



904 (Lake Chapala-Mexico) Wing Air Force Association of Canada

Newsletter

September 2004

President's Message

We are embarking upon another 'season' at the Lakeside. Many of our full-time resident members traveled extensively this past summer and have returned full of new travel ideas. On the other hand, some have yet to return and we are looking forward to hearing their "on the road" stories when they get back. We are also looking forward to seeing our snowbird colleagues who will soon begin to trickle back to their winter homes here at Lake Chapala. The next few meetings will provide us all with the opportunity to once again see old friends and meet some new ones.

The new summer song here is entitled "The hills are alive with the sound of thunder", (with apologies to the von Trapp family). The rainy season this year has been a little overpowering at times. I am beginning to wonder about those famous words: "it only rains at night"! However, those of you who have been away from the Lakeside since April will be glad to hear that the water level in Lake Chapala is now higher than it has been for 10 years.

A reminder that the 55th Annual General Meeting and National Convention of the Air Force Association of Canada will be held in Halifax, Nova Scotia, from October 7 to 10, 2004, with convention headquarters at the Casino Nova Scotia Hotel. We do not plan to send a delegation from the Lakeside. Nonetheless, if any of you (especially snowbirds) are going to be in the area and are planning or would like to attend, please let me know. Registration information is available on the AFAC web site (<http://www.airforce.ca>).

This year, Battle of Britain Sunday in Canada officially occurs on 19 September. Accordingly, we have invited a Battle of Britain veteran to speak at our next meeting on Friday, 10 Sep. Charles Morgan served as a Spitfire armourer with the RAF during the Battle of Britain. He will recount some of his experiences of those fateful months of 1940.

The Executive Council is continuing to develop the program for the coming period; however, we very much want to obtain your input. We are always grateful for suggestions on who, where or what, so if you have some ideas, please speak to any member of the Executive.

I will close on a sad note. On behalf of us all, I have extended condolences to Dick Strobl and his family on the loss of Dick's wife Dorothy. I have told Dick that he can count on us to assist in whatever way we can.

Per Ardua Ad Astra
Bill Watt

In Memoriam - Dorothy Strobl

The members of 904 (Lake Chapala-Mexico) Wing of the Canadian Air Force Association extend most sincere condolences to Dick Strobl on the loss of his wife Dorothy who passed away suddenly on the morning of Thursday, 2 September. Dick, the families of their three children Richard, Randy and Heidi and especially their seven grandchildren will miss her dearly. Dorothy and Dick moved to Ajijic over five years ago from Victoria and have enjoyed an active and happy lifestyle. Dorothy loved her life here and will be greatly missed by her many friends in the Lake Chapala area.

Chiapas Visit

During July four couples from 904 Wing took a fabulous six-day trip in the Chiapas region with a superb guide with an amazing knowledge of the history, culture and customs of the area. The group included Pete and Leith DeTracey, Don Slimman and Nicole Pinel, Bill and Jane Singlehurst, and Bob and Heather Rowlett. The tour included visits to the Maya ruins at Palenque, Bonampak and Yaxchilan. The final site at Yaxchilan was in the middle of the rain forest that we reached after a one-hour boat trip along the river that separates Mexico from Guatemala. After the Maya ruins we moved to a Hotel in San Cristobal in the high country and toured a selection of villages, churches and the waterfalls at Misol-Ha and Agua Azul. The final day was a boat tour through the Sumidero Canyon to an Ecological Park, then a short drive to Tuxtla for a dinner dance at the annual meeting of the Mexican Air Force Association. The dinner/dance was our excuse for the whole trip!

Greetings from other Wings

Dear Bill

Our Wing secretary gave me your name and address so I'll take the opportunity to welcome you and your Wing to the RCAFA fold. Since we are almost "next door" neighbours, I hope we'll have a chance to meet someday – or arrange for some sort of exchange visit.

I wish you all the best.

Jane Kennedy, President 902 Wing
Santa Barbara, California

Dear Mr. President

Greetings and Welcome to the Airforce Association of Canada from 888 (Komox) RCAF Wing, the largest Wing in the Association.

We look forward to a mutually pleasing relationship with you.

Our members are interested in knowing your whereabouts in relation to a large centre, Any of them in the area would be honoured to visit your Wing. We invite any of your members visiting the beautiful Comox Valley to drop into Triple 8 for a brew. We are located adjacent to the local Air Base, 19 Wing Comox.

Again a warm welcome to the newest Wing in the Association from the largest.

Tom Miles, President

Sabre Pilots Association of the Air Division Squadrons (SPAADS)

Ron Hudson and Babette attended the SPAADS reunion in Winnipeg this summer and provided this information for our newsletter.

SPAADS is made up of pilots who flew the F-86 Sabre with Royal Canadian Air Force squadrons in Europe, with NATO, from 1951 to 1963.

