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## FLYING HIGH IN COLD LAKE

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**RIGHT:** Flight Lieutenant Matt McCormack of the Royal Australian Air Force flashes a smile after another successful run over the Cold Lake air weapons range. **INSET:** CF-18 Hornet specially painted for use in air shows, such as the awe-inspiring Cold Lake Air Show.

## Flying High with 4 Wing!

**Author gets special access to the Cold Lake restricted zone.**

*Story & photos by Jacqueline Chartier*

I'm waiting in the Wing Commander's office at 4 Wing Cold Lake and suddenly I am greeted by Col. Charles "Duff" Sullivan, the man responsible for overseeing Canada's largest and perhaps most strategically important airbase. As we shake hands I observe that, in his late forties, Sullivan still possesses a boyish smile that exudes charm. Dressed in a striking blue air force uniform, Sullivan looks every inch the career fighter pilot-turned-Wing Commander – he radiates dignity and authority – as he offers me a seat and something to drink.

On this bright June morning, the headquarters building is a flurry of activity in preparation for the upcoming day of festivities, the culmination of 4 Wing's year-long Golden Jubilee celebrations. "I felt extremely privileged and honoured to be given this opportunity to command here in Cold Lake," Sullivan confided. "But when they said you're going to be here for the 50th anniversary of the base and the 80th anniversary of the air force, I said, Wow! What an awesome responsibility! I don't know how many hundreds of letters I've signed to invite people to come here to be part of our celebrations."

According to Sullivan, being the commander of an airbase with the scale and magnitude of 4 Wing requires being on call 24/7. "You're working to prepare fighter squadrons to be deployed if and when



needed," he said. The job also demands outstanding management and supervisory skills. "There is an awful lot of decision-making that goes on with respect to resources and how we manage our resources," explained Sullivan. "There is a tremendous amount of responsibility with the way we manage our people, including where people are posted to for their next tour of duty and what individuals are selected for different courses and opportunities for advancement."

In Sullivan's view, the fact that all of these issues come across the Wing Commander's desk makes it a position of enormous privilege where he can help create opportunities for other people. He appears very much concerned and empathetic to those under his command when he makes the assertion, "What I respect most about this position is that you have a certain amount of responsibility towards everyone here in the Wing and on the base, to help them progress through their careers."

On a base with over 2,000 air force personnel it is inevitable that there will be intermittent challenges to military structure and discipline. When seriously dishonourable or disreputable behavior occurs, it is the Wing Commander's duty to deal with the perpetrators. "There are, from time to time, what we call leadership challenges where you have to make some very diffi-

cult decisions with respect to discipline," Sullivan acknowledged. "Some people look at this as a negative aspect of the job, but I don't. I look at it as being an opportunity that if someone is having a difficult time, I can help them choose a new path – one that will lead to success."

### HIGH FLIGHT

As a military pilot Sullivan has accumulated over 3,500 flying hours on jet aircraft, 1,600 of which have been flown on the CF-18 Hornet. At present, the Hornet constitutes the primary combat capability of the Canadian air force. The twin engines of this supersonic tactical fighter jet deliver 7,290 kg of thrust and speeds of up to Mach 1.8 – nearly twice the speed of sound. Sullivan, like the majority of fighter pilots that I encountered at Cold Lake, is modest about belonging to what many perceive as an elite club in possession of "the right stuff."

"I never had a dream specifically of being a pilot, because I never thought that the opportunity was available to me," said Sullivan. "I think most young boys have some sort of longing to get involved in flying or aviation, but you look at it from a distance and admire it from a distance." It wasn't until he was 16 or 17 that Sullivan began to seriously set his sights on pursuing a career as a fighter pilot. A summer job he obtained while attending St. Laurence



**LEFT:** A ground crew goes to work on a CF-18 after it has come in for a landing.

College in Cornwall, Ontario, helped him to make his career decision.

"It was while I was in college that I got a summer job with a company that was using helicopters to fly surveyors in and out of the bush," Sullivan explained. "Once while talking to a helicopter pilot, he mentioned to me that aviation, as a profession, is open to anybody if they choose to pursue it. About a year later, I applied to the air force for pilot training."

