

The Tribute

Spring 2022

Chairman's update

By John Argue, Chair AFMSA

Welcome to the spring edition of The Tribute online magazine and I would like to take this opportunity to wish all of you a Happy New Year for 2022.

"May you live in interesting times" Author: Unknown

The above quote has often been linked to an ancient Chinese curse and more contemporarily to a speech delivered by Robert F. Kennedy in 1966. The most important part of this quote would be one's definition of "interesting times." Regardless, 2021 has had its share of ups and downs with notable challenges that all of us have been forced to navigate in some fashion or other.

In our January 2021 winter edition, I wrote with optimism and enthusiasm for our future. Vaccines were at our doorstep awaiting distribution, new and varied therapeutics were being discovered and a broader understanding of COVID was naturally being attained. This, in my estimation, pointed to a 2021 whereby we could reasonably expect a return to our lives as we had known them prior to COVID. Additionally, I believed TMM and AFMSA could open its doors to our volunteers and public while resuming normal operations. Unfortunately this was not to be the case in 2021 and our path took a more difficult route. The COVID virus morphed into new variants and government restrictions or mandates, which we once believed would be removed, were in reality enhanced with even greater emphasis. Bottom-line, my abilities as a fortune (future) teller are hereby retired.

In January 2021, our AFMSA board approved four focus areas for the calendar year. To paraphrase:

1. Return to normal operations,
2. Seamless transition of the AFMSA board,
3. Cold War Expansion project and,
4. RCAF 2024.

For almost the first half of 2021, TMM and by extension our facilities, were closed to our volunteers and the public due to COVID. Fortunately, on 1 July 2021, we were able to bring our volunteers back and fully open to the public once again. However, this would be short lived and in mid Sept 2021, AFMSA unilaterally decided to shutter our facilities as a result of a devastating fourth wave of the COVID Delta variant which began to sweep through Alberta. On 1 Nov 2021, and with the receding Delta variant cases, AFMSA once again fully opened just in time for Remembrance Day ceremonies.



Check out Bob Wade's account of his 1989 flight in a MIG 29, the first North American pilot given that privilege. Page 3.

The Omicron variant appeared on our radar in early December 2021 and the AFMSA board determined, from all available data, that although the transmissibility of Omicron and the case numbers were high, its virulence was reduced with significantly fewer hospitalizations and ICU numbers. Therefore the board decided to use await and see approach to this new variant while trying to live with COVID. To date, we have achieved a state of remaining open while utilising normal operating hours for these last 2.5 months.

I would like to express my gratitude to all our volunteers who have joined us in keeping our exhibits open throughout this scheduling period. Our volunteers are the cornerstone of what we do and your full support will always be necessary to successful mission completion. Thank you.

With our ability to remain open utilizing normal hours of operation and a full complement of volunteers returning, we will only need to see a more robust return of our patrons along with the return of education and cadet groups before we can, hand on heart, decree that we have returned to normal operations. (Focus area 1 achieved, TBD in 2022).

In mid-September 2021, just prior to the closing for the Delta variant, AFMSA was able to complete its mandated AGM and elect some new directors to the board. Our #2 focus area for 2021 (from above) was a seamless transition of the AFMSA board. This was mainly centered on the change of chairmanship in 2020 between Don Matthews and me. Don's mentoring was pivotal during

The Directors & Staff (<https://www.rcaf.museum/>)

Ken Lett, Honourary Director

John Argue, Chairman of the Board of Directors,
volunteer@rcaf.museum

Don Matthews, Director (at large)

Michelle Gerwing, Secretary

Bob Parkinson, Treasurer

Ed McGillivray, Vice Chairman (fund raising)

Alison Mercer, Curator,
alison@themilitarymuseums.ca
Tel: 403-410-2340 Ext 2661

Gordon Todd, Director (memberships)
membership@rcaf.museum

Dave Lowery, Director (newsletter editor)
dave@bethereraces.com

Michael Ricketts, Director (at large)
michael_j_ricketts@hotmail.com

Gerry Morrison, Director (at large)

Kenn Nixon, Director (casino coordinator)

Bob Wade, Deputy Chair
b_wade@hotmail.com

Marty Doyle, Manager (facilities)

Jim Powell, Honourary Director

Chairman's update contd.

this period and we believe it has been successful, which subsequently lead to Don stepping down as deputy chair at the AGM and assuming a director at large position. Thank you Don for all your guidance these past few years and I hope to continue leaning on you going forward. Bob Wade is taking over from Don as our new deputy chairman and I welcome and thank Bob for stepping into this position.

