

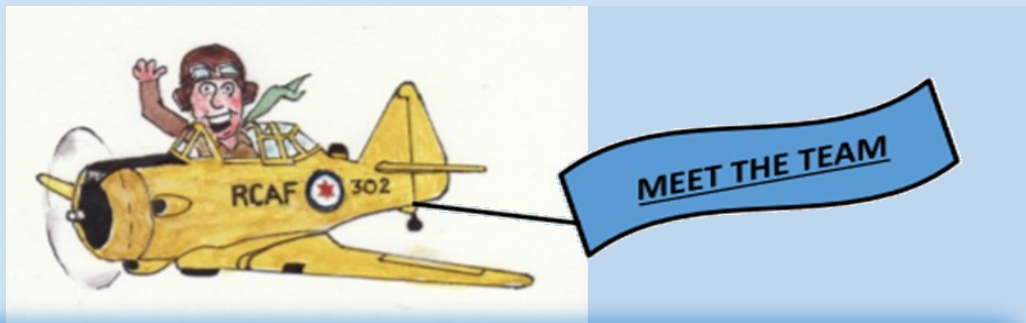
SPIRIT

783 (Calgary) Wing Newsletter

***ROYAL CANADIAN
AIR FORCE
ASSOCIATION***



***The Wing meets the last
Tuesday of the month at
7pm in 285 Legion Horton
Road (virtually as well)***



Chairperson	Scott Deederly
Honorary Chairperson	Col (Retd) Don Matthews
Immediate Past Chairperson	Michelle Gerwing
First Vice Chairperson	Vacant
Second Vice Chairperson	Adriano Fisico
Treasurer	Kenn Nixon
Secretary	Cecilia Brugma
Past Chairs Advisory Council	Pat Sulek
Casino Chairperson	Darlene Laroche
Friends of Col Belcher	Pat Sulek
Membership	Anna Lewis
Newsletter	Bev Spielman/Michelle Gerwing
Health and Wellness	Michele Henderson
Sergeant at Arms	Kevin Knight
Entertainment Chair	Muriel Mymko/Darlene Laroche
Public Relations	Bob Wade
Cadet Liaison	Kevin Knight
Advocacy	Scott Deederly
Webmaster/Social Media	Charlee MacLean





Message from the Chairperson

This is my first message as Chair of 783 (Calgary) Wing RCAFA in our newsletter... and well, they did warn me if you stay Vice Chair long enough, they will make Chair. I am grateful for the support of the Wing as I enter into the new role and thankful for the leadership of past Chair, Michelle Gerwing, who's good example I wish to follow and carry forward with the help and support of our members and our new 2025-26 783 (Calgary) Wing executive. We are all looking forward to a great year ahead.

The Wing had a very active Summer. First, our members helped out the Col. Blecher Society at their casino, volunteering their time for shifts on Saturday, June 28th and on Sunday, June 29th. 783 Wing help ensured all the Col. Blecher's shifts were filled and they had the volunteers they needed to receive their casino funds. Then we had a great Stampede breakfast on Sunday, July 6th, hosted again at Bev Spielman's home. Appreciated all the hard work of the volunteers who made the breakfast tasty and possible, for Bev for hosting us and everyone who was there had a great time. Next was Peace-keeper Memorial Day on Sunday, August 10, 2025, at Peace Keepers Park in the community of Lincoln Park in Southwest Calgary. Kenn and Norman were in the Colour party, I laid a wreath on behalf of the Wing and Moe, as always, talked with great grace and emotion regarding the Buffalo Nine and the events of August 9, 1974.

I look forward to seeing everyone at 783 Wing's September events, either at Battle of Britain Sunday or at our September 30th Wing meeting.

Per Ardua Ad Astra

Scott Deederly
Chairman

783 (Calgary) Wing
Royal Canadian Air Force Association



Happy Birthday to you (Sep/Oct)

Nathan K	5 Sep
Bernard H	8 Sep
Glenn H	12 Sep
Bob W	21 Sep
Wesley D	26 Sep
Betty W	27 Sep
Ken D	27 Sep
Neil H	2 Oct
Lois M	5 Oct
Jane M	6 Oct
Elizabeth B	21 Oct
Beverley B	22 Oct
Charlene M	24 Oct
Kenneth C	25 Oct
Heather M	25 Oct
Maurice H	28 Oct
David M	28 Oct

Executive Director's August Summary

We invite you to read the latest update from our Executive Director, which provides insights into recent activities and priorities for the Association.

General Overview

- August focused heavily on planning key events and strategic meetings.
- The Executive Director represented RCAFA and the RCAF at a memorial service in Ottawa honoring aircrews who aided the 1944 Warsaw Uprising.
- Progress was made on several initiatives: website redesign, national auction, 24 Honorary Wing project, and the annual auditor's report.

Key Projects & Events

1. Airforce Magazine

- Next edition delayed to include coverage of the Battle of Britain Parade.
- Features an interview with new RCAF Commander, LGen Jamie Speiser-Blanchet.
- Growing interest from aerospace industry advertisers.

2. Battle of Britain Parade (21 Sept)

- Finalized guest list including 30 RCAFA veterans and RCAF Commander's guest of honour.
- Interview with RCAF Commander scheduled during the event.
- RCAF Foundation funding refreshments for attending Air Cadets.

3. RCAFA AGM (24 Nov)

- Notifications sent to members; elections for all board positions announced.
- Nominations open with bios and photos required by mid-September.

4. VIA Rail Travel Voucher Program

- RCAF Foundation providing travel support for RCAFA Directors attending fall events.

5. National Auction Project

- Led by David Farnsworth; aims to raise operational funds.
- Supported by partners including the NHL Players Association.

6. Vimy Awards Dinner (5 Nov)

- RCAFA table reserved; Boeing sponsoring.
- RCAF Commander and CWO confirmed to attend.

7. Monthly Communications

- New monthly newsletter well received; will soon transition to quarterly format.

8. 700 Wing Trust Fund Request

- Funding request under review for a veterans' memorial garden in Edmonton.

9. Air Force on the Hill (25 Nov)

- Planning underway; event tied to RCAFA's hybrid AGM.

10. Business Plan Development

- Still in progress for FY 2025–26.

11. 24 Honorary Wing Project

- Stakeholder network forming for RCAF Centennial.
- First members to be inducted during Gatineau Air Show (12–14 Sept).

12. Website Revitalization

- Four-phase redesign underway with eLearnza Inc.
- Completion expected by early November. Upcoming Work (Sept–Oct)
- Final site visit for Battle of Britain Parade.
- Continued development of the business plan, website, and Airforce Magazine.
- Coordination for AGM, elections, and Air Force on the Hill.
- Support for auction project and strategic communications.
- Preparation for annual awards nomination process.

Save the Date – 2025 Annual General Meeting (AGM)

The Royal Canadian Air Force Association's 2025 AGM will be held virtually via Zoom on:

Date: Monday, November 24, 2025

Format: Virtual (Zoom)

The agenda will include the review of financial statements, Board reports, Director election results, and proposed by-law changes. Further details, including the Zoom link and voting procedures, will be shared by email and posted in the members' section of the RCAFA website.

3. Call for Nominations to the Board of Directors– Deadline September 24, 2025

Members in good standing are encouraged to put their names forward for election to the Board of Directors.

The nomination package requires:

- A CV or brief bio (maximum 300 words)
- A short written statement (maximum 150 words) explaining your interest and how you would contribute to the organization. This statement will be shared with members as part of the official election materials.
- A recent headshot (to accompany your statement in the election materials)

[Submit Your Nomination Here](#)

Please note that all voting will take place prior to the AGM, and nominees will not present or campaign during the meeting.

The continuation of the RCAF Victoria Cross Winners:

Wing Commander WILLIAM GEORGE BARKER, VC, DSO and Bar, MC and two Bars

Flying over the Forêt de Mormal in France, then-Lieutenant-Colonel Barker attacked and destroyed a German Fokker biplane. Another Fokker retaliated, shooting Barker in the right thigh but Barker destroyed it too. He was then pursued by a large formation of German Fokkers with another shooting him in the left thigh. Barker again managed to drive down two enemy aircraft but lost consciousness and control of his aircraft. He awoke to find another large formation of German aircraft pursuing him but Barker attacked again and shot down another aircraft. His left elbow was shattered in the process and he passed out from the pain. When he regained consciousness for the second time, he shot down one more German aircraft. Barker broke up a third formation of German planes before he crash-landed behind his own lines.



Second Lieutenant ALAN ARNETT MCLEOD, VC

Second Lieutenant McLeod was attacked at 5,000 feet by eight German aircraft. While he flew the aircraft, his observer, Lieutenant Alex Hammond, shot down three of them. In the process, McLeod was wounded five times and a bullet hit the gas tank and set the aircraft on fire. McLeod climbed out of the cockpit and piloted the aircraft from the left side of the fuselage and allowed the observer to continue firing. When the plane crashed in "no-man's land", Hammond had been wounded six times. Nonetheless, despite his own wounds and having a bomb dropped in his vicinity, McLeod dragged Hammond away from the burning aircraft before collapsing from exhaustion and blood loss.



Hearing Loss

Being able to hear is one of the joys of life, whether it's your favourite song with the volume way up, the soothing whoosh of waves crashing, or the sweet rumbles of your cat purring. It's also vital for making us aware of potential dangers. In short, it's highly valuable in every aspect of life.

The gradual loss of hearing can start at any age, but it tends to be most common as you get older. It's crucial to identify if it's happening so that you're able to maintain your independence and quality of life. Hearing loss can develop slowly, so you may not even realize the issue is your own ears. You might chalk it up to the source, such as assuming someone is mumbling or a restaurant is too loud.

Identifying early signs of hearing loss is critical, as it makes treatment options far more effective. Getting your hearing regularly tested is especially important for those over 55, people with a history of hearing loss in their family, or anyone frequently exposed to loud noise, such as concerts or machinery.

Here's what to look for:

- You find it difficult to understand what someone is saying to you, especially in noisy places like restaurants or large social gatherings. You need to ask others to speak more loudly or clearly. Voices seem unclear or muffled.
 - You're often turning the volume up on your TV, phone or radio.
 - You struggle to hear high-pitched sounds such as birdsong, children's voices, and phones ringing. Those experiencing early signs of hearing loss tend to lose the ability to perceive high frequencies first.
 - There's a persistent ringing or buzzing in your ear, medically known as tinnitus.
 - You start to avoid social situations because attempting to hear and understand conversations feels exhausting and/or even embarrassing.
- You become oddly tired after a long conversation or meeting.

Help from VAC:

The Treatment Benefits Program provides financial support to qualified Veterans for a wide variety of healthcare benefits and services, including: medical, nursing and related healthcare; aids for daily living; special equipment; prescription medication; as well as dental, audiology, or vision services.

The extent of your healthcare benefits and services coverage will depend on several factors, including how you qualified, your health needs and your individual circumstances.

If you qualify for the Treatment Benefits Program, you will receive a [VAC healthcare card](#).

Medavie Blue Cross, on behalf of Veterans Affairs Canada, provides authorizations and claims processing services in support of the Treatment Benefits Program. They:

- reimburse you or your healthcare provider for authorized claims
- answer your, or your healthcare provider's, questions about healthcare benefits and services

register and keep a list of healthcare providers who can bill us directly

You do not need to apply for the Treatment Benefits Program or for a [VAC healthcare card](#). You will be issued a card automatically after you have been approved for a disability benefit or qualified for one of the other benefits listed above.

Get help

If you have questions about your healthcare benefits and services coverage or about VAC's Treatment Benefits Program, our staff can assist you.

Call us toll-free at 1-866-522-2122. (Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. local time), send us a My VAC Account secure message, or request an in-person appointment using our [online booking form](#) or by calling 1-866-522-2122.

Please note our service locations offer in-person services by appointment only.

This is what happens when a put a nurse in charge of the newsletter.....

She fills it with medical information

Battle of Britain Sunday Commemoration is on Sunday, September 21, 2025!

A reminder to all members that 783 (Calgary) Wing RCAFA's Battle of Britain Sunday Commemoration will be starting at 2 PM on Sunday, September 21, 2025, at the Military Museums.

Ron Beirnes, MM, CD, will be our Guest of Honour this year.

After the Service is complete, all Wing members and their families are invited to stay for refreshments in the Cold War Exhibit of the Air Force Museum.

I certainly hope you can join us.

Big Hill Springs School Cairn Found

I was in North Calgary waiting to meet-up with a friend, and after he was delayed decided to go out, find and check-on the cairn marking the November 10, 1941, BCATP crash that we have been discussing at the last few Wing meetings. I found the cairn at the Northeast corner of the intersection of Range Road 25 and Highway 567 about halfway between Airdrie and Cochrane, Northwest of Calgary.

The cairn is in very good condition physically, however the gravel path to it and around it requires a good weeding and some round-up to bring it back up to standard. Discussion regarding the next steps in the cairn's care to be on the agenda for our next Wing meeting in September.

For members who may not be familiar with the story of the crash of a BCATP Tiger Moth by the Big Hill Springs School in 1941, I have drafted up an article for the newsletter on the history of the crash and the building of the cairn by Canmore Air Cadet Daniel Fitzgerald in 1995. Sources from the excellent Bomber Command Museum of Canada website. It is a story of tragedy, heroism and what Air Cadets can accomplish.

News From Group and National

National has set the date for a hybrid (both in-person and virtual) AGM for Monday, November 24, 2025. It will coincide with a planned RCAFA visit to Parliament Hill in Ottawa on Tuesday, November 25, 2025, called "Air Force on the Hill" to advocate for the RCAF. More details to come later in the year.

July Virtual Air Force Magazine Out

Please use this [LINK TO AIRFORCE MAGAZINE](#) to access the July 2025 edition of the now

The Story of the 1941 Big Hill Springs School Crash

On November 10, 1941, a Tiger Moth aircraft piloted by Flying Officer James Robinson from [No. 2 Wireless School in Calgary](#) crashed in the yard of Big Hill Springs School north of Cochrane, Alberta, narrowly missing the school building itself. F/O Robinson had been instantly killed in the crash and despite the fact that he had been severely injured in the crash and his clothes were on fire, L.A.C. Karl Gravell, the eighteen year old student wireless-air gunner aboard the aircraft, attempted to pull his pilot from the burning wreckage.

