

## Airmen lost in training remembered at CFB Penhold



More than 100 people turned out at Red Deer Airport on Saturday for the unveiling of a memorial to 44 airmen who lost their lives training at CFB Penhold during the Second World War and the Cold War. The memorial also includes the name of Civil Air Search and Rescue Association Herluf Nielsen, whose plane crashed following a training exercise in November 2008.

By Paul Cowley - Red Deer Advocate  
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In a moving ceremony, a memorial to 44 military airmen who lost their lives training at CFB Penhold was unveiled at the former air base on Saturday.

A 45th name belongs to Herluf Nielsen, and it was due to the determination of his friends to remember the well-known area pilot that this event happened.

Founder of the Innisfail Flying Club, Nielsen logged more than 3,000 hours in the air for the Civil Air Search and Rescue Association (CASARA), whose volunteers help finding downed or missing aircraft.

Nielsen, 67, had just completed a night training exercise and was heading back to Innisfail from Red Deer Airport when his small plane went down in bad weather around 10 p.m. November 2008.

Since it was a training incident, Nielsen did not qualify to have his name on a monument in Winnipeg honouring search and rescue members lost on their mission.

That didn't stop his local supporters. They were determined to recognize the Spruce View farmer and local flying legend, and in so doing realized other flyers who had died training at CFB Penhold had not been given their due recognition.

Saturday's ceremony changed that and more than 100 people, including air force veterans and serving members, cadets, friends and family of Nielsen and dignitaries came to pay their respects.

Nielsen's widow, Alice, said the memorial was about honouring those who made the ultimate sacrifice including "my own fallen hero."

Her husband took his first flight in 1960 and was immediately hooked, she said.

"It was at this airport that Herluf took me on the first ride in his plane. I will never forget that thrill."

Herluf was devoted to his faith, family, farming and flying but as the family joked not necessarily always in that order.

"My faith assures me that he is still flying high."

Jody Smith, president of the Harvard Historical Aviation Society, said the memorial includes the names of 34 airmen; 31 from Britain, two Australians and a New Zealander, who died training during the Second World War.

Britain's Royal Air Force operated flying training schools at Penhold and Bowden with relief airfields located at Innisfail and Blackfalds.

One of the names on the memorial belongs to Charles de Wever, originally from Belgium, who fled his German-occupied country and made his way to Spain, where he was arrested in 1942 by the pro-German Franco regime.

The following year he was allowed to go to British-held Gibraltar and then made his way to England. By the summer of 1944, he was training in Bowden.

On an August day, he and his instructor were flying in a Fairchild Cornell a few miles east of Bowden when a wing fell off the plane and it plunged into the ground, killing both men.

De Wever, who was listed as British in the records of the day, was buried in the Innisfail cemetery, but in 1956 his body was repatriated to Belgium.

Penhold was closed in 1944 as demand for pilots dropped as the war came to a close.

In 1951, it was reopened for NATO training as the Cold War began. Ten airmen, seven Canadians, two Danes and an Australia lost their lives during the next 11 years.

"We will remember them," said Smith in closing.

Red Deer Flying Club president Jim Thoreson, who led the memorial campaign, was thrilled with the turnout.

"I was absolutely amazed by the number of people who came out in this weather."

He knows the memorial meant a lot to the Nielsen family.

An air force cadet colour guard carried flags representing the five nations of the fallen. Members of the Nielsen family placed flowers on the memorial and the Civil Air Search and Rescue Association, the Harvard Society and 703 Central Alberta Wing of the Royal Canadian Air Force Association laid wreaths.