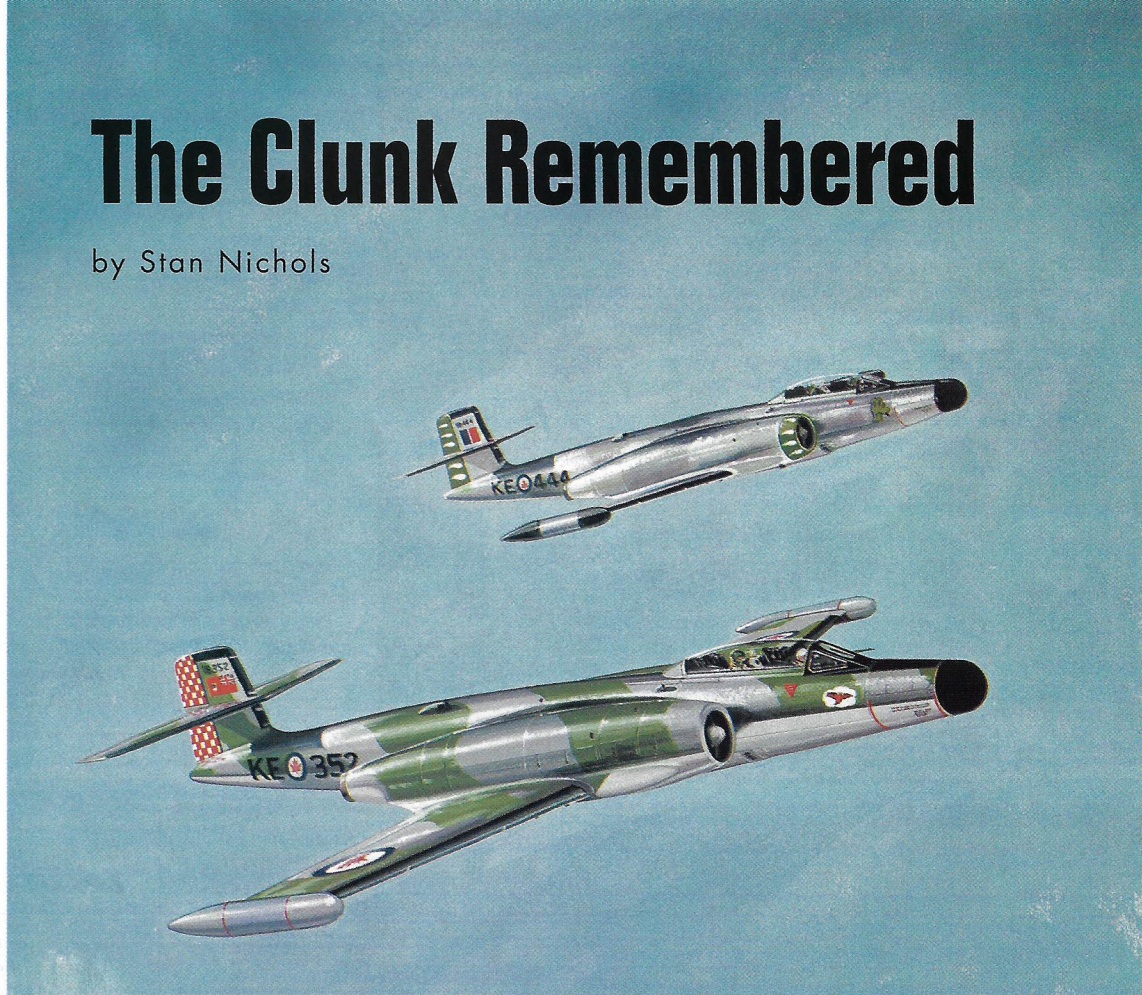


# The Clunk Remembered

by Stan Nichols

Aviation artist Peter Mossman created this painting of two CF-100 Mk IVBs in 440 Sqn colours, both the domestic bare metal version and the NATO camouflage version used later in Europe.



