

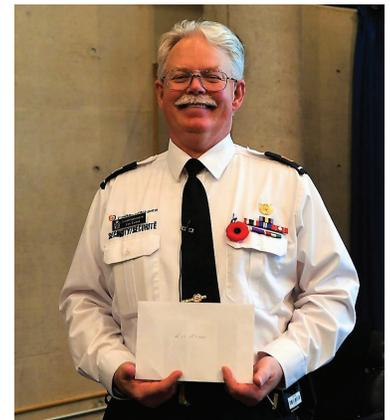
November 3, 2018 CAHS Toronto Chapter Meeting

Topic: *Capt. (Ret'd) Les Evans – My Career*

Speaker: Capt. (Ret'd) Les Evans

Reporter: Gord McNulty

An inspiring, riveting and well-illustrated presentation with a Remembrance Day and Veterans' Week theme was given by Capt. Les Evans, of North York. Our speaker was introduced by Chapter Treasurer Brigadier-General (Ret'd) Paul Hayes. Capt. Evans spent 31 years in military service, including 20 years as a forward air controller in the RCAF and 10 in the RCN. During his RCAF career, Capt. Evans served with the U.S. Marines, where he was wounded in action in the Gulf War of 1990-91 against Iraq by a U.S.-led coalition that defeated Iraq. He was awarded two medals for his service in Desert Storm: the U.S. Purple Heart and the Kuwait Liberation Medal. Capt. Evans' father served as a gunnery petty officer on wartime convoy duty. Capt. Evans began by paying tribute to the remarkable men and women who have served Canada over the years, including veterans in the audience. Commenting on



Speaker Les Evans
Photo Credit - Ken Swartz



Hill 70 1917 Courtesy - Legion Magazine

the 100th Anniversary of Canada's First World War Hundred Days and the Armistice of 1918, Capt. Evans noted the Battle of Hill 70 along the Western Front was commemorated in August. While often overlooked in history books, the campaign was significant for Canada as it was the first major action fought by the Canadian Corps under a Canadian commander in the war. Some 2,100 Canadians gave their lives in the 10-day battle to liberate Hill 70, with the aim of gaining control over the high ground in Lens, France, while diverting German resources from Passchendaele. More than 1,300 of them have no known grave.

Canada's war effort a century ago was remarkable for a nation of eight million people. With a regular army of just 3,100 and a fledgling navy, Canada was ill-equipped to enter a world conflict. Yet by war's end, more than 650,000 women and men from Canada and Newfoundland served. More than 66,000 gave their lives and more than 172,000 were wounded. The immense sacrifice led to Canada's separate signature on the Treaty of Versailles, signed on November 11, 2018. Few of many tough struggles fought by Canadians during the war were as brutal as Passchendaele, profiled in this year's Veterans' Week poster. During the Second World War, more than one million Canadians and Newfoundlanders served in the military, from Hong Kong to Dieppe, the Battle of the Atlantic, the Italian campaign, D-Day, the Battle of Normandy and much more. It was an incredible contribution for a country with only 11 million people at the time. More than 45,000 Canadians gave their lives and another 55,000 were wounded between 1939 and 1945. Thanks to their sacrifice, Canada had become a significant military power with the world's third largest navy, the fourth largest air force and an army of six divisions.



CH-124 Sea King Helicopter Photo - DND

Capt. Evans then reflected on his career. He started his navy career as a sailor on the west coast, circa 1977-1979, taking initial MARS (Maritime Surface and Subsurface) Officer Training, Firefighting School and Damage Control School. He completed second phase MARS training at the Canadian Forces Fleet School at Esquimalt. Training on the destroyer HMCS Yukon, he did bridge watching, navigation, and finished MARS training. On one trip, the crew went to Hawaii. On another, they went to Peru, Panama, and Mexico. They twice visited the U.S. On operations, the crew went to Australia. They then went to the East Coast. Capt. Evans served as a bridge watch keeper and a navigator, and then became an anti-submarine air controller. He controlled CH-124 Sea Kings on the destroyer HMCS Fraser. He did three trips to the U.K., two trips to Europe itself, right into Sweden once, as well as the Caribbean on four occasions.



Argus CP107

In addition to the shipborne Sea Kings, Capt. Evans controlled the CP-107 Argus and then the CP-140 Aurora – both excellent maritime aircraft. As an ASAC, the navy term for an Anti-Submarine Air Controller, Capt. Evans and his colleagues controlled any aircraft deployed against a submarine. The destroyer HMCS Iroquois was his next ship on the East Coast, circa 1985-1986. Capt. Evans noted the R2D2 rapid-fire air defence system, capable of firing 5,000 rounds a minute. It's designed to protect a ship with a wall of bullets to destroy an incoming enemy missile, "theoretically." Controllers used two radars that faced aft to provide accurate data to recover helicopters and land them safely on the deck when the weather

deteriorated very quickly. Capt. Evans, as the senior air controller at sea, would control one aircraft onto another ship in “zero zero” visibility. On Iroquois, he did two trips to the U.K., one to the Scandinavian area, and the Caribbean three times. Canada’s Victoria-class submarines now in service are only about half the size of some of the Russian boats encountered by the RCN. During the Scandinavian trip, HMCS Iroquois was followed by a Russian Akula-class nuclear-powered attack sub. In fact, Akulas are longer than a 280-class destroyer like the Iroquois. They are believed to carry a crew of as many as 300 to 350.