The aspect of closing this focus area for 2022 may be premature at this juncture. Our long time treasurer, Jim Powell, formally stepped down from the position at the AGM and Jim has taken on an honorary director role. We are grateful to Jim for his decade plus of service to our organization. Replacing Jim is Bob Parkinson as our new treasurer. This position is arguably the most difficult directors job and requires the most intensive level of study to guide our non-profit organization in the future. Jim and Bob have been routinely conducting handover training while also modernizing our processes. We thank Bob Parkinson for stepping into this position and we are confident that he is the perfect fit. However, and in support, it would be prudent for our AFMSA board to keep this seamless transition focus area active for 2022 while Bob gets firmly acclimated in the treasurers chair.

Although we have been closed for large portions of 2021, we have been actively pursuing the Cold War Expansion project as our #3 focus area. Bob Wade, as lead of this project, will provide greater details, but I will take this opportunity to add some insights. Since approximately 2017, the vision for expansion has been verbally articulated to numerous stakeholders both within and outside our organization with enthusiastic support received by all. In January 2021, The AFMSA board approved a date revision to our original strategic plan and from here it was finally time to table this plan for approval to the TMM council chaired by CO 3CDSG. On 3 November 2021, a formal presentation was made to TMM council and a motion to approve the project was made with near unanimous consent by the membership. This is an important first step, but as we have learned, no plan ever survives first contact with the enemy. Not that we have enemies here, however, authorities for approvals of land allocations and new projects have shifted over the last few years and there are brand new processes in place that must be accomplished before the TMM land can be reallocated to

AFMSA for the expansion. We are diligently working with Real Property to achieve a new land use agreement (LUA) to cover our existing facilities and the expansion. We are receiving outstanding support from RP Ops in crafting the submission; however, it's now just a matter of time and some bureaucracy before it is official. (Note: I am cautiously optimistic, but no guarantees).

On a very positive note, AFMSA and the expansion project have received outstanding support from our membership. The benevolence of our members have insured that we have a very sizeable financial war chest from which to stake a very valid claim to achieve our current operational necessities, but most importantly our CWE expansion goals. The Ken Lett Foundation continues to be the bedrock of support to our organization that makes our growth desires possible. To all our members and the Ken Lett Foundation, we thank you for being there in support of our RCAF museum mission.

The RCAF 2024 Centenary project is a work in progress and I cannot offer too much at this point. Essentially, we are awaiting the warning order, the development and assignment of the regional (military) teams and a direct request to our organization for support. We expect the warning order shortly, but we are at this point, not high in the food chain so to speak (receive mode only). If the stars aligned, a LUA were secured and full expansion funding became available, there was hope that we could construct our new facility prior to 2024 and possibly be a western area event center. A pipe dream at this point, but let's see what the near future brings.

Take care everyone, stay safe, and we look forward to seeing all of you in 2022, maybe without masks, mandates and restrictions.



*John Argue, Chairman Air Force Museum
of Alberta / Air Force Museum Society of
Alberta*

How I became the first western pilot to fly the MiG-29 Fulcrum

By Bob Wade, Major (Ret'd) RCAF

In 2020, Stuart Craig, an Air Force Museum of Alberta member, spoke with Bob Wade, the first pilot outside the Soviet Union to fly the MiG-29 during the waning days of the Cold War in 1989. The following are excerpts from the full story which will be contained in a book being written about life in RCAF Fighter Squadrons during the Cold War era.

During the dying days of the Cold War, the Soviets were probably having money problems and so they took the decision to start marketing the MiG-29 to the western world. After having crashed their MiG-29 at the Paris Air Show in June 1989, their next airshow was scheduled to take place in Abbotsford, British Columbia, Canada.

