



427 Squadron Association

Volume 5 – Issue 12

www.427squadron.com

May 2025

427 Special Operations Aviation Squadron

CO - L/Col Christopher Bray



Current and
Past Lions,

2025 is off to a
busy start with
operations being
conducted

around the globe.

This pace is expected to continue throughout the remainder of the year while we balance a heavy turnover in sub-unit leadership and with the Squadron Chief Warrant Officer. CWO Jamie Lewis will be taking his retirement later this year after nearly 37 years of service within the Canadian Army and CANSOFCOM. It was truly an honour working with CWO Lewis both as the DSM, while I was the Deputy CO in 2022, and now as my 427 SOAS command team partner. We wish CWO Lewis and his family all the best on their next journey.

HCol Leanne Ing



Fellow Lions,

I am sure it will come as no surprise that the squadron has been maintaining a high tempo over the past many months. Under the steady guidance of LCol Bray,

CWO Lewis, and the rest of the leadership team, 427 is undergoing an evolution in its role under 1 CAD to better support the operational needs of CANSOFCOM. The current geopolitical landscape is highlighting the importance of continued Canadian investment in tactical aviation capabilities and the Next Tactical Aviation Capability Set (nTACS) project, announced by the RCAF, represents a major modernization program for the RCAF fleet that will ultimately provide key platform updates for 427.

Amidst this backdrop of change, the squadron hosted its annual Leadership Symposium at the beginning of December, with a theme of *Transformation – Preparing for the Future Fight*. This year's symposium included a first-hand account by Col.

Replacing CWO Lewis is MWO (P) Adam Frey, who joins us from CANSOFCOM HQ. The change of appointment will take place on August 5th 2025 at 427 SOAS. Invites to be sent in the near future.

Another major milestone is the Release to Service (RTS) of the CE145C VIGELENCE ISR aircraft this past February. This new 427 SOAS fleet will provide dedicated crewed ISR to CAF operations around the world. Currently, the sub-unit is building their initial cadre of aircrew, but are looking forward to supporting CAF operations in the foreseeable future.

The benefits of crewed ISR allows rapid projection of the capability and provides certainty and continued operations when considering a degraded operating environment. We are extremely proud of the work the sub-unit has conducted over the last few years to integrate and develop this new 427 capability.

Lastly, we expect to host a Gathering of the Lions later this year in the usual Fall timeframe.

We look forward to coming together as a community and share our collective stories.

Ferte Manus Certas.

Matt Snider on *Operation Legion Lion*, in which 427 deployed to Kandahar in 2010 – 2012 to engage in operations against the Taliban. The mission included many “firsts” and underscored the ability to act with speed and resilience under extremely challenging conditions. I had the opportunity to share some of the key lessons we have learned through our engagement in space research, with a particular focus on the universal project management tools that can be utilized to navigate any major project or transformation.

Finally, the squadron was fortunate to host Dan Gardner as a speaker at the symposium. Mr. Gardner is an award-winning journalist and New York Times best-selling author who provided an insightful summary of his latest book entitled *How Big Things Get Done*. The book analyzes a wide range of major projects—including epic construction projects like the Sydney Opera House and Empire State Building—and identifies some of the key factors that cause big projects to fail and what tools can be used to avoid these pitfalls. The lessons he shared are highly relevant as the squadron looks ahead to its own major projects in the coming years.

Lions also had the opportunity to gather for various events over the past several months. *Family Day* was held in October and was an excellent opportunity for families to experience a taste of squadron life. November and December included several events prior to the Christmas break, including holiday parties, a Sticky Floor event, and the annual ground crew versus air crew hockey game. Additional events, including the next *Gathering of the Lions*, are currently in the early planning stages. I look forward to the next opportunity to connect with Lions, past and present!

Ferte Manus Certas.



THE AD ASTRA PROGRAM

Introduced in January 1996, the Ad Astra Stone Program celebrates the service and sacrifice of the over 12,000 air force personnel whose legacy is preserved in the RCAF Memorial Airpark at the National Air Force Museum of Canada. Originally conceived by Maj (Ret.) Roy Skillicorn and developed by Col (Ret.) Cy Yarnell, the Ad Astra Program offers a way to memorialize yours or a loved one's contribution to Canada's air force history.

