

1st Canadian Parachute Battalion Association

Final National Reunion CFB Trenton 21-24 September 2006

Joanne de Vries

It was most fitting that this final national event was held during the Anniversary month sixty-one years after the stand down of the Battalion which occurred on September 30, 1945.

Thank you to everyone who attended. We were pleased to see all of you along with many family members. We were doubly pleased to see those that travelled the long distances from the east and the west to attend this final national event. Also, we were delighted to have nine widows of Battalion members attend the reunion. We are so glad you came. For those of you who would have attended but could not because of health issues, we missed you. Hopefully, you are managing well, under the circumstances.

Jan and I have received many very favourable comments by email, telephone, cards and letters. Judging by these responses the reunion was a success. Thank you for these. And we were grateful that many of you didn't even notice the couple of little 'blips' in the flow.

Special Thanks

Without the assistance of LCol Ewing and staff at CFLAWC this reunion would not have happened. We appreciate, beyond words, all the help during both the planning stages and the reunion.

Adrienne Anderson took on the huge job of producing the name tags which included the Battalion hat badge with the attendee's name superimposed. They turned out very well. Adrienne also helped during the registration.

Bev Delory's organizational skills made the stuffing of the registration bags go so smoothly that in one afternoon Bev and I had them all organized and ready to be transported to Trenton packing Bev's and Wilf's car to the roof. Bev also assisted during the registration.

Sgt. Rick Ruthven was available throughout the reunion taking photos. He apologised profusely for not being with the Ladies during their outing. He obviously preferred to hang out with the Battalion veterans. The Ladies have forgiven him. A complimentary CD of the photos will be made available to all attendees.

The assistance of Joe Drouin and Marlene Schmile of Drouin Enterprises was invaluable during the planning of the reunion. The table flags, registration bags, and souvenir 'dog tags' were obtained through Drouin Enterprises at very reasonable costs to the Association. We appreciated Joe's and Marlene's suggestions regarding design for the above items.

Padre Mark Sargent assisted in the planning of and conducting the memorial service for the Sunday as well as acting as MC for the Banquet. Again as at past Battalion events we deeply appreciate his support.

Thursday, 21 September 2006

Most members were booked in the Yukon Lodge at Canadian Forces Base 8 Wing Trenton, but also several stayed in nearby local hotels. The staff at the Yukon Lodge was most obliging and assisted our veterans wherever possible. All meals were available on the Base in the Yukon Galley which is the All-Ranks Mess. 8 Wing Food Services provided the food for the Meet and Greet, the Banquet, and the Farewell Luncheon on the Sunday. The quality of the food was excellent.

At 1500 hours in the Astra Lounge Junior Ranks Mess, Registration commenced. The Astra Lounge turned out to be an excellent venue. Adrienne Anderson, Bev Delory, Doris Firlotte, Irmina West (thanks to you all) and Joanne de Vries welcomed the attendees and handed out the registration packages. The packages included: itinerary, bus schedule, VAC information folder, Canada flag, poppy pin, book mark, Sky Hawks decals and fridge magnets, Nivea products from Beiersdorf Canada Inc. for both men and women, Province of Ontario pins, brochures from Trenton area, brochure from Irvin Aerospace, and shampoo samples for ladies. Draw prizes were displayed: a Para statuette; a framed Airborne Collage print by Katherine Taylor; and a framed Varsity print by Roger Chabot. Tickets were sold at \$10 each throughout the reunion. Copies of the Battalion war diary were on display for sale at \$60 each.

With the compliments of Dole and Ab Brum, pineapples fresh from Hawaii were distributed. As at several previous Battalion Association reunions and tours Ab arranged this delivery. All the attendees were delighted to receive the pineapples. There were a few concerns though as to how they were going to pack them to get them home. Thanks Ab for the Hawaiian flavour.

