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July 8, 2009 - 6:43 pm



All images: Eric Dumigan

By Mary Lee

It was a very poignant moment in the air show season and a particularly moving one for the family of the late Colonel (Retired) Peter Graham Howe, a former Sabre pilot who served in the Air Force for 30 years. The

story of Peter Howe is one that will leave a lasting impression on the Hawk One team for years to come because of this one simple yet beautiful act of kindness that symbolizes what the mission of Hawk One and Centennial of Flight celebrations are all about – to resurrect, to celebrate, to motivate and also to pay tribute.

What began with a request to Vintage Wings of Canada grew to become one of the most endearing tributes I have ever witnessed and, I venture to guess, that it was because of the *can do* attitude of the men and women of Vintage Wings and Hawk One that it was able to happen in the first place.

It was in early May when Paul Kissmann, Hawk One Deputy Team Lead, received an email from Dan Magee regarding an unusual request. In his endearing email, Dan humbly asked if it was at all possible to fly the ashes of his stepfather who had sadly succumbed to his battle with cancer in February. Before Peter's passing, he had always spoken about his fondness for the Canadair Sabre. These stories left an impression as it was Marc Magee, who realized what better gift for his stepfather than a ride in the Sabre. As fate would have it, Dan and Paul were college mates at the Royal Military College (RMC), class of '87. At the same time, Peter's friend and neighbour, Dave Houghton, had also been inquiring directly with Vintage Wings. So, when the word spread throughout the team, without hesitation the request was met with a unanimous yes. What more fitting and compelling way to honour those who came before us than through a remarkable tribute of this calibre.

Thus, on July 4, a day that had already been set aside for Peter's memorial, Hawk One flew his ashes at the Trenton Open House and gave Peter what he had always dreamed of most: to fly once again in a beloved Sabre.



Laurie Howe brings the ashes of her late husband, Peter, to LCol Steve Will, Hawk One Team Lead, for his Sabre flight, July 4 during the 8 Wing Trenton Open House.

Yet, while the story may end there, it began many years earlier. It is Peter's story and it is the story of all our airmen who once served for the love of their country, for the love of flying and because life just happened to put them in places for much greater things to happen. This is the story of Peter as I have come to know it. I have never met the man but I know him. I know him now in my own special way through my connection with Laurie, his wife of many years, and because Laurie entrusted me with Peter until we placed him onboard the Sabre for his long awaited flight.

Peter, too, was a RMC graduate, class of '56. His career took him across Canada and over to Europe. He loved flying and spent many years on various airframes including Sabres, Harvards and then CF-5s before accelerating to higher rank and file then eventually retiring into the private sector. He is particularly proud of being a part of the Air Force's introduction of air-to-air refuelling in 1971 when he commanded 434 Tactical

Fighter Squadron in Cold Lake, Alberta. Peter was a free-spirited fellow, according to an RMC alumni newsletter. That same spirit was evidently personified when, at an Officer's Mess function the night before a flying competition with US Air Force F-5s, Peter broke an ankle while partaking in fun shenanigans on the dance floor. Nevertheless, he remained focused on his mission, completed the competition and led his squadron to victory. Records will have it that when asked how he defied doctor's orders not to fly he replied, "Simple, I out-ranked the base doctor!"



No member of the Hawk One team can fly in the F-86 Sabre without being christened a member of the Hawk One team. Steve Will places the team crest on the box containing Peter Howe's ashes as he prepares for the flight.

A risk-taker who pushed the envelope is perhaps the story of Peter, much like the many great aviators who came before him and will come after him. But Peter was a friend, a father, a husband, and he was loved; that is what struck me the most about this man. When Laurie came to meet the team on Friday before the flight, she was accompanied by Dan, Dave and his wife Jane - a tight knit of friends who shared their tales about Peter. Suddenly, Peter came to life as we read through scanned newspaper clipping and photographs that Laurie passed on in emails.

As our meeting adjourned, Laurie asked us to keep Peter's ashes in case problems were encountered getting on to the base Saturday morning. We wouldn't dare take Peter to pub for the Meet and Greet later that evening since any good pilot should know and respect the *bottle to throttle* rule before a flight. Yet, somehow I think he would have appreciated it and seen the humour in it. Instead, I gingerly placed him by the night stand in the base accommodations, and, as the team bid him goodnight, we felt as though we were in the company of an old friend.

His flight, in the hands of Steve Will, Team Lead, was as graceful as his character and charm. The Sabre flew in formation for the Centennial Heritage Flight and then with the Snowbirds before breaking off into its solo routine. And, as Dominic Taillon, Hawk One Team Coordinator, announced the special meaning of this flight, I caught a glimpse of Mary Kapitza, Peter's daughter, who stood quietly with her son among the crowd of thousands. A hand brush along her cheek as the words "this flight is dedicated to Peter Howe and his family," echoed across the Trenton airfield. In that moment, the purpose of the Hawk One journey was realized.



Members of Peter Howe's family meet with the Hawk One team to place the ashes aboard the Sabre. Back row (l - r): Laurie Howe, Dan Magee, Andre Magee (grandson), Bryton Kapitza (grandson) and Mary Kapitza (daughter). Front row: Hawk One Team members Mary Lee, Steve Will, Dominic Taillon, Chris Adams, and Andrej Janik.

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