Busted Knuckle Chronicles – June 24th, 2010

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Ottawa - We arrived at a Tim Horton's parking lot in Ottawa's East End as the clouds were clearing and the sun was finally coming out. First one bike and then another. Soon, a steady stream of riders from different clubs were arriving and greeting each other with a firm handshake and a hug. A Tim Horton's customer greeted us, went home and came back on his Harley Davidson.

Riders from the UN/NATO, Canadian Army Veterans (CAV), Fallen Sappers (FSMC), National Memorial Ride (NMR), Canadian Veteran Freedom Riders (CVFR), and one independent rider, convened at the Tim Hortons at 6:30pm. All of these men and women on their motorcycles were meeting to pay tribute to Sgt James MacNeil, the 148th Canadian Soldier to fall in the cause of freedom.

In May the CVFR decided to hold ceremonies in respect of the Canadian Forces who paid the ultimate price for freedom in Afghanistan. These ceremonies would be held at the Orleans Legion, Branch 632, on the same day that the fallen is repatriated to Canadian Forces Base Trenton. With each, sad, service, the number of riders and pedestrians in attendance has risen.

After a short briefing, led by Smokey, National President of CVFR, we departed at 6:50pm. We rode in staggered columns to a rendezvous spot just short of The Legion where we stopped and made our final preparations. At approx 6:58pm, with the sound of Amazing Grace coming from his bike's speakers, Smokey slowly led the way to the cenotaph at the Legion.

While the main body parked and dismounted, the lead bike rode right up to the cenotaph while the sad sound of the bagpipes continued to play. The riders slowly made their way to the cenotaph in a solemn procession; Legion members that were playing horseshoes stopped what they were doing and stood silently to one side.

Once the tune was completed, a short narrative was read by Chevy, the National VP of CVFR and then two wreaths were laid. The FSMC had two members who had served with Sgt MacNeil and they were asked to lay their wreath first. This

was followed by the laying of the wreath from the CVFR. Once the wreath laying was completed, all members were invited to pay their respects at the cenotaph.

The group of approximately 25-30 bikers approached the cenotaph and paid their respects two by two. There was no deference to club affiliation and riders from different clubs proudly joined each other two by two to pay their respects

to Sgt MacNeil. Between riders, Legion members, pedestrians and others, the group of participants must have exceeded 50 people.

Overall it was a very emotional experience and one that we know will, unfortunately, be repeated. Regardless of the theatre of operations, Canadian Forces personnel will always be asked to put their

lives on the line, be it in peacekeeping or actual conflicts. We can only ask that all Canadians honour the sacrifices that are, and will continue, to be made.

We will never forget.

Afterward, some people went their own way but most of us retired to the Legion to share some refreshments and some fellowship.

The sadness that had hung over the preceding half hour slowly lifted as we started sharing riding stories and stories of our time in and around the military. By the time our glasses were emptied and the bikes were started up again for the trip home, several riders from different clubs had arranged for a weekend ride to a local bike show and everybody had committed to helping keep the memory of our troops' many sacrifices alive.