

Last Month's Meeting

May Meeting

Topic: Memories of a CF-100 ("Clunk") Crew

Speaker: E. Scott MacLagan --- Former Flying Officer
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Reporter: Gord McNulty



Scott MacLagan and Dave Strachan with CF-100.
Photo S. MacLagan

Our September meeting featured an exceptional presentation by Scott MacLagan, who was introduced by CAHS Toronto Chapter President Howard Malone. Scott, born in Toronto, attended Orillia District Collegiate Institute and graduated from Grade 13 in 1955. He joined the RCAF as a Flight Cadet, aircrew trainee Sept. 2, 1955, along with some 25 others out of 250 who had gone through rigorous two-week "pre-flight" selection at RCAF Crumlin in London, Ont. Initial pre-flight training was at RCAF Station Centralia,

Sept. 4 to Dec. 7, 1955. Only nine recruits went on to flight training at Winnipeg or pilot training at Portage La Prairie. Navigation training began Dec. 10, 1955 at Winnipeg. Scott's first flight was in a C-45 Expeditor, on Feb. 2, 1956. Navigation training continued on C-45s and Dakotas until June 1956 when Scott was selected for Airborne Interceptor School. It was also at Winnipeg where he flew in B-25 Mitchells, converted to AI trainers with an APG-33 radar in the nose and scopes for two navigators behind the bomb bay area.

Scott received his Navigator/Air Observer wings Oct. 27, 1956 and was promoted to Flying Officer. In December 1956 he reported to RCAF Stn. Cold Lake as a member of Course 34 at the Operational Training Unit. He partnered with F/O David Strachan (pilot) and became one of nine crews converting to CF-100s. Initial training was on B-25's. In January they converted to the CF-100 Mk.3D for their first jet flight together. They continued training on Mk.4A and B CF-100s, graduating as "Combat Ready" crew on March 22, 1957. They transferred to 433 Porcupine Sqdn. at North Bay on April 1, 1957, and initially flew CF-100 Mk.4B's until new Mk.5's were received by the Sqdn. On Aug. 1, 1957, coincident with 419 Sqdn. moving to Germany, they were transferred to 414 Black Knight Sqdn. at North Bay flying Mk.5's.

On Feb. 13, 1959, preparing to fly the Arrow Mk.1, Scott was grounded because of deteriorating eyesight. He became Duty Operations Officer until his transfer to the Weapons Controller Branch in April. On May 1, he was transferred to a radar station at RCAF Station Parent, Quebec. In May 1961 he was transferred to another radar station at Falconbridge, Ont. Rather than accept a subsequent transfer to the DEW Line, in October, 1962, Scott took his release after seven years in the RCAF. He then joined Revenue Canada as a Collections Officer in the Sudbury District Office. He won a competition and was transferred to the Toronto Office in May 1963. Collecting overdue tax arrears was not his love, so in March 1964 he joined Wm. M. Mercer Limited, Canada's leading actuarial and benefit consulting firm. He has been an Employee Benefit Consultant and Insurance Broker for more than 44 years and now owns his own firm with his two sons, MacLagan Inc. They serve the benefit and insurance needs for the self-employed as well as multi-national corporations for their expatriate employees around the world.

Scott, who illustrated his presentation with many fine slides, thanked Chapter Secretary-Treasurer Bob Winson in particular for the opportunity of speaking to the Toronto Chapter. He said it was indeed an honour to speak about his adventures as a CF-100 crew member during the "Cold War" era in the late 1950s. Although 50 years have elapsed, Scott said that many of the memories and pictures he shared "seem like yesterday." As to why the CF-100 was referred to as the "Clunk" or the "Lead Sled," he noted the name "Clunk" came about from the very loud "clunk" that was heard when the nose gear retracted into the wheel well after the main gear retracted. Scott said he never understood the reference to "Lead Sled," but he believes it came from an ex-Sabre jockey who was "probably a little jealous." A CF-100 Mk.5, Scott said, could hold its own with any Sabre in terms of takeoff run, climb to altitude, and high altitude performance --- in particular, the extended wings and horizontal tail extensions on the Mk. 5 allowed the C-100 to fly higher. It certainly wasn't as manoeuvrable as a Sabre at altitude, but it was designed as a high altitude weapons platform to be used against bombers, not as an air superiority fighter.