Frances Walsh, the teacher at the one-room school, "displaying great personal courage and coolness," rushed from the school house and into the fire, dragging L.A.C. Gravell from the burning aircraft, and rolling him on the ground to extinguish the flames which by this point had completely enveloped his clothing. She then attempted to remove F/O Robinson but the flames prevented her. After dispatching her oldest pupil, Lloyd Bowray, to bicycle to the nearest telephone, Mrs. Walsh and her students carried the injured airman to the schoolhouse and rendered first aid.

It is reported that as Mrs. Walsh pulled the airman back by his parachute harness, L.A.C. Gravell slipped into shock and at one point asked: "Did I get Jimmy out?".

RCAF Staff arrived as quickly as possible from [Calgary's No. 3 Service Flying Training School](#). Although Walsh suffered burns to her arms, hands, and face, she made no comment regarding her own injuries until medical officers had cared for the injured airman. Sadly, L.A.C. Gravell died four hours later in Calgary's Col. Belcher Hospital. A doctor told the inquiry that L.A.C. Gravel might have survived had he not raced back into the flames to attempt to pull F/O Robinson out. L.A.C. Gravell was posthumously awarded the George Cross for his heroic attempt to save his pilot.

Mrs. Walsh was awarded the George Medal, the second highest civilian award available at the time, for her unselfish acts. Instituted in 1940, the medal can be awarded both to civilians and to military personnel for acts of bravery not in the face of the enemy. The presentation was made at Rideau Hall in Ottawa by the Governor General, the Earl of Athlone. It was the first time a Canadian woman had received the George Medal.

F/O Robinson was a First World War veteran, who after the war had returned to his hometown of Jasper, Alberta, to settle down, raise a family and practise law. When the Second World War came, he returned to duty and was praised by fellow fliers for his skills and dedication as an instructor. L.A.C. Karl Gravell was born in Sweden and had moved to Canada with his parents in 1937, settling in Vancouver, British Columbia. He joined the air force in March 1941, just eight months before the crash. He was posted to No. 2 Wireless School in Calgary, where he trained as a wireless operator and air gunner.

Mrs. Walsh's wartime efforts included working shifts in a munition factory in eastern Canada during a summer break. But tragedy and a terrible twist loomed ahead for the teacher. In 1955, Mrs. Walsh's 18-year-old son, who had joined the RCAF, was killed in a flight-training accident in Manitoba. It crushed Mrs. Walsh, who died six years later of complications related to cancer.

The deaths of F/O Robinson and L.A.C. Gravell were far from the only ones as more than 130,000 people took part in the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan during the Second World War. More than 1,400 air crew died in training-related accidents across the country, the Bomber Command Museum of Canada estimates. The dead include Canadians, Britons, Australians and New Zealanders. At least 80 were training at Calgary flight schools.

[Canmore Air Cadet leads construction of the Big Hill Springs Memorial Cairn 1995](#)

As loved ones mourned, the war effort moved on and the details of this tragedy seemed destined for obscurity within government archives. However, more than five decades later, a 15-year-old Alberta boy rediscovered the story and gave it new life. Daniel Fitzgerald was an air cadet in 1995 when he spearheaded a year-long effort — with the help of family, friends and fellow cadets — to erect a cairn near the crash scene in the prairies between Cochrane and Airdrie. What started as a volunteer community service project soon turned into a passion. Air Cadet Daniel Fitzgerald, shown at age 15 in 1995, stands in front of the cairn he led efforts to create at the site of the 1941 training accident.

(Sources: [Frances Walsh - A School Teacher becomes a WWII Hero – Bomber Command Museum of Canada Archive website](#) – [CBC 11-10-2018 A REMEMBRANCE DAY CHRONICLE - THE FRANCES WALSH STORY](#))



Air Cadet Daniel Fitzgerald, shown at age 15 in 1995, stands in front of the cairn he led efforts to create at the site of the 1941 training accident. (Daniel Fitzgerald)



From your Membership Director:

Please contact Anna Lewis, our Director of Membership, if you change any contact info at bandalewis@shaw.ca



From your Health and Wellness Director

All Wing members already receive birthday cards. Do you know of anyone in our membership who would appreciate receiving a card of congratulations, or perhaps a card to raise their spirits? Greetings could be sent for many reasons, such as:

- *a “milestone” birthday*
- *best wishes for someone in hospital or convalescing at home*
- *bereavement on the passing of a Wing member*
- *retirement*
- *graduation*
- *marriage*
- *a special wedding anniversary*
- *receiving recognition and/or winning an award*