

The Tribute

Spring 2024

Chairman's update

By John Argue, Chair AFMSA

Welcome everyone to the spring 2024 edition of *The Tribute* Air Force Museum Society of Alberta (AFMSA) quarterly magazine.

Congratulations to the RCAF on reaching its centenary spanning 01 April 1924 to 01 April 2024. From its post WW1 auspicious beginnings in the fledgling medium of aviation, the RCAF were instrumental in building not only that now highly respected military aviation organization, but the RCAF connected people and places throughout Canada and abroad all while helping to build our great nation. Flying fabric covered wings, open cockpit biplanes at 100-200 mph, with service ceilings no higher than 10 to 20,000 feet, to modern carbon fibre winged pressurized jet aircraft that could exceed Mach 2.2 and fly well over 50,000 feet.

Imagine an early pioneer aviation enthusiast in the early 1900's being told that there is such a thing as a sound barrier, and that actually there really isn't a barrier at all as we had first suspected considering we can breeze through it without even noticing it today. Or that future RCAF officers would not only fly these incredible modern machines, but some like Col (Ret'd) Chris Hatfield would travel several times to space and command a space station



Alison Mercer and John Argue at city hall for the flag raising and flypast celebrating the RCAF 100th anniversary. *Stuart Craig photo*

where groups of international astronauts lived and worked for often several months at a time. Or, that two other RCAF astronauts, Col Jeremy Hansen and LCol Josh Kutryk will also soon travel to space, potentially visiting the moon or beyond and becoming possibly the first Canadian to set foot on our moon or even another planet well outside our current atmosphere. Would all this really be unthinkable for

an early RCAF member in 1924? Maybe? However, it's that question mark that they pursued and conquered which has brought us from adversity to the stars.

The RCAF and our members' exploits over these first 100 years are truly the stuff of legend with accolades and glories too numerous to mention. With greatness often comes tragedy and the RCAF, like so many other military organizations, has not been shielded in any way from the human cost. As we celebrate these RCAF 100 years and marvel at where we have come, please take a long moment to reflect and remember those who made the supreme sacrifice in her service.

The AFMSA and our volunteers have been hard at work creating events and exhibits to celebrate the RCAF 100. I distinctly recall, at an AFMSA board meeting four years ago (circa 2020), Kenn Nixon suggested that we begin planning for this day. Admittedly, I also remember that I felt it was well in the future and therefore no need to hurry. However, we all ultimately agreed with Kenn and began exploring the possibilities. Kenn was prescient in his early warnings regarding procrastinating on this event and that those four years would pass quickly. Thanks to Kenn's crafting of a dynamic team of volunteers from the AFMSA, 783 RCAF Assn, RCAC Sqns, the Canadian Legion, Veterans Affairs and other aviation museums of southern Alberta, I am proud to say that Kenn and his team have put together numerous outstanding events to mark the passage of this RCAF milestone.

The support of the RCAF 100 team has been extraordinary with the kick off on March 24 of our TMM "refreshed" Air Force Gallery which featured the "Great Escape" interactive display designed by our curator Alison Mercer. Thank you to Alison for your superb work. Additionally, we would like to recognize 783 Wing for their generous donation toward the completion of this exhibit.

On 01 April, Kenn's team planned and spearheaded our RCAF celebrations by opening our RCAF exhibit in the TMM Founders Gallery. This temporary exhibit will run from April through September 2024 and features the human side of the serving personnel and their families over those 100 years. Following this exhibit's grand opening and a brief luncheon, everyone reconvened at Calgary City Hall to receive the declaration of "RCAF day in Calgary" hosted by Mayor Gondek and several federal, provincial and military dignitaries. A fly past of a Winnipeg based 402 Sqn



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Chairman's update Contd.

Dash 8 Gonzo was one of the major highlights of the day, especially when we were gifted with perfect April weather and with an on track, on time performance. We are very thankful to 402 Sqn for their support.



Winnipeg based 402 Sqn Dash 8 Gonzo on a flypast over Calgary's city hall. *Stuart Craig photo*

Over the next several months the RCAF 100 team will be involved in several events from Stampede, Spruce Meadows, RCAF mess dinners, pub nights, TGIF's and much more. I encourage everyone to take part in as many events as possible. (Event details to be published later within this edition).

