



EAST MOOR MEMORIAL 2022

COMMEMORATING 415 SQUADRON'S CONTRIBUTION TO RAF'S BOMBER COMMAND DURING WORLD WAR II

Maj Patrick Ouellet, 415 Squadron



A small sundial cairn memorial stands proud in the small village of Sutton-on-the-Forest, in Yorkshire, England. The monument, erected in 1990 by veteran Canadian aircrew and ground staff, stands in memory of the 640 members of 415, 429 and 432 Squadrons who flew out of RAF East Moor during World War II and never returned. A memorial event is organized annually by the Sutton-on-the-Forest Parish Council, chaired by Mr. Bob Shearman, and has had an RCAF presence since the memorial was built. After two years of absence due to the COVID-19 pandemic, members of the currently active 415 and 429 Squadrons were honoured to attend the ceremony, which took place on May 14th.

RCAF members attending the ceremony

Left to right: Capt Rob Alexandre & Capt Russ Black (429 Sqn), Maj Doug Publicover & Maj Patrick Ouellet (415 Sqn)

RAF East Moor, one of numerous airfields that spawned across the UK to enable the allied forces to combat Germany's aggression in Europe, was established in 1942 and became home to 415 Sqn in July 1944, when the Squadron moved from No. 16 Group of Coastal Command to No. 6 (RCAF) Group of Bomber Command. Re-equipped with the Handley Page Halifax aircraft, 415 Squadron flew over 100 bomber missions before being disbanded on May 15th, 1945. RAF East Moor, which closed in 1946, was located next to the village of Sutton-on-the-Forest, which was home to a large number of crew and support staff during the war.

This year, 415 and 429 Squadrons members were hosted by Royal Air Force Flt Lt Alan Dolding, who provided outstanding support throughout their stay. The day before the memorial, the members performed a tour of RAF Leeming, an active air base nearby, which was home of 429 Sqn after its relocation from RAF East Moor in 1943. The highlight of the tour was a visit of the station's museum, where a myriad of memorabilia revealed how important the participation of the RCAF was during the war efforts. The visit was followed by a private tour of the magnificent house of Sutton Park, home of the Sheffield family in North Yorkshire, which was used by Canadian aircrew for housing and also as their Officer's Mess.

The day of the memorial started in Sutton-on-the-Forest with a meet and greet, including members of the Parish Council, and RAF Leeming Station Commander, Group Captain Gareth Prendergast. Taking place at the lovely Betty's Tea House, everyone present was extremely welcoming and appreciative of the RCAF's presence for the memorial event, pointing to the rich history and profound ties between the community and the RCAF during the war. With over 1800 British and Canadian personnel stationed at East Moor through the height of the war, the RCAF members were soon considered "family" in the village, and the feeling still stands today.

The ceremony, which took place at the memorial on a beautiful warm and sunny day, was attended by a large crowd of local residents. Maj Publicover addressed the gathering, thanking them for their warm welcome, and touched on the history of 415 Sqn and its close ties to the area - and the significance of the annual event to remember those who served, and those who never returned. Reverend Steve Whiting delivered reflections and prayers, followed by the Act of Remembrance by retired RAF Squadron Leader Henry Morgan. A touching Last Post / Silence / Reveille was performed, before the laying of Wreaths and Flowers at the Cairn while Lead Piper Jim Sharpe played. Closing remarks from the Parish Council were followed by the Canadian and Great Britain national anthems.



Wreaths and Flowers adorn the Sundial Cairn Memorial, in Sutton-on-the-Forest, Yorkshire, England

The ceremony was followed by afternoon tea at the Village Hall, where the RCAF members had the pleasure to exchange with the local residents and various group representatives. After the reception, the Pipers approached the members to offer a visit to a nearby memorial of the crash site of a Halifax Bomber from the RAF, of which six of the seven crew members were from the RCAF. The aircraft was returning to RAF Dishforth in 1945 from a mission over Germany when an enemy fighter shot it down as it was preparing for landing. The young crew were all killed in action. The Pipers played a number of songs in memory of the crew - a very moving experience for the RCAF attendees. Following the impromptu ceremony, the Pipers recommended a stop to a local pub in the nearby village of Tholthorpe, which is said to have very close connections to the RCAF. Unfortunately the pub was closed for a few more hours, however another memorial site was observed across the street, with wreaths at its base, and revealed to be in memory of the RCAF members of 420, 425, 431 and 434 Sqns who served at RCAF Tholthorpe during the war. Yet another example of how much impact the RCAF has had on Yorkshire.

The next day, the RCAF members attended the Morning Service at All Hallows Church in Sutton-on-the-Forest, before getting ready for the return trip to Canada.

The whole experience was deeply humbling for the four RCAF members in attendance. During the war, some 120,000 crew flew in Bomber Command, of whom 55,573 British, Canadian, Australian, New Zealanders and other nationalities were killed, and of these some 9,919 came from Canada. The enduring ties of Canada to Great Britain, as a result of the contributions during the war, are found all over the area.

The RCAF members are extremely grateful to have had the opportunity to visit Sutton-on-the-Forest and its beautiful surroundings, meet its lovely residents, and reconnect with the strong heritage of their respective Squadrons. They would like to sincerely thank the hosts for their incredibly warm welcome, and hope to return again soon.



RCAF members on their way to the Morning Service at the All Hallows Church, Sutton-on-the-Forest, Yorkshire



At RAF Leeming's Museum

Capt Alexandre, Capt Black, Maj Publicover, Flt Lt Dolding, Maj Ouellet



Canadian section of the museum, covering the RCAF presence at the Station



The house at Sutton Park, which was home and Officer's Mess to Canadian Aircrew stationed at East Moor



Meet and Greet in the garden of Betty's Tea House



RAF Leeming Station Commander Group Captain Gareth Prendergast, RCAF members, Flt Lt Dodling, and Bugler Flying Officer Dan Ramsbottom.



Marching off the Colours



The Pipers at the Memorial



The Sutton-on-the-Forest Village Hall, for afternoon tea reception



Meeting with the friendly crowd at the Village Hall



Exchanging laughs following the morning service