

Ghost of a Silent Sentry

(Foymount 888 Reunion DVD title)

The motto on the Foymount Crest is Silent Sentry. That motto is the key to my remarks today.

Almost 60 years ago, Canada and the United States drew a mantle of protection around North America so that these nations would not be victims of surprise attack and to ensure that our liberties and our ways of life would endure.

We are here on Foymount today to recognize that we were part of a defense plan based on cooperation and trust between two great countries, United States and Canada, and to celebrate the friendships built up during the RCAF / CFS years at Foymount.



It is relevant to refer to some world events which give today's 888 ceremonies a background that allows us to grasp the importance of Foymount first internationally and then locally.

I hold up before you a small object that is very large symbolically; it is a symbol of the end of the cold war and yet it is a symbol of hope. **It is an actual piece of the Berlin Wall.** (Thank-you, Tom Robinson, for sharing this artifact.)

To understand which historical details are significant, we need a context. Thus, I ask you to use your imagination. You are on a space platform orbiting earth and have electronic surveillance of North America, especially, and other important countries too. Or depending on your electronic experiences, imagine that you are logged in to YouTube which allows you to view video clips to connect with communities or groups who have similar interests.

Suppose that this is a day to share historical photos and video clips with sound. At this moment, we are viewing clips from various decades especially ones about the interaction of the former Soviet Union and the United States and Canada.

First, we are getting a review of the increasing Soviet threat to the free world and even the North American Continent. The clips shift forward and backward in time.

- In a 1946 clip, we hear the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill deliver his famous "Iron Curtain" speech in Fulton, Missouri. The speech called for an Anglo-American alliance against the Soviets, whom he accused of establishing an "iron curtain" from "Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic". The iron curtain was a mantle that smothered and enclosed many countries as the Soviets tried to build buffer states presumably for protection but also to assert their control.
- We see a clip of the end of World War II and lines of Soviet and western troops stretched across Germany.
- We hear background comments pointing out the increasing suspicions among the former allies and the intent to assert control in Germany. We witness the beginnings of the cold war and its effects; such as:
 - Igor Gouzenko's defection which exposed Joseph Stalin's efforts to steal nuclear secrets, and made us aware of the spy technique of planting sleeper agents. The Igor Gouzenko information was a major triggering event of the Cold War
 - the blockade of transportation routes between east and west Germany and
 - the resulting 1948 airlift of food supplies
 - the explosion of the 1949 first Soviet atomic bomb
 - the Soviet presence in Cuba, and of course
 - the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 when the world came closest to nuclear war.

Within the context outlined, you and I, and students of history and military analysts, understand why as early as 1946, the United States and Canada discussed a joint defense plan for North America to guard against Soviet attack: namely a mantle placed around North America, a protective cloak or shield of military cloth that has three layers.

First is the The Pine Tree Line within which Foymount was an important link. (Source material from Wikipedia).

The Pinetree Line was a series of radar stations, the majority of which ran in a line at about the 53rd parallel in the west (to offer coverage of major Canadian cities) and about the 50th parallel in the east. A second line ran up the eastern seaboard from the southern tip of Nova Scotia to the southern tip of Baffin Island. Of these, 22 of the main stations and all of the gap fillers were paid for by the USAF, leaving 11 to the RCAF. However 16 of the main stations were manned by RCAF personnel. On January 1, 1955, the entire system was officially handed over to RCAF command, and over time an additional 10 stations were added. The system was gradually placed in control of NORAD. NORAD, short for North American Air Defence Agreement, was announced on 1 August 1957 and renamed North American Aerospace Defence Command in 1981; it integrated the air-defence forces of the US and Canada under a joint command at Colorado Springs, Colorado. Over half the Pinetree stations were manned by United States

Air Force personnel with the balance operated by the Royal Canadian Air Force. Although the line was the first coordinated system for early detection of a Soviet bomber attack on North America, the early 1950s radar technology quickly became outdated and the line was in full operation only for a short time.

