

The Tribute

Summer 2019

Chair's update

We have had a busy and productive time since my most recent update in January. Our volunteers working with RCAF History and Heritage, the wonder-

ful staff at TMM and the wider community of partners and supporters have moved the yardsticks well down the field.

Below: Col (Ret) Don Matthews, Air Force Museum Society of Alberta, receives the Trans-Canada (McKee) Trophy from BGen Leblanc at the Air Force Museum of Alberta on May 5, 2019 in Calgary. The Trans-Canada Trophy, also known as the McKee Trophy, is awarded by the Canadian Aeronautics and Space Institute to a Canadian citizen who has made an outstanding, contemporary achievement in aerospace operations, whether a single act within the year prior to the award or a sustained level of performance over a period of several years. The award was founded in 1927 by James Dalzell McKee (1893–1927) and is the oldest aviation award in Canada.



In May we celebrated the 10th Anniversary of the Air Force Museum of Alberta with a reception in the Cold War shelters. Many thanks to our visiting dignitaries from 2 Air Div Winnipeg and 4 Wing Cold Lake: Brigadier General Leblanc, Colonel Doyle and Lt. Col Pilon. You can read more about the event in the exhibit committee chairman's report and suffice it to say that everyone had a good time celebrating our accomplishments and at the same time looking forward to a dynamic future. A big thank you to Kenn Nixon and Pat Sulek for their hard work in organizing and managing the celebration.

The planning for future upgrades and additions to TMM are ongoing. We are excited to be a member of the planning group and it will be wonderful to have a coordinated and comprehensive plan upon which to base future requests for funding and support.

Over the last few years, the Canadian Aviation and Space Museum (CASM) in Ottawa has been building a large network that currently boasts 30 partners from the aerospace industry. They have launched a number of projects, including a career

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exploration fair which attracted 25 partners and over 1000 students during two days. It is CASM's goal to expand this network, nationally, and we believe that the RCAF would be a great partner/beneficiary of this program. Should the RCAF join this network, we hope that our museum can be part of the solution to reaching out to Canadian youth looking for a rewarding career.

We recently held our AGM. We welcomed two new directors to the board: Bob Wade and John Argue. As well, the gentleman who has been our constant source of strength has decided to leave the board but remain in an advisory role. I am speaking of Gerry Morrison and we all wish you well Gerry. You have been a great leader and example for the rest of us. 18 years of volunteering is an incredible accomplishment!! The board of directors now includes: Ed McGillivray, Jim Powell, Michelle Gerwing, Gord Todd, Mike Ricketts, Dave Lowery, Ray McKay, Kenn Nixon, John Argue, Bob Wade and Don Matthews. In an advisory role, Alison Mercer is our curator and Marty Doyle is the HAS manager. The commanding officer of the Air Force Museum of Alberta remains Lieutenant Colonel Jonathan Pilon, CO of 1 AMS at 4 Wing Cold Lake and our honorary director is Ken Lett.

We have looked for years for a state-of-the art technology to make a tour of the museum that is bilingual

and in the future multi lingual. We have teamed with ASICA Ltd. to build a high tech sustainable solution. There will be a grand digital opening this autumn and it will be on your mobile device.

In closing let me recommend our web site www.rcaf.museum. It has been undergoing constant revision and has several new additions. Among the many treasures you will find:

- A virtual tour of the cold war museum in the shelters
- A virtual tour of the air force museum in the main building
- A searchable data base of our archives containing photos, letters, records and various documents related to RCAF heritage
- Biographies of the 100 famous aviation leaders named on our CF 18.
- The story of Canada's 26 plane CF 18 squadron in the first Gulf War 1990 – 1991.
- And last but not least you can sign up for our golf tournament that will be held at SilverWing golf course on August 7th.

One final note, you can look for our MK 82 Snake Eye in August in the CF 18 HAS.

See you at the golf tournament
Respectfully, Don Matthews

Curator's report

As 6 June 2019 marked the 75th Anniversary of D-Day, The Military Museums put together a collective temporary exhibit about the Canadian units serving in Italy. The personnel of these units were known as the 'D-Day Dodgers,' an originally derisive term attributed to Lady Astor MP but then adopted with pride by the men themselves.

In addition to the Canadian airmen serving with the Royal Air Force in Italy and the strategic bombing role of 420, 424, and 425 Squadrons during the Sicilian campaign, the Royal Canadian Air Force contributed one fighter squadron to aid Field Marshal Montgomery's Eighth Army as it advanced up the Italian boot. This was 417 'City of Windsor' Squadron.