Today, the RCAF Memorial Airpark is the largest living monument dedicated to air force personnel in Canada. Ad Astra Stones line the pathways of the RCAF Memorial Airpark, reminding us of thousands of air force personnel, both past and present, who have served Canada. Some names may be familiar, such as Canadian First World War flying ace, Wop May, or Victoria Cross winner, Andrew Mynarski – both famed Canadian aviators whose legacy is prominent in our historical narrative. Though, most Ad Astra Stones bear the names of individuals who will not appear in our history books, providing all proudly serving air force personnel and veterans a way to celebrate and preserve their legacy, becoming a part of Canada's air force story.

Ad Astra Stones can be dedicated in the name of:

- ANY PERSON who has served or is now serving in Canada's Air Force – including the Air Reserves;
- ANY CANADIAN CITIZEN who has served or is now serving in an Allied Air Force;
- THE SPOUSE of any person who is eligible;
- ANY PERSON who has completed a minimum of four (4) years of service with the Air Cadet League of Canada;
- ANY REGULAR MEMBER of the Air Force Association of Canada.

*****If an individual does not meet the requirements above an application can still be submitted for consideration.**

Ad Astra Stones

Bearing the words "Ad Astra" and adorned with an Air Force Roundel, the 6" x 10" gray, granite stones are inscribed with the name, hometown, and province of the dedicatee. Also included are the year of birth and year of death if the individual is deceased; these dates can later be engraved when and if the Museum is informed of the person's passing.

Dedicating an Ad Astra Stone

To dedicate an Ad Astra Stone in yours or a loved one's name, please submit an application form accompanied by a \$200 donation to the National Air Force Museum of Canada. Donations can be made on site (cash, credit, debit, cheque), over the phone (credit card only), or by mail (cheque). Please note that there is no online payment option. All Ad Astra Stone donations are eligible for an income-tax receipt.

Each year, a dedication ceremony is held to commemorate the service of the air force personnel whose legacy is held at the NAFMC, and thank all those who have contributed to the program in support of the Museum. An invitation to the ceremony where yours or your loved ones' stone will be dedicated is included with the income-tax receipt.

BIOGRAPHIES



LCol Christopher Bray enrolled in the Canadian Armed Forces in 2005 as a Pilot after completing a Bachelor of Science from Dalhousie University in Halifax NS.

Following basic training in St-Jean QC, he was posted to JRCC Halifax as an Assistant Air Controller.

Completing rotary wing pilot training in 2010, Lieutenant-Colonel Bray earned his wings and was promoted to Captain and posted to 427 Special Operations Aviation Squadron as a CH146 Griffon Pilot where he deployed on multiple domestic and international operations such as OP IMPACT, EX FLINTLOCK, and OP NANOOK.

In 2018, he was promoted to Major and posted to 1 Canadian Air Division Headquarters in Winnipeg MB as the Staff Officer for Tactical Aviation Systems, and later promoted AWSE to Lieutenant-Colonel as the Senior Staff Officer for Tactical Aviation.

In 2020, Lieutenant-Colonel Bray returned to 427 SOAS as a Flight Commander where he commanded a Special Operations Aviation Detachment on OPERATION IMPACT.

In 2022, Lieutenant-Colonel Bray was promoted to his current substantive rank and appointed as the unit Deputy Commanding Officer where he simultaneously completed the United States Marine Corps Command and Staff Program in Quantico Virginia.

In 2023, Lieutenant-Colonel Bray was posted to NDHQ VCDS in Ottawa within Chief Force Development as the Foresight Team Lead, modernizing the CAF's approach to Force Development and Design.

Lieutenant-Colonel Bray currently resides in Petawawa, ON supported by his wife Mel, and children Maya and Luca.



SCWO Jamie Lewis. enrolled in the Canadian Armed Forces in March 1989 at then CFB London, in London, Ontario. In December 1989 he successfully completed his Basic Training in Cornwallis, Nova Scotia, and obtained his Infantry trades training at The Royal Canadian Regiment (RCR) Battle School in Petawawa.