As part of an upgrade, the manual system was replaced by the SAGE, the Semi-Automatic Ground Environment.

By the time it was fully operational the Soviet bomber threat had been replaced by the Soviet missile threat, for which SAGE was entirely inadequate. Nevertheless, SAGE was tremendously important; it led to huge advances in computer online systems. It is generally considered to be one of the most advanced and successful large computer systems ever developed. Each computer took up about ½ acre (2,000 m²) of floor space, weighed 275 tons and used up to three megawatts of power. Each SAGE site included two computers for redundancy, with one processor on "hot standby" at all times.

It is impossible, however to learn about the Pine Tree Line and SAGE without also learning about the Mid Canada Line and the more northerly DEW line.

The Mid Canada Line (MCL), also known as the McGill Fence was a series of military sites designed to function as the second line of detection. The MCL sites activated in 1958, were strategically located along the 55th parallel from the Alaska border to the Atlantic Ocean.

Activated in 1957, the DEW Line - short for Distant Early Warning Line - is a chain of 63 radar and communication systems stretching 3,000 miles from the northwest coast of Alaska to the eastern shore of Baffin Island opposite Greenland, near the 70th parallel.

The Pinetree stations were kept operational during this period, but by the later 1950s some were being mothballed as newer systems came on line to the north. Nevertheless, many of the Pinetree stations were still kept operational into the 1980s, particularly on the East and West coasts.

I return to my artifact, a piece of the Berlin wall. The wall separated East Berlin and West Berlin for 28 years, from the day construction began on August 13, 1961 until it was dismantled in 1989, and was considered to be a longtime symbol of the Iron Curtain. This piece of cement is like a relic: I repeat that it is a symbol of the end of the Cold War and a symbol of hope. In the Ottawa Citizen of Friday, July 25, there is an excellent exposé by Kerry McPhedram of how Germany has learned to accept its many war ghosts: he says that *the period of shock and silence is over, Berlin is an über-cool city: Berlin is Europe's biggest bargain – cheaper than London, Paris, Rome, and most other western European capitals. Stylish hotels and restaurants are half the price. There is the Berlin Philharmonic - free, free noon-hour concerts, 150 theatres, 175 museums, 300 galleries.* Good reasons for hope!

In case, you feel too much euphoria in my sense of hope, here is a sobering reminder – also in the Ottawa Citizen of the same date –

Reports in Moscow have claimed that the Russian air force is going to resume flights of its long-range bombers to Cuba, six years after military cooperation ceased between the two countries.

Foymount, where are your domes?

And yet we know that the official dissolving of the Soviet Union in 1991 was also a hopeful sign.

Many people here today of my age, lived through the historical events I have outlined. They understand why Foymount was an important link in our international defense chain. If time allowed, it would be worth reminding people of the *Duck and Cover* drill for school children as published in the Handbook for Civilians, Denver Colorado, 1951. But I pass by that; although, if you purchase Bonnechere Museum's commemorative DVD of Foymount, the Handbook information is included. Do remember also the underground Diefenbunker at Carp – now a museum.

Although the background I have outlined is necessary to grasp the motivations for the Foymount base, there is a local and human face to the development of Foymount: there are many personal experiences and memories.

Several people who worked on the base have generously given their time for interviews that have been incorporated into a DVD entitled Ghost of a Silent Sentry, The Foymount DVD includes several chapters: Walkabout, The Foymount Base, Radar Civil Defense, Bomarc, Wings, and Homes and Gardens. 100 copies are available for \$20.00 each. They are available at Bonnechere Museum and at the arena today. Jim Austin, the patient and thorough producer, assisted by Suzanne Scheer one of our museum directors, interviewed a cross section of Foymount personnel: Rita Valiquette, the Barry family and the DesRoches family, Kevin Knox,, Jim Mulroy, Weldon McEachen, Roger Johnston, and Orville Menard. We wish more could have been included but there was a time and length limitation.

