

Memories - Bill Hillman

I spent many memorable hours on that base. Back in the '50s, while a member of #317 Strathclair Air Cadet Squadron for eight years, we were often bussed over to this Rivers where we were thrilled to ride in most of the aircraft shown below. The visits to the Rec Hall were a favourite because it was our first exposure to a real gymnasium. We spent many enjoyable weekends practising drill on its huge hardwood floor as well as playing volleyball, Bordenball, and other gym sports. The building also housed a bowling alley, rifle range, snack bar, and an area for films. Later, in the early '60s, while earning tuition money for university, I worked summers in the CE section painting PMQs, hangars, fuel tanks, etc. I boarded in one of the barracks through the week and but many nights I climbed onto the military shuttle bus to Brandon -- guitar slung over my shoulder -- to play with one of the country, rock or TV bands I was playing with at that time. Still later, in the late '60s, Sue-On and I performed many times in the various messes and clubs on the base.



My first helicopter flight was in this Bell 47.

A real thrill for a 14-year-old kid.

The all plexiglass cockpit made for an incredible view and gave the sensation of floating through the air.

We landed on one of the steep drumlin-like hills outside of rivers - I think to the southwest.

I heard a few years later that the pilot had retired from the air force and gone into the lumber industry in BC where he was decapitated after landing and exiting on a steep slope.



C-119 Flying Box Car

Our cadet squadron took many rides in this aircraft -- an experience I never looked forward to.

For much of my time in my eight years in the squadron I was a Flight Sergeant and Warrant Officer and was expected to set an example. However, the ride was always very noisy and rough... and I spent every hour in this craft trying to keep from vomiting.

The most memorable ride was the trip to summer camp at St. Jean, Quebec. Before reaching our destination, however, we lost an engine and had to make a tense forced landing at Toronto where we spent an uncomfortable night.



The Dakota was another of the planes in which we were "treated" to regular flights all over SW Manitoba



The Harvard trainer was a plane I didn't catch a ride in until 40 years later at the Commonwealth Air Training Plan Museum in Brandon, MB.



Championship Tug-O-War Team with Colonel Saul.
Mike Chimko (upper left)



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1. A BIT LATE FOR ELVIS' SHOW

Interestingly, one year after Elvis played to a huge crowd in Vancouver's Empire Stadium in 1957, I spent an evening serving as an usher in the same stadium. It was for a slightly different crowd though 😊 I was an Air Cadet in Strathclair's 317 Squadron for eight years. The first two-week Air Cadet summer camp I attended was at the Royal Canadian Air force base on Sea Island. It is now site of Vancouver's International Airport. I was given the choice of spending a night at a stock car race or at a BC Lions CFL football game. I was a major football fan so of course I chose to attend the game -- even if I had to work as an usher and wear my cadet uniform. Great memories of the first football game I attended . . . even though I missed Elvis' appearance by a whole year 😊

A few days later, however, we served as part of the colour party that met Princess Margaret's plane when it landed at the base. She didn't generate quite the excitement that had surrounded King Elvis's appearance. It was quite a few years later that we finally got to actually see Elvis in concert.

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