THE RIDE OF A LIFETIME

By Chief Warrant Officer Rick Day

Having completed 27 days of riding a motorcycle across Canada with seven others as part of the Military Police National Motorcycle Relay Ride, I have been asked to provide insight into our travels. It is challenging to put into words what one sees, hears and smells as they travel across this big country on the seat of a motorcycle.

First, a bit of history of the ride. The ride started last year after Mark Farrer came up with a thought about having each province put on a ride for the charity. It then snowballed into an adventure for Mark as it turned from a provincial only ride to a cross-Canada ride. Bob Edwards, Andy Stewart and Gerry White decided to ride across Canada in support of two charities, the Military Police Fund for Blind Children and the Support our trooper's fund. Norma Edwards thought it would be cute to have a mascot accompany the riders and she acquired a white teddy Bear, dressed him in OPD and red beret and he was subsequently named Cpl Stone.

The three riders, with Cpl Stone as a passenger, left St John’s NL and travelled West for Comox BC. After leaving New Brunswick, Gerry had a minor mishap with gravel in Quebec which took him out from finishing the remainder of the ride. Once Gerry was taken care of and under the care of the medical professionals, Bob and Andy decided to carry on to the West Coast.

I met up with Bob, Andy and Norma in Comox when the CFPM and I met them at the end of their trip and listen as they recounted the many adventures they encountered as they travelled across this big nation. I was so ecstatic listening to them that I decided that next year I would be part of their team, so when the call came looking for cross-Canada riders, I eagerly accepted, (with the concurrence of Niner and Niner domestic).

Mark graciously decided to be the chairman of the ride again this year and a new committee was formed. This year the ride was going to travel from Comox BC to St Johns NL (a reverse of last year). As we were going to start in Comox, the largest obstacle was how motorcycle riders from Nova Scotia and Ontario were going to get their bikes out to Comox for the start of the trip. Mark worked hard and after many negotiations, Canadian National Railway stepped up to the plate and graciously offered to transport our bikes to Comox for free, which you can all imagine was a huge relief for the riders, not to forget the savings it brought.

In order to ship my bike, I had to drop it off at CMTT in Montreal so that they could crate it alongside the Military Police Bombardier Spyder which was loaned to us in order to showcase this bike across Canada. After draining my bike of all liquids, I
dropped it off at CMTT where a carpenter, who I cannot thank enough, built a beautiful wooden shed to hold my bike for the shipping.

The ride began on Tuesday August 17 at 0900 hrs and 19 motorcycles, lead by four Victoria escort bikes, headed south for beautiful Esquimalt. Along the way, we stopped at Cathedral Grove and saw the huge and old Douglas Firs. Our Vic PD escort took us downtown where we passed the Empress Hotel and stopped at the Legislature building for a photo op, afterwards, we proceeded to “Mile Zero” for another photo op and then on to McCauley point where the National riders dipped our rear tires in the Pacific Ocean.

With an early start the next day, 16 bikes left the base and headed east for the ferry. Upon arriving in Vancouver we were met by the Vancouver PD Motorcycle unit who escorted us downtown to the Olympic Flame in under 20 mins. The VPD escort leader told us to stick on his tail and to follow him no matter where he went.

We drove more on the left side of the road than the right and manoeuvred through congested traffic and many onlookers (I think they thought a movie was being filmed as they all strained to take our pictures) while heading downtown. A fascinating note is that the VPD traffic unit don’t use their sirens as too many other agencies use sirens and are ignored. They use the standard whistle and when blown, it gets everyone’s attention. After a tour of Stanley Park the VPD gave us a heart warming salute and we headed on towards the mountains.

When you ride through the Rockies on a motorcycle, you see scenery that no camera can do justice, it’s simply beautiful. Although the smoke from more than 300 forest fires blocked out some of the scenery and caused us to don bandannas on our face we were still able to see much of the scenery as we made our way to Alberta while being baked by the BC sun as temperatures soared to 40 degrees.