CWO Lewis has had the opportunity to lead personnel at various rank levels and have served in all three regular force battalions of RCR, as well as in multiple units within 2 CMBG and CANSOFCOM.

In December of 1989, he was posted to the 2nd Battalion of the RCR in Burton, NB. CWO Lewis has effectively completed several operational deployments, including three missions to the Balkans in 1992, 1994, and 1999, as well as one to Eritrea/Ethiopia in 2001.

After a lengthy stay in New Brunswick, CWO Lewis was posted back to Petawawa, ON in 2003. During this time, he served with the 1st and 3rd Battalions of the RCR, he received numerous service medals as a result of three deployments to Kabul in 2003 and Kandahar, Afghanistan in 2006 and 2008.

In 2016, CWO Lewis was deployed on OP IMPACT Roto 5, and in 2018 was deployed to Latvia as part of OP REASSURANCE with 1 RCR as the Multinational Combat Support Company Sergeant Major.

He has also deployed on several Domestic Operations to support Canadians.

In November 2019 he was posted to 427 Special Operations Aviation Squadron (427 SOAS) as the Drill Sergeant Major. Most recently CWO Lewis deployed to the External Ops Platform in 2023 as the Senior enlisted advisor.

On 19 July 2024, CWO Lewis was appointed SCWO of 427 SOAS in Petawawa, ON. He is a loving husband to his wife, Jennifer of 15 years and is a proud father of Ava and Jacob.

We Will Remember Them

At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them - Laurence Binyon



Dennis Edward Becker passed away in Medicine Hat on Thursday, February 13, 2025, at the age of 70 years. Dennis was predeceased by his father, Edward on March 20, 2017; mother, Alice (nee Schlinker) on March 14, 1959, and by one son, Daniel on August 30, 2019. He is survived by his son, Donald (Tanya) as well as numerous other extended family and friends, including his close friend, Jenn. Dennis joined the Royal Canadian Air Force in 1973, embarking on a fulfilling career that shaped much of his life. While balancing the demands of military service, he raised his two sons with love and commitment. Dennis achieved the rank of



Chief Warrant Officer in June 2001, shortly before he retired in 2006 when he returned to Medicine Hat and embraced a quieter pace of life. In his early retirement, Dennis dedicated himself to visiting and caring for his father until Ed's passing in 2017. In the years that followed, he found joy in the simple pleasures of life—sharing a game of cribbage or a meal with his dear friend Jenn, enjoying home-cooked meals from generous neighbours, or indulging in his favourite Chinese food. His memory will live on through the stories shared and the friendships cherished. A Celebration of Dennis' life will be held at Cook Southland Funeral Chapel, 901 - 13 Street S.W., Medicine Hat on Tuesday, February 25, 2025, at 2:00 p.m. with Major Murray Jaster officiating.

Wing Commander C.L.V. (Lyte) Gervais F-86 (CL-13) - d: November 13, 1997

W/C Gervais died after a two year battle with cancer. During WW II, W/C Gervais served in Malta with RAF 185 and later 249 Squadron. Post-war he was CO of 427(F) Squadron when it re-formed at St Hubert in August 1952, operating the F-86 Sabre. He led the squadron at 3 (F) Wing, Zweibrücken, Germany from April 1953 to June 1954 under the command of No.1 Air Division Europe. He later served at ADHQ as Director Air Defence Requirements and at a NORAD site in the USA. After retiring from the service, he was employed by Noranda Mines in Toronto.

Ed. Note: There is no deadline on submitting obituaries. This obituary for W/C Gervais has just come to light and is included here as well as entered on the website. Many from the Sabre era knew and respected W/C Gervais.



Lt Col. David "Dave" George Girling of Sidney, passed away on 7 December, 2024 following declining health due to dementia.

Dave was born on 31 October, 1935 to Frank Robert Girling and Dorothy Frances Hilda Girling (née Hughes) in St. Boniface, MB. After graduating high school, he enlisted in the Royal Canadian Air Force.