417 Squadron was formed in England as part of Fighter Command in 1941. They transferred to Libya in North Africa two years later, flying with the RAF's Desert Air Force before moving to the island of Malta. From Malta, the Spitfires of 417 Squadron flew bomber escort missions while the RAF 'softened' up German defenses in Sicily prior to invasion in July 1943.



Slow going for 417's Spitfires!

By August of that year, they were in Italy, continuing their escort role. The autumn of 1943 belied Italy's sunny reputation; torrential rains, winds, flooding, and mud forced the squadron to move location multiple times while they continued their support of incoming naval convoys and the doggedly advancing Eighth Army. The rain continued into the

winter and after one downpour in December, an enterprising airman measured the depth of the mud: four feet and only three feet in shallower spots!

Since the German Luftwaffe had been driven from the skies, the Spitfires of 417 Squadron turned their attention to ground targets. In one week alone in early 1944, they shot up six locomotives, fourteen freight cars, thirteen vehicles, and two gun posts. But outside of Anzio, the Luftwaffe was back in force. On Valentine's Day

Damaged rail lines, courtesy of 417 Squadron.



1944, 417 Squadron fought their most successful action: nine Spitfires against eighteen German Focke-Wulfs and twelve Messerschmitt 109s. They destroyed three enemy aircraft and damaged three more. By the end of May 1944, the squadron's score totaled 29 enemy aircraft destroyed, eight probably destroyed, and 22 damaged.

For the remainder of the year, the squadron was converted to a fighter-bomber role, fitted with racks to carry 500-lb bombs. They targeted crossroads, bridges, and rail lines but it was costly work with seven pilots reported killed or missing.

King George's visit, July 1944.



King George VI visited the squadron outside of Perugia in July 1944. Despite their rustic living conditions, the 'Windors' turned out smartly in uniform and in drill for the King's informal inspection, no

doubt surprising their RAF superiors!

Bombing sorties slowed into the autumn months of 1944 and throughout the winter into 1945 but increased again by the spring, and in April 1945, squadron operations rose into a final climax. Aircrew flew 938 hours on 723 sorties, dropped over 244 tonnes of bombs, claiming three rail cuts, one locomotive, 24 freight cars, eighteen tanks, 148 vehicles, eight barges, seven bridges and seven guns.

Group photo of Canadian and Italian airmen, Italy 1944/1945.



Curator's report – Contd.

Hostilities in Europe ceased on 8 May 1945. After participating in the Desert Air Force's victory flypast on May 28, the squadron was disbanded and the men returned home to Canada.

The Air Force Museum was privileged to accept the collection of Flying Officer D.H.A. McKay DFC in May 2019. McKay joined the RCAF in 1941 and served with 417 Squadron in North Africa and Italy. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross in 1945 for proving himself a "consistently courageous and successful fighter pilot" and for his service as an "outstanding deputy flight commander and formation leader." We extend our gratitude and acknowledgement to Flying Officer McKay's family for this kind and significant donation.



F/O D.H.A. McKay DFC.

Exhibit chairman's report

Our 10th Anniversary on the 9th of May was celebrated on May 5th with a gathering of approximately 80 members and friends. The VIP attendees were BGen. Mario Leblanc, Commander 2 Canadian Air Division, Col.P.Doyle, Wing Comd 4 Wing Cold Lake and LCol. J Pilon, CO I AMS Cold Lake. The host for the event was our chairman, Col.(Ret'd) Don Matthews.

What a difference from 2002 when a small number of retired Air Force types gathered to see if we could build a museum to honour the men and women of Canada's Air Force, past and present. So with a dream, no money and an offer of 4,000 square feet in the new Military Museums we set out to build what we have now. It took eight plus years to complete the inner gallery which was followed by the Cold War Exhibit completion in September 2015. At times in the early stages of development we wondered where the next dollar was coming from but we always managed to get it. I believe we have achieved what we set out to do. All RCAF members past and present can proudly say their museum is one of the best, if not the best, in Canada.

This marks my last column in the AFMSA newsletter as I am stepping down after 18 years of volunteering. Bob Wade is taking up the exhibit chairman's job on the 19th of June. It has been a wonderful experience for me to associate with the board members, volunteers and the staff at TMM. I am about to kick the tires, light the fire, plug in the burner and head off on a new experience.

Per Ardua Ad Astra.