Under the escort of the Alberta Sheriffs Motorcycle team, (ex MP Mario Fortier and his team) we left Jasper for Edmonton in freezing 1 degree weather. The Northern Alberta wildlife came out in abundance to cheer us along the way as we travelled to Edmonton and then on to Cold Lake where the Wing and the Air Force Association proudly received us and put on a great show raising in excess of $6000 for our cause.

We left Cold Lake and headed to Dundurn where I stopped in Saskatoon to replace my rear tire which was wearing down quicker than anticipated due to the changes in temperatures. We attended CFS Dundurn where our mascot Cpl Stone met his relative Cpl Stone from the MP section. From CFS Dundurn we carried on to Winnipeg via CFB Shilo.

In Winnipeg Norma too had to change her rear tire as we were about to head into Northern Ontario. The CFB Winnipeg Det put on a great dinner and auction where the riders where able to pick up some good items at a decent price. From Winnipeg, an early morning start, we headed towards Northern Ontario and before crossing over to Ontario, we stopped at the “Centre of Canada” for a photo shoot and to reminisce that
we were geographically half way done. We stayed at the armoury in Thunder Bay who took care of us by providing a great meal, a place to park and wash our bikes as well as a spacious drill hall, with the largest Canada flag I have ever seen, to sleep in.

From Thunder Bay, we left at O dark early for Sault St Marie where along the way we stopped at the Terry Fox Memorial and at the large goose in Wawa. You have not seen how picturesque Northern Ontario and Lake Superior are until you have ridden the Trans-Canada Highway on a motorcycle. Coming over the hills and seeing the big blue lake is breathtaking, its beauty overwhelming.

We arrived in the Sault armoury where we met retired MWO John Corbett. Tired of eating Hamburgers and Hotdogs for most of the trip, we decided to go to Boston Pizza for something a bit different. The next morning, again at O it’s so early, we headed east towards North Bay where we met up with CWO Rooker and other members from the CFMPA. After a quick lunch we headed out to Meaford where the CO provided some great hospitality and conversation. The next morning, another early departure, we headed down the scenic Hwy 26 towards CFB Borden where along the way we picked up more riders and finally into Mackie Harley Davidson for 0900 hrs.

Imagine our surprise when we pulled in Mackie and there were about 150 motorcycles already waiting for us, what a sight to behold. Here we had many members from the CFNIS and Trenton section join us along with Mark Farer, the Chair for the ride. This year, Mark was allowed to ride up front as his mufflers were a bit quieter than last year – so I hear. The majority of past and present MP took the lead of the procession and under the escort of the OPP Golden Helmets we headed east on Hwy 401.

Imagine being at the front and looking into your mirrors and all you see is three kms of motorcycle headlights following you. We arrived in Trenton to a thundering applause and a great set-up. While there, the Air Force Museum had their grand opening of the MP display – a display showing the past and present uniforms and artefacts of the MP Branch. After a great steak dinner at the MP Club, we hit the sack (Yukon Lodge – Air Force roughing it) and readied ourselves for the trip to Ottawa.

The next morning, we headed to Petawawa under beautiful warm skies which made for a great ride up Hwy 41. We arrived at the Petawawa Legion around noon where a BBQ was laid out for us by Sergeant Rick Gurney and crew. From Petawawa we travelled the afternoon to Ottawa where I and Greg MacIntosh dropped off our rides for an oil change and the once over to ensure we could carry on the rest of the way. From there we headed out to the Bell’s Corner Legion for a great BBQ and a chance for me to meet some old friends (Terry Flynn) and my family who all came out to support our cause.

That night, many stayed at the Canadian Police College as the next day would be a day of maintenance and rest. Even though it was a rest day, the riders from Quebec joined us and we headed out on our bikes to take in the sights of the Nation’s
Capital, under the escort of two of OPS Traffic squad’s finest. We toured through the city up to Parliament Hill as if we were visiting dignitaries.

