



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

September 2009

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President's Message

As the sixth president since Bill Watt did all the hard work to get us organized and recognized as a Wing in 2004, I feel my task has been made much easier as a result of all the efforts of my predecessors and by the members of their Executive Councils. Looking forward, I can also add that I am greatly encouraged by the enthusiasm of the current council.

This year's program will not differ much from that of 2008/09. We have decided on a trial basis to change the location of the Beer Calls to Las Miche. The Executive will welcome your views on whether this site is successful and indeed on any other items on our programmed events. Our regular meetings at the Nueva Posada will be continued, and we hope to have several presentations on aviation-related matters to offer. We also hope to see many of our ladies attend these events.

Don Slimman

AEMA Annual Convention

As in past years representatives from 904 Wing have attended the Annual Convention of the AEMA. This year our representative was Mario Okunsky who attended the XXXIII Annual Convention of the AEMA including the ceremony in front of the EMA (Escuela Militar de Aviacion) Monument on Avenida Chapultepec in Guadalajara. This year was very special as Mario was asked to be part of the six man Honour Guard, and to represent 904 Wing by placing the Wreath with the AEMA's Guadalajara Chapter President Roberto Montoya in front of the Monument, in Honour of all its fallen pilots and the late Cap. P.A. Jaime Zeniso Rojas, (who many of us knew) the last surviving member of Mexico's 201 Fighter Squadron that participated in the Philippines Theatre during WWII.



Members of the Honour Guard from left to right are:
Cap. P.A Gualterio Gonzalez Reyes - President of AEMA National
Gen'l P.A. Manuel Wonchee Montaño - Retired from Mexican Air Force
Cap. P.A. Roberto Montoya - President of AEMA Guadalajara Group
Mario Okunsky - Past President 904 (Lake Chapala-Mexico) Wing
Gen'l P.A. Ernesto Rivera Rojas - Active Mexican Air Force
Cap. P.A. Amador Cantu - Treasurer of AEMA Guadalajara Group



Mario Okunsky and Roberto Montoya place the wreath in Honour of all Mexico's fallen pilots and the late Cap. P.A. Jaime Zeniso Rojas

The POST 7 ROLL CALL and the LCS LIBRARY

I am putting in two unashamed "plugs" for the above in my dual capacities as the Wing liaison person for Post 7 American Legion, Chapala and as a volunteer in the Library at the LCS, Ajijic.

ROLL CALL

ROLL CALL is a Monthly Publication of POST 7, CHAPALA that is distributed at the beginning of each month. Often kindly brought to our meetings by Suzannah Kelly, Dan Williams and Bernie Metcalfe who are officers of the Legion and also members of our Wing. It can be picked up at the LCS, MBE at San Antonio or even better the Legion itself where you will always find a friendly soul, a drink and a meal (before 3pm). Edited by Victoria Schmidt (766-0253) who not only produces a wonderful publication, but also solicits your articles and adverts. It has a beautiful color cover of local scenes and a variety of contents which is more than remarkable for a voluntary editorial group. The March 2009 issue had articles on the Korean War, Mexican History, the Victoria Cross, Mexican Citizenship, Veterans Benefits, Cooking Recipes and a Crossword Puzzle. In addition all the numerous events the Legion sponsors as well as a comprehensive list of Chapala and Lakeside advertisers all of whom deserve your support. It is distributed for free, but a small donation for an issue is greatly appreciated. It deserves our support.

LCS LIBRARY

I appreciate that the LCS has many wonderful services and events. In this instance I want to ensure you are aware of the excellent collection of military related volumes in the Library. Unfortunately you have to be a member to borrow a book, but you have free access to the magazines and the books so long as you read or consult them within the confines of the library (M-F 1000-1400hrs, Sat 10-1300hrs). We have a small stock of Military magazines with the RCAA publication very often there. See them in the Reading Room adjacent to the office. The main library has three main areas of interest for you. The front and middle rooms are soft and hardcover fiction, but have such notables as Bernard Cornwall, Alexander Kent and Len Deighton to name but a few of the selection of military subject authors along with another section of biographies which include prominent military types. The back room contains the nonfiction which will be particularly of interest to Wing members. This area can be slightly confusing to the novice because the books are conventionally stacked by Dewey classification. This means that our excellent collection of WW11 books is in the 940.54 section. More recent conflicts e.g. Iraq are in the 960.0 section while Military history and other texts are in the 450.0 section. However there are other gems that are more hidden away. "The Worlds Worst Aircraft" by Jim Winchester is Dewey number 629.13 in a small section we have related to aviation. Another recent addition is "The last Generation" by Alan Robertson-a riveting account of an RCAF aircrew member in WW11 in the 940.54 section-a lot of books to browse through in this particular section. We have an excellent collection relating to the US Civil War and if you want illustrated volumes go to

the oversize collection where we have a wide variety of military subjects. The best way to find your way around is to go to our computer index by the registration desk and browse by author, title and subject or ask a friendly volunteer.

