



# Project North Star Newsletter

August 2006

## Happy birthday

A belated happy birthday to all of our American cousins who have recently celebrated the 4<sup>th</sup> of July! Allow us to mention that North Star 17515, our restoration aircraft, and a handful of sister aircraft made 599 round trips of the Pacific Ocean in support of the U.S.- led U.N. intervention during the Korean War to bring peace and a certain measure of stability to this Asian peninsula. Let's make that a nice round number: commemorative round trip number 600.

In lieu of actual entertainment, herein you will find a few snapshots of recent project activity.

## North Star quick change

The number one engine has been removed from the North Star. Preparations for Power Pack removal, also known in the trade as a "Q.E.C."



Illustration 1: Tex single-handedly disconnecting port outer engine

(quick engine change) included the building of a suitable engine transport stand (described in an earlier newsletter), which was completed this spring. The first engine has been removed for

overhaul -- engine no. 1 -- the port outer. Thanks to Michael Hope of Hope Aero for his assistance with the removal of the spinner and propeller. All engine control, fluid, and electrical connections were uncoupled and the engine was transferred to the transport stand on June 27<sup>th</sup>. Ted Devey and Peter Houston performed the quick change, with an assist from Mike Irwin on the forklift. The fully restored *tripod crane hoist* was close at hand just in case the forklift malfunctioned.



Illustration 2: Merlin inspection by Ted Devey

On Canada Day, the storage hangar was opened up to display the North Star with the engine on its blue stand, thus marking a milestone of significance in Project North Star. The engine and stand has since been moved into Building 193 where surgery will be

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performed on the engine.



*Illustration 3: Ted "Ironman" Davey checking the compression on engine no.1*

A rotisserie-style workstand has been retrieved from the Museum of Science and Technology and it will be modified to accept the Merlin 622 engine.

*Ted Davey*

## The current whereabouts of Tex...

Now vacationing at StalagLuft 17, Tex is digging post holes for a fence at a nearby airfield, which will soon be the site of Volksjager test flights. Watch out for those 88's!



*Illustration 4: A rare sight-- Tex lying down on the job*

## 426 goes global

In June 1951, during the Korean Airlift, 426 Squadron returned to Montreal from McCord AFB at Tacoma, Washington. Instead of flying

directly to Japan, from now on the Squadron would do scheds across Canada and combine them with the Airlift. By operating from home base it would also be available for other commitments.

Experience on the Pacific route seemed to unleash the squadron for a wide variety of tasks. Destinations included Resolute Bay, Kingston, Jamaica, Tokyo, Washington, D.C., and a trans-Atlantic to London and Paris. This entailed 144 flying hours in August, and 104 in September.

On returning from Europe, preparations were underway for a royal tour by Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip. The VIP North Star from 412 Squadron, with Stu Cowan as captain would be flying the Royal Party. The main event on the royal tour was the dedication of the Commonwealth Air Training Gates at RCAF Station Trenton. Air Vice Marshal Slemon, the AOC of Air Training Command had spent weeks of meticulous planning to prepare the very moving ceremony that took place. Typically, his drive for perfection even went to the lengths of measuring the folds in the blankets, made available for guests in the event of cold weather.

Two days later, our squadron was called upon to perform an unusually secretive operation. All we were told was that it was a hush-hush trip with a double crew. Forbes Nelles was the only person briefed on the purpose of the trip. Leaving Montreal, our first landing was at Moncton where some army vehicles appeared, and we prepared for the flight to RAF Lyneham in the U.K. En route, we became aware that our cargo was a senior German P.O.W., who had been in the high security penitentiary at Dorchester, N.B. He was former S.S. General Kurt Meyer. During the flight he was well-spoken and did not appear to be the dangerous-looking character one might expect. He had been an exemplary prisoner and had spent most of his time working in the prison library. We landed in England, refueled, and were obliged to continue on to Germany, even though the weather was socked in at destination. This had something to do with the Canadian authorities not wanting any news to leak out.

Sure enough, our intended aerodrome in Germany was weathered-in and we were diverted to a RAF Master aerodrome which had the ultimate in bad weather aids. While circling overhead, we could clearly see the runway lights through the haze, but on approach we lost them. Not wishing to commit himself too early, Forbes kept the airspeed up, unsure there would be enough visibility to land. When the runway did appear, we were going too fast. The combination of fatigue, and not wanting to do another approach probably led to the decision to land anyway.