Scott's RCAF career originated during the war years of the 1940s in Toronto. His father would bring him to Downsview airfield to watch the Mosquito bomber on test flights. A close friend of his, Joe McKeown, worked as a quality control manager at de Havilland at the time. They would go to the Beaches and watch Harvards from the Norwegian training base at the Island Airport, practicing air gunnery on targets on the water or dropping parachutes over the water. All of this made quite an impression! In the spring of 1953, Scott witnessed a CF-100 on a test flight from Malton fly over the family country home north of Beaverton. It went over at about 100 feet at high speed. Scott could clearly see the crew in the cockpit. The following March, he attended a Career Night at his high school in Orillia. He spoke to RCAF representatives who were there about his interest in aviation and the opportunities. At the time, Canada was rapidly rebuilding the air force --- with nine CF-100 all-weather fighter interceptor squadrons at five bases across Canada, and 16 Sabre and four CF-100 squadrons in Europe. Scott, however, didn't necessarily intend to join the air force.

In fact, he was preparing to enrol in Radio and Television Arts at Ryerson when, in August, 1955, he

received a phone call from the RCAF asking if he was still interested in flying. The air force was desperate for aircrew and technical support staff. He immediately said "yes," and the very next day he was in Toronto having a medical. The following Monday he reported to RCAF Crumlin. Along with 250 other potential candidates, he went through "some of the weirdest testing" he had ever experienced in his life. Psychological, mental and other tests examined the aircrew potential of the recruits. Finally, he was accepted and on Sept. 2, 1955, at age 18, he was inducted into the RCAF as an Aircrew Trainee. He was selected as a Navigator because his eyesight at the time was 20/25, just below Pilot standards. The recruits underwent more intensive training at RCAF Station Centralia, including physical and psychological, to determine if they could stand up to the pressure. It was difficult. On Dec. 7, a group of just nine of the original 250 took the train from London to Toronto to catch the train to Winnipeg for actual aircrew training. On Dec. 10 they embarked on training, which the RCAF claimed was like a three or four year university course crammed into 10 or 12 months. Over the main entrance way to the No. 2 Air Observer School in Winnipeg was a banner that read: "Flying is hours of boredom interspersed with moments of stark, sheer terror!" Based on his subsequent flying experiences, Scott said that statement was very true.

Scott's first flight was in an RCAF North Star troop transport aircraft, a couple of days before Christmas, when he was lucky enough to hitch a ride to Ottawa. It was an eerie trip in the dark, sitting in a sling seat with his back to the window. Looking out, all he would see was flames coming out of the exhausts on the Merlin engines. The crew claimed it was normal, but as a novice flyer Scott didn't believe them. On Feb. 2, 1956, he took his first navigation training flight along with two other students, one instructor and one pilot in an Expeditor. The young airmen also flew Dakotas and Mitchells at Winnipeg. They spent five months in basic navigation and flight training on Expeditors. A number of flying incidents occurred during that time. While waiting for takeoff one day, sitting in the co-pilot's seat of a C-45, Scott watched a B-25 take off. One hundred feet in the air, the port engine exploded. The pilot unfortunately feathered the wrong engine and the entire crew died about three hundred yards in front of the C-45. One Friday afternoon in early June, on final

approach to the main North/South Winnipeg runway, Scott was again in the right front seat when another C-45 decided to cut them off. The pilot was anxious to get to "Beer Call." He hit the lead aircraft a few hundreds ahead. Scott watched as six classmates tarried to bail out over a golf course. No one survived --- a total of eight were killed including the two pilots. As a result of these incidents Scott became rather hardened to seeing death at a very young age. The final 10 weeks were spent in the AI School flying B-25's that had been converted to airborne interceptors with radar in the nose and two radar scopes behind the wings, where the young aviators sat in the back in the dark with an instructor. Scott's graduation day finally arrived on Oct. 26, 1956. Only seven of the original 250 won their wings and received their commission as a Flying Officer. Scott arrived in Cold Lake late one afternoon in December to find he had been paired with David Strachan, a new graduate pilot from Courtenay, B.C. He arrived too late to meet any potential pilots to crew with. However, Scott was fortunate that Dave was an extremely competent pilot. They were both 19 and about to embark on rigorous and dangerous training. Their first few weeks were again spent as a crew flying B-25's, becoming familiar with each other and the concept of Ground Control Intercept (GCI) radar setting up the "hits" on other aircraft.