In closing, I want to thank Kenn Nixon, the RCAF 100 team, and all of our volunteers, not only for the RCAF 100 activities, but for all your day to day contributions to our organization. Our volunteers' continued committed service and support to the RCAF is instrumental in the sharing of our RCAF story. We now kick off the next 100 years of the RCAF and I look forward to this experience and working side by side with all of you. Great challenges lie ahead for the RCAF and I am confident that we will meet them, much as those early pioneer aviators and our predecessors did.

Per Ardua Ad Astra

Sincerely, John

Exhibits

By Bob Wade. Photos by Stuart Craig

The past few months have been very active at the Air Museums of Alberta. Continuous progress has been made in developing the engineering plan for the new Cold War Exhibit Expansion Project. The wings and tail sections of two CF100 aircraft have been delivered from the museum in Borden, Ontario and we are now working on a means of transport to bring out the two fuselage sections. One complete CF100 aircraft will be constructed from these two airframes to be put on display in the new expansion. It is anticipated that we will be able to start laying the foundation of the new Cold War Expansion in late spring or early summer of this year.

The celebration of the RCAF Centennial commenced with a Flight Jacket Beer Call in the Cold War Exhibit on the 21st of March. Well over 100 RCAF veterans and volunteers participated with many travelling from across Canada and even one from Germany. The next evening a mess dinner was held at the Hangar Museum culminating a two day event celebrating the 100th Anniversary of the RCAF.

The opening of the Great Escape Exhibit in the Air Force Gallery on the 24 of March drew significant attention from both the media and local dignitaries. This display relates the story of the daring escape attempt by allied prisoners of war in Stalag Luft III during WW 2. We were very fortunate to have Paul Tobolski and Barry Davidson, whose fathers participated in that significant attempt, speak and relate their stories of how that venture affected their lives.



Snowbird team members from the past 52 years attending the Beer Call.



Dave Jurkowski, Ian Struthers and Bob Wade.



Bob Wade and Jody Weyman, director at Canadian Aviation Hall of Fame.



Keith Hunt, Dave Jurkowski, Pat Fitzpatrick and John MacNeill.



Curator update - On cold war era artefacts

By Alison Mercer

When the AFMA opened its doors in 2009, its collection was very small – not more than a few dozen items. Fifteen years later, we are approaching 1200 artefacts. The bulk of these items are second world war era with a hardy few from the first war and a small, slowly growing group of cold war era materials.

Visiting Calgary's gun and militaria show a few weeks back, I asked a long-time collector if he found cold war era items hard to come by and was relieved to find he did. We concluded this was due to a few factors: one, most cold war veterans are still alive (a good thing!); two, cold war era items aren't as collectible as first and second war memorabilia for most enthusiasts; and three, retention of service-related items by cold war veterans simply seems to be lower.

These three factors are worth a closer look. Factor one is self-explanatory. Factor two – the collectability and popularity of era-specific items – is more complex and mirrors general interest in these time periods. The first and second world wars are deeply rooted in popular consciousness due to their social and economic impact on western society. This is reinforced by the vast quantity of popular culture (films, television shows, pictorial history books, video games) developed around both events. The second war in particular was chock full of visual identifiers that gave it a very memorable aesthetic: Winston Churchill's staunch, round bulk, the aggressive sharp toothed, red tongued nose art on P-40 Tomahawks, Adolf Hitler's bizarre moustache, the workmanlike heavy woolen battledress worn by the Canadian army.

The cold war, in contrast, lacks this glut of related media and imagery; outside of the nuclear concern, it is challenging for the average public to get a sense of the period's zeitgeist, and what they are familiar with – the Berlin Wall, the potential destruction

of civilization via nuclear weaponry - may feel a little grim and unappealing compared to debonair Spitfire pilots and King Tiger tanks. (I fully believe this is worth a proper academic study eventually because it's very interesting.)

Factor three, then – the low retention of cold war era service-related items by the people who used them – may be due to two reasons. First, these individuals moved frequently while living in relatively stable circumstances. As there is nothing like a move to remind you how much junk stuff you own, it is quite possible many items were disposed of early on during frequent moves. Compared to men and women of the second war, who lived in and moved between Nissen huts, tents, and barracks before returning home after five years with their possessions packed in one or two trunks, the likelihood of cold war era items getting disposed of between many moves over a few decades is much higher.

Additionally, those serving usually served for much longer periods than their earlier counterparts, leading to outdated and specialized kit getting reabsorbed by the system and destroyed or sold off as military surplus for public use.

