

# The Tribute

Spring 2020

## Chairman's report

By Don Matthews, Chair AFMSA

Thank you for dialing in to our first newsletter of 2020. We hope that everyone is safe and free from COVID 19. Most of us in one way or another have been personally impacted by the pandemic. It is hard to acclimatise to such a different daily routine but we are all doing our best. It is good to see Canadians doing what they can to support those around them, in nursing homes, across the nation and in many cases reaching out to those in distant lands. It's good to be a Canadian.

Closer to home, Bob Wade, chair of the exhibit committee, and Alison Mercer, our curator, have outlined what has kept them busy and I highly recommend their reports. I am going to provide a high-level look at our museum and most importantly our volunteers. I am sure that we are up for the challenge and that is a good thing because the longer we remain closed the harder we will have to apply ourselves to ensure we are ready to go when we open up again.



**Baker-Nunn Camera at SATTU Cold Lake.**

Reaching back to 2019, a group of us went out to spend an evening at the Rothney Astrophysical Observatory, which is part of the U of C. The connection between the Rothney Astrophysical Observatory and our museum is that the camera/telescope they use today is the same one that was stationed at Primrose Lake during the Cold War. It was called the Satellite Tracking Unit SATTU and was a unit of Canadian Forces Base Cold Lake. We are still considering a space exhibit to show another facet of the Cold War that took place right here in Alberta - hence our interest. Info on Rothney can be found here:

<https://science.ucalgary.ca/rothney-observatory/about/history>

Dr. Phil Langill and Jennifer Howse provided a tour and a presentation. It was a fantastic time and we look forward to working with them in the future. Thank you to Phil and Jennifer!! (see photo left below)

Stuart Craig is a member of the Society and a volunteer tour guide in the Cold War Exhibit. Here is an update from Stuart on our book.

“In March 2019, Don Matthews announced the project for a book capturing life within RCAF fighter squadrons throughout the Cold War era. Its purpose is to capture the remarkable stories (humorous, intriguing or frightening) of those who flew, maintained and controlled the four generations of fighters during this period. Ultimately, the book should entertain audiences within and outside of the military, build awareness of an all too often under-recognized and under-appreciated RCAF – all with the strong hopes that sales will provide a source of revenue to help the AFMSA fulfill its vision.

To date, we have assembled descriptions of the museum's history, the four generations of fighters (particularly our resident aircraft) and pilot perspectives; along with descriptions of NATO and NORAD operations and key bases. Of course, the book's heart and soul are the stories. On this front, a number of interviews have been held and stories captured, however, we are only at 15-20% of our target. With an intended completion date of mid-2021, and the success of this

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### Chair's update — Contd.

book contingent on stories that you and others can share, the deadline is looming large.

If you find yourself with free time on your hands, I would be most grateful for any time you could set aside to share a story or two and would appreciate you contacting me – either at [sscraig@gmail.com](mailto:sscraig@gmail.com) or (587) 436-1302 – to set the wheels in motion. Keep well and I look forward to hearing from you.”

Our golf tournament is always one of the highlights of the year. Our hope is to continue that tradition if at all possible. A final decision will have to be made some time in May. The plan right now is to play at the Hamptons Golf Course on Wednesday August 5<sup>th</sup>.

Sometimes after working with someone for years and years it is easy to unknowingly take them for granted. I would like to say that the museum has, does and always will be thankful for the mutually beneficial relationships we have. One that I would like to highlight is with 783 (Calgary) Wing Royal Canadian Air Force Association. We have many shared goals and a lot of us are also members of 783 Wing. The wing and the museum form an effective and enjoyable team that really works well. Thank you 783 Wing.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of March we hosted two staff from RCAF History and Heritage. We had a very productive time and we look forward to another gathering of RCAF museums this year. We expressed our strong desire to be an integral part

of the RCAF's Centennial in 2024. The time to plan is now and we are ready.

I hope that this newsletter has assured you of three things. First we are a constantly evolving organization that is volunteer driven and has enjoyed considerable success. Second, our work in the coming months will be focussed on returning to a fully staffed “ops normal” ready to take on the challenges of refurbishment with high energy. Thirdly we will continue to manage both our long term financial viability and our long term upgrades to ensure that our museum remains fresh and current for years to come.

In closing let me say that I miss all of you. As effective as platforms like Zoom are (and I have used it frequently) they cannot provide that sense of fun and camaraderie that we have all come to appreciate at our museum

Take care my friends.

## Curator's report

### News from the collection room

By Alison Mercer, curator

In an effort to make our collection holdings easily searchable, we have developed a spreadsheet in Excel to track our objects, their donors and any relevant information. When our museum first opened its doors, artefacts were catalogued with legal-sized sheets that recorded the donor's name, contact information, relevant information and then listed the artefacts themselves, their accession numbers and their values. While these hard copies still work well, it is very difficult to search quickly through the collection holdings for objects of a specific nature.

To solve this, we developed a basic spreadsheet in Microsoft Excel back in 2019 that included the accession number, object name, location and value of all our objects. But with the opportunity to dive deeper into this project during our current health situation, we have found this spreadsheet version insufficient in terms of artefact information. After studying the approach taken by world-famous museums like the Met in New York, we designed and implemented a more extensive catalogue template now including fields for donor information, object medium, date, era, theatre, size and many other categories. Naturally, this makes the digitization process much more time-consuming but in light of museum best practices, this is certainly the way to go. We plan, in the future, to share our collection online like the Met does! We have our holdings catalogued digitally for the years 2006 – 2010. These years and the years 2011 – current are also catalogued in hard copy.

### Archives

When it comes to collection items online, we have made excellent headway via our archival material and the efforts of Mara, our archivist. She has been working very hard to scan and upload the photographs in our collection so they are available to view via the Internet. We have had researchers from as far away as Germany and Australia reaching out for more information about these photos or obtaining better quality copies to use in their own work. With many students, researchers and aviation enthusiasts using the Internet to access information, having our own collection available online contributes tremendously to the field of historical aviation and military aviation research. I encourage all to check out our online archives here: [archives.rcaf.museum](http://archives.rcaf.museum)

### Museum lecture series

Back in the fall, the Military Museums put out a call to its staff for a volunteer to coordinate the lecture series and the Air Force Museum stepped up.

Past speakers and topics include:

- Major (Ret'd) Bob Wade – Flying the Russian MiG-21 (one of our best lectures!)
- Dr. Robert Engen – Gender integration in the Canadian Armed Forces
- Dr. Geoff Jackson – Battering the German Forces
- Col. Mike Vernon – A screening of his film, *Deployed*, about Canadian reservists overseas.

Upcoming Speakers include:

- David Howard and Don McLeod of the Homes for Heroes Foundation (building tiny homes for homeless veterans in Calgary)
- Kate Armstrong – One of the first female cadets to attend the Royal Military College
- David O'Keefe and Peter Berg – Breaking the Enigma Code

The lecture series is an excellent means of connecting with Calgary communities by offering them topics a bit outside the norm of 'standard military history.' We will continue this endeavour once business resumes. Lecture updates will be available at: [www.themilitarymuseums.ca](http://www.themilitarymuseums.ca)

### New hallway exhibit – ground crew

Our new hallway exhibit, featuring our airmen and airwomen on the ground, will be unveiled in early summer. While military aviation history tends to focus on the achievements and exploits of aircrew, the efforts of Canadian ground crew are equally significant yet under-appreciated. As one of our board members mentioned: "In the army, the officers send the men off to die. In the Air Force, the men send the officers off to die!" Consequently, the 'culture' of leader-subordinate relationships in the Air Force is distinctly unique compared to the Army or Navy. This new exhibit seeks to explore that uniqueness and properly bring to light the enormous contributions of Canadian ground crew throughout the history of our air force.

As always, personal experiences are invaluable when building exhibits like this. If you have served as ground crew yourself, our curator would love to hear your stories! Please email Alison: [alison@themilitarymuseums.ca](mailto:alison@themilitarymuseums.ca) and she will coordinate the next steps.

## Exhibit chairman's report

By Bob Wade

Continual progress is being achieved with projects designed to make the Air Force Museum of Alberta as a whole and the Cold War Exhibit (CWE) in particular, larger and more effective. The development of a downloadable app to describe displays and exhibits in English and French has been achieved after considerable work by Kenn Nixon over the past two years. Exhibits are now numbered to correspond with numbers on the app to provide a descriptive commentary of the item being observed. The app may also be played when away from the museum when the audience may have more time to hear the commentary. We get many visitors from around the world and we will endeavour to expand the commentary in other languages in the future. A roll out ceremony was held at the CWE on the 29<sup>th</sup> of February 2020 with ASICA team members, the company that developed the app, translators, L/Col Jonathan Pilon and his family and a host of volunteers attending the function.

401 Tactical Fighter Squadron from 4 Wing Cold Lake has redeployed back home from Romania after a tour of duty on NATO Operation Reassurance. The Squadron Historian, M/Cpl James Ferris contacted our volunteer and past Director Gary Watson for assistance in organizing a celebration in honour of the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the end of WW 2 squadron operations and their recent return to 4 Wing. Gary attained the Squadron photo albums and after over 650 hours of production time has created an outstanding video detailing the squadron history from initial stand up in 1918, WW 2 Ops from 1938 to 1946 and post war history. The film predominantly deals with the WW 2 history including some outstanding video footage, digitized photos, battle honours, awards and losses. Covid 19 concerns have postponed the gala celebration but the video will be presented to the squadron and used by our museums and others across Canada. Great work by an outstanding volunteer.

Planning is continuing towards expanding the CWE to accommodate NORAD assigned RCAF fighter aircraft from the Cold War era of our history. The search continues for a CF 101, CF 100 and T-33 aircraft in restorable condition to museum standards. Sprung Instant Structures and BMP Construction Management have submitted cost estimates for the selected expansion plan and we will be addressing funding of the project in the coming months.

Our volunteers are the strength and greatest resource in maintaining and presenting the history of the RCAF in our Military Museums. We remain eternally grateful for their valuable and enthusiastic participation.

## Upcoming exhibit: They never talked about it Untold stories of WWII

By Alison Mercer

The Air Force Museum has contributed images, stories, and artefacts to TMM's new exhibit – Untold Stories WWII – slated to open in The Founders' Gallery in late Spring. Built around individual stories, the exhibit highlights the Canadian experience during the Second World War.

One of the individuals we have chosen to feature is Flying Officer Clifford Glenn Balsdon, DFC. Born on 23 June 1914 in Medicine Hat, Balsdon was seven years older than most Canadian aircrew when he joined the RCAF in 1942. After training as a bomb-aimer, he was assigned to a Halifax crew with 432 Squadron. Keep an eye out for this exhibit to learn how he earned his Distinguished Flying Cross and other details about his service.



**Flying Officer Balsdon, England, c. 1942 [AF2017.025.049 - 33]**



**F/O Balsdon and Halifax crew, England c. 1942 [AF2017.025.049 - 27]**