In January 1957 Dave and Scott took their first flight together in a CF-100 Mk.3D dual stick trainer. Ten other crews were flying that day, 40 seconds apart, in trail formation from the base to Meadow Lake, Sask. The instructor had warned the pilots that he didn't see want to see them above the hills of a valley. In the middle of the valley was a huge lake, frozen solid. On the way down they descended to 10 to 15 feet above the ice, at 500 miles an hour. At one point Dave said, "Watch the stick." Scott watched in horror as he pushed it forward. Scott thought they would crash for certain, but the speed and smooth ice made the aircraft like an air cushion vehicle. If they had lowered the landing gear they would have been taxiing! Scott's first flight in a jet fighter was terrifying and he almost concluded that enough was enough.

On Jan. 23, 1957, then 19, Scott wrote to his future wife: "After 1 year, 4 months and 21 days I finally got airborne in a CF-100. Dave took me up for 1.5 hours. It was quite a thrill, nothing like those slowpoke

Mitchells. She climbed like a homesick angel, straight up from the ground. It took us roughly 4 minutes to reach 30,000 feet. That will go you a rough idea of what it is like going up. Straight and level at 37,000 feet we were doing approximately 500 miles per hour and yet the ground seemed to remain motionless. We did loops, rolls and other aerobatics. The earth really looks odd when you are upside down! This morning we went up again, did some more aerobatics, stalls, engine flameouts etc. at 20,000 feet. I survived that okay without 'honking,' so we went down to 50 feet above the ground to do some high speed low level runs. We were doing 500 mph when Dave suddenly pulled the nose up and I felt my breakfast start to come up, pulled my mask off and reached for the 'honk bag,' but nothing came up!" The crew moved from Mk.3D's to Mk.4A's and Mk.4B's armed with eight .50 calibre machine guns in the belly and 58 folding fin rockets in pods on the wing tips. On the morning of March 18, 1957, heavy freezing rain hit Cold Lake; all taxiways and runways were coated with ice. It was the final week of operational training. Despite the bad weather, the operations officer thought it would be great practice for all concerned if three CF-100's were scrambled to intercept an RAF Valiant bomber routed over the North Pole to a U.S.A.F. base in the U.S. The scramble order was given when the Valiant was 250 miles north of Cold Lake. Scott's aircraft was third in line, a Mk. 4B. The number one CF-100 slid off the icy taxiway and almost hit the control tower, while the next aircraft tried to turn too fast onto the main runway, skidded off and became stuck in the snow. At this point Scott's aircraft was advised the Valiant was at 63,000 feet, 200 miles out. "We laughed to ourselves thinking we would be the heroes of the day if we alone got airborne and intercepted it," Scott recalled. "Power on, take-off roll, 50 feet in the air, and half way down the runway, too late to abort the takeoff, the left engine exploded! Debris flew through the cabin, and flames engulfed the left wing and engine...Rather than attempt a bailout at such a low altitude --- the ejection seats of that era required a 500 feet minimum altitude for a safe ejection, Dave decided to make a quick turn away from the base and make an approach back to the active runway we had just left. He succeeded, but it was an extremely hard landing with almost full fuel load and loaded rocket pods. We couldn't dump fuel with the aircraft on fire. We were

immediately surrounded by fire trucks spraying foam on the burning aircraft. Dave and I escaped from the aircraft and received a somewhat less than heroic ride back to the hangar in a crash truck!”



