

NIGHT STALKER - THE LAST FLIGHT OF "THE LAST PUNCH"
by Alan W. G. "Casey" Hale, Commander, RCNR (Ret'd), August 2003



There is a lot of info re politicking that I did to get the BANSHEE (some of which cannot be released because some of the critters (like myself) are still alive).

I lobbied long and hard to get the aircraft so that we would have the only collection (in Canada, anyway) of all three fighters that flew in the Royal Canadian Navy Naval Air Branch.

It was quite a coincidence that the time we were offered the aircraft was almost coincident with my relinquishing command of TECUMSEH. When approval was given by the Province of Alberta for us to display the aircraft and we received the blessing of Director of Naval Reserves, we requested assistance from CFB Calgary to move it to TECUMSEH.

Thinking it would take an Act Of the Almighty to obtain this blessing (after all, what did the Army know about moving aeroplanes (save helicopters and small spotter aircraft), I did not hold my breath. Imagine my surprise when ten days later CFB Calgary was given the nod and tasked with the move (considering they had to obtain permission from Mobile Command whose Headquarters were in St. Hubert, PQ, who probably had to go to NDHQ for further approval).

(Our Guardian Angel was looking out for us).

CFB Calgary Transport section checked out the aircraft and route and obtained assistance from the City of Calgary Police Force, etc. (as we needed a Police escort). The route was from West Campus of SAIT (near what is now the LRT station, south east down the hill following what is now the LRT to junction of 10th st.; south on 10th to 5th ave; west on 5th to Crowchild; south on Crowchild passed Kensington and to TECUMSEH taking the 24th St. exit; into the North-West gate of TECUMSEH and down onto the parade square.

The move was scheduled for 19 August 1978 at 0100 (almost exactly 25 years ago). Base Calgary supplied two trucks - one for the tow, and the other to act as a brake for the trip from SAIT to the bottom of the 10th St. hill (in case of an emergency). At this point, the brake truck would depart for Base. Note, there was no hydraulics in the aircraft, so riding in it to handle emergency braking would be a futile effort. Base personnel also did a dry run with a broom sticking up from the back of a truck to the height of the aircraft wing tips (wings folded) to ensure the tow would not come in contact with any overhead obstacles (like overpasses). It turned out that there would be little more than 6-inch clearance (that is why the a/c was towed on wheels rather than on a flatbed).

At the appointed hour, we (Base Calgary vehicles, personnel, and PO Huta and myself from Tecumseh, and Bob Bergen from the Calgary Albertan (newspaper - he entitled his article Night Stalker, hence the above) had gathered at the appointed spot and the tow readied. The weather was inclement to say the least, a veritable monsoon letting go torrents of rain. The LAST PUNCH "slipped her chocks" at 0100.

We proceeded down the hill to 5th Ave intersection, let go the brake vehicle and carried on to Crowchild and up to Tecumseh without incident. Traffic along Crowchild to Kensington was similar to morning rush hour and no doubt some were somewhat irritated, as our speed of

advance was only about 5 knots. Someone in a vehicle adjacent to mine (I was passenger in staff car) opened the window and light-heartedly asked "what have you got here, Newfy airstrip???".



Once we arrived at TECUMSEH, we met the only obstacle on the trip - a pair of phone wires going from A Block to a pole on 17th Ave - these were raised above the wing tips and the aircraft parked on the parade square. Effectively, "landed on" at 0230.

On arrival at TECUMSEH, we noticed that the police escort had two additional people in the vehicle than when the trip began. It appeared that

occupants of one vehicle became somewhat irritated at the slow progress had attempted to pass the parade by moving into the left turn lane at Crowchild and Kensington and endeavouring to overtake the procession - effectively falling right into the hands of the Calgary Constabulary. The police also noted, on interception, that both occupants had been into something stronger than soda pop and were effectively arrested and took occupancy in the back seat of the police car for the balance of the trip.

After securing the aircraft on the parade square, I declared "UP SPIRITS" and, upon opening the Wardroom bar, bought beer for all involved. The police declined, not surprisingly, as they were still on duty and had some other details to which they had to attend. One can only imagine the indictment on the Court Docket when the two were brought to trial "Overtaking a jet fighter at the corner of Crowchild and Kensington at 0200 on the morning of 19 Aug 1978, whilst intoxicated". I have no idea as to the outcome of the trial.

The workers departed about 0330 and I closed the bar, and after informing the Commissionaire at the gate that I would be sleeping in the Captain's cabin - I left all doors open in case on an emergency. Little did we know what would happen in case of fire - we found out of 30 Apr 1981 when the tragic fire destroyed A block.

There is more to this story regarding placement of the aircraft on concrete pads (which are still visible from the Wardroom windows looking North toward 17th Ave), and the refinishing of both the Banshee and Fury by CFB NAMAQ. This will have to wait for another time.

Epilogue

TECUMSEH Wardroom has a custom probably unheard of in other Naval Messes and that is to make presentations of T-shirts or other suitable regalia to certain individuals for "Conduct Above and Beyond". One officer was given a T-shirt with the inscription "No More Mr. Nice Guy"; another (know for his scrounging abilities) was presented a Capt. Rabbit flag (embroidery of Bugs Bunny). When I was dined out in Sep 78, I was given a T-shirt with the inscription "MIDNIGHT BANSHEE

RIDER" and the caricature indicated below painted thereon. The custom in the mess is for those to sport their awards after the Loyal Toast at Mess Dinners.



MIDNIGHT BANSHEE RIDER