We touched down hot, about halfway down the runway, and the lights seemed to be going by at incredible speed. Realizing there couldn't be many left, I started to meter the emergency air brakes. The aircraft passed over the end of the pavement, bare ground, taxi strips, more bare ground, and finally came to a halt with all the tires blown. No wonder Kurt Meyer would later tell the press that the RCAF had landed him in a ploughed field!

We shut down the engines and sat there for a few minutes in serene silence with fog swirling around the wingtips. I mentioned to Forbes about metering the air brakes. "Hell," he said with his hearty laugh, "You metered them, I had them out up to my elbows." Cam Baine and Wally Hoehn, the flight engineers, got out to take a walk around, calling out: "Sir, all your tires are blown!" A few minutes later an RAF jeep appeared out of the blackness and fog. A voice from the jeep called out: "Blimey, do you chaps know where you are? About a hundred yards ahead of you is a quarry 100 feet deep and 200 yards across!"

Our hair-raising arrival called for some therapy, so it was off to the Mess, formerly occupied by the Luftwaffe, and now generously supplied with duty-free spirits and good German wine. In no time, a roaring party was underway, interspersed with water fights and practical jokes. For the first time, Canucks were introduced to an item in the washroom provided by the practical Germans for the Luftwaffe crews. There were moulded bowls attached to the wall with comfortable handles extending from each side – nicknamed by the RAF as "barf

basins."

All the aircraft needed to get airborne again was a new set of tires and we were off the next day for London, leaving the undercarriage down en route pending completion of a retraction test at the BOAC maintenance hangar. The test proved positive and we returned to Montreal ending our "POW ODYSSEY."

*C.S. (Stu) Olsen*

## Wib Neal

The fourth in a series of volunteer bios



*Illustration 5: Wib Neal*

## Greenwood

I joined up in June of 1951 – right out of Essex High School down near Windsor. Then after basic training in St. John, Quebec, and trades training in Camp Borden I was transferred to Greenwood, Nova Scotia. Now with 404 Squadron, I flew in Lancasters. As I progressed with the E-Tech (A) apprenticeship within the OTU, I spent a lot of time on the LINK trainers,

the low-level bombing trainer, the celestial navigation trainer, and the gunnery trainer which used film projection of Me109s in flight. After you fully qualified and passed exams as an electrical tech you were Group 2 qualified. Then I got back to work and fly on Lancasters and became Group 3 qualified.

In that era at Greenwood everyone knew, or had heard about Corporal Frank. He was in charge of the Spark Plug Shop, which was next to our Electrical

Shop. He was one of the first people we met as he stormed into our shop and gave us s\*\*t for not having the coffee on. One of his jobs was to inspect spark plugs and then colour-code them, based on each plug's degree of serviceability (i.e., red, blue, green). He got mad at one of his bosses, so he had them all painted red (unserviceable). I had many personal exchanges with Frank since he always seemed to be in charge of various base details. One day we were in the back of a truck – Frank was up front in the cab with the driver. Frank ordered the driver to stop, and the driver did so, but with due consideration for us passengers in the back. That wasn't good enough for Frank: "I wanted you to stop 10 feet back. When I say stop, I mean STOP!" The next time, the driver slammed on the brakes and Frank hit his head on the windshield. Frank: "Now *that* was a good stop." He insisted that not only was he sane, but he had papers to prove it. He was deadly serious when he said this, but as far as I know, no one asked to examine the papers. I recall many of Frank's weird exploits. He came in one day with a black eye. Someone asked, "Frank, what happened?" Frank: "The bitch got in a lucky punch!" Corporal Frank had a motorcycle and sidecar. He cut part-way through the bolts attaching the sidecar to the motorcycle, and then with his wife in the sidecar, tried to shake it loose. Fortunately, although the sidecar broke loose, it stuck to the road and his wife remained safe in the sidecar but Frank was launched into the ditch and broke his arm.

Corporal Frank was also noted for riding his bicycle past the headquarters building. He would stand at attention on his pedals, and

while he was gliding past the flagpole, salute the ensign. The station Warrant Officer tried to discourage him from saluting, but without much success.