Map of Air Defence Bases. Photo "Air & Space"

The following March, they were posted to 433 Sqdn. at North Bay. It had about 30 crews and 25 aircraft then. Crews worked 24 hours on --- without any break --- and 48 hours off, for three weeks. They were either flying or on alert duty, and it was strenuous. They were certified as “Combat Ready” in May 1957 at North Bay. They jokingly referred to themselves as “trained professional killers,” and in the eyes of the RCAF, they were. They were trained to the point where they could be scrambled against an “unknown” and would be prepared to shoot down an unidentified aircraft, possibly a civilian airliner, that appeared to be threatening the lives of North Americans --- all without any hesitation. In fact, they came very close to doing that one night in the early morning hours in June. Scott’s crew was scrambled with another crew after an unidentified aircraft flying at 37,000 feet, and nearly 600 miles an hour over James Bay headed for Chicago. Luckily the lead CF-100 did a successful ident run and the aircraft, a Boeing 707, was not fired upon. It was one of the first transpolar flights by a 707. On a test run, it was supposed to be heading to New York. “We would have pulled the trigger,” Scott said, noting that Russian Bear long-range turboprop strategic bombers were intruding into the Hudson Bay and James Bay areas to test North American air defences. When the CF-100s got to within 50 miles of the Bears, they would head back home. None of the CF-100’s got close enough to take a picture. Ironically, the now 50-plus-year-old Bears are still doing the same thing today.

During the 24-hour shift, the two crews would normally be on 10-minute Alert Duty, so they had to be airborne

within 10 minutes after the scramble bell rang. They could even be on five-minute alert during major exercises, strapped into the aircraft and ready to go. They took occasional trips to U.S.A.F. bases on long weekends. On one trip to Selfridge AFB in Michigan, pilot Vic Tayles bought a ’56 Ford Thunderbird engine to replace an engine he had burned out in his Meteor. The T-bird engine was trundled over to the flight line in a crate, and inserted into the empty gun pack in the belly of a CF-100. Other pilots would fly to the East Coast to pick up lobster for Friday night dinner, or to Goose Bay to buy liquor from the Americans stationed there. Crews enjoyed their trips to SAC and NORAD fighter bases. They would often savour a formation takeoff with an F-89 Scorpion, F-86D Sabre, or F-102 Delta Dagger. The CF-100 Mk.5, with its extended wings and more powerful engines, would be airborne in just over 1,000 feet. On a cold day the crew could be at 10,000 feet by the time they were over the end of an 8,000-foot runway. The Americans could not believe the performance. In fact, the CF-100 could be at 45,000 feet in less than 9 minutes. During major exercises, crews would often be deployed to other bases such as Val Dor, Bagotville, or St. Hubert, and Uplands. Once, at Bagotville, more than 150 CF-100’s were lined up waiting to be scrambled against a large number of SAC B-47’s, B-52’s, B-58 Hustlers and RAF V-bombers coming over the North Pole. “In those days, we felt we really had an air force to be reckoned with,” Scott said.

Air Force Day --- June 8, 1957 --- brought the loss of two aircrew. It was a hot, humid Saturday throughout Ontario. Dave and Scott were scheduled to fly in an air show at London, with three other aircraft, but Scott came down with a cold and couldn’t fly. Fellow Sqdn. members “Birdie” Sparrow and Nav Doug Sheffield went in their place. Birdie decided to really put on a show with high speed passes over Crumlin. On his second pass he must have been going about 600 miles an hour at 500 feet, when the overstressed wings broke off. Scott showed photos of the crash in sequence from the Toronto Star, taken by a photographer on his 8 mm camera. Birdie, having flown Sabres in Europe, was used to pushing his aircraft to the limit. He ejected, but the investigation revealed he mistakenly attached his oxygen tube to the seat harness, rather than the chute harness. Unfortunately, when he separated from the seat the oxygen hose pulled the seat into his chute, fouling it.

He died on impact with the ground. Doug Sheffield had been taking movies as they flew over the crowd and did not have time to eject.

In July '57 the crew were transferred to 414 (Black Knight) Sqdn., also based at North Bay. Of 36 members of the Sqdn. pictured at that time, Scott said to his knowledge there are only 3 or 4 living today. Flying without pressure suits, being exposed regularly to up to 8G's and 50,000 feet or more, took its toll on all of the pilots. Many have died at a premature age. Each Sqdn. had a distinctive shoulder patch. The one for 433 was drawn by Walt Kelly of the famous "Pogo" comic strip. Walt came to North Bay in May 1957 to present the original design to the Sqdn.

