



Gathering of Lions 13-15 October 2017

Walt Pirie, Dale Horley, and Dick Dunn met at the Best Western Pembroke Hotel Friday afternoon, then drove to 427 Hanger #4 for the Meet & Greet at 5:00 pm. Earl Gowlett, Neil and Clare Lakins were already partaking of the refreshments with Bob Hyndman and Bernie Hamel of the CF-104 era. At 5:30 pm, we made our way to the tarmac for an aerobatic display by a retired Heli Squadron pilot.

After a short welcoming address by the Commanding Officer, Lt Colonel Clay Rook, we decamped to the double ended buffet of pig roast and salads. I made contact with several Heli era retired pilots and invited them to a meeting of our Executive Committee for 3:00 pm Saturday.

In conversation with Lt. Colonel Rook regarding the forthcoming unveiling of the "Fallen Lions" Cenotaph, he mentioned that he had some "push back" from senior officers who noted that no other squadron had their own memorial. His reply was, "So what!"

Saturday afternoon we met in the hotel lobby. Neil Lakins did not show, and Wayne MacLellan had sent his regrets having cancelled because of a bad cold. Randy Meiklejohn and Ken Sorfleet, both previous Commanding Officers of the Squadron were welcomed as observers. During the meeting, both agreed to serve on the Executive Committee and were duly appointed.

We then returned to Petawawa for the Gala Dinner. Squadron personnel and the caterers had done an exceptional job in transforming Hangar #2 into an elegant venue, complete with exquisite table settings and hanging chandeliers. A large screen projected photos from WWII, the Sabre and Starfighter eras, to the present Special Operations Air Squadron helicopter mission.

My wife Danielle was to accompany me, but had cancelled due to a cold. It is just as well, for she had planned to wear a colourful cocktail dress. With 90% of the ladies dressed in gorgeous long evening gowns, she would have slit my throat for failing to inform her of the dress code!

Lt Colonel Clay Rook, Maj General Christian Drouin and Maj General Michael Rouleau gave short speeches, followed by the Grace of Padre Raymond Smith.

The 438 Squadron band from St Hubert, Quebec played softly throughout the dinner; a comprehensive buffet of roast beef, marinated chicken, and cold salmon. After the Loyal Toast and Unit Marches by the 438 band, Lt Colonel Rook summoned me to centre stage. After brief introductory remarks, I read the text of the “Lionheart Award” that I then presented to Honorary Colonel Del Lippert. Attached is a copy, which speaks for itself.

The assembly proceeded to the adjacent Hangar #3 tarmac for a brief history of the “Piano Burning” ritual. The second shot from a flare gun alighted the gasoline-soaked upright piano, which blazed brightly as fireworks shot into the sky. Attached for your reading pleasure is the history of this venerable Royal Air Force tradition by USAF 4th Fighter Wing’s historian Professor Roy Heidicker.

Sunday afternoon we drove to the village of Cobden, 28 kms south of Pembroke. The “Fallen Lion’s” Cenotaph stands

proudly at the Veteran's Memorial Park. Photos of all squadron aircraft types are etched into the eight walls of black granite, together with the names and dates of the fallen. Honorary Colonel Del Lippert had arranged for closure of the Trans-Canada Highway for the Cenotaph unveiling ceremony.

At 2:00 pm the Colours were marched on, with the salute taken by Hon Colonel Del Lippert. Del Lippert and Lt General (Ret'd) Jim Smith, a 427 WWII Lancaster veteran, pulled the cord releasing the RCAF tartan covering to reveal the magnificent bronze lion atop the Cenotaph.

Brief speeches followed by the local Mayor Hal Johnson, Walt Pirie, and Lt Colonel Rook. Padre Smith dedicated the memorial to conclude the ceremony. Attached is a comprehensive article from the local Whitewater News.

With a cold front approaching, foul weather of wind, rain and thunderstorms were forecast. In the event, the weather at Cobden was quite benign. I had my car parked south of the road closure and departed immediately after the ceremony. About 15 kms south I encountered rain, and 5 minutes later, lashing wind and a torrential downpour. Had the front been 30 kms north, our ceremony would have been a debacle. Perhaps the Padre had put in a good word to the powers above!

Dick Dunn
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