Rita Valiquette has said that for her and her late husband, Don, their experiences at Foymount were the best years of their lives. Rita recalls well the development of Foymount:

1. in 1949 the rumours of a government project to be built on Ryan's Mountain
2. the purchase of 500 to 600 acres from William O'Connor, George Holly and George Granzie
3. the whole hillside a mass of stakes and pickets with a narrow sandy road running up between;
4. Canadian Forces Station Foymount by 1952 progressed to a stage that allowed W/C D.L. Ramsay, the first Commanding Officer, to open the station officially.
5. In full operation in May 1953, it was designated as No. 32 Aircraft Control and Warning Unit.

6. From 1953 to 1963, its contribution to the defense of Canada was in the manual ground environment portion of the Ottawa sector; however, by October 1963 the station was redesignated as a Long Range Radar and integrated into the Ottawa sector, now called the 41st NORAD Division.
7. the Canadian Corps of Commissionaires who guarded the site
8. over 600 people employed in the construction, of whom 200 to 300 lived on the site
9. the square corner at Cormac which led to several accidents
10. her students, many of whom had travel experiences in France, Germany and United States (I myself taught several Foymount students at Eganville and District High School and at Opeongo High School.)
11. she recalls sending the Grades 9 and 10 to Eganville
12. the beautiful terraced lawns and flower beds, the well- maintained homes and buildings
13. the mobile equipment section and the supply section
14. the school and hospital and church
15. Rita remembers belonging to the Officer's Mess (the Club 32 mural is on display at Bonnechere Museum this weekend)
16. the day Flight Lieutenant Clifton's plane crashed
17. the raising of the new Canadian flag on February 15, 1965 (I was privileged to have been in the gallery of the House of commons the night the flag resolution was passed.)
18. the 1973 announcement that Foymount would be closing

Kevin Knox recalls:

- the jobs and spin-off from Foymount that was so good for local businesses
- the friendly personnel who interacted so well with local residents
- the sports teams, the curlers
- the excellent chefs from whom he learned his trade and the methods of presentation
- he remembers Lin Black who carved the eagle on the Club 32 mural
- the highlight of Foymount events for him, of course, was he met his wife Mary there.

Let me close with a few observations:

A reunion is a kind of reward, not just that you have survived the rigours of life, but a satisfaction that your life has had meaning. Victor Frankl explains ways our lives have meaning.

One way is by experiencing something -- or someone – that we value. It might be viewing great art or natural wonder or the beauty of flower gardens or the friendships renewed here today.

A second method of finding meaning is through creativity: by “doing a deed,” as he puts it, by becoming involved in one’s projects, or, better, in the project of one’s own life; for instance, the pictures you take today, viewing exhibits, and the “I was there” feeling of pride in participation.

A third way of finding meaning in today is an attitudinal value like bravery, a good sense of humor, or grief that has become meaningful. We are missing some comrades, a fellow worker, or a spouse, who would have liked to be here. Our grief that they are absent is a form of suffering for us; but the suffering has meaning when we remember that they helped to make the Foymount years what they were and they are a part of us forever. This grief or suffering is a living memory and helps give this day meaning. Finally, Frankl said: *"...everything can be taken from a [person] but one thing: the last of the human freedoms -- to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."* The very fact that you are present reveals your attitude of commitment to comrades, and respect for the right action and the right conduct of 32 Squadron symbolized by the motto Silent Sentry - on duty, on guard in Canadian Forces Station Foymount, in Canada and in the world,

Ladies and gentlemen, the ghost of a silent sentry lives on in us today.

It is a reminder of military cooperation,

 a reminder that preparedness is deterrence,

 a reminder that the vigilance must continue,

 but it is especially a reminder that friendships endure,

 and that there are good reasons to focus on the future.

Preston O'Grady

Address to 888 Foymount Reunion

2008 08 09