By then, crews flew the CF-100 Mk.5, capable of flying to 50,000 feet and beyond due to the extended wings and horizontal tail surfaces, plus Orenda Mk. 14 engines with increased thrust. It would exceed the speed of sound in level flight, so detents were placed on the throttles to prevent pilots from using maximum power because the tailplane could break off. Prior to 419 Sqdn. going overseas, crews had to be flight tested and to practice close formation for the long trip across the North Atlantic. At Mach .86, with the wingtips about 4 feet apart at 42,000 feet, it's "an interesting experience" as Scott recalled.

The Arrow rollout on Oct. 4, 1957 took place the afternoon before Scott and his wife were married in Orillia. They drove to Ottawa for their honeymoon, but it lasted only three days. Scott was told to report back to North Bay. The entire Sqdn. was deploying to Cold Lake for a month's rocket firing without any prior notice. Less than a week later, Scott's wife was back home. Dave and he were flying west. Most people in Orillia thought it was a very short-lived marriage, but Scott is pleased to say that it has now been 51 years and still going strong. At Cold Lake, crews participated in live firing exercises almost every day and night over the range that was 100 miles by 100 miles square. Every human being had been moved out of there. The site is still used for training today. It was a thrill to fire a full load of 58 2.5-inch, folding fin rockets, at targets towed by a T-33. The pods weighed 2,000 pounds each and when they fired, the CF-100 suddenly lost 4,000 pounds of weight and rose sharply in the air. The odd time, the rockets wouldn't fire and had to be disposed of before landing. A year before, a CF-100 returning with a full

load, had the load go off when the nose wheel touched the runway, almost destroying the control tower. From then, crews were told to get rid of the rockets before returning to base. Crews would either drop them into a lake or a few times, search out "targets of opportunity" at low-level, such as bears or moose.

While at Cold Lake that October Scott met John Baer, a former high school classmate from Orillia who was now a pilot. Unfortunately, about a month later, John and his Nav were killed when their CF-100 had a hydraulic control malfunction. It went into a steep dive from 40,000 feet, broke the sound barrier, and hit the ground in 33 seconds. John had left his mike on while he tried to pull the CF-100 out. The tape made by the control tower showed that as it went down, John pleaded with his Nav, Zeke, to "stay with me, we'll get it out," until it was too late. They bailed out, but their parachutes were torn to shreds and both were killed. One day after a "bumping heads" mission with another crew, Dave and Scott were flying at 37,000 feet in close formation. They noticed the other pilot, Paul McGrath, had passed out due to oxygen failure. They advised his Nav, Tom Murray, who tried everything he could to wake him, to no avail. Dave then tried a risky manoeuvre. They closed in on the left wing of the other CF-100. Dave gently touched his wing on their wing on the top side, causing the aircraft to drop its wing and go into a dive. Dave and Scott followed them down and kept calling Paul. At 11,000 feet he came to and was able to regain control and make a wobbly but safe landing. The CF-100 had numerous temporary groundings due to unexplained crashes, until it was discovered that the rubber "O" rings joining the hydraulic lines were disintegrating and forming round little rubber particles that floated in the fluid, causing the hydraulic pistons moving the ailerons or rudder to jam. Thirteen crew members were lost at North Bay in just over 12 months. Many of the crashes were caused by this problem.

In March 1958, Dave and Scott were scrambled to intercept an "Unknown" flying at 22,000 feet over Northern Ontario at 300 knots. They intercepted and identified a U.S.A.F. KC-97 tanker. Pulling up along side, they learned from hand signals that the aircraft had lost all electrical power, including their radios. They had no idea where they were because of the heavy cloud they were both in. Dave and Scott guided them in to a safe landing at Kinross AFB, just outside Sault Ste.