Have a good read MJI (Wing SAI).

Meet the Members – President Don Slimman

The fact that military aviation became the basis of my career can be attributed to one of my schoolmasters, with whom I shared an extremely strong mutual dislike. I met him soon after arriving at Edinburgh Academy at age 14. Mr. Cooke, who had served as an artillery officer in WW2, was assigned the secondary duty as CO of the school's Army Cadet Corps. Participation was obligatory for all boys, and I soon found out that parade-square drill was unpleasant, boring and pointless. Field exercises, consisting largely of crawling as close as possible to the cold and muddy Scottish ground, were equally unappealing. Yes, there was an alternative, the RAF Section, but Mr. Cooke made it clear that requesting a transfer to what he called the "Brylcream Boys" was akin to disloyalty to him, to the school, and perhaps even to the country. True, some 5% of the students had done so, and they were, obviously, boys with character defects.

I can still remember the day I saluted Major Cooke and told him that I wanted to join the RAF Section. As he looked at me scornfully, he said "S-s-slimman" (he had a pronounced stutter), "I'm not s-s-surprised. You're just trying to avoid military drill which is what a b-b-boy of your age needs to improve your character." Still, perhaps because he wanted to get rid of me, he did sign my transfer. I changed my khaki uniform for light blue, and suddenly, military training took on a new, and highly enjoyable, perspective. Each Friday afternoon, instead of drilling in the cold rain, we would be in a warm classroom, learning Morse, Meteorology, Aero-Engines and Principles of Flight. Even better, summer camp would be at an RAF station, we were all given flights in Anson aircraft, infinitely better than the lot of our colleagues in khaki. In the following year, I was selected for a course in gliding, and because I did not kill myself there, I was offered a Flying Scholarship, which involved 30 hours of pilot training in the Tiger Moth, an antiquated open cockpit biplane.

Again, the sequence continued. Because of my flying experience, I was admitted to Edinburgh University Air Squadron. Here, we could fly Chipmunks, actually getting paid for doing so, any day we were free from our academic classes. The instructors, who were old (and often lazy) RAF officers, were happy to sign us out for solo flying, allowing us to fly in and around cumulus cloud, and also to do the hero stuff over our pre-warned families and girlfriends. It was a great time. After university graduation, I became subject to the UK's two-year period of National Service. My background led to my being commissioned as a pilot trainee, with the dizzy rank of Acting Pilot Officer on Probation. Training was on the Piston Provost, followed by the Vampire, where my instructor was a Canadian on an exchange posting. He was, I believe, acting as an unofficial recruiting

officer for the RCAF, and I was one of four members of the graduating class who applied to join that service.

At this point, I should mention the importance of another factor that has had a strong influence on my life. The Scottish climate, dark, cool and wet in winter and not much different in what is humorously called its summer, can be rather depressing. At age 17, I left home for a hitch-hiking trip through England and across the Channel to France. I was wearing a kilt, and found that obtaining rides was absurdly easy. My high school French seemed to work, and several drivers offered me meals in restaurants and in their homes. As I travelled south into the Rhone Valley, it got drier and brighter and warmer, and continued so all the way to Monaco. It was then that I decided that I had no interest in spending my life in Scotland, and I was open to any ideas involving travel.

So why Canada? Partly because I had been given to understand that it was a bilingual country, and I enjoyed using my French; partly because of the influence of my instructor; and, to be honest, mainly because the RCAF offered me a permanent commission on entry and at a salary more than twice what I would receive in the RAF. Was it a good decision? Yes, although there were times when I doubted this. Winters in the Prairies were staggeringly cold, and I lived through five of these, at Saskatoon (instrument flying), Penhold, as a flying instructor, and much later, at Cold Lake for the CF-104 OTU. Five years at Summerside, PEI, seemed interminable, as did many of the 18-hour maritime patrols we carried out in the Argus, boring holes in the sky and usually seeing nothing other than waves.

Fortunately, however, the good bits greatly outnumbered the bad. For winters, I discovered the joys of skiing, both downhill and cross-country. Summers offered canoeing, and while in Ottawa, my wife and I made several wilderness canoe-camping excursions into Algonquin Park and to the Gatineau. Socially, Canada was a much less stratified country than the UK, with less emphasis on one's accent and the related issue of "which school did you go to?" In some ways, it was a boring country. Travelling abroad, you would encounter few if any newspaper references to Canada – but lots about Northern Ireland, Lebanon, Israel/Palestine, Pakistan and Bosnia. Being boring can be a plus.