I was the alert force commander in Comox at that time and was advised by NORAD that two MiG-29s would be transiting Canadian airspace from the Alaska panhandle over to the airport in Abbotsford, about 40 kms east of Vancouver. My direction from NORAD was that I was to proceed no closer than 1000 feet to the MiG-29s for the escort, and that I was to make no attempt at communicating with the MiG-29 pilots. Three CF-18s were scrambled from the Comox Alert Center to conduct the intercept and escort mission.

After about 20 minutes, I noticed that the two MiGs were proceeding about 40 degrees right of where I thought they should be on their flight profile. I contacted Vancouver Air Traffic Control (ATC) to determine where they were being vectored, only to learn that the MiGs had made no radio contact with ATC. I decided to put the two MiGs on my right wing and called my two wingmen to join in close formation on my left wing. We made a long descent through 30,000 feet of cloud on approach to the airport. The two

MiG pilots did a great job of remaining in close formation, as visibility is very limited in dense cloud. After waving off the MiGs to land at Abbotsford, we returned to Comox to put our three CF-18s back on alert status.

I had just shut down the engines when the crew chief came up the ladder and said "Major, the phone has been ringing off the wall for you!" I wasn't too surprised at that, as I had just broken all the rules that NORAD had given me prior to launch. It wasn't NORAD on the phone though, it was the Soviet Embassy wanting to thank me for the assistance provided in getting the MiGs into Abbotsford! They said: "we'd like you to be our guest if you're coming over to the Abbotsford Air Show." I was already scheduled to take two CF-18s to the show for static display and accepted their invitation.

The Soviets wanted one of their pilots to be able to get flights in either the CF-18 or the USAF F-15 and, in exchange, they would give a western pilot the opportunity to fly the MiG-29. American and Canadian officials stated that this would not happen under any circumstance. On the last day of the Air Show, however, the Soviets agreed that they would allow a Western pilot to fly the MiG-29. It seemed they wanted to have a western pilot's assessment of their aircraft to improve their marketing capabilities. Mary Collins, the Associate Deputy Minister of Defence and Major General Scott Eichel, the senior military commander at the show decided to let this happen against the direction given by superiors in Ottawa.

I was selected as the pilot to fly the MiG-29 and was taken over to meet Valery Menitsky, a Mikoyan test pilot. I was told I could fly from the front seat of the dual MiG-29 and Valery would fly in the rear seat. Well, Valery spoke very little English at that time, so the translator taught Valery the phrases he'd need: just say 'Bob pilot' when you want Bob to fly or 'Valery pilot' when you're going to fly! It had literally been 10 minutes from the time I was asked to take the flight until I was strapping into the cockpit. They strapped me and then showed me how to start the engines. The flight instruments were all in Cyrillic which made many of them hard to understand. The airspeed indicator was in kilometres per hour, altitude in metres – and though my math is pretty good, I couldn't translate fast enough the numbers that I needed to know.



Bob Wade, fourth from right, Roman Taskaev, third from right and Valery Menitsky standing on the wing in the white shirt. (Source unknown)

I was the CF-18 demonstration pilot in 1986, so I wanted to duplicate some of those maneuvers so I could make a direct comparison between the MiG-29 and the CF-18. Once we were taxiing out, I took control and got clearance for takeoff and Valery was happy with me doing the takeoff. I had no idea what the take-off speed was but after watching their air show and how much runway they were using, I figured I would go down the runway that far and take her airborne. I didn't

know what the fuel load was on the airplane, so I didn't really know what the weight was either. It would be seat of the pants flying.

I wanted to do a roll off the top and pulled through the vertical after takeoff. On the CF-18, the airspeed would stagnate or maybe roll back a few knots, but on the MiG-29, when I pulled through the vertical, that airplane was still accelerating so I knew it had better thrust to weight at whatever fuel weight it was carrying than what the CF-18 had. The CF-18 would roll at 720 degrees per second – two complete rolls in one second – and the MiG-29 was quite comparable to that.