The Meet and Greet took place in the Astra Lounge as well. The cash bar opened at 1900 hours to a long and thirsty line-up. It was great to see so many familiar faces. There was lots of reminiscing (no doubt with the usual embellishments that seem to come with advanced age and the passage of time) and

fond memories of past gatherings. Joe and Marlene had the QM open. The 17 minute video of Battalion wartime footage was shown throughout the evening. We were pleased to have Guy Plamondon, Irvin Aerospace Operations Manager, join our group this evening. Irvin Aerospace Canada Ltd. is based in nearby Belleville. They made a most welcome monetary donation to help defray the cost of bussing. Refreshments, consisting of cheese and crackers, vegetables with dips, tea and coffee, were well set up and replenished as needed. The evening ended approximately at 2300 with the usual few hanging out to the end.

Friday, 22 September 2006

The day was clear and sunny with a touch of fall coolness in the air. After breakfast at the Yukon Galley, buses were available to take us to the restricted north side of the base where the Canadian Forces Land Advanced Warfare Centre (CFLAWC), formerly the Canadian Parachute Centre, is located. Montgomery Transit, a local bus company, provided the buses for our transport throughout the reunion. This arrangement was made by MCpl Derek Richards who was our liaison with the company. We thank MCpl Richards for his time and effort securing a very competitive price for our group and we thank Montgomery Transit for the generous donation of the use of one free bus per day. CFLAWC provided a vehicle and two most obliging troopers to assist three Battalion members who were in wheelchairs. This service was greatly appreciated by the members directly involved.



LCol Ewing and staff welcomed our group and gave us a most informative PowerPoint presentation comparing the old with the new responsibilities of CFLAWC; then we had a tour of the facilities. At 1100 hours The Canadian Forces Parachute Team (Sky Hawks) made an exhilarating demonstration drop to cheers and applauding. One could see in the eyes of many of 1Can Para veterans that they would love to have been able to again experience the thrill of jumping. After the demonstration, the Sky Hawks lined up, were individually introduced, and then took the time to join our group to talk with our members and family.

Following lunch which was back at the Yukon Galley, the buses transported the group for a tour of CFLAWC Support Company. We were again warmly welcomed and divided into two groups to facilitate the tour. Here is where the parachutes are packed; put up to dry and inspected following each use; and repaired. Our member Monty Marsden was particularly recognized as he was CWO of Support Company in the 1960's. Monty had his picture taken beside his photo which hangs in the hall of the Maintenance Depot. Next it was a tour of the RCAF Memorial Museum and to see the refurbished Halifax Bomber. The Museum has undergone extensive expansion and is well worth a visit.



The buses transported us back to the Yukon Galley where most remained for supper. The evening was free. Many took the opportunity to see the Sky Hawks again early in the evening. Their second demonstration of the day was part of a benefit concert which happened to be held on the Base that evening. The concert was in support for families of soldiers killed and injured in Afghanistan. A number of us then gathered at the bar in the Junior Ranks Mess which was open to all.

Saturday, 23 September 2006

The day began cloudy with rain but it let up by mid-morning. Fifty-three Association members attended the Association General Meeting held at 0930 in the Astra Lounge. An exhibit by Tim Sullivan and Ken Irvine of 1st Can Para Battalion Preservation Association, and a book promotion by authors Ken Joyce and Gary Boegel were set up for the meeting and remained in place throughout the day and for the Banquet. Again Konrad Gunzel, as he has done for many events in the past, set up a display of Battalion artefacts which he has gathered together over the years. This also was available for view throughout the day and for the Banquet.

Following the General meeting most of the men took the opportunity to attend a most interesting and informative guided tour of Irvin Aerospace. The tour was conducted by a representative from Irvin who

really knew his stuff and was able to answer all the questions posed to him.

