

## Reflections of Ponoka: Some great memories of being a Ponoka Air Cadet



By Ponoka News

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When my parents insisted I join the Ponoka Air Cadet Squadron in the 1950s I was just a little bit leery about marching with the big boys, taking orders and having to polish my shoes and keep my hair cut short. Over the next few years I would enjoy one of the best adventures of my life, getting to fly in an airplane, going to summer camps and learning to respect others and maybe even grew up just a bit.

David Spink, an early member and later officer and avid long-time supporter of the Ponoka Air Cadet Squadron #65, kindly helped me to put this story together and explained the program was first approved by the Secretary of State of Canada on Sept. 9, 1941. Requirements for entry into the squad, which would aim to attract 50 healthy young lads from Ponoka and districts to their ranks, was to be 12 to 15 years of age for junior corps, and 16 to 18 for seniors, with all members requiring written parental consent. Ponoka resident Hugh Preddy was one of the first cadets in the squadron, which received its #65 designation on Dec. 7, 1941 and enjoyed immediate support from the Royal Canadian Legion Branch #66 Ponoka and the community.

Rumour has it that there was a cadet group organized as early as 1915 in Ponoka, while the later meetings from the 1940s and on were held in the Elks Hall on Chipman Avenue, at the Red Brick School, in our first Town Hall, and even in the basement of the Spink residence. A wooden building was moved into place at the north end of Railway Street (50th) in the mid-1940s, serving as the official armories of the #65 Cadet Squadron and other groups for many decades, and later adding a well-used rifle range and training area in the basement.

Officials were appointed to various positions to conduct the many activities of the busy squad, and these included: J. Gordon, R. Cline, T. Webber, P. MacDonald and W. Kankewitt as the commanding officer. Later replacements were John Byers, Garnet Ranks, Arthur Eastes and W. McIntosh, and over the years many officers and volunteers have willingly come forth to keep our cadet moving going strong and a special opportunity for hundreds of young men and women from far and wide. In those beginning years the young men of #65 Squadron were carefully but rigorously prepared to do their duty and serve their country if required, but then in the early 1960s the national education program was changed to encourage the cadets to learn the responsibility and importance of citizenship, leadership, first aid, survival techniques and a keen sense of discipline.

Many of us who grew up in the 1950s and beyond era will never forget those exciting two-week camping trips

to various places throughout the province and Western Canada. It was an opportunity to see new places and to meet young cadets from throughout the Prairies and beyond. The Ponoka Squadron #65 attended camps at Gimli and Paulson, Man., Patricia Bay, Abbotsford, B.C., and at the former Penhold Air Force Base, which opened in 1966 and still operates to this day.

Dave Spink was one of the officers who accompanied the Ponoka Squadron #65 on a long train trip to Summer Camp at Sea Island (Vancouver), always reminding us we were supposed to have fun but there were also so many events and duties to tend to, including: getting up at 6 a.m. for inspection, making beds, cleaning up our area, drill, swimming, sports events, band, first aid, shooting, flying, being on time for the great meals at the mess hall, tours of the base and area, more drill, and much more — but no girls.

Many cadets and their leaders were shocked by the recent announcement the Department of National Defense will close the Spring Brook Air Cadet Summer Camp at Penhold at the end of the 2014 season due to rising costs of running the huge event.

Since its inception in 1966, the popular Penhold camp has drawn about 2,500 Air Cadets each summer from across Canada, who enjoy vigorous but enjoyable two-week training and activity sessions under the direction of 120 staff cadets and volunteers. Despite the Penhold closure, the current and future members of these Air Cadets squadrons will still be given every opportunity to take part in ongoing training programs, summer, and special camps throughout the area at Cold Lake, Vernon, Whitehorse, Camp Borden and others.

### **Ongoing changes in the National Air Cadet training program**

Since its inception so many decades ago, the aggressive motto of the Air Cadet movement across the nation has been "To learn to serve and advance," while always encouraging the importance of citizenship, physical fitness and the ongoing participation in intersquad activities and community events. A milestone event in the Air Cadet program was the addition of the young ladies in 1974, with membership now open to all youths from age 12 to 19 years.

I really enjoyed a recent chat with Stan Monkman of Ponoka, a retired air force veteran, who served as an instructor and commanding officer of the local #65 Squadron from 1997 to 2007, and later the Castor squad, as well as assisting in the operation of the Penhold Camp for 10 years, and is also currently involved as the Alberta director for public affairs of the Cadet League of Canada.

He stressed that as well as the regular training sessions offered to the young cadets, they now have opportunities to earn scholarships, and take special training and camp sessions for such exciting programs as: gliders, power pilot, the International Cadet Exchange, advanced aviation airport operations and aircraft maintenance. The active Royal Canadian Legion Branch #65 Ponoka Air Cadet Squadron meets every Tuesday evening at 6:30 p.m. at hall on 51<sup>st</sup> Avenue, next to Flowers for You. Boys and girls between the ages of 12 and 19 wishing to sign up are welcome to drop down on a Tuesday evening, and you must bring your parents along to hear about the programs offered. The parent committee is a vital part of the operation of the #65 squadron, while volunteers are always welcome, and you do not have to have a child in the squadron to help out with this great youth program! Take it from an old cadet.....it's a unique and inexpensive adventure that you will never forget.

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