At the hill, we parked our bikes and had our photos taken at the centennial flame and then we were escorted to the Orleans Legion where Dick Rutter put on a great buffet and we were visited by the CFPM, Col Grubb and LCol Delaney of DPM Police. During the evening, Wayne Kendall passed the symbolic torch (Cpl Stone) over to the Quebec Region rep, WO Guy Gauvreau and after the BBQ we headed back to the CPC for a good night’s rest before heading out to the Belle Province of Quebec.

September 1, 2010, is a day many will remember, including Wayne Kendall. The day before, Wayne gave up the duties of the safety vehicle to his nephew Cpl John Kendall and he joined us riding his own new motorcycle (new to him). After leaving CPC, we took the bridge over into Quebec and while negotiating the off ramp, Wayne rode into some loose gravel and hit the guard rail. Both Wayne and the bike went airborne for a bit and luckily Wayne came out of this mishap only slightly scathed, which is more than we can say for his bike as it was considered a “Write off”. Wayne, being a trooper, wanted to carry on the rest of the way, injuries and all.

The riders carried on to Valcartier while Wayne got checked out and after being checked out he and John joined us in Valcartier. I cannot say enough praise for the welcome and generous hospitality afforded us from Maj Vouligny, CWO Bernie Caron and the members of 5 UPM and their families. We enjoyed a BBQ dinner which included fresh local corn which tasted out of this world to all the riders.

We spent the night there at the unit and the next morning the unit put on a fine continental breakfast for us before hitting the road. Most members of the unit came out to see us off and escorted us from the base down the highway towards New Brunswick. After travelling through the picturesque countryside we arrived at the New Brunswick border where the relay torch (Cpl Stone) was turned over to our national rider and Atlantic region rep Maj Bob Edwards. After travelling halfway into NB, our PQ riders said au revoir and travelled back to Edmundston to for the night as we carried on to the Fredericton Armouries for our nightly sleep on an army cot.

The next morning, we mounted our bikes and then the rain started, something we hadn’t seen for many a days. We put on our rain gear only to have the rain stop a few miles down the road. We stopped for gas at a local Irving directly across the street from the CBC building which was sporting a humongous satellite dish on their front lawn as they were constantly reporting on Hurricane Earl.

After refuelling, none of the Harley bikes would start, apparently all of their FOBs (sort of remote starters) had been erased and required them to input their emergency codes in order to start the bikes. Greg and I thanked Kawasaki for our Vulcans as we watched them, in the rain, trying to recode their bikes. Once started, we headed off to CFB Gagetown where, outside of the base gym, we were met by Capt Neufeld, MWO Ross Tourout, Wendy Harnish from PSP and Capt Powell, a Visits officer.
Outside the gym we handed out bottles of water, TH muffins as well as accepted donations. Unfortunately it was the Friday before a long weekend and not many people had come to the gym this day so the turn out was not a many as hoped. After a few hours, we thanked our supporters and turned our bikes east and headed towards Moncton. While enroute we stopped in Shediac and headed towards the water where we sat down for lunch with Paul Power at Capt. Dan’s Restaurant & Bar on Pointe du Chene Wharf.

Well after a great seafood lunch, we headed from the wharf out towards the Confederation bridge where we crossed over into PEI (what a scenic ride!) where we were met by Ed Prebinski who, assisted by the Charlottetown City Police, escorted us through town to the Queen Charlotte Armoury where we spoke to the press and sat down to a great Swiss Chalet meal provided for free by Amanda Doucette and the local Swiss Chalet restaurant.

As Hurricane Earl was approaching the Maritimes and the Northumberland ferries announcing the cancellation of all trips, we bid or farewells to Ed and the gang and headed out for the Wood Island ferry and thanks to their staff we arrived in Pictou safe and sound. That night, we arrived at Halifax where most of the east coast riders headed home to check on their homes while we Ontarians (Joe Hebert, Wayne and John Kendall and I) headed to Juno Towers at CFB Stadacona to wait out Hurricane Earl.