Then, too, is the factor of item acquisition. Officer's tunics, trousers and hats during the second war were almost always privately purchased with a clothing allowance and tailored to the individual out of good quality wool. Fast forward a scant few years to the polyester horrors of the late 1950s and 60s and you get flimsy, standard issue garments that lack the style and longevity of their woolen predecessors. Mess dress is the exception to this as most are still made of doeskin wool, bespoke, and purchased via the clothing allowance (unsurprisingly, we have no shortage of post-1940s mess jackets!)

Currently, the lack of cold war era artefacts and the comparative disinterest of collectors reflects broader attitudes to that conflict as a

whole. However, the Ken and Roma Lett Cold War Exhibit, its displays, and its superlative volunteer guides are doing a great job at generating public interest and awareness. I look forward to sharing the cold war story further with our upcoming cold war exhibit expansion.

Curator Alison Mercer on the sled in the Great Escape display.
Dave Lowery photo.



Harold Kearl ... 101 and counting!

By Gerry Morrison

Born on December 10, 1922, in Cardston, Alberta, Harold moved to Calgary looking for employment after graduating high school. His older brother started the family RCAF tradition by graduating flight school as a sergeant pilot.

In 1943, Harold also joined the RCAF and after three months of ground school in Edmonton, was transferred to High River for flight training on the Anson. Only two weeks before receiving his wings, Harold received news that his brother, Eldon, was lost on a night raid to Berlin. And though his parents had mixed feelings sending another son to bomber command, Harold found himself on a conversion course to Wellingtons and Halifaxes in Bournemouth, UK. Posted to 432 squadron, Harold and his crew flew 17 missions before war ended sustaining damage on one mission to his parachute from shrapnel and a few holes in his aircraft.

In the fall of 1945, he was transferred to 437 squadron where he decided to try and find his brother's grave which was known to be close to Bugk, east of Berlin in the Russian sector. After convincing senior allied officials to provide him with forged Russian papers, Harold and an interpreter travelled to Bugk and located the German who had buried his brother and two of his crew members. The graves were relocated by the Commonwealth Graves Commission and there is a 15-minute film at the museum entitled "The Kearl Brothers."

Following the war, Harold returned to Canada with 437 squadron, now flying DC-3s, married Marilyn, joined the Air Reserves to keep flying and eventually retired in Calgary.



The Great Escape exhibit opens at the Military Museums

By Stuart Craig. Photos by Dave Lowery

The opening of this exhibit commenced at 11:00 a.m., Sunday March 24 at the Air Force Gallery in the Military Museums. Dignitaries, veterans, members of the armed forces, museum volunteers, family and friends attended.

On 24 March 1944, allied prisoners of war (POW) launched the largest escape effort of the second world war. Seventy-six men escaped via a 300-foot-long tunnel dug deep below the confines of the German-held Stalag Luft III POW camp. Many of the men involved in this escape initiative were Canadian and brought unique skill sets gained in pre-war life to the complex operation. The Great Escape Exhibit will remain a place where these extraordinary individuals will be remembered and honoured.

24th March 2024 marks the 80th anniversary of the great escape and so it is in honour of all those in Stalag Luft III, and particularly those involved with the digging and escape through the tunnel known as 'Harry,' that this specific date was chosen for the opening of our Great Escape exhibit. It was also an opportunity to pay tribute to the 50 POWs who were tragically executed under order by Hitler after the great escape.

The Great Escape experience provides an immersive, interactive re-telling of this significant second world war event including a recreated POW hut with escape-related accessories and a length of the escape tunnel itself, built to the same height and width of the original. Visitors are invited to traverse the tunnel to get a sense of the tense, claustrophobic conditions of the original tunnel.

Biographies



Left to right: Paul Tobolski, son of executed great escape participant, Pawel Tobolski, Alison Mercer, Air Force Museum Society of Alberta (AFMSA) museum curator, Samir Kayande, NDP MLA for Calgary-Elbow, Lieutenant-Colonel John-Alec Bossence, 1 Air Maintenance Squadron (1 AMS) Commanding Officer and CO AFMSA, John Argue, AFMSA chair, and Barry Davidson Jr, son of Royal Air Force Pilot Officer Barry A. Davidson who survived the great escape.

Barry Davidson and Paul Tobolski – both POW sons, spoke about the role that their fathers played in "The Great Escape" from Stalag Luft 111 (a Luftwaffe run POW camp). They were joined by the Air Force Museum of Alberta (AFMA) chairman, John Argue

The Great Escape exhibit – Contd.

and AFMA curator, Alison Mercer, who spoke about the launch of the Great Escape exhibit and the reopening of the updated Air Force Gallery.

Barry Davidson Jr.