While stationed as an instructor at RCAF Station Moose Jaw, Sask, Dave met Beverly Ann Symons, who was training as a nurse. They were married on December 6th, 1958 in Estevan, SK.

In the years that followed they raised three children, Nancy, Pamela and Gregory and ensured they made the most of exposing their young family to as much travel and adventure as possible, through postings across Canada, a tour in Italy, two tours in Germany as well as a diplomatic posting to the Canadian Embassy in Washington, DC. In Europe school breaks were spent in a caravan and car, traveling to over a dozen countries.

During his time in the RCAF/CAF Dave held numerous commands and had the challenge and joy of flying a wide range of aircraft. This included instructing new pilots on Chipmunks and Harvards as well as T-33 T-Birds, F-86 Sabres and CF-104 Starfighters. Outside of his day job, Dave got time on Stampses, Gypsy Moths, Dakotas, Twin Otters, L-19s, to name a small number of other aircraft.

On leaving the forces there was a stint with Canadian Aviation Electronics (CAE), in Dorval, traveling around the world selling the company's flight simulators.

Though Dave and Bev were born on the prairies, they preferred to follow the long tradition of itinerant former service members that renounced shoveling snow, moving to the more temperate climes of Vancouver Island. There Dave sold real estate as a thinly-disguised-yet-successful means of moving more of his former squadron mates out west. Following his retirement, Bev continued to work as a nurse, working at the not-for-profit, Mount Newton Centre, which assists North Saanich seniors with care, allowing clients to retain their independence.

Eventually Bev was diagnosed with dementia and Dave dedicated himself entirely to her care for years, until her passing in May 2015.

As a couple Bev and Dave were charming, gracious and made the most of the time they were given. Despite the frequent moves associated with life in the service, they were role models in offering their children a sense of stability and love.

Dave is pre-deceased by his wife, Beverly, his parents and older brother, Bill and older sister, Audrey. He is survived by his children, Nancy (Gold), Pamela (Potts) her husband Tom and her children, Jon (Perla), Landon (Jaime), Ben (Carissa), David (Rae) and four great-grandchildren, Gregory and his wife, Elizabeth Soutar and their daughters Madeleine and Charlotte, as well as numerous nephews and his niece.

We are grateful to the staff of the Chartwell Vista in Esquimalt, who cared for him in last days. His children invite Dave's many friends and family to join them in remembering him at a later date. Information will be shared as plans are made.





427 SQUADRON IN BOSNIA – 25 YEARS LATER

Lieutenant-Colonel Ross Wuerth



While flying overhead Bosnia on a routine mission, I pondered what we had been told in our pre-deployment training. Only land on the pre-authorized helicopter landing zones. In the event of an emergency, you could land on the asphalt of paved roads. However, stay off the shoulders of the roads, and never stray onto the grass or into a forest because those could be your final mortal steps. During the Bosnian War, between 1992 to 1995, all three conflicting factions planted landmines, mostly of the anti-personnel type, and generally along their political entity borders. Millions of them. Many of those mines were laid hastily and without accurate record-keeping, so making the land safe again would be nearly impossible. The wars ripped through almost every corner of the country, pitting neighbour against neighbour, Muslim against Serb, Serb against Croat, and even Muslim against Muslim – which was the case in the northwest region where we served. There were atrocities, stemming from ethnic hatred and differences of language and culture. All that decimation and horror caused over 1.2 million refugees to flee the region and a million more internally displaced persons.

Despite the known hazard beneath me, from my vantage point, I was lulled daily by beautiful scenery with mountains, lush winding valleys, meandering blue rivers and quaint villages where people

still lived like in feudal times. Not everyone had electricity, or even glass windows, but that was due to come as part of the nation rebuilding plan to winterize homes and repair the extensive war damage so that the people could get on with their lives and their livelihood, particularly in the rural areas. In the towns you saw extensive damage to houses, apartment buildings, schools and stores but the people carried on with their lives as best as they could. Almost every rural home had a cow, some chickens and some sheep and many people got around in horse-drawn wagons. They did have some luxuries though, such as televisions, a satellite dish nailed to their roof and maybe a late-model car.



Canadians had been in Bosnia from the beginning of the conflict. At first, they contributed to the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR), then the Implementation Force (IFOR) and then the Stabilization Force (SFOR). 427 Tactical Helicopter Squadron deployed troops from September 2000 until March 2001 as part of SFOR, with the Task Force Bosnia-Herzegovina (TFBH). During that time, we participated in Operation JOINT FORGE, a NATO-led operation to deter the resumption of hostilities, stabilize the peace and

enforce the General Framework Agreement for Peace, a.k.a. the 1995 Dayton Peace Accords. Much NATO effort was focused on resettlement of returning refugees and displaced persons and hunting down of war criminals. There were over 22,000 troops in Bosnia-Herzegovina from 19 NATO countries and 15 non-NATO countries.



The Canadian contribution to SFOR was known as Operation PALLADIUM, and it comprised the TFBH. The establishment was approximately 1650 troops, and our rotation (Roto 7) was centred on 2 PPCLI Battle Group. I commanded the Bosnia-Herzegovina Rotary Wing Aviation Unit (BRWAU), based on 427 Squadron ("minus", as it was known in military parlance, because B Flight with support elements, and a headquarters element with the squadron Colours, remained on duty in Petawawa for special operations activities). We were

augmented by personnel from other tactical helicopter squadrons. The BRWAU was a combat-ready unit and comprised 91 people with eight Bell CH-146 Griffon helicopters. Under their Operational Control, we provided tactical aviation support to the NATO Multinational Division (Southwest), commanded by Canadian Major-General Rick Hillier, for roles such as surveillance, reconnaissance, resupply, troop lift, illumination,

convoy escort, passenger airlift and casualty evacuation. The BRWAU was based at Camp Black Bear, in the village of Velika Kladuša.

Our pre-deployment preparations in Petawawa were extensive and included weapons handling, mine awareness, general safety and rules of engagement. Aircrew had to be trained to a high level of readiness in such flying skills as navigation, instrument flying, door gunnery, evasive manoeuvring and tactical operations. We deployed in August 2000 for eight days to Ashern, Manitoba to link up with the rest of TFBH-designate for an exercise confirming our operational readiness. Afterwards, we had about a week of leave at home, then flew to Europe in the first week of September.



Although there was money available through many international agencies for rebuilding troubled nations, including a sizable contribution from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), most military units lent a hand whenever possible to improve the quality of life of the Bosnian people. The BRWAU adopted a small rural school in a village called Glinica which was badly shot up by passing forces during the war. Reminiscent of Canadian schools long ago, this three-room

facility held 42 elementary grade students and had no running water or bathrooms - only a two-hole outhouse behind the building. The BRWAU raised money through private donations, raffles and charity events, then purchased and installed two woodstoves so that the children could have some heat for the winter, and a new roof to keep them dry.

Of course, our life in Bosnia was not all about work. We found ways to amuse ourselves with ball hockey, movies and a nice Christmas Dinner. Occasionally, depending on the assessed threat level, we were permitted to hike or jog “outside the wire” along specifically approved paved roadways, or buy CDs from the small shop across the road. We were visited by a travelling Canadian entertainment company with singers, dancers and a band. The highlight of the tour, perhaps, was a three-day visit by Canadian comedian Rick Mercer, who filmed some amusing clips for his show *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*. Rick brought us lobster!



I look back on my notes taken at mid-tour when I was starting to organize my own handover to Roto 8 – based on 408 Squadron – and I had written that we envisioned the Canadian and NATO presence to continue much longer, although it was hard to predict. After seeing what ethnic hatred had done to the place, we assumed that we had still a long way to go. Op PALLADIUM was closed out with Roto 15 in December 2004 and the last Canadian troops left Camp Black Bear.



Lieutenant-Colonel Ross Wuerth is a native of Port Elgin, Ontario and 1982 graduate of the Royal Military College of Canada. He earned his pilot wings in 1984 and started his tactical aviation career at 403 (Helicopter) Operational Training Squadron, Tactical Flight, in Gagetown NB. In 1999, at the rank of Major, he was appointed Deputy Commanding Officer of 427 Tactical Helicopter Squadron, then in the following year was promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel and assigned as Commanding Officer of the BRWAU. While he was deployed, his pregnant wife, Monique, “held down the fort” in their Petawawa home, with two young daughters and endured heavy snowfall during a long winter. He made it back home just two weeks before their third daughter was born in the Pembroke Hospital.

Ed Note: This is a very fine example of the history that is needed for our ROAR and website. Given that the TacHel era was not officially over for 427 Sqn until 2006 there must be a multitude of memories , good, bad or ugly, that should be documented during the 36 year Tactical Helicopter life of our Squadron. You can send me any you wish to share (even if you wish to remain anonymous) and I will respond quickly. Photos are great but not necessary. My email is macway01@gmail.com

Notes

The aim of ROAR continues to be a link between the operating squadron and past members. As one of our deceased WW II members, Ian Thomson, said “ I will not be able to represent our glorious squadron much longer but it has been a supreme honour to be a “Lion.” Many of us who served or “grew up” in the Squadron have wonderful memories of our time as a Lion. ROAR generally concentrates on historical stories/articles from the different eras highlighting the challenges and yes, even shenanigans, that surfaced throughout the 81 year life of the squadron.

Our Membership/Treasurer Dick Dunn at richmark@telus.net requests that you be aware of our membership categories. We welcome Associates. Sign them up.

[The Facebook site](#) has much more extensive and “breaking news” coverage and I urge you to check it out. Space restraints limit how much coverage can be provided to ROAR articles unless I am willing to publish a book, however, you are in luck; most articles are posted to the web where space is not limited but it takes more time and Ken Sorfleet has excellent topical coverage on the Facebook site of most articles (which I also use) posted here.

All previous Volumes of ROAR from Volume 1 to the present are available at:

<http://www.427squadron.com/roar/roar.html>

ROARs from Volume 2 to the present can be searched with the search bar.



**TWM 4 (Tactical Weapons Meet) and TAM
Chaumont Air Base
11 to 25 June 1965**

It was the first time that CF-104s were participating in an TWM exercise. In total two CF-104s were seen from both the participating 4 Wing and 422 Squadron. The 4 ATAF team won the Broadhurst Trophy. One of the participating aircraft seen at Chaumont was CF-104 12738, which actually belonged to 3 Wing.

During this AFCENT Tactical Weapons Meet Starfighters have been seen from the Canadian 427 Squadron, 3 Wing at Zweibrücken and 422 Squadron from 4 Wing, Baden-Sölligen, Belgium 10 Wing and German Air Force JBG31 and JBG33 (Fighter Bomber Wings). It was the first time the Germans have participated in this exercise. The Canadian team was led by Wing Commander Bill Bliss, Commanding Officer of 422 Squadron and was very successful. As part of 4 ATAF (which won), the RCAF team won the Best Nation award and Flight Lieutenant Frioult of 422 Squadron was the top individual scorer and won the Top Gun Trophy.

Other pilots inside this successful team were Flight Lieutenants Bob Hyndman, Elmer Dow and Norm Hull. German JBG31 pilot Leutnant (2nd Starffell) Kmonitzek won second place in the Nuclear Attack roll. Other pilots from JBG31 were Hauptmanns (Captains) Angermann and Hetzel, Oberstleutnant (Lieutenant Colonel) Weiss and OFW (Staff Sergeant) Kaiser. The 4th ATAF won the exercise (including JBG33 and the Canadians).

During this exercise Starfighter DA+259 was lost. It crashed in a field about 1 km from Mahrecourt, France, near the SUIPPES range. During its third approach for an air-to-ground attack, the aircraft encountered an engine failure and rapidly lost height. Pilot Hptm Gunter Angermann ejected in time and was unhurt.

A Day in History—Lion Landmarks –CF-104 Era

March 16, 1962—W/C P.B. “Pete” St. Louis formally handed over 427 Squadron to W/C R.G. (Bob) Middlemiss marking the end of the Sabre era.

October 11, 1962—427 Lion Squadron was the first of the six CF-104 European based Squadrons to receive their aircraft with the delivery of CF-104 #721.

