

## Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame

# Honorary Poet

## John Gillespie Magee Jr.

(1922 – 1941)

Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame has declared John Gillespie Magee Jr. as our Honorary Poet. John was a 19-year old Spitfire pilot serving in the Royal Canadian Air Force when he wrote his famous sonnet, "High Flight," which has become one of the best known and best loved poems about aviation.

The eldest of four sons, John was born on June 9, 1922 in Shanghai, China, to his missionary parents, an American father and English mother. John attended Rugby School in England where he first distinguished himself as a poet. Later, continuing his education in the United States, he earned a scholarship to Yale University. However, in 1940 before the United States entered the Second World War, instead of attending university John enlisted in the Royal Canadian Air Force and trained as a pilot in Canada, graduating with the rank of Pilot Officer.

Posted to England where he qualified as a Spitfire fighter pilot, Magee wrote "High Flight" in August 1941. The poem was mailed to his parents, then printed in a Pittsburgh newspaper, and became widely known after publication in his father's Washington D.C. church bulletin. On December 11, 1941, John served with RCAF 412 Squadron and was killed in a mid-air collision in England on December 11, 1941.

John Gillespie Magee Jr. will be remembered as Honorary Poet in the displays and archives of Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame.

## High Flight

*Oh! I have slipped the surly bonds of Earth  
And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings;  
Sunward I've climbed, and joined the tumbling mirth  
Of sun-split clouds – and done a hundred things  
You have not dreamed of – wheeled and soared and swung  
High in the sunlit silence. Hov'ring there,  
I've chased the shouting wind along, and flung  
My eager craft through footless halls of air...*

*Up, up the long, delirious, burning blue  
I've topped the wind-swept heights with easy grace  
Where never lark, or even eagle flew –  
And while with silent, lifting mind I've trod  
The high untrespassed sanctity of space,  
Put out my hand, and touched the face of God.*

*John Gillespie Magee Jr.  
1941*