Marie, Mich. Once, Dave and Scott diverted to St. Hubert because of weather at North Bay. As they taxied in, they saw a formation takeoff by three CF-100's, being filmed by CBC for a documentary. The aircraft on the right side of the formation hit a patch of ice, then the tarmac, with its right wheel. The right oleo leg broke off right at the wing root and went flying across the runway. The pilot continued with the takeoff and flew around, with the remaining left gear and nose wheel hanging down, dumping fuel. He made a superb landing, holding up the right wing as long as he could, then gently letting it down until sparks started to fly from the rocket pod. One Sunday night Scott and Dave were scheduled for a night AI exercise with another 414 crew to complete their required hours for the month. It was a crystal clear, cold night with an almost full moon. On start-up the other CF-100 had an engine problem, so aborted the mission. Scott and Dave made it a low level night navigation flight trip instead, filing a VFR flight plan. After take-off they climbed to 500 feet and followed Highway 11 south to Orillia, hometown of Scott's wife. They let down to 50 feet, lowered the gear, and with full flaps, speed brakes out and landing light on, they flew down the main street at full power --- what a noise that must have been on that cold night! Retracting the gear and flaps, Dave pulled the CF-100 into a nearly vertical climb heading for Toronto, about 60 miles to the south. As they passed through 48,000 feet and switched automatically to pressure breathing, Scott asked Dave what he was up to. His response was, "I want to see how high this bird will really go!" At 60,000 feet it was still climbing at 500 feet per minute. Dave finally levelled off at 65,000 feet right over top of Toronto, with air traffic control requesting their position and altitude. At that altitude, they could see the curvature of the earth, with Montreal, Halifax, New York, Boston, Detroit and Chicago clearly visible during the beautiful clear night. The northern lights danced in the sky as they started their descent. What Scott would have given for one of today's camcorders on that night to remember! As Dave put the nose down at that altitude, the CF-100 started to "bunt." This was typical of the "Clunk" when it exceeded Mach .96. Dave rolled the CF-100 on its back and they fell upside down to the denser air at 42,000, when Dave righted it and returned to North Bay. Scott said the crew could never talk about that kind of experience while they were in the air force ---- they

would have been booted out if they did. Most people would refuse to believe it.

In August, 1958, Scott visited the CNE and was fortunate to take a picture of Jan Zurakowski and F/L Jack Woodman at the RCAF ground display featuring the Silver Dart and a model of the Arrow. Dave and Scott were sent twice to the old Malton terminal on a TCA Viscount from North Bay to pick-up a new CF-100 from Avro. They flew down in full flight gear, including hard hats, oxygen masks and parachutes (not supplied with the aircraft). They purposely asked for seats right by the exit door at the rear and obviously alarmed other passengers as they sat there with their helmets and visors on. Their first aircraft pick-up was number 18666! They should have known. Problems occurred on start-up and they ended up staying overnight at Downsview in their flying gear. No one wanted to fly that aircraft once it was at North Bay because of the number. Flying back from Cold Lake once in a Mk. 5, Dave and Scott ran into headwinds, and ran out of fuel as they passed over Sault Ste. Marie. They didn't have tip tanks. Winnipeg, the Lakehead and Kinross were all closed because of the weather. Recognizing they were running low, they had climbed to 48,000 feet. After losing the engines, they had a controlled glide for more than 100 miles to a straight-in approach, dead-stick landing at the Bay. Scott recalled a heart-thumping experience as they flew silently like a glider. He had one hand on the ejection ring between his knees the whole time. On a night exercise in the summer, they encountered severe thunderstorms with ice caps on them at 50,000-feet plus and had to go through one to get back to the Bay. They entered the cloud at 42,000 feet and immediately lost both engines due to severe icing and hail. They hit a downdraft within the cell and went down to about 18,000 feet where Dave managed to get one engine going. The next morning the heavily dented Mk.5 was declared un-flyable, permanently. Scott compared the damage to "a thousand elves with ball peen hammers banging on the wings and body."