At approximately 0915 the Ladies departed by bus to Bloomfield in Prince Edward County, a 40 minute drive south of the Base. To our delight the bus driver was Don Halcrow (ex Airborne Regiment and presently treasurer of CAFA National) who helped keep the Airborne spirit with us while we were away from our men. Bloomfield is a small town with many interesting boutiques, galleries, antique shops, and tea rooms. We had an enjoyable couple of hours browsing the shops, then it was to Angeline's restaurant for lunch. Angeline's is in an historical house lovingly refurbished to its original beauty by owner and Chef Willi Fida. Our lunch was Quiche Lorraine and salad; for desert the most delicious fresh apple strudel I have ever tasted, followed by tea or coffee. Taking a different route we arrived back at the Base about 1430.

In true Airborne fashion most attendees were ready and chomping at the bit waiting for the bar to open which was scheduled for 1730 in the Astra Lounge where our Banquet was held. A harried young bartender finally rushed in about 1755 and had the bar open shortly thereafter. There was an hour of socializing prior to the dinner. Tables were set for groups of eight people with a seating plan posted. A Battalion Hat Badge and Pegasus table flag, printed programme, and poppy pin were placed at each setting. The room was impressive with the maroon and blue of the flags as decoration. A table for the missing comrade was set in the corner of the room. As it was nearing time for people to take their places at the tables we realized that the wine was not available and the bartender did not know where it was. Enquiries were made and finally it was found. Col Ewing, CWO Brown and Mrs. Brown assisted in opening and serving the wine - the best wine stewards anyone could have! It had been arranged with the Canadian War Museum for the Cpl Fred Topham VC and medals to be on display, giving many members who had never seen them an opportunity to view them. They were well guarded by the Military Police, as was required by the CWM.

The Colours were marched in by troopers from CFLAWC with Capt Angelo Manzara capably in charge. Our National anthem was sung, Grace was said by Padre Mark Sargent, and the Act of Remembrance read by Bob Firlotte. Monty Marsden offered the Toast to the Queen; Wilf Delory, the Toast to our Fallen Comrades; and Vic Ramsbottom, the Toast to the Airborne.

Special souvenir 'dog tags', inscribed with the date and location of the reunion, were distributed to each veteran and family member. The dinner consisting of salad, roll and butter, beef consommé, shrimp cocktail, Prime Rib of beef, Yorkshire pudding, garlic mashed potatoes, glazed baby carrots and broccoli

florets was excellent and the service staff very pleasant. Chocolate cup with fresh fruit, followed by tea and coffee was a perfect ending to a delicious meal. Padre Mark Sargent was the MC for the evening. If Mark ever contemplates a career change, I am sure he would be snapped up immediately. He has a real talent! Local MPP Ernie Parsons and Mrs. Parsons were guests and in Mr. Parson's brief speech he conveyed best wishes from the Government of Ontario and welcomed those from out of the province. We were also pleased to have MP Rick Norlock and Mrs. Norlock as guests of the Association. Mr. Norlock offered best wishes on behalf of the Canadian Government, and expressed regrets that Minister of Defence O'Connor and Minister of Veterans Affairs Thompson were unable to attend. Our Association Patron MGen (Ret'd) Herb Pitts gave an impassioned address, noting that the Battalion is better known now than it has ever been, referring to those that had made significant contributions over the years. Herb particularly noted and thanked LCol John Fotheringham and Kim Mathieson for their dedication to the project to keep the Cpl Topham VC and medals in Canada. The members were pleased that John and Kim were able to attend the banquet and Sunday service as guests of the Association. The Executive and members thank Herb for his generous and heartfelt words.



A letter of best wishes with his regrets that he could not attend was received from Canada's Chief of Defence Staff General Hillier, and read out at the Banquet. General Sir Michael Gray kindly sent a letter of best wishes from the UK. Also received were greetings from the Associations of both the 8th and 9th British Battalions, and from Ken Ward on behalf of the 224 Ambulance. All these letters were read out during the banquet.