I was amazed at how maneuverable the jet was at 30-40 degrees angle of attack – it was equal to a CF-18 in that high alpha and low speed environment. After that, Valery said, “Valery pilot” again and went into a turn which I estimated to be about 8 G through a 360-degree turn (I couldn't read the G-meter because it was in Cyrillic and didn't know where it was). He never told me he was going to do that and so I got buried into the cockpit and was working hard just trying to stay conscious and watch the airspeed indicator. At 8G, that airspeed never decreased by any more than about 20 knots throughout that 360-degree turn – that's a pretty credible turn capability for a fighter airplane.

Valery took the airplane into the vertical about 3000 feet above the ground and then pulled both throttles to idle. The aircraft stopped going up and then went into a tail slide. When you're falling backwards your elevators should work in the opposite direction. On the CF-18, if you go into a tailslide it takes you about 5000 feet to recover. Valery threw both throttles into afterburner and both burners lit off at exactly the same time. The aircraft was very stable, the nose came down and he flew out without problem. I then said, “Bob pilot” and took control to do the same thing. I was surprised at how capable the jet was with this maneuver.

For a seat of the pants flight, it was a great experience. You wear an airplane – you don't fly it – it's part of your body so you get a feel for it pretty quickly. I brought the MiG back in one piece and I'm sure our folks were mightily relieved about that. I owe everything to General Scott Eichel and Associate Deputy Minister of Defence Mary Collins. That flight would have never taken place unless those two put their careers on the line to allow it to happen.

When we unstrapped, there was a lot of excitement. The media was there and the Soviets, at that point, didn't let me talk to the media and immediately whisked me off to their pavilion. There were a whole lot of Russians in there along with a translator. They poured me a tumbler glass about half full of vodka and we toasted the MiG 29. I was a fighter pilot and wasn't going to let them outdo me, so I did the same thing! We then toasted the Mikoyan company (manufacturer of the jet). They immediately filled those glasses again and this time they toasted me for flying the MiG-29. We were now three half tumblers into it and I'm guessing maybe four or five

ounces at a shot, and we toasted the Soviet Union next. Well, my ears started to ring and my tongue was tingling and I figured the buggars were going to kill me with alcohol poisoning before I got a chance to talk about this flight! I don't really recall a lot that went on after that. I left the pavilion, and the media were there in droves wanting to talk about my opinion of the MiG-29. I guess I gave the Soviets good press because I was sincerely impressed with their airplane. The interview is out there somewhere on YouTube, and it is funny to watch. I had no qualms about painting them 10 feet tall either, because that only helped our defense industry: the threat was real, and the jet was very capable. I was only able to assess the MiG from a flight performance perspective without any knowledge of weight or fuel load and never got the opportunity to see the radar, heads up display or weapons capability.

They say that everyone at some period of their life will get twenty minutes in the sun, I guess that was mine.

Stuart is constantly looking for stories from any perspective: pilots, the wide range of technicians and specialists, families and leaders. If you have a story that you would like to share, please email Stuart at: sscraig@gmail.com. As an interim initiative, the AFMSA is considering the sale of booklets containing individual stories (such as Bob's) while the larger project of the book is underway. Proceeds from sales will be for the benefit of the AFMSA to help with the ongoing maintenance and growth of the Cold War Exhibit and Air Force Gallery.



My military service!

Story and photos by Alison Mercer, AFMSA Curator

I've been your curator for nearly twelve years now and I have been asked on more than one occasion, "are you in the military?" or "were you in the military?"

And I always answer: sort of. I was in air cadets for four years at the tail end of junior high and throughout high school. Not by choice initially but because mum was concerned with the depth of my then-interest in Ancient Rome and figured I needed a change of pace. Spoiler: I hated it. Hated the itchy wool socks, hated getting bossed around by twelve-year-olds, hated giving up one precious night of my week to drills, classes about ailerons, VHF, cloud formations, and mixtures full rich. Particularly abhorrent were the volunteer opportunities: municipal park clean-up, handing out brochures at the local rodeo, and lastly, bottle drives. I can tell you with conviction that prop-ositioning strangers for their recycling at 8 AM on Saturday was a personal favourite.