Barry is the son of Royal Air Force Pilot Officer Barry A. Davidson – one of the longest serving World War II POW (five years) who survived the great escape at Stalag Luft III. P/O Davidson specialized in bribing and blackmailing the German guards and hut searchers. The contents of Red Cross packages like chocolate, Nescafe, and cigarettes became currency in exchange for paper, india ink, pen nibs, and even a camera critical for forging travel documents for escapers. He also obtained important items such as train schedules, uniform insignias, passports, travel permits and even lock picks and timber were also obtained. It was through these efforts that his father became known as “the scrounger.”

Paul Tobolski

Paul Tobolski is the son of Pawel Tobolski, a Polish born Royal Air Force navigator, who took part in the great escape using one of the tunnels at Stalag Luft III on the night of March 24th 1944.

Just 76 individuals out of the initially planned 200 made it out of the tunnel that night. Of these, 73 were recaptured and only three made it back to England. Unfortunately, 50 of the recaptured escapees, Pawel Tobolski included, were murdered in contravention of the Geneva Convention, as an example to other POW not to escape.

Pawel’s wife, Jadwiga, was four months pregnant when Pawel left for his bombing mission and was shot down on June 25th 1942, ending up in Stalag Luft III. Their son, Paul, was born while Pawel was in Stalag Luft III. Handwritten letters that his mother received from her husband Pawel in the POW camp detailed his excitement on the birth of his son in November, 1942.



Samir Kayande, NDP MLA for Calgary-Elbow tries out the exact tunnel replica used in the Great Escape from Stalag Luft III.

Upcoming centenary events

Kenn Nixon and his RCAF 2024 team have put together a very impressive set of events that will span a significant portion of the RCAF 100th anniversary

John Argue.



Draft Program for 2024

Here is a summary of the events still under consideration for 2024:

Date	Event	OPI	Comments
Jun 24	Happy Hour		Another fundraising opportunity
Summer 2024			
Jul 24	Calgary Stampede		
	Presence at the TMM display		TBD
	Stampede Float in the parade Deadline – Feb 24	Wayne	Andrew Abbott is contact
	TMM Summer Skirmish	Phil	Air Force Display
	Dorset Club Beer Call	Stuart	
	Marda Loop	Bryndis	
11 Aug 24	UN Peacekeeper Day	Kenn & Bob Wade	Possible flypast over the Buffalo Park wreath laying
Sep 24	Spruce Meadows	Wayne	Possibly have the RCAF band for the military day. Possible flypast F18
15 Sep 24	Battle of Britain	Kenn & 783 Wing	Possibly a fly past – 408 Sqn
Fall 24	Stampeders Game	TBA	Fly past or kickoff
19 or 26 Oct 24	Mess Dinner	Kenn, Bryndis & Don	LGov, RCAF VIP & RCAF Band Combo
11 Nov 24	Remembrance Day	Kenn, Bryndis & 783 Wing	RCAF VIP & British Counsel
Nov 24	Calgary Flames Game	TBA	

AFMSA celebrated RCAF 100th anniversary

Photos by Stuart Craig and Dave Lowery

As part of the celebrations for the Royal Canadian Air Force one hundredth anniversary on Monday, April 1 2024, the AFMSA, with Kenn Nixon as lead, arranged a city hall RCAF flag raising ceremony and RCAF flypast. At 13:50 on the west side of Calgary City Hall, Mayor Gondek and Hon

Col Andrew Abbott raised the RCAF flag following a flyover by a RCAF Gonzo, a heavily modified DE Haviland Dash 8 modified to meet DND requirements.

The Gonzo was flown by Major Dan Rossi, chief training pilot with the 402 “City of Winnipeg” Squadron.



Mayor Gondek and Norm Harvey at right.



Above: Air cadets from 52, 538, 604 and 918 squadrons.

Founder's Gallery reopening

Additionally, the Air Force Museum was proud to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) with the celebratory opening of the RCAF Centenary exhibition in the Founders' Gallery.

Below: L to R Greg McLean MP Calgary Centre, Alison Mercer, John Argue and Hon Col Andrew Abbott.

In cooperation with Ucalgary's Founders' Gallery, the AFMSA is proud to present People of Canada's Air Force: 100 Years.

This exhibit celebrates human experience in Canadian military aviation over the past century and invites viewers to form their own definition of Canadian Air Force culture by combining personal narrative, material culture and interactive elements.



Below: Bob Wade gave numerous media interviews during the Founder's Gallery reopening.

