

The Motorcycle Time – 24 June 2010

By MICHAEL CHIVIENDACZ, Canadian Veteran Freedom Riders

We arrived at a parking lot in Ottawa's East End 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. Rider from the UN/NATO, Canadian Army Veterans (CAV), Fallen Sappers (FSMC), National Memorial Ride (NMR), Canadian Veteran Freedom Riders (CVFR), and one independent rider all meeting to pay tribute to St 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 the National President of CVFR, we departed. We rode to a rendezvous point just short of The Legion where we stopped and made out final preparations. With the sound of Amazing Grace coming from his bike's speakers, the lead rider 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 sound of the bagpipes played. Once the tune was complete, a short narrative was read and two wreaths were laid. The FSMC has two members who had served with Sgt MacNeil and they were asked to lay their wreath first. The group of approximately 25-30 riders approached the cenotaph and paid their respects proudly joining each other two by two to pay their respects to Sgt MacNeil. In all, the group of participants much have exceeded 50 people.

Overall it was a very emotional experience and one that we know will, unfortunately, be repeated. Regardless of the theater of operations, Canadian Forces personnel will always be asked to put their lives on the line, be it 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, most of us retired to The Legion to share some refreshments and some fellowship. Emotions slowly lifted as we started sharing riding stories and stories of our time in and around the military. By the time we were ready for the trip home, everybody had committed to helping keep the memory of our troops' many sacrifices alive.