January 15, 1963—427 Lion Squadron began CF-104 operations as an attack squadron .

May 30, 1968— After twenty-five years to the month, the Lion Squadron met with MGM Film Corporation in London for an official hand-over ceremony of a film depicting MGM’s adoption [\(available here\)](#) of 427 Squadron in 1943. The CF-104 Squadron was on deployment in England at the time and fifteen aircrew members were able to attend the ceremony.

June 30, 1970—The official hand-over of Squadron records to the Base Commander took place in the 4 Wing arena at Baden-Soellingen, West Germany, thus marking the end of the CF-104 era and the closing of 427 Squadron. Many Lions from the Sabre era and early CF-104 years were in attendance.

The 427 crest was not inactive for long. The Squadron was re-established on January 1, 1971 as a Tactical Helicopter Squadron and has officially transitioned to a Special Operations Squadron with CANSOFCOM in 2006.



“Widow Maker” was a dark nickname allocated to this aircraft after the West German Luftwaffe lost many of its aircraft of this type in the 60s. The nickname was not generally regarded as fitting by Canadian airmen who viewed the name as unfair. The aircraft was challenging to fly but with known and predictable characteristics.

427 F-86 (CL-13) ERA



1952-1962

Requiem for the Sabre

From *The Sentinel*, on the retirement of the Sabre, November 1968

Contributed by *Chick Childerhose*

Goodbye you old Sabre. Goodbye you good old bird. There's a lot of good old service people that remember you. What's farewell to a good old bird anyway? Why goodbye to a piece of ironmongery? Sophisticated, maybe. Sweptback and supersonic down. But ironmongery. It's obsolete. The design is obsolete. It looks old fashioned. It is old fashioned. It's a good old Sabre and we're saying goodbye to it like we said goodbye to the good old Spit and to the good old Mossie. And to the good old Vamp and the good old Mustang.

All these are just old airplanes. They went slow. They had no range. No altitude. No firepower. No black boxes. They were—confessions of confessions—eyeball airplanes. All depended on the man sitting in it. If he was a fighter, you had a fighter plane. But if he wasn't...

So what did this make of the Sabre? Nothing, except that maybe it was the last of the dayfighter airplanes to see combat. And that was in Korea and a mere handful of Canadian pilots flew with USAF squadrons in that war.

But because of that Korean episode, and the Cold War fright it induced, Canada bought Sabres to equip fighter squadrons to be stationed in NATO Europe. It was a time of expansion in what we called the RCAF. Good times and not forgotten.

The Sabres were the best fighter planes in the world and Canadians were the best fighter pilots. Our Air Division was the best in all NATO. Or so we reckoned.

There were other factors. Canadians had built an enviable reputation as fighter pilots in the lamentable dispute with Germany a few years previously and a sprinkling of Korea-experienced Sabre pilots were returning to inject Canadian fighter squadrons with more tiger spirit.

Any more was probably superfluous for the ethos of the WW II fighter pilot was strong upon us. The Sabres flew early and late, both groundcrew and aircrew worked hard and –let's be fair - played hard. It was like WW II all over again, really, except Sabres had replaced Spitfires and MiGs replaced Messerschmitts. Not to feel badly. Our Communist adversaries were doing the same thing. Human nature and fallibility being what it is.

For ten years into the Missile Age we flew our day fighter Sabres. 'Every man a tiger' as the saying went. Bishop and Richthofen; Baden and Beurling. Huns in the sun and 12 o'clock high. It was great. And we believed it. Anyone who participated in the Air Division of the 1950s who now says he didn't believe in it, is lying. We believed. We flew sweeps and patrols and rat/terrier exercises. We fought wing versus wing, squadron versus squadron, anyone versus anyone. Huge hairy hassels spinning down, down, down. NATO war exercises where we flew low level interdiction. Strafing targets of opportunity. The role was gone then but we didn't believe it.

Not only us, of course. Our U.S. allies designed a super dayfighter called the F-104A to replace existing dayfighters. The design was only saved from extinction by converting it to a nuclear bomb carrier. This was the role our own government assumed when it replaced the Sabres and CF-100s in NATO Europe with Starfighters.