Hurricane Earl came and went with 110 km winds and rain and left most of Halifax without power. All our bikes survived and that night we all headed to the CFB Halifax Military Police Thunderbird Club for a party with the band “Trailer Trash” who played for all those who ventured out that night.

Unfortunately, Earl left most people without power so only a handful of the brave showed up to enjoy the festivities including, none other than Doug Scott (aka “Scotty”) who was kind enough to give us two cartoon sketches he had just completed which we could use to auction off. Also Gerry White, one of the initial National riders dropped by to tell a few stories and have a few laughs and ales. The next day was a rest day, so being bikers we head out for a tour of Nova Scotia via the “old road” and stopped at Peggy’s Cove for a late afternoon snack. Got some great photos of the cove and surrounding homes, a very scenic town.

The next morning some friends (Paul and Peggy Power, Marcel and Kathy Lapierre, Mike and Sharon Gallant, Gerry White, Dave Seeley and Joe Young) came to ride with us as we left the CFB Halifax MP Detachment heading for Sydney. We travelled via old hwy 7 and arrived at the Victoria Park Armouries where the National riders bunked down for the night. The next morning was a nice bright morning as we headed for the ferry terminal. As we crossed over to Newfoundland, the weather changed and as we rolled off the ferry, the rain, sleet and fog had already been hitting the rock for some time.
We were met there by Scott Timpa, the NL rep who guided us down the highway to Corner Brook where we spent the night in a hotel. The next morning, a bit cooler day and a bit drier. We headed through the beautiful Newfoundland countryside, taking in the scenic towns and constantly watching for moose, hiding behind every tree and rock. We arrived at Island RV in Grand Falls Windsor for an afternoon BBQ and a change of a low beam headlight bulb for my bike, much to the pleasure of the riders in front of me who were getting tired of having my high beam in their mirrors.

From Windsor, we headed East for Gander, avoiding a large moose that decided to run on the ravine beside us and arrived in Gander safe and sound. That night, Cpl Stone and the other riders were all screeched in at the Sinbad Hotel Bar by the bartender Kathy. Kathy put on quite the show for not only us, but also the other patrons in the bar. During the ceremony, if anyone didn’t do the ceremony correctly, we had to down our shots and start all over. Needless to say, Cpl Stone, after 4-5 shots of screech, was not feeling much pain except for the fire in his tiny stomach. The next day was a rest day and we relaxed as the rain continued.

On Day 25, we left Gander enroute for St John’s, the day was cloudy and as we started out, but by the time we were halfway to St John’s, the clouds opened up and down came some of the hardest rain I have ever had the displeasure of driving through. Cars where parked on the sides of the road and thankfully we had a MP and RCMP escort to guide us through the torrential rain.

We arrived safe and sound and waterlogged at the Pleasantville Legion where the CFPM Col Grubb and the St John’s Detachment CO Cmdr Jones met the riders as we finished our trip. I was rushed over to CMTT where before I could get out of my wet rain gear my motorcycle was crated and loaded on a CN truck destined to make the ferry that night. We checked into our rooms and then headed back to the Legion for a BBQ, speeches and a silent auction.

The CFPM presented his personal coin to all the National riders for all that they endured and the efforts put forth for the two charities. So the ride for me had ended as my motorcycle was on its way home.

I have been often asked if it was tiring, or a long ride and I can honestly say that never once did I feel sore or become tired of the ride, the weeks went by and it felt like only a few days and the days felt like
minutes. At the end of the ride, the national riders talked and jokingly said that we were prepared to turn around and go back to Comox the next day, but we all had jobs to go back to. For more information about the ride, stories, photos and the auction of Cpl Stone, please check out the MPNMRR web site at http://www.mpnmrr.ca/

In closing, I wish to thank Wayne Kendal for driving the safety vehicle across Canada and I wish to thank my fellow riders, Bob and Norma Edwards, Andy Stewart, Betty Calder, Greg MacIntosh and “old” Joe Hubert, my wing man, for riding the ride of a lifetime with me.