According to Sullivan, even after he was accepted by the air force there were times when he doubted his ability to successfully become a fighter pilot. Unlike most of his fellow recruits, he hadn't had any civilian pilot training and had never flown an aircraft before in his life. An older, experienced military pilot mentored the young Sullivan by telling him that in order to succeed "you have to want to do it. It has to be the most important thing to you." Twenty-five years later, Sullivan remains adamant that motivation, dedication and commitment are the key ingredients to becoming a pilot or fighter pilot.

In 1947 American Charles "Chuck" Yeager made history by being the first person to actually break the sound barrier – a feat that has basically become routine for elite fighter pilots today. Sullivan insists that when you break the sound barrier in a modern fighter aircraft you hardly notice the

sensation. "The only indication that you actually have, that you are going supersonic is when you look down at your instruments and see that you are going faster than the speed of sound. Otherwise you might not realize it," he said.

In Sullivan's opinion the most exciting sensation with respect to speed occurs when you are flying just above a cloud layer. "When you are flying in an open blue sky, it's almost like you're floating, because you don't have any sensation of speed. There is nothing close to you that gives you the sensation," he explained. "But whenever you are flying just above a cloud layer—it doesn't matter at what altitude, maybe just 10,000 feet, that's when you see the clouds going by and they are going past you at 600 miles per hour, which gives you an incredible sensation of speed."

For Sullivan, though, it is the non-physical or spiritual aspects of flying that are paramount. Eyes gleaming, he illustrates his point by referring to one of his favorite poems, "High Flight" by John Gillespie Magee. Pilot Officer Gillespie Magee was an American who chose to join the RCAF during World War II. He lost his life on December 11, 1941, however his sonnet "High Flight" has, over the years, become a mantra to pilots. It continues to speak to the spirituality, wonder and romance of aviation. "Oh! I have slipped the surly bonds of earth/And

danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings" read the now-celebrated opening lines.

## BEYOND ENVY

My visit to 4 Wing Cold Lake during its Golden Jubilee celebrations culminated with a personal tour of the base's restricted area, which is the actual working environment for fighter pilots, aircraft technicians and ground crew personnel. Upon my arrival I was free to stand outside a hangar and witness the awesome spectacle as a formation of CF-18s came roaring in for a landing. My tour guide, Capt. Iain Cummings, could only grin as he watched my wide-eyed reaction. Once I had recovered from the thrill, he took me inside to speak to members of 410 Tactical Fighter (Operational Training) Squadron.

I quickly learned that, since 410 Squadron has always had some of the most experienced CF-18 pilots in the fighter community, it has become a recognized centre of excellence both in Canada and on an international level. The squadron runs one course every year, training approximately 20 CF-18 fighter pilots. The highly demanding program consists of nine months of ground school, simulator flights and flying missions. Areas covered in-depth include aircraft handling, instrument flight, formation flying, night flying, navigation and weapons delivery tactics.

Capt. Brian Bews, a student on the CF-18, seemed to be abundantly self-assured and yet still modest concerning his remarkable accomplishments. "I started doing some civilian flying training prior to getting into the military, so I knew I wanted to be a pilot and that's what I joined for. I've been lucky to make it this far," he told me. "You have to be extremely keen. It's a lot of hard work. You have to be willing to learn. Even after you finish your training and go into a squadron, you're always learning something new."

Later, Bews conveyed to me his initial

CELEBRATIONS ... CONTINUED ON P. 28



**CAEN BATTLE ... CONTINUED FROM PAGE 20**

**LEFT:** At Passchendale, the constant shelling meant that neither side could bury their dead, and so the bodies laid where they fell.

"Bloody Buron." They made it to the outskirts of the village with few casualties. Unfortunately, the village itself was strongly held by a ring of defensive positions and the battle lasted all day. The Germans fell back and then counterattacked with tanks, which were beaten off by a battery of British 17-pounders attached to the regiment. By day's end, the Highlanders had lost 262 men and their commanding officer.