Well, we've digressed. We came to eulogize the good old Sabre.

What about it? We said it was a good old bird. And it was. It flew well. A pilot's airplane, no bad habits, forgiving. All the cliches and all correct. But more, too, depending on who you were and what you were doing in the Air Force at that time. It was gunnery in Rabat or Deci, a flypast in Paris. It was the Golden Hawks. A ferry flight across the Atlantic. It was predawn planning, the OTU at Chatham.

The Sabre was Orenda noise and JP-4 stink. Drooping slats and a hanging ammo door. It was heat waves shimmering on some distant runway. It was guard duty at a prang. (Can't remember his name or even the squadron, now.) Silver Sabres at Luffenham. Mark 4s to the Brits. Bechers Brook, remember? Clapped out 2s to the Greeks and Turks. Was it true they practiced bailing out over the Acropolis?

Remember Grostenquin? I mean, that first winter? Before doors, windows, sidewalks and heat? The Sabres perched—muddy and immovable—on the only slab of concrete.

Remember the hard edge 5s? And the arguments about the slatted 6s? Remember? Remember? The details fuzz. No matter. We're saying goodbye to a good old bird.

Remember our fly-in party at 4 Wing? The beer? The mess that was the Mess the next day? Who was the Wing Commander who...? Whatever happened to ...? Did he get out? Stay in? The names are lost but we remember the Sabres.

Remember the flypast at...? Who led that thing? Wasn't it...? Talk about a screw up. I was flying number Three on the right hand side back in the third tier and...

Great days, great times. The characters. Crocodile, where are you now? Uncle Wally? Ben Simard in a DC-4. Squirrelly Joe Hurley, high school pedagogue. Bruce Fleming, legitimized test pilot.

For this is what happens to us: we go legit. The skits and escapades are forgotten. We become respectable. Get promoted. What we think about now when we think about Sabres is how we were when we were involved with Sabres. It was our youth. Goodbye youth.

The late S/L Robert J. "Chick" Childerhose, a SPAADS member who served with 434 Squadron, 3 (F) Wing, 1952-54 and later became a member of the Overseas Ferry Unit (OFU). He was also the author of "Splash One Tiger", "F-86 Sabre" and "Wild Blue" as well as a Journalist for the Toronto Telegram.

Stories/Biographies/Books Wanted

We need your input. Consider sending your stories, biographies, books or photos. As little or as much as you want. All posted mailed material will be returned to the sender. Email—macway01@gmail.com and if necessary request a snail mail address

Everyone has a story.

HEAVY BOMBER ERA



Gandy Rides a Cow

In the service, those hailing from Alberta were sometimes nicknamed “Cowboy”. It had something to do with ranches, rodeos and roundups no doubt. There was one line squadron pilot from Edmonton who picked up a similar handle in the summer of 1943 for quite a different reason. The airman was no other than Vaughan (Gandy) Ganderton, a deputy flight commander at the time.

Based at Leeming, the Halifax piloted by Gandy was crossing the enemy coast on the way to Cologne when a night fighter jumped them. That cannon fire from the Jerry riddled the rear turret with at least 20 holes and the rudder, trim and elevator controls were severely damaged, making it impossible to continue. They jettisoned their bombs and managed to point the aircraft in the general direction of England. They staggered across the North Sea losing height all the way. By the time they reached the coast, it was obvious there was no way to land the aircraft, and so the invention of Leslie Leroy Irvin was put to good use.

One by one, the seven crewmen qualified for membership in the Caterpillar Club as they abandoned the doomed aircraft. Gandy who was the last to leave was doing okay until he neared the ground – then it happened. In his own words he reported “I was swaying from side to side and couldn't see a thing. As the ground loomed up, I suddenly found myself on top of a cow. It's hard to say who was the most startled, but the quadruped didn't think much of an aerial intruder, ditched her rider and took off to join the herd. From that day onward, Gandy became known as “Cowboy” having straddled a bovine in the best bronco – busting tradition. The name was to follow him through two distinguished operational tours, including the last as squadron Commander.

Ways to Worry Your Kids