I enjoyed most parts of my career. Being a flying instructor can teach you much about flying, knowing how far to let a student go in a mistake before taking the controls, ideally at the last possible moment. My log book tells me that I did two instrument flights with a certain Flight Cadet DeTracey in 1958. The Argus period allowed us to fly to Bermuda, Puerto Rico, the Azores and the UK, usually with a 2-3 day stopover. And when I finally achieved my long-standing dream of being posted to the CF-104, there began the most enjoyable and challenging period of my flying career. Low flying, which in other aircraft normally incurs the risk of a court-martial, was actually required, in order to keep below enemy radars. After the Cold Lake 6-month course, I was posted to Baden Soellingen to 421 Squadron, made famous in its earlier Sabre days by the presence of a certain Flying Officer called Renaud Prefontaine, and later by another who went by the name of Ron Hudson. Our role was totally different from their high altitude air combat. Instead, we would fly low-level practice routes in West

Germany at 450 knots, before pushing up to 540 knots for the final 50-mile run in to the target. Believe me, there are few experiences that make you so conscious of being alive as moving at 540 knots at 50 feet above the unforgiving ground.

Although many pilots bemoaned the requirement to do ground tours, I found that they could be equally enjoyable and varied. I served as a recruiting officer in Hamilton, talking to high school students about the military colleges. I can also remember warning nursing students that although they would earn more money as military nurses, they would have a problem. Living in an officers' mess, they might find themselves deprived of female company. The response was predictable.

Along with some 140 Canadian and foreign students, including a certain Major Bob Rowlatt, I spent an enjoyable year at Staff College in Toronto. On completion, I was seconded to the Canadian Institute of International Affairs in the same city, again for a year, but this time wearing civilian clothes, a less easy task than putting on the same tunic, shirt, tie and shoes every day. Once I mastered this challenge, I found that as a so-called military expert, I was expected to pontificate on Canada's military strategic policy at CIIA conferences and in its publications. To put it mildly, I was a little bit out of my depth, but nobody seemed to notice, or if anyone did, they were too polite to show it.

There followed 13 years in National Defence Headquarters in Ottawa, in a pleasing variety of jobs. I was part of a group tasked with sketching the world 10-15 years in the future, in order to identify the military threats to Canada, and thereby helping ensure that weapons systems would be purchased to counter future threats. Another job was in Personnel Development, including a study, highly controversial at the time, on expanding the role of women to include serving in ships, combat arms, at isolated units, and, dear to my heart, as aircrew. It was immensely enjoyable, and I was succeeded in the position by a certain LCol Bill Watt. After retiring from the Regular Force in 1988 (my God, that's over 20 years ago!), I was offered the task of organizing the NATO Nuclear Planning Group 1989 Ministerial Meeting in Kananaskis, Alberta. Since this was not a total disaster, I was asked to do a similar role, again as a reserve officer, for the NATO Chiefs of Staff. Again, it was fun and kept me gainfully employed for yet another year, before finally taking off my uniform in 1991.

The thought of retiring in Canada was not appealing, and Nicole and I travelled widely, mainly in Latin America, studying Spanish in Costa Rica and Guatemala. In 1995, we purchased land in Roatan, a Caribbean island off the coast of Honduras, and had a house designed by a recommended architect. It looked great, and we foolishly accepted his offer to act as the building contractor. In this capacity, he was incompetent, lazy, and, we believe, frequently under the influence of cocaine. Needless to say, we had lots of subsequent problems, but to our great surprise, the house remained standing after Category 5 Hurricane Mitch in late 1998. Nicole had had enough, however, and said she was leaving. "Did I want to come with her?" Despite my reluctance to leave some of the best scuba and snorkeling in the Caribbean, I said I would. And Mexico was the next and best choice. We've been here now for over ten years. I have no regrets.

Program 2009/2010

The full program of activities is available on the Web Site at www.904wing.org.

Date	Day	Theme	Venue
25 Sep 09	Fri	Beer Call	Las Miche (Note 1)
09 Oct 09	Fri	Guest Speaker	La Nueva Posada
23 Oct 09	Fri	Beer Call	Las Miche (Note 1)
11 Nov 09	Wed	Remembrance Day	Chapala
20 Nov 09	Fri	Welcome Back Snowbirds BBQ	LCS Gazebo
11 Dec 09	Fri	Guest Speaker	La Nueva Posada
01 Jan 10	Fri	New Year's Day Cocktail Party	Birds of Paradise
15 Jan 10	Fri	Beer Call	TBA
26 Jan 10	Tue	Golf Tournament (Best Ball)	Chapala Country Club
12 Feb 10	Fri	Regular Meeting	La Nueva Posada

Notes

1. We have changed the Beer Call venue from Roberto's to Las Miche on the other side of the street. If it turns out to be successful, we will continue there in 2010
2. Notice of events organized by outside organizations, including the AEMA and the American Legion, will be announced separately to our members.

904 Wing Executive Council 2009-2010

Don Slimman	President	765-4141
Ken Reppen	First Vice President	766-4316
Martin Inwood	Second Vice President	766-1900
Tombo Thomlinson	Treasurer	766-4684
John Prichard	Secretary	766-1876
Ed Healey	Snowbird Rep	766-1930
Ron Hudson	Past President	766-2142