We worked shifts doing snags and routine maintenance. We were assigned to repair the aircraft and get it serviceable – a lot of it was pretty basic, but the wiring was British. The British electrical diagrams and schematics were on a long sheet of paper strung between two rollers. I called this backward invention The Dead Sea Scrolls. On the operational side of it, we did get to fly quite a bit on search and rescue, including many trips cross-country for navigation training. The longest trip in the Lanc was to Portugal via the Azores using astro shots and a driftmeter. Primarily the unit was training crews to be fully operational in a maritime recon role. At Greenwood we had a really good bunch of guys – a mix of young guys like myself and a well-experienced group from the Second World War. One of these guys I met up with in St. John – Al – was quite a bit older than myself. We went through training together and he was a good influence on the group.

One noteworthy incident happened on a clear and sunny day as one of the 103 RU Daks was taking off. The pilot had been flying Lancs and had just been certified on Daks. The Dakota was fully loaded with OTU material as part of a number of shipments for the move from Greenwood to Summerside. As he took off he pulled the gear up just at the point of liftoff and both props hit the runway. One prop broke off completely at the hub and the other had the tips bent back almost 90 degrees. Amazingly, he was able to continue the takeoff. When we heard the crash alarm we looked out and when we got outside he had come around on the downwind leg. A long stream of smoke and oil was coming from the starboard engine and the undercarriage was badly damaged by the prop. Only the port wheel was fully down. The most beautiful landing I've ever seen – he comes in – lands on the port wheel with the starboard wing well over the grass, and landed with minimal additional damage to the aircraft.

## North Bay

After Greenwood I was transferred to North Bay just as the brand new CF100 Mark IV A's were arriving from Avro. I was trade qualified on the CF100s

and the T33, and flew in both from the back seat. We knew many of the pilots so they would let us do a few loops and rolls. While up doing a test flight on a CF100 the hydraulic tank blew, and due to its location the back seat floor was awash with hydraulic fluid. I mentioned this to the pilot and he asked, "How bad is it?" I said, "If it gets any worse I'm pulling the cord on my Mae West!" He put the gear and flaps down and we headed home. We had a lot of interesting challenges on these new aircraft as a result of the many snags we had to deal with.

A Lancaster lost an engine on takeoff and crashed right on the base; We watched it crash and scatter into a million pieces. We ran out to the wreckage, but everything had burned and there were no survivors. As we helped the firefighters I'll always remember brushing up against pieces of the wreckage and noticing later that blobs of molten aluminum had stuck to my wet woolen pants. Our squadron was very, very lucky. We were spared any fatalities while I was at North Bay.

## Two Wing

Then in '55 I got transferred to 2 Wing at Grostenquin in France, which was part of No. 1 Air Division. I was assigned to 421 Squadron on F86 Sabres. The squadron insignia was a red Indian. 421 was an operational squadron in WW II and continued on right up to the 1990's. My first new 1956 VW bug was a good little car. I toured all over Spain, France, Italy, England, Scotland, Luxembourg, Belgium, Germany and Holland. I made many trips up to Holland. The Dutch loved us, and we loved the Dutch.

You had a very close relationship with the guys in your squadron. We were flying day and night in all sorts of weird operations throughout '55, '56, and '57. Our squadron was a mobile squadron so we were deployable, and made an exchange trip with a British squadron at Celle in Northern Germany. They were flying Venoms,

which was a souped-up version of the Vampire. We had great food at our home base of Grostenquin but the Brits had a very different ration system. We just couldn't stomach a lot of the British fare so, when we were working we'd go to the local gasthaus for lunch. The owner of the gasthaus asked us what we would like to drink, and was incredulous when we asked for cold milk. The locals thought this was quite a novelty. In the evening we returned to the gasthaus for supper and we were so popular the owner gave us all a free meal the day we left to go home. Most of the time we just took whatever he had. It was all very good. While on exchange with the Brits we always ate breakfast at the NAAFI wagon since the food cooked in the wagon was always superior to the mess hall grub. We also did a mobile ops down at Belfort near the Swiss border. We were here for three or four weeks; on duty 24 hours and off duty 24 hours. On our off days we often traveled to Lucerne.

As a recurring feature of Operation Zulu we traveled to 4 (F) Wing at Baden-Soelingen, and always enjoyed that trip. One interesting event occurred when our aircraft were positioned (two or three to a side) at the end of the runway. This guy, flying one of the 4 Wing Sabres, landed short and wide while he was doing a tight landing pattern. Our a/c were sitting at the end of the runway while the ground crew worked on them, as part of Operation Zulu. As he landed short and wide his starboard wing sliced through the nose of our first Sabre. This broke off his starboard wing tank, which slammed into the next Sabre. Nothing burned, but he did a good job of writing off three a/c in one landing. (Plus, he scared the s\*\*t out of our guys.)

