



**HONOURARY NATIONAL PRESIDENT'S INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS
TO THE 60th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
HELD IN TRENTON, ONTARIO
17 OCTOBER 2009**

First, I must apologize for my absence at the 60th AGM. This event is an important milestone for the Air Force Association and even more so that it occurs during the year where we are celebrating the centennial of flight in Canada. Aviation has meant so much to the development of Canada throughout the last century and it is appropriate that we acknowledge the many achievements that have been made by Canadians in both civil and military aviation fields. And, I think we can all agree that the air force future looks very bright indeed with the purchase of new equipment and the deployment of an air wing to Afghanistan, to mention just two examples. The reason I am not in attendance is because of an opportunity to visit Afghanistan and to see first hand the work being done there. I will report on it sometime after my return.

In thinking about what I might say to the participants of the AGM, I sought advice in the messages of a few of my predecessors. I was not surprised to find a resonance with their views and my own, even with a separation of several years. Some of you will know Don McNaughton who was HNP in the early 90's. In his final year, his comments to the 1992 AGM identified some of the positive and negative aspects of the Association. On the positive side, he reflected on the outstanding volunteers and hard workers throughout the organization, the support given to cadets, the honours and awards program, among others. He then went on to describe what he thought were the negatives. He cited a negativism that sometimes cause distress and bad feelings. He also suggested that the Association needed to reach out to members at large with a view to adopting a more inclusive approach with respect to them. Finally, he described a resistance to change which he felt was an impediment to the positive evolution of the Association – this at a time when the name change was topical.

My own experience in the organization is somewhat consistent with General McNaughton's views 17 years ago. There are many positive aspects to the Association, but we must always be working to improve. In my view, the most enduring comment that Don made is that related to negativism. I have witnessed several instances where well-intentioned people have engaged their mouth, or their keyboard, while their brain was still in neutral. Sure, we may all be tempted to shoot from the hip from time to time, but we must keep in mind that constructive criticism is really the only acceptable kind. In an organization like ours, sensitivity, diplomacy and congeniality never grow stale.

General Bob Morton was a dear friend of mine and was serving as HNP at the time of the 1998 AGM, on the eve of the 75th anniversary of the air force. He made some telling comments at the meeting which I would like to share with you. He said:

“... the Association has an enduring obligation. We are the largest collective voice of aviation history, tradition and advocacy in the country... With that many voices, we can inform, sponsor, and encourage aeronautics in all its forms and branches. We can do so also by ceremonies and remembrances, and through the circulation of our excellent and successful *Airforce* magazine. At the same time we can help our next generation, by sponsoring Air Cadets....The past and future are important, but so too is our present-day advocacy role for air power....we need to keep putting the message out in clear, persuasive language and repeat it often...Our Association's voice has credibility in these matters, the credibility born of years of experience in peace and war and, yes, of tragedy too. We owe our brethren in uniform our unending help in their struggle to keep Canada's air force strong, relevant, and balanced to the needs of the second biggest nation on earth.”

Bob spoke these words 11 years ago, but they are equally relevant today. We belong to a terrific organization, a unique Association of like-minded people, all with an interest in some aspect of aviation. No, we don't all work directly with cadets, or sponsor a heritage event, or openly advocate for a strong air force. But we all belong to an organization that does all of these things and more. It needs our collective support to continue to credibly do those things.

A lot has happened in the past 60 years since the Association came into being. The founding members of the RCAF Association belonged to a generation with a life experience quite foreign to those of us who have followed. We need to honour and respect their heritage and that of others who have served in the military. We must never forget.

But at the same time, the Association is engaged in so much more than that. Let's celebrate the diversity which we have and exploit the rich talent pool of our membership to retain the Air Force Association of Canada as a vibrant, relevant and viable organization. Let's focus on the good things the Association has to offer and do our best to avoid the negative aspects. Let's work together to find solutions, not simply create problems. We're all in this together. Our similarities far exceed our differences. Let's all commit here and now to do our best to promote the overall purpose and vision of the organization, all the while working in the specific areas in which we are each interested.

We have come a long ways in 60 years. As we enter the second century of flight in Canada, let's work to build the Air Force Association into an even stronger, more unified body of engaged members, working in unison for the good of the whole.

Again, I apologize for not being at the meeting in body, but you can rest assured that I am there in spirit. I wish you all an enjoyable and useful AGM.

George Macdonald, LGen (Ret'd)
Honourary National President