That was all grade 9. But by grade 10, things got real. I discovered the first and second world war, which pared perfectly with dad's lifelong interest in Canadian military history and our house full of books on the subject. I suddenly started to understand, nay, appreciate, the background and the culture of this group I belonged to. And things took on a new focus and vigour. The Roman republic took a hard back seat to the Battle of Britain, Vimy Ridge, Arthur Currie, and the Great Escape. Air cadets was the perfect vehicle to drive this passion forwards. I started caring about my turnout, signed up for ground-school, and had a, fortunately, successful turn on the provincial public speaking circuit. Somewhere in the

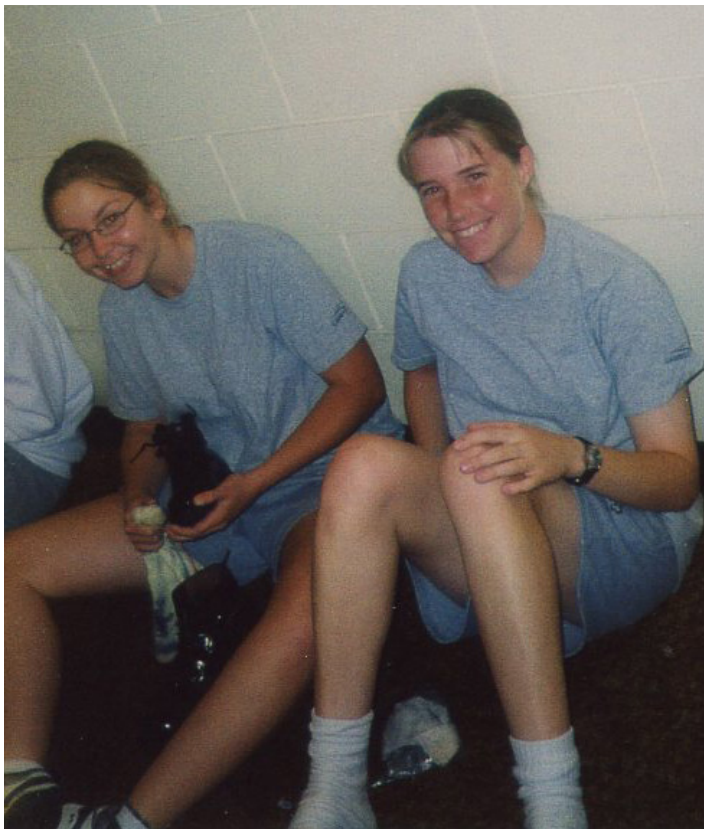
mix was a mess dinner at the aerospace museum that featured one Col. (Ret'd) Gerry Morrison as the guest of honour and a line of kids asking for his autograph.

Compared to our local squadron, which was a potpourri of reprobate boys, power-hungry girls, and a sprinkling of other social misfits too uncoordinated/unpopular for the local sports scene (me), summer camp was a veritable buffet of potential friendships. The kids tended to sort themselves into groups: the sporty ones went off to athletics instructor camp, the weekend warriors off to survival training and the ambitious to leadership courses. Thankfully, most of the nerds (also me) ended up in the introduction to aviation course (ITAC). This particular camp was held in Gimli and was my longest foray away from home to date. I started things off right by forgetting my wallet (and ID) in the family car before boarding the Greyhound bus to Edmonton for the flight to Winnipeg (Note: This was 2001, a scarce ten months after 9/11 and the subsequential tightening of airport security). Thankfully the desk attendant in Edmonton was more concerned about the can of hairspray in my bag than my lack of ID and allowed me onboard. Landing in Winnipeg, I attempted again unwitting self-sabotage by seizing the wrong suitcase and dragging it out to the waiting bus. About to leave, a wild airport employee appeared, bounding up the stairs of the bus. "I'm looking for Alison Mercer! Is Alison here?" The error had been discovered, the correct suitcase was procured, and we were off.

Upon arrival, we were sorted into Dragon Flight and Cobra Flight. Right away, in our child brains, the cadets of Dragon Flight conceived a sense of superiority over Cobra Flight, which was confirmed in the days to come. Our drill was sharper, our barracks were cleaner, our uniforms (slovenly-looking gray t-shirts, gray sweat pants, and tilly hats) were somehow better. This overconfidence peaked during the lead-up to the course drill competition: as the normal drill routine posed no challenge, we elected to do it in French. With one fluent French speaker in the squadron, this went about as well as you can imagine. It was a resounding defeat, right up there with the French at Agincourt or Custer at Little Big Horn. The image of Cobra Flight slouching triumphantly back to the barracks, out of step, arms flapping, wedges shoved on to the backs of skulls is forever emblazoned in my frontal lobes. We all would have laughed had we not been bitterly consumed with perfecting our own indignant retreat.