Sept. 15, 1958, is a date that has both positive and negative memories. Scott's first son, John, was born at North Bay that day. Scott went to the hospital at 4 a.m. to see Marilyn and John and then went to work at 8 a.m. Subsequently, Dave and Scott were returning to the Bay as part of a group of four aircraft. There was solid cloud from the ground up to 42,000 feet, so they used Ground

Controlled Approach (GCA). They were the number two aircraft on approach, when the first aircraft landed in what had been “zero-zero” conditions and then half-way down the runway broke into clear sky! When Dave and Scott were about five miles from touchdown, the GCA controller advised that contact had been lost with the third aircraft and he asked them to go around to determine if he could be picked up on radar. Flying back through the fog, they saw a glow on the ground from a fire. Bob Fletcher and Gill Dallaire were killed instantly. Bob apparently misread his altimeter, probably due to a head cold. Scott has always felt badly about it since he talked Bob into flying that day as they were short a crew.

On Sept. 29, 1958, Dave and Scott were the ‘First Alert’ crew at North Bay. The day was heavily overcast, with a 100-foot ceiling and quarter mile visibility. About 10 a.m. they were scrambled with their CF-100 fully armed because of recent intrusions into the James Bay area by Russian bombers. They were told to intercept a civilian aircraft that had declared an emergency due to low fuel near Val D’Or, Quebec. They couldn’t find it after two passes, but on their third pass they made contact at 5,000 feet. A Cessna 172 appeared, flying above the cloud deck. Dave and Scott deployed full flaps and speed brakes, gear down, to try to slow down to the Cessna. After making intermittent radio contact, and almost stalling, they learned the Cessna pilot had less than five minutes fuel remaining and needed to land. They went down through the now broken clouds but couldn’t find any spot in the dense bush. Checking his knee map, Scott located the Lac Des Loups beacon and emergency airstrip about 25 miles north. They guided the Cessna in to an emergency landing. On final approach, the Cessna’s engine sputtered and it had just enough fuel to complete the landing. At that point Dave and Scott had only 500 pounds of fuel and couldn’t make it back to Val D’Or. Rather than bailing out, they landed on the Lac Des Loups 3,000 foot runway. It was a nail-biter, but they stopped with the nose gear just barely off the end of the runway. The Cessna pilot had only 25 hours of flying time and was flying “a madam” to inspect her “operations” in Rouyn Noranda and Val D’Or. The story made front-page headlines in North Bay and beyond. In October 1958, over two weekends, all air traffic in North America was grounded to enable NORAD to conduct massive air defence exercises. They were

intended to display to the Russians that combined RCAF and USAF forces could deal with “over the pole” intrusions. Hundreds of USAF and RAF bombers staged “attacks.” Something never made public at the time was the fact that a Russian submarine was spotted in the St. Lawrence on the surface with a variety of antennae listening to the exercise. It quickly submerged and disappeared after two CF-100’s were scrambled from St. Hubert to make a low pass at it. Most attacks took place at night. As navigator, Scott would plot the attackers’ tracks on his knee-mounted map board, determine the closest target, and plot an intercept course. Dave came in on a B-52 to the simulated firing point of 500 yards, then broke up and away to the left after making a “kill” on the big bomber --- only to miss the tail of a second B-52 by inches! Flying dead astern and above the first bomber, “blacked out” without any running lights, it was only 100 feet behind and a few feet above in order to make the ground radar think there was one target, not two. In November 1958, 50 aircraft “stacked” at 500-foot intervals in freezing rain, short on fuel, over Uplands waiting for GCA to bring them down. Dave and Scott touched down as the third last aircraft, after running 3 hours and 15 minutes without tip tanks.

One morning, Dave and Scott were given an airborne “scramble” against ‘Zura’ and the Arrow while returning to the Bay after intercepting a Grumman Widgeon that had taken off from Parry Sound without a flight plan. They picked up the Arrow at 45 miles on radar, closing in to within about 15 miles when ‘Zura’ went supersonic and left the CF-100 in the dust. To their knowledge no other crew from any other CF-100 Squadrons had the opportunity. By late January 1959 Dave and Scott, senior crew on 414 Sqdn., were scheduled to fly the Arrow starting in May at Malton. Then the RCAF determined it was no longer safe for Scott to fly as his eyesight had deteriorated to the point where if he lost his glasses in flight he wouldn’t see critical circuit breakers pop. He returned to North Bay rather deflated and \$135 a month poorer due to the loss of flying pay. Scott was temporarily reassigned to Base Operations when on Feb. 20, 1959, Prime Minister Diefenbaker cancelled the Arrow.