Many presentations recognizing those who have contributed significantly to the Battalion Association were made. Very much of a surprise, presentations were made to Jan and me for our contributions over the last many years to the Battalion Association. Andy Anderson with very kind words on behalf of the members of the Association presented Jan with a beautiful inscribed Pegasus statuette for his dedication to the Battalion Association over the last

sixteen years; five as Secretary and the last eleven as President. Bob Firlotte presented me with an inscribed plaque adorned with a striking Pegasus with very kind words on behalf of the Association for my contribution over those same sixteen years. Also, on behalf of the Association Adrienne Anderson presented me with an arrangement of beautiful flowers.

There was a flurry of last minute sales for the draw, and then the tickets were drawn by MP Rick Norlock. The first winner was Bill Story (former president of FSSF) who chose the Airborne Collage. LCol Ewing's name was drawn second and he chose the Varsity print, and member Albert Wellman's name was third and he was left with the Para Statue which he was very pleased to receive - not bad for third prize!

God Save the Queen was sung, and the Colours were marched off. A great selection of music including some from the 40's by the 8 Wing Band Quartet was played for our listening enjoyment and dancing. Shuttle service by Dawn Walker and Wendy Grant (Doreen and Reg Walker's daughters) was used by some of our members to and from the Banquet. Thank you, Dawn and Wendy, for the excellent and friendly service.

Sunday, 24 September 2006

We awoke to a partly sunny and very windy day. At 1000 hours, the buses were ready and waiting to again take the group to the CFLAWC facility on the restricted north side of the Base where the Parade and Service was to take place. Cpl Topham's VC and medals were again on display. Disappointingly, due to logistics, a mass drop was not possible. We were hoping up to almost the last minute that a symbolic one-man drop could have been managed. However, it was not to be because of the high winds.

On the tarmac outside the facility the serving troopers were formed up in place as the Honour Guard. The "Old Guard" marched on, with the Colours carried by Wilf Delory, Jim McCann and Keith Metcalfe, and were positioned in the centre. Jan led the Colour Party and Bob Firlotte led the "Old Guard." MGen (Ret) W.M. Holmes, MBE, CD was the Reviewing Officer. It was Padre Sargent's very fitting idea to include in this memorial service the scripture and hymns from the service that was held at war's end for 1 Can Para. The 8 Wing Band provided the music for the service. Padre Sargent delivered some very thoughtful words for this emotional event during this final national reunion. Last Post, Lament, Reveille, Binyon's Words; then following the closing prayer, 1 Can Para Battalion Colours were exchanged from the "Old Guard" to the "New Guard" and 1 Can Para marched off.



From front: 1 Can Para veterans Keith Metcalfe, Jim McCann and Wilf Delory march off after passing the Battalion flags to representatives of CFLAWC. Photo by Sgt Rick Ruthven.

This significant event was recorded by two strong supporters of 1 Can Para and veterans in general. Peter Silverman of City TV and cameraman were present. They filmed the parade and service and interviewed several members. The programme aired on City TV. There have been a number of most favourable comments regarding it. Peter was a big advocate for the Topham VC Fundraising Project. Lance Goddard, producer from Global TV, and Associate Dennis Bilbrough filmed the event. Members will recall that Lance produced the well received Battalion documentary 'Victory From Above.'

Inside the Centre, the Battalion Veterans gathered for a group photo, which is on the inside cover of this issue. There was an opportunity for the young troopers to chat with our members. A lunch of sandwiches, vegetables with dip, fresh fruit, sweets, tea and coffee was served. Daryl Kramp, MP for Prince Edward Hastings District, offered a few words on behalf of VAC Minister Thompson. Clay Samis, President of CAFA National, reminded everyone that CAFA is a very strong organization and is open to all military qualified Paras. He noted that there are a number of chapters across the country and encouraged members of 1 Can Para to join. LCol Ewing and Jan de Vries each gave a few words of thanks and farewell, wishing all a safe journey home. Good byes were said and the buses departed for the south side of the Base, ultimately with everyone heading back home.

It was a great reunion. Again, a sincere thank you to those who attended.

Airborne!