of Elbert E. Stevens of this village. Her sister, Ella, was the wife of Gaylon G. Griswold, and thus the kinship with that Canton family. It was Elbert and Mary Stevens who established the Stevens Store in this community, a business so successfully continued by their son, Bing S. Stevens. The store has been continued by its present owner, Ferris Caldwell.

Brayton Stevens was born in Worcester, Mass. May 22, 1923, Worcester being his mother's former home, and the place of residence of the grandmother, Dr. Bray.

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His entire life was spent here in Canton. His mother was for several years prior to her marriage head of the home economics department at the State School. His father was one of Canton's best known, most respected and likeable men, his death occurring several years ago from heart trouble.

After receiving his education in the Canton grammar and high schools, he entered St. Lawrence in the fall of 1941, thus continuing a family tradition dating back to the days when Richard Eddy Sykes attended the University. Following in the footsteps of his father he became a member of the Alphas during his freshman year. Not only had his father graduated from St. Lawrence, but so had his four cousins, the Griswolds, and in 1938 his sister, Aldine. Thus, then was a thoroughly St. Lawrence family devoted and loyal to the institution.

Like many of the other college boys of his days, in fact about all of them, he left college, in the spring of 1943, and entered the army where he passed the examinations and was accepted as an air corps trainee. On August 4, 1944 he completed his training and was commissioned a second lieutenant, and received his pilot's wings. He did so at Napier Army Air Field, Napier, Ala., where he had taken work in single engine plane operation. Last January Lt. Stevens went overseas to begin combat duty as a co-pilot on a B-29 which had its squadron base in England. When V-E day arrived he had already completed five missions. V-E Day found him with the other members of his bomb group at Copenhagen, Denmark, where he saw that liberated Danish capital celebrate its freedom from the German yoke. He served overseas as a co-pilot.

At the time he was ordered back to this country, efforts were already being made through the Red Cross to have him returned, due to his mother's critical sickness. Upon reaching this country he came at once to Canton. He was to have reported back for reassignment last Friday.

The young Canadian soldier who was accompanying him to Potsdam escaped from the accident with only a fractured leg and severe bodily bruises. This young man had served in Italy with the Royal Canadian Army medical corps. He had been spending several days in town while on leave.

Brayton's sister, Mrs. Bernauer Newton, and Lt. Newton, were advised by long distance of the accident and arrived here on Friday. They had to leave their baby son ill in the Lincoln, Neb. hospital on coming east. Lt. Newton was a member of the Canton High School faculty when he entered the service. He is stationed at Lincoln, Neb. at present.

The mother, the sister, and her small son are the immediate surviving members of the family.

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Transcribed on 18 May 2008 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY