

The Tribute

Fall 2021

Chairman's update

By John Argue, Chair AFMSA

Welcome to the fall edition of The Tribute Air Force Museum Society of Alberta (AFMSA) quarterly magazine. As the calendar flips into the fall season, we at AFMSA unfortunately find ourselves once again dealing with a closure of our facilities (to our volunteers) as a result of a COVID fourth wave. Hopefully, this spike in cases, hospitalizations and ICU numbers will be short in duration and we can target a reopening ASAP.

On a positive note, the summer months provided all of us with a respite from COVID and visiting with family & friends, or once again travelling was relatively unhindered. For AFMSA, we kicked off the summer season in mid-June by holding a deep clean of our Air Force Gallery and Cold War Exhibit (CWE). Removing the layers of dust was challenging enough, but the superb polishing of the aircraft made the exhibits gleam. Thank you to all our members and volunteers for contributing to this venture and setting us up for a welcomed full reopening at The Military Museums (TMM) that occurred on Canada Day. The return of our public was modest, but has been steady over these last three months and is an encouraging sign that we can/will eventually return to normal operations once this pandemic abates.

As you will read later in this article, the Cold War Expansion Team conducted a field trip in August to Edmonton and Cold Lake. This trip allowed us the opportunity to assess potential new aircraft for the expansion, meet with TMM's CO, 3rd CDSG Col McBride in Edmonton and our AFMA CO, LCol Philippe Gibeau of 1 AMS in Cold Lake. This fact finding tour was extremely valuable on numerous fronts, not only in the investigation of the aircraft we would like to acquire, but also to engage with 1 AMS experts on several electrical and mechanical repair aspects for the museums CF-18. Additionally, we began looking at the possibility of expanding our weapons inventory and the possibilities on how to utilize our new planned expansion facility for potential restoration purposes of these new acquisitions. To LCol Gibeau, I would like to thank you very much for the amazing hospitality of you and your very professional team, as well as, the coordination and support provided by Col Moar and 4 Wing.

As September rolled around, the AFMSA AGM was successfully conducted in the CWE and we hope that our members enjoyed the vast amount of information that was presented. The election of the board was held and going forward, we can enjoy the significant continuity & the expertise provided through the return of Bob Wade, Gord Todd, Michelle Gerwing, and Dave Lowery, to new two year terms. The remainder of the board not up for election have graciously offered to remain in their current positions.

However, Jim Powell, one of our founding father long serving members of AFMSA as the treasurer and active on the board of directors has stepped down. Both Jim and his wife Penny now have the opportunity to pursue other interests that will see them out of area more often in the coming months and years. Jim has been instrumental in guiding this organization for well



Jim Powell (right) receives his AFMSA Lifetime Membership Certificate from the AFMSA chair, John Argue.

Dave Lowery photo.

over a decade and handling the vast financial interactions that occur on an almost daily basis. To Jim, we extend our deepest thank you and congratulations for a job well done. Note, we can't just let Jim that easily off the hook. So, to keep Jim and his expertise

close to our organization we have nominated and elected him to an honorary board of directors position. This will allow Jim to be a part of the board when he is available, to contribute to any projects that he desires to participate in and for the board to continue to enjoy Jim's essential inputs. As many of you can well imagine, the AFMSA treasurers position carry's significant weight and responsibility. Fortunately, Bob Parkinson accepted this challenge and was elected to the board of directors and now assumes the treasurers chair. Given Bobs significant background in computers and IT we can appreciate that there may be tweaks to our systems in the coming years and we look forward to seeing his proposals as he becomes accustomed to how a non-profit organization operates. Bob, thank you for stepping up for this very important AFMSA position and good luck with the myriad of information during the handover.

In conclusion, the state of the union within AFMSA is strong, but as with all organizations challenges are present, not the least of which is the ongoing management aspects of COVID and the pandemic restrictions. Until we talk again and see each other at the museum, please remain safe and take care. *Sincerely, John*



Don Matthews (left) receives his AFMSA Lifetime Membership Certificate from the AFMSA chair, John Argue.
Dave Lowery photo.

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Mount Ptolemy DC-3 crash

Story and photos by Alison Mercer, AFMSA Curator

In the early hours of Saturday 19 January 1946, a voice crackled over the airfield radios in Cranbrook, BC. It was Flying Officer W.J. Woods, eleven thousand feet in the darkness above, reporting in from his Dakota DC-3, enroute to Winnipeg via Lethbridge. Woods and his crew of six were flying Dakota DC-3 FL636 from Comox to Greenwood, Nova Scotia as part of No. 6 Operational Training Unit's migration from Vancouver Island to RCAF Station Greenwood. Their route across the prairies included stops in Lethbridge and Winnipeg.

FO Woods reported his altitude and his fuel remaining — four hours' worth. That was the last contact made with DC-3 FL636.

Woods and his crew were due in Winnipeg at 0811 CST on the same day but when the twin-engine transport failed to arrive at its predicted time, Western Air Command launched an immediate and comprehensive search. All available aircraft from Western Air Command and Northwest Air Command were tasked to the effort; warning orders were issued to a RCAF Parachute Rescue Squadron in Vancouver and a detachment of mountain troops in Calgary was alerted.



The wing of DC-3 FL636 in the foreground with Mount Ptolemy's 2813 m peak behind.