Aurora CP140



Russian Nuclear Submarine - Akula Class

Flypast V. 53 No. 3

Capt. Evans was then chosen to teach the ASAC course. He introduced 27 qualified ASACs to the fleet, in 2½ years, circa 1985-88. They took gunnery training and simulated various scenarios, with the Sea King and the Aurora. Capt. Evans wanted to continue as an ASAC, rather than train. He was posted to 22 Wing/CFB North Bay in 1988, where he could control fighters. He soon encountered the NORAD Underground Complex colloquially described as “The Hole,” a Cold War bunker that could withstand a nuclear bomb much more powerful than the one dropped at Hiroshima. “At least that’s what they told us,” Capt. Evans noted. The tunnels were designed to minimize the impact of any blast. Steel bank vault-type doors were set back, so that anything which blew out would go through the tunnel and not impact the doors. Capt. Evans served an initial four years at the complex and 10 years a second time. A proverbial “Northern Shield,” the structure was excavated from rock and had two buildings of two storeys and three storeys in height. The complex was 180 metres deep. Crew who worked there received an “Honorary Mushroom Certificate.” Capt. Evans explained: “You were down there, working in the dark, and fed nothing but BS.” He earned 12,000 hours on his first certificate and 37,000 on his second, serving as a weapons officer and weapons assignment officer.



E-3 Sentry AWACS Aircraft

Fighters would receive data from E-3 Sentry AWACS (Airborne Early Warning and Control System) aircraft and be assigned to escort unidentified air traffic that didn’t have authority to be in the airspace. Extensive radar could pick up a Russian aircraft such as the Tu-95 Bear flying through what was known as the Greenland-Iceland-U.K. gap. Pre-positioned interceptors would escort the aircraft as it continued further south to Cuba, to be covered by American fighters. If an aircraft showed hostile intent, it was the job of NORAD to shoot it down. Capt. Evans said the Bear H could carry as many as eight air-launched cruise missiles in the 12- to 14-megaton range. They could fire all of the missiles on one target or two on each of four targets. Fortunately, however, any unidentified aircraft would typically prove to be an airliner coming from Europe. A pilot, for example, forgot to turn on his transponder. Air traffic controllers at Pearson once helped weapons officers to provide radar coverage for aircraft from the U.S. In one case, the system intercepted a drug runner from the U.S. who landed in the Holland Marsh area and was arrested by the OPP. He had almost 400 pounds of Colombian drugs and almost 3,500 weapons on board.



Russian Tu-95 Bear

Describing his perilous Desert Storm combat experience with the U.S. Marines, Capt. Evans flew with and surprised the USAF AWACS officers with his appearance. He wore the Canadian flag, and his RCAF name tag on his American flight suit. They controlled F-16s, F-15s and F-18s. As a forward air controller, Capt. Evans' job was to find targets such as command posts or supply dumps in the middle of the night. Protection would be provided by the other 16 members of the platoon. They were about 100 miles from Basra at the time. They always slept with their radar intercom on so that everyone would hear a transmission. They searched for targets for around three days in December 1990. They observed some Iraqi soldiers in trucks but they didn't bother anyone. The main push came in February 1991. Capt. Evans' group arrived by helicopter just west of Baghdad. As the platoon advanced, everyone was wakened from sleep and told to bring their gear and weapons. All they could see was a small red dot. Then it flared. With infrared binoculars, the troops could see it was a soldier who was smoking. Then he turned around, put his hands up, did something, and a door in the sand lifted up. White light came flashing at the platoon. The soldier then walked in, the door closed, and the platoon didn't know he was there apart from the butt of his cigarette. Capt. Evans described his use of laser technology to destroy what was an underground Iraqi bunker. He was about 150 metres away from where his laser was hitting the target. He called in two F-16s and two F-15s, both heavily armed. They launched their 'smart bombs,' hitting the roof of the bunker. Sand and concrete went everywhere. A piece of the roof about the size of a Volkswagen was blown out, landing about 30 metres behind Capt. Evans and his colleagues. The hole was made and two big missiles were launched. A fireball erupted with a whoosh about 300 feet in the air. Everything inside was torched, including a jeep, other transports, missile launchers in a vault, and more. They had blown up a command post. Then they were told to hightail it out as a drone had watched the strike and Iraqi mechanized forces were approaching from Baghdad. On day three, 200 Iraqis caught the 18 personnel in Capt. Evans' group. A firefight erupted. The Iraqis were decimated. They were vulnerable as they came out of their trucks standing up, trying to fire, while the platoon members were on the ground. Capt. Evans estimated they killed 40 or 50 Iraqis and took three wounded before the Iraqis retreated. For his part, Capt. Evans was hit with a bullet in the gut and a bullet in the chest that hit his flak vest. The bullets "just

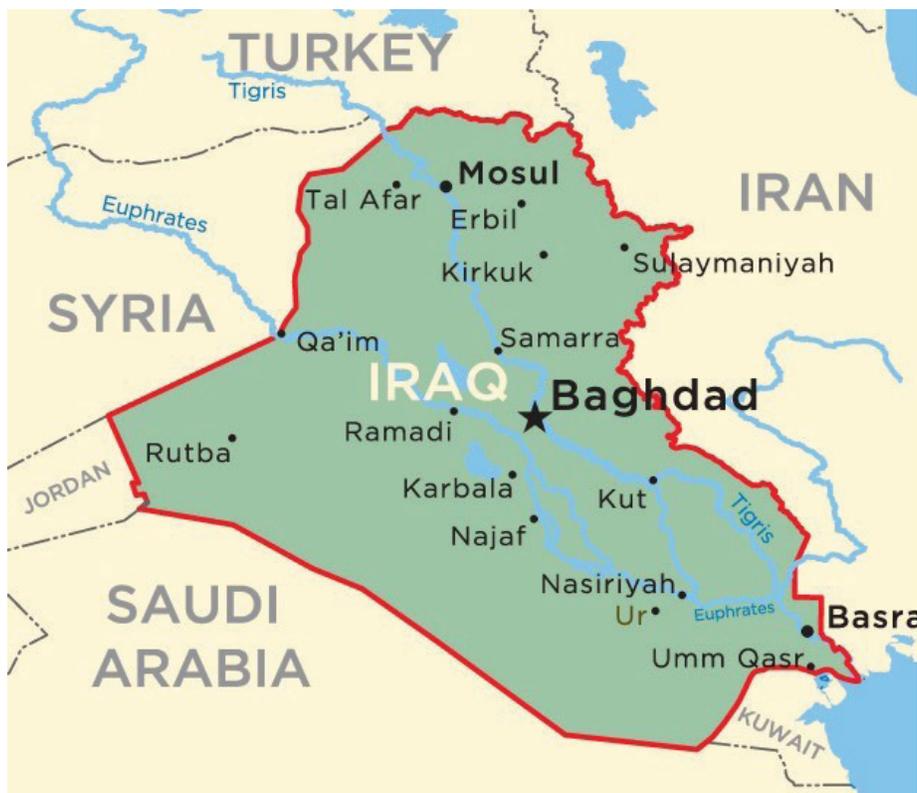
mushroomed” against him and when the flak vest was removed, he had two big black bruises over his heart. The wounds resulted in his Purple Heart decoration. He still has two pieces of metal in his hip that can’t be removed. Unfortunately, they set off airport metal detectors.

Capt. Evans and two injured colleagues were taken to the military hospital at Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Then he was transferred to the huge 4th Field Hospital at Ramstein, Germany. It has 16 major operating rooms, with three ICUs attached to each.

Capt. Evans endured three surgeries on his gut. He spent three months in Germany, was

flown home, then did another month of rehab in Oklahoma. Capt. Evans’ posting to Oklahoma was cut short as he couldn’t fly with the AWACS any longer because of his condition. He returned to North Bay for his 10-year stint until 2003, then went into weapons team and joint operations on ship. He sent instructions to any E-3 Sentry AWACS flying in Canada at the time. Capt. Evans finished his career in June 2005 as an instructor. He enjoyed a retirement party and received letters from the prime minister, governor general, the U.S. president, and the USAF chief of staff among other things.

Capt. Evans also paid tribute to the Canadians who served in the Korean War, Afghanistan and nearly 50 United Nations peacekeeping missions. He mentioned the challenges of violent extremism, as exemplified by the losses of Cpl. Nathan Cirillo and Warrant Officer Patrice Vincent, risky search and rescue missions, and emergencies of all kinds. Spouses and children who remain at home and pay a high cost for their loved ones’ service were commended as well. Our speaker closed by asking the audience for two minutes of silence and prayer for all fallen members of the Canadian Armed Forces. He answered many questions. Of note, the underground complex at North Bay was ultimately mothballed as operations were moved above ground to a block house. Paul Hayes, presented Capt. Evans with a gift in appreciation, and thanked Capt. Evans for his profound sense of duty and incredible presentation.



Iraq and adjoining countries