NATO - the North Atlantic Treaty Organization - was formed in 1951 by a group of nations concerned with the threat of communism expanding into Western Europe. As a founding member Canada agreed to provide, along with other military units, an Air Force contribution which would be tasked with the role of air defence.

It was against this backdrop that the Royal Canadian Air Force created 1 Air Division with the headquarters to be based in Metz, France. The considerable engineering and industrial capacity of Canada was pressed into action to provide the aircraft needed for the mission. With a sense of urgency the Royal Canadian Air Force started to train the aircrew and technical personnel.

In November 1951, 410 was named as the first squadron of the Air Division. It was transported on the RCN aircraft carrier HMCS Magnificent to North Luffenham in England, where it would be joined in 1952 by 439 and 441 Sqns.

By September 1953 the Air Division had four Interceptor Day Fighter Wings in Europe, No.1 Wing at Marville, France, the new home to 410, 439, and 441 Fighter Squadrons; No. 2 Wing at Grostenquin, France, consisting of 416, 421, and 430 Sqns; No. 3 Wing at Zweibrucken, Germany, with 413, 427 and 434 Sqns; and, No. 4 Wing at Baden-Soellingen, Germany with 414, 422 and 444 Squadrons.

In 1956 the decision was made to provide an all-weather and night fighter capability for the Air Division, and by July 1957 four Sabre squadrons: 410, 413, 414 and 416 had been deactivated and replaced by CF 100 squadrons.

With an authorized strength of 300 first rate fighters, plus spare aircraft as replacements when needed, the RCAF 1 Air Division was a force that any opposition would treat with great respect. During the life of the Air Division, the threat was great, and the so-called Cold War was always in danger of turning hot. Training was very realistic and demanding. One hundred and seven Royal Canadian Air Force Sabre pilots gave their lives guarding the freedoms and ideals for which Canada stands. A monument dedicated in their honour stands in the Air Park of the RCAF Memorial Museum in Trenton, Ontario.

The incident described on the next page took place during "Exercise Tall Timber" an eight day exchange between the RCAF and RCAF in 1961. It is believed that it was written by Jim Foy as a spoof on the "Good Show" articles published in the RCAF Roundel. Coincidentally, it involved a member of 904 Wing.

Sabre Pilot Tales

F/O RL Pope, 439(F) Sqn, was leading a three plane section of Canadian Sabres in the vast uncharted regions of the Norwegian Northland when tragedy, suddenly and without warning, struck. F/O Pope keeping his keen eye on his lesser experienced wingman, perceived a surly seagull attacking him head on: from then on things started happening at a tremendous pace. Listen, as the pilot tells the story in his own words.

“I looked up suddenly seeing this mammoth bird right in front of my aircraft. I could see his huge wings outspread, gaping beak open, razor-like talons reaching for me. I was definitely at a disadvantage; my poor Sabre was only flying at 300 knots. I hadn’t even had time to charge my 50 calibres; my radar sight didn’t lock on; that arctic albatross had tried to outwit me, and it sure looked as though he had . . . Quickly, my superb training and superior intellect took over, and the agile cunning fighter pilot that I was came to the fore. Instantly I pushed –2G and dove the aircraft - - - that poor bird was a dead pigeon. I had him right in my sights, at good range (one foot) and I saw him hit. I ducked my head and pulled up sharply (+8 G) so as to be sure of my victim. I knew I had him now, for he seemed to come right at me through the windscreen. I felt splintering glass falling around me; I was hit; blood appeared as if by magic, all over me. This looked like the end. . . Quickly I went through my checks: runup check, fire check, prestart check, and a traveler’s check. Through my blood –shot eyes I could see an airfield just ahead. Could I reach it? I lowered my landing gear and headed for the end of the runway, slowed to approach speed, and made my usual graceful landing, clutching my prize to my bosom.”

Yes, F/O Pope deserves a GOOD SHOW for his excellence and skill displayed in averting what might have been an even longer stay in the arctic.

904 (Lake Chapala-Mexico) Wing Executive Council

President	Bill Watt
1st Vice-President	Pete De Tracey
2 nd Vice-President	Ron Hudson
Secretary	Jack Girard
Treasurer	Tombo Thomlinson

Meetings

Date	Theme	Speaker	Venue
Ø 10 Sep	Battle of Britain	Charles Morgan	Nueva Posada, 4 P.M.
Ø 8 Oct	Burma Star 60 th Anniversary	Pete DeTracey	Nueva Posada, 4 P.M.
Ø 19 Nov	Welcome Back Snowbirds	Welcome Back	TBD
Ø 10 Dec	Aviation Art	Aviation Artists	Nueva Posada, 4 P.M.
Ø 14 Jan	Nostalgia Night	Members	Nueva Posada, 4 P.M.

Next Issue: The next issue of the Newsletter will be published in November. Please pass any articles or letters to Bob Rowlett or Mario Okunsky by **29 October 2004**.