Ironically, Scott was the Duty Ops Officer two weeks later on a Saturday morning in March when he received a call advising that Diefenbaker and Defence Minister Pearkes were flying in for a “hush hush” visit. They

wanted to see the Bomarc missile site under construction about 60 miles from the Bay at Lamacza, Que. As their beautifully polished C-47 #1000 rolled up to the red carpet, Scott smelled smoke in the Ops room. A radio console was burning. Firemen almost knocked down the PM and Defence Minister as they arrived at the Op Rooms door but the fire was quickly extinguished. The Base Commander decided he would show off to the PM and instructed Scott to “scramble” two Alert aircraft. Scott stood his ground as he twice told him that the authority had to come from Air Defence Command in St. Hubert, until Pearkes told him to “Go ahead.” Scott rang the scramble bell and looked down to see an accident. One pilot, instructed to go the wrong runway by the tower, hit another aircraft. The mayhem was compounded when the second pair was scrambled --- one of the aircraft struck a fuel bowser as it pulled out from the line.

Dief commented, “See that’s why we need missiles instead of pilots!” Scott spoke up, telling him that was not the case at all. He told Dief he had made the mistake of his career in cancelling the Arrow. The PM did not reply and stormed out of the room. “I should have been kicked out of the RCAF that day, but was not,” Scott said. Instead, a week later, he was posted to RCAF Station Parent, a remote base about 250 miles northeast of Ottawa. During an early morning shift in 1960 the staff encountered what they believe was a UFO that was picked up off the East Coast heading west directly over the station. It was clocked by four radar stations in a row, travelling at 3,600 miles an hour at 100,000 feet --- far beyond the capabilities of anything in those days. Even the SR-71 Blackbird could not match it many years later.

During the 1960s and 1970s the CF-100 served as an Electronic Counter Measures aircraft, testing NORAD defences. With tip tanks it could remain aloft for more than five hours at high altitude and could carry electronic jammers and chaff dispensers. In September 1981 the final flypast of CF-100s took place at North Bay. The aircraft was finally retired more than 31 years after its first flight in 1950.

Scott concluded by saying that while his RCAF career was relatively short compared to others, “being involved in the defence of North America during the highly stressful times of the Cold War, in my early twenties and thirties, was an exciting series of experiences I will

never forget!” Scott’s logbook showed that he made a total of 306 flights in the CF-100. “We went supersonic several times without having the tail plane fall off, and flew to 65,000 feet. We survived an engine explosion on takeoff; hydraulic control problems; a double engine flameout and dead-stick landing from 100 miles; and several single-engine landings.” Scott said he was extremely lucky to have been paired with a very capable pilot in Dave Strachan, who saved their lives on many occasions. Unfortunately, Dave later became an alcoholic and died in B.C. before the age of 60. Scott was proud to have served and to have come so close to flying the Arrow. “I am very lucky to have survived so many incidents while flying, as many of my colleagues did not, and many more have died prematurely after their service career, in my opinion because of the lifestyle and stresses imposed on our bodies.” The All-Weather Fighter Association website lists “The Gone but Not Forgotten” --- aircrew who flew the CF-100, or later the CF-101B. There is now a Memorial at Trenton in honour of a lengthy list of men who died in the service of Canada.

Howard expressed thanks on behalf of the Chapter to Scott for a compelling and fascinating outline of the lives of a CF-100 crew during the peak of the Cold War. Everyone in attendance gained a new appreciation of the service given by dedicated CF-100 aircrew in the line of duty.



Scott MacLagan speaking
Photo G. McNulty

The contents of this article were originally presented to the CAHS Toronto Chapter at a previous meeting or event. All / or some material has been edited and adapted for this website. Many thanks to CAHS Toronto Chapter for their courtesy in the use of this material. CAHS Toronto Chapter Meeting & Membership information is available elsewhere on this website