

Exercise Winged Beaver, Fairchild Air Force Base, Washington, June 1-12, 2009

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In the world of construction, there is nothing more gratifying than taking on a project as a crew, where all trades work in unison instead of the usual pockets of tradesmen cycling through a worksite. And nothing else can add to the excitement more than taking on an assignment in a US Air Force Base. This was the case for the construction team at 191 CEF from 19 Wing Comox, as they undertook office renovations at the Fairchild Air Force Base near Spokane, Washington from June 1st to June 12th.

After a 13 hour bus drive, we finally arrived on a sunny Sunday afternoon and were immediately greeted by a handful of American Servicemen. We knew that we were in for a busy couple of weeks but that the Spokane Valley has a number of activities to help us unwind after work as well. We unpacked early Monday morning, collected our materials, double-checked the drawings and were on our way.

The project consisted of two open spaces where a number of offices were to be built. The crew at 191 CEF originally planned to work on one of the open spaces but at the end of day one, it was clear that we were going to need more work. We immediately doubled our order for materials and flew past our projected completion date. Tradesmen were working side by side, as plumbers helped electricians trace circuits, WFE technicians helped carpenters build walls, and every kind of trade mix-and-match possible helping each other. This construction project provided the perfect excuse to step out of office duties and get our hands dirty as all ranks picked up tools. The more experienced ranks such as Master Corporals and Sergeants, and even the MWO had some tricks of the trade to pass on to the younger folks. The days seemed to go by faster, and the project was well ahead of our schedule. We laboured through, as EGS techs learned to apply mud on seams and joints and WFE techs learned to wire a receptacle.



After work hours, we all enjoyed the sunny days that the Spokane Valley had to offer. Some went golfing, others went bike-riding. And for some, the NHL Stanley Cup Finals was the perfect way to unwind after a long and arduous day. There is a lot to be said about the tight friendship and sense of camaraderie of our crew. We shared laughs, listened to the great Rock and Roll radio station, and even made our own Karaoke versions of the songs playing (there's a lot to be said about people's horrible singing ability too, but that's another story). The workdays flew by fast, but the weekend seemed even shorter. There was much to do in the area and very little time to do it all. But the weekend did provide a great escape from work on a construction site. We were back to work refreshed and relaxed for Monday morning and that's when we started counting the days to head back home. Even for the most seasoned soldiers, a two-week exercise is enough to feel slightly homesick towards the end.

We packed our tools Wednesday afternoon, did an inventory count of our personal tools, and loaded the truck early Thursday morning. The drivers had left after lunch on Thursday and the rest of the crew had the afternoon off. Needless to say, we were all scrambling to find a souvenir for the ones we love. Bags in hand and nostalgic feelings already set-in, we were back home Friday afternoon on a one-hour flight, thanks to the pilots and crew of our CF Airbus flight 3227.



On Wednesday afternoon, our hosts held a Picnic to show their gratitude, and thanks to the local Wal-Mart, introduced us to the largest submarine sandwich we had ever seen, 54 feet! That's right, 54 feet cut into sections. Major Cunningham, the squadron's CO that the renovations were being done for, was almost in tears when she came in the renovation site to see how we were progressing. To her, the progress made, was so incredible that if we were to sum it up in only one word, 'wow' would have been that word. No one has ever seen a group of engineers work so hard and so fast and complete so much in two weeks. We had originally thought the name of the exercise seemed a little 'cheesy', but in perspective, without a shred of doubt, yes we were flying like 'Winged Beavers'.