## Rabat

Gunnery practice was undertaken at Rabat, which was a French base in Morocco in 1956. Unfortunately, although the jet fuel supplied to us at Rabat was spec'd as NATO fuel, all of our F86 Sabres were grounded with sand in the fuel. We had to remove the aft section of the fuselage, put the engine on a mattress, re-install the aft section, and then pull the Sabre back on the line. Picture this: 18 Sabre engines

placed on mattresses on the hangar floor. All of the fuel pumps were shot so we had to order new ones. Outside the hangar, a French MP walked in front of the long line of Sabres and peered into each of the aircraft. He seemed perplexed when he discovered that, so soon after their arrival, the Canadians had taken all their engines out and put them in the hangar. Strange air force, non?

After replacing the fuel pumps and the engines we got the gunnery practise and everything went quite well. Each aircraft had a different colour of machine gun ammo which marked the towed target. Some guys were good pilots but they couldn't hit the broad side of a barn. This was a busy time for the armourers. We all worked... every trade there was helping us refit the fuel pumps and re-install the engines; even the MP's were helping us.

### Return to Canada

During the summer of '57 I went back to Toronto and 400 Squadron, which had a mixed bag of aircraft for the reserve squadrons. This was when I took up flying myself. The instructor said I had a natural affinity for flying. I soloed in six hours. It was really an amazing feeling, that first solo flight. Touchdown took place on a grass strip at the town of Maple. And then from Toronto I was transferred to Bagotville because I was qualified on CF100's and single. I continued to fly privately at Bagotville. On the base itself we were very mobile – we spent a lot of time flying between Chatham and the base. This was Operation Checkerboard: monitoring Russian flights to and from Cuba via the Atlantic. We also made regular trips to Cold Lake for rocket firing at the rocket range. One day back on the tarmac at Bagotville the ground crew short-circuited the firing mechanism on a fully-loaded rocket pod of a CF100 and the entire salvo was launched across the runway. A bunch of CE guys were working on a trench on the far side of the runway as the rockets hit all around their trench position. And just as this was happening, an Expeditor was on final approach when he saw these friggin' rockets go across the runway. We expect it was a bit interesting in that cockpit as he did an overshoot to determine what the hell was going

on.

### El Arish

After Bagotville, in the spring of '61, I was posted to El Arish, Egypt, which was near the *Gaza Strip*. We had Caribous and single engine Otters. We (115 ATU) were the transport unit for all U.N. forces in this area of the Middle East. We flew between El Arish, Beirut, Athens, and Cyprus, plus ongoing flights to Sharm Al Sheikh to re-supply the U.N. units there. The latter was a remote location which had many tanks, landing craft, and a few bodies scattered over the area. We also supplied a Canadian army unit at Rafah.

The bartender at our mess was a local who had three wives, which seemed to be typical for El Arish. Our base guards were Yugoslavian, which was also interesting because you couldn't communicate with these guys. My roommate came in late one night, but the guards wouldn't let him in at the gate, so he climbed the fence. The guards started shooting since they thought he was an infiltrator; that woke us all up in a hurry. I had a pet chameleon who drank a lot of beer – possibly too much because eventually it was unable to change colour anymore. We holidayed up in the mountains back of Beirut at a hotel, and took leave at Famagousta. This is a resort town in Cyprus where we did a lot of swimming and snorkelling at a beautiful beach. We also enjoyed many trips to Cairo and the Holy Land. Truly a great experience for a year.

### Toronto

When I left El Arish I returned to Toronto and 436 Squadron, which was flying the C-119 Packett "Boxcar." One interesting incident with the Boxcar: one day we had a padre on board. The pilot took the Boxcar down the runway but couldn't get up to takeoff RPMs, so he threw it into reverse (the plane *really* shook). The pilot then taxied back to attempt another takeoff. After the third unsuccessful attempt the padre said: "I'm getting out! I'm not going to push my luck!"