A segment of engine further down the run-off valley.

Three days of searching across the Cranbrook — Lethbridge trajectory revealed nothing; it wasn't until the fourth day that a forestry observer sighted wisps of smoke at the base of Mount Ptolemy from his post at Iron Stone Ridge in the early afternoon of 24 January. With a team of forest rangers from Coleman, they set out via snowshoes through areas thick with forest and snowfall, covering considerable ground in a short amount of time and arriving at the crash site around 6 PM. By this point, the smoke, previously guiding their search, had vanished in the growing darkness. Tea was prepared while one ranger continued his search on foot; within one hundred and fifty yards, he discovered the first portion of aircraft. The remainder of the DC-3 was located swiftly and the extent of the damage suggested that none of the seven crew had survived. Forest Ranger Harry Boulton was one of the three men in this initial expedition. "After making an inspection and believing that no one could possibly be alive, we thought it best to make all haste back to Coleman and report our discovery to the proper authorities," Boulton said. The group of three began their long trek home, reaching Coleman at 10:40 PM.

A composite team of airmen, soldiers and forest rangers brought out the remains of the seven aircrew the following day by toboggan.

FL636's last reported altitude of 11,000 feet would have provided ample clearance above the remaining ranges between Cranbrook and the flatter expanse of the prairies towards Lethbridge. Minor internet sleuthing uncovers second-hand evidence of the aircraft's crash card which states that a combination of starboard engine failure and rapidly icing wings led to a loss of altitude. If this were the case, these factors would have certainly led to FL636's collision with Mount Ptolemy and the subsequent deaths of all onboard.

Today, you can hike or ride an all-terrain vehicle to the crash site via the North York Creek Plane Crash Trail. It is approximately sixteen kilometers of moderate to difficult terrain from the trail head. Much of the wreckage is still visible at the base of Mount Ptolemy including the tail, a substantial portion of wing, components of engine, and landing gear.



Landing gear struts and supports.



The following aircrew lost their lives:

- Sergeant V.R. Ducklow,**
- Leading Aircraftsman Daniel Levy,**
- Leading Aircraftsman R.B. Lowe,**
- Flying Officer J.L. Norris,**
- Flight Lieutenant W.J. Sealey,**
- Flying Officer R.H. Watt,**
- Flying Officer W. Woods**

The Cold War Museum exhibits and displays

By Bob Wade, AFMSA Co-Chair

The recent AFMSA AGM provided the opportunity to inform members on changes to existing exhibits and the status of planned changes at the Cold War Exhibit. The following will outline the information provided at that meeting.

The radar controller's console which Phil Conroy and Gary Watson have been working on is progressing nicely. Most of the buttons surrounding the screen display can now be illuminated. The next challenge will be to get an operative centre screen display which will permit symbology to show intercept profiles through use of an application program. Gary Watson has successfully resolved the wiring challenges to get the CF18 canopy operational and demonstrated its function for all to see at the meeting. Opening and closing of the canopy still requires external power to be hooked up before operation can be accomplished and its daily function is not available at this time. Gary also has wiring diagrams he received from our visit to 4 Wing, Cold Lake and anticipates getting the nav lights operational on the CF18 in the future.

A Cold War Expansion Project status update was presented at the meeting to explain progress to date in meeting our objectives. Land acquisition from DND is anticipated before January 2022 and is necessary before the project can be initiated. None of the approving agencies have stated any opposition to the project but a written approval has not been submitted either. We anticipate a positive result at the TMM AGM to be held in November. The recent trip to Edmonton and Cold Lake by five of the board members resulted in the nomination of three aircraft we would like to acquire for display in the Cold War expansion. A potential donor has a CF101 and a CF100 aircraft that are deemed to be in suitable condition to permit refinishing to our museum display standards with practicable effort. The T-33 at the Cold Lake Air Force Museum is in very good condition and is available to us at the present time. This aircraft was an AETE ejection seat trial bird and has the rear cockpit boxed off for that purpose. It's not yet determined if the rear seat instrumentation is installed and if an ejection seat is available for installation. Fund raising for the project is continuing for the project and there are now approximately 1.6 million dollars available thanks in large part for a very generous donation from Ken Lett. Sprung Structures has agreed to act as the general contractor for the project with Calibre Construction being the sub-contractor for erecting the structure and installing heating, lighting and plumbing facilities. Cost estimates for the completed project was quoted at \$2.25 million in 2020 and recently updated in July of this year to the following numbers: \$1,169,172 for the structure and accessories and \$1,443,335 for contracting services yielding a total cost of \$2,613,077. The increase in costs is COVID related as the prices of material have increased substantially. Aluminum, for example, has almost doubled in price over the past year. The current area of our Cold War Exhibit is 9000 square feet in the two existing hangars and will be expanded to a total of 21,760 square feet with the new expansion.

Exhibits in the new structure will be developed in such a way as to present artifacts and displays to be unique and not information that is available online. The expanded Cold War Exhibit will be the largest in Canada and a great addition to the Air Force Museum of Alberta.

Aircraft being looked at for the CWE expansion.



CF-100 "Clunk." Gary Watson photo



CT-133 T-33 or "T-bird." Gary Watson photo



CF-101 "Voodoo." Gary Watson photo

Gary Watson managed to successfully wire the CF-18 canopy so it can be opened and closed electrically.
Dave Lowery photo