Other moments stick out: an afternoon of 'leave' in the town itself after the local parade when one of the boys, an inordinately tall kid who looked more man than child, decided he was hungry, went to the local grocery, bought a BBQ chicken, and ate the entire thing while we were at the beach. A bizarre rumour developed early on that there was a complete Avro Arrow buried under the concrete of Hangar 4 and unmanifested pacts were made for nighttime assaults with shovels to dig it up. It rained only once, thankfully, so our exposure to the foul-smelling, military-issue ponchos was brief but not brief enough to prevent one case of vomiting. Sick parades were barebones and smacked of quackery – you were either given crutches or Cepacol regardless of ailment. But we were having too much fun to be truly sick.

The Tribute Spring 2022 • Page 5



Myself (right) and very good friend Marla D. (left).
Marla was from Saskatchewan.

Returning to regular squadron life in the fall was triumphant yet bitter-sweet. Returning to school was harder. I missed my friends from camp, missed the simple pseudo-military structure of camp life where everyone wore the same thing, did the same stuff. There's something about disparate humans thrown together in a completely new social experience that bonds them tighter than normal and air cadet summer camp was no exception. The friends I made there persisted well into university and while we lost touch over the years, these friendships were, without a doubt, some of the finest on record.

On the topic of new social experiences and their related fallout, I spent the following summer (my last year) as staff at Penhold. That, however, will be a story for next time.



I wish I was kidding about the gray sweats and tilly hats. Mike B., center left, was a humorous, whip-smart kid from Manitoba.

My CF-100 (Clunk) ride

By Col. (Ret'd) Gerry Morrison

In August of 1958 I was instructing on T-33's at RCAF Station Gimli Manitoba. Having been stationed there since November 1956 I was looking forward to my next posting, hopefully on the F-86 Sabre in Europe. The majority of first tour instructors wanted to fly the Sabre however to increase the interest in all weather air defence postings, a CF-100 was flown to Gimli on a regular basis to pro-vide familiarization flights to a number of first tour instructors.

My day arrived on August 21st 1958. On the third mission of the day for the CF-100, I was briefed on the ejection procedure and strapped in for the flight. After getting airborne the pilot informed me that we would have to fly to Portage la Prairie to refuel before the demonstration could be flown. After 20 minutes we arrived over Portage and pitched out for a landing. Touch down seemed smooth but on brake application two tires blew and lost all their air. End of trip! Duration 40 minutes. Motivation NONE.

I had to borrow a T-33 parachute and hitch a ride back to Gimli. On the completion of my tour I was transferred to the Sabre OTU and then 421(F) Squadron in France.



Air Force museum of Alberta exhibits and displays

Continual effort is being expended toward enhancing exhibits and displays in both the cold war exhibit (CWE) and main building museum. It's conventional to conduct major upgrades to museum exhibits and displays every seven years. At a recent board meeting it was decided to make a major change to upgrade the CWE to enhance the presentation of artifacts and aircraft to further increase public interest. These changes will be incorporated over the next few months. There have been several software problems being experienced over the past few months in both the main museum and CWE. Ian Watson has the problems identified and we should hopefully see the rectification of these issues very shortly. The cold war expansion project is continuing to make progress towards getting the increase in land allocation from DND and fundraising to cover cost estimates provided by contractors. It was anticipated that it may be possible to start construction this year but unfortunately delays in approval from DND and difficulties in getting financial support makes that seem unlikely. These challenges are simply obstacles that need to be overcome and the team remains more determined than ever to see this project completed as soon as possible. Our volunteers are our greatest asset and it's primarily due to their efforts that our guest signature book is filled each day with so many commendable comments from our guests. Thank you so much for your efforts and generous contribution of time. We very much look forward to the relaxation of COVID restrictions where we can have a gathering of all our members and show our appreciation for your contributions.