### Marville

After two years with 436 Squadron at Downsview I was transferred back to France in

the spring of '64, this time to 1 Wing at Marville and 109 COM Flight. Here I was in charge of the off-maintenance test crew. On arrival I immediately worked a little history into my CV so it looked like I was a lot more qualified on Dakotas, et cetera, than on jets as I did not want to go on the screaming 104s. It worked, and I was assigned to 109 COM flight, which consisted of Dakotas and Bristol Freighters. This was a great group of guys which included one guy by the name of Garnet Chapman who became a close friend and remains so to this day. A lot of folks we lose touch with but close friends are forever. Ask Garnet about some of the great trips we took together. Travel we did -- between the 'Wings' and around Europe... skiing in Austria and Switzerland... and during the Formula 1 season I followed the races.



*Illustration 6: Garnet Chapman*

Friends from the first tour in the 50's were also back for another tour and they always added to the mix. I was on the DCRA team for 1 Wing and qualified to come over to shoot at

Connaught, so I did get one trip back during this tour. Without doubt the highlight of the tour was meeting a special young lady who became my wife and has put up with me ever since.

One incident that I witnessed is worth note: we were working on the Daks on a Sunday morning shortly after we were moved from Marville to Lahr, Germany (I was on the advance party into Lahr and the French Air Force was still there as they were gradually moving back to France). This particular morning we heard one of our CF104 Starfighters running up at the other end of the runway and as there was a noise restriction on Sunday we all said somebody was going to get s\*\*t. Then we heard what sounded like the start of a takeoff run and we all took up good positions to watch this 104 take off. It sounded normal but we could not see it yet -- then there was a bang and silence; suddenly we could see the pilot ejecting and the Starfighter sliding down the runway with a good deal of flame behind it. Apparently, the a/c was just airborne when the engine blew. The pilot ejected within seconds and what we saw was the result. The pilot was slightly injured from the high speed, low-level ejection but fully recovered. Not so for the 104 as it slid off the right side of the runway. Luckily, it was the *right* side as on the left side the Lahr French Air Force gliding club with gliders and tow plane were parked very close to the end of the runway. A truly amazing event with no serious injuries except of course, the 104.

After Marville and Lahr we were transferred back to Canada to Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan with Tutor and T-33 a/c. I spent seven years at Moose Jaw and enjoyed every minute (well, almost every minute) until I was transferred to Ottawa at Rockcliffe, where I spent the remainder of my military career until 1983.

I had an opportunity to go directly into the DGQA organization as a civilian and since we had made a resolution to stay in Ottawa, I did just that.

My DND career ended after 53 years as manager of the Eastern Ontario DND Quality Assurance Group. As you never really get aircraft out of your blood, I volunteered at the

Canadian Aviation Museum, and also with this most worthy group known as Project North Star. Not really the end of the story but a continuation in a way of my love of flying and aircraft in general.

## Snapshots of recent activity



*Illustration 7: Restored and lockwired to perfection by Keith Penney*



*Illustration 8: North Star wheel getting slimed*



*Illustration 9: Garnet pressure washing the wheel*



*Illustration 10: C/U of prop hub splines*



*Illustration 11: Prop liberated for transport*

## Song of the North Star Volunteers

*We work upon the North Star every single bloody day  
We have not got it flying yet but its well on its way  
And when we get it in the air Museum staff will say:  
Un miracle! Un miracle! Un miracle!*

*Chorus: We're the North Star Volunteers  
We're the North Star Volunteers  
We're the North Star Volunteeeers  
Yes we are! Yes we are! Yes we are!*

*They say that we're old codgers who have nothing else to do  
I've told them this before my friends and now I'm telling you –  
We are the greatest bunch of guys we are Rob Holmgren's crew  
Yes we are! Yes we are! Yes we are!*

*(Chorus)*

*It is the only North Star in the Universe today  
We could not stand around and watch the poor thing rot away  
We grabbed our tools and went to work, the rest was child's play  
Yes it was! Yes it was! Yes it was!*

*(Chorus)*

*There are fasteners that are Whitworth, there are fasteners SAE  
There are some Metric, and probably some none of these three  
And when I try to lift the toolbox  
I get 'buckling of the knees'  
Yes I do! Yes I do! Yes I do!*

*(Chorus)*

*We realize that we are a thorn deep in The Warden's side  
He hates us with a passion and he makes us work outside  
But when the North Star's finished we will take him for a ride  
Push him out! Push him out! Push him out!*

*(Chorus)*

*It flew the wide Pacific during the Korean War  
It dropped off all its cargo and it flew back home for*

*more*

*The pilot on the flight deck with his crew of only four  
Yes it did! Yes it did! Yes it did!*

*lyrics by Peter Houstonov*

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