On the right flank, the Glens captured Gruchy with much less difficulty then, led by an unconventional charge by the Bren gun carriers of the 7th Reconnaissance Regiment, moved on to the Château de St. Louet. The North Novas pushed through Buron and seized Authie, having sustained "very heavy casualties by mortars and 88 fire."

At the Abbaye d'Ardennes, the Regina Rifles reported that every move forward was checked by tank, mortar, and machine-gun fire. B Company suffered 61 casualties and C Company was pinned down by a pillbox in one corner of the building and snipers in the bell tower. D Company was able to make it to the Abbaye garden under the cover of 2-inch mortar and tank smoke, then dug in and waited for morning, protected by the walls.

The Canadian Scottish found the approach to Cussy contested by snipers and shellfire. Both flanks were still held by the SS and a confused battle raged until nightfall when two companies of the Winnieps were brought up to reinforce the position before the anticipated counterattacks. But there would be no counterattack. During the night, Rommel ordered a withdrawal of all German forces south of the Orne River and rearguards in Caen could put up only token resistance. The next day, the Canadians cautiously pushed into the city, snipers, mines and booby traps slowing their progress. Reconnaissance units ordered forward to seize crossings over the Orne were unable to move through the rubble-choked streets. Yet, to their astonishment the Canadians were greeted as liberators. David Halton of the CBC reported:

"Amid their thousands of dead and wounded men, women and children, most of them the victims of our bombing and shelling, amid worse wreckage than I've ever seen in any war or campaign, amid fire and smoke and bursting shells and diving enemy aircraft, several thousand people of Caen came out of the ancient abbey church where they'd been taking shelter, to watch the flag of France broken from a masthead and to sing the *Marseillaise* with strained and broken voices and with tears running down their cheeks."

It had taken more than a month to reach Caen – a city that had been a D-Day objective. ♣

**CELEBRATIONS ... CONT'D FROM PAGE 11**

impression of flying the CF-18. "You don't really notice it (breaking the sound barrier) – it's basically just a number on the instruments. There isn't much of a sensation at all. But it's pretty incredible to fly an aircraft that is that powerful and that fast. I don't really think about the danger or being scared and a lot of the reason is you're too busy to think about it. You know what you have to do, and you do it, and it is a very difficult and very dynamic thing, so your brain is always trying to process the last bit of information and react to it."

I came away from 410 Squadron with the realization that high standards in fighter pilot training are the principal reason why 4 Wing is so highly regarded on an international level and why it has become the crown jewel in Canada's air defence system. Don Pearsons, Director of Air Force Heritage, recently expressed his opinion regarding 4 Wing Cold Lake by asking, "What's three levels beyond envy?" He was only half joking as he insinuated that what Cold Lake has achieved in 50 years might easily provoke jealousy among other military bases.

Not to rely on past glories, 4 Wing is currently in the process of modernizing all of its CF-18s. According to Sullivan, the upgrade includes new computers, new radar and new weapons systems. The modernization will take the aircraft to about 2017 or 2018, when it is estimated that the fleet will finally have to be replaced. Even more noteworthy, in Sullivan's estimation, is that fact that Cold Lake is adopting a new readiness posture, focused on what are called expeditionary operations.

"This means that we will be able to send a small package of CF-18s anywhere in the world in a matter of days to respond to emerging crises. We have had the ability to employ CF-18s, but our focus has always been on supporting NATO and in responding in a much longer period of time," explained Sullivan. "We're concentrating now on what we call a six-pack, where we would be able to send six CF-18s and approximately 400 people anywhere in the world in a number of days. This is a huge transition, a fairly big change, it means that all our people have to be trained and ready to go and that all our equipment has to be packed and ready."

According to Sullivan, this is in line with the vision of the Chief of the Air Staff in Ottawa, who wants to see the Canadian air force as an expeditionary air force ready to move anywhere in the world more rapidly. "We are going to achieve that this year in Cold Lake," Sullivan promised me. "I believe we will be the first air force base in Canada to achieve that high level of readiness – the expeditionary capability. I consider this an awesome accomplishment by the team here at Cold Lake."

At last I realize why Sullivan is justifiably proud. And I also have a suspicion that 4 Wing is destined to remain "beyond envy" for many years to come. ♣