**A**s a teenager growing up on a Manitoba farm during WW II, my dream was to fly Spitfires. Fate frowned and I ended up as co-pilot on Sunderland flying boats with Coastal Command, first in the U.K., then as captain on PBY-5A Cansos in Newfoundland. After the war I ferried various aircraft around the country out of St Hubert, Que, and Rockcliffe, Ont, later flew Dakotas out of Goose Bay, Nfld, for medical evacuations and supply flights in the eastern Arctic.

During the winter of 1949, several flights were made to small outposts with emergency food supplies because of the Newfoundland rail strike. Newfoundland joined Canada in 1949 and we were dubbed "Smallwood Airlines" because we distributed ballot boxes for the vote. It was during this period that we were in for a special treat. In the summer of 1950 we flew to Rockcliffe to exchange a borrowed Dakota for our own aircraft which had just undergone maintenance. During our visit, the prototype Avro CF-100 Canuck arrived at Rockcliffe while on a promotional tour of Ottawa, Montreal, Washington and Boston. We were astounded with the eye-watering flight performance of the sleek black jet. On the flight from Toronto to Montreal with company test pilot Bill Waterton at the controls, the air-

craft flew at mind-blowing average speed of 575 knots! This was my first contact with the CF-100 and I could only dream that someday I would fly this incredible fighter.

The CF-100 Canuck or the "Clunk" as it was dubbed, was a product of Canadian design, engineering and production of which this country can be justly proud. The powerful state-of-the-art jet proved to be the mainstay of all-weather fighter/interceptor operations for the RCAF for many years as part of Air Defence Command, NORAD and NATO during the Cold War.

At the peak of RCAF activity during the 1950s Canada had 13 CF-100 squadrons, four in Europe with NATO's 1 Air Division, one each at 1 Wing Marville and 2 Wing Grostenquin in France, and 3 Wing Zweibrücken and 4 Wing Baden-Soellingen in Germany. At home in Canada, we had nine operational squadrons attached to NORAD; two each at Bagotville and St Hubert, Que, and Uplands and North Bay, Ont, and one at Comox, BC. Operational training was carried out initially at North Bay, then later at Cold Lake, Alta.

My next association with the CF-100 was as a ground radar controller, first at Foymount, Ont, from 1952-54, then in Nov 1954, I was posted to



Comox as the first commander of 51 Aircraft Control and Warning (51 AC&W) Sqn. At the time, 409 (Nighthawk) Sqn was being re-formed at Comox and was re-equipping with CF- 100s.

Time passed. After five years of ground jobs, 1956 saw me returned to flying duties. Since I had no jet flying experience I first underwent a full medical assessment at the Institute of Aviation Medicine in Toronto, including high altitude indoctrination in the decompression chamber, a workout in the centrifuge to check my "g" tolerance, and a battery of interviews. Next, it was on to Centralia, Ont, for a re-acquaintance with the Harvard trainer before flying the T-33 Silver Star at Gimli, Man, and Saskatoon, Sask. The Saskatoon phase was for us pilots going on to No. 3 Operational Training Unit (3 OTU) at Cold Lake and was designed to give us an extra three weeks of instrument flying in preparation for the all-weather role.

Once at Cold Lake, the first order of business was to find a compatible navigator. I found "Duster" Martin – he would later manage to keep me out of trouble on more than one occasion. Then it was on to ground school, followed by introductory flights in B-25 Mitchells to familiarize the new CF-100 crews with the air intercept radar equipment, which led to check-outs in the Mk III dual CF-100, and then the more advanced Mk IVA. The dream had been realized!

Flying in the winter nights at Cold Lake was a "fish bowl" experience; stars above, sparse lights below and the surrounding atmosphere full of ice crystals.

Completing the course, in Jan 1957 Duster and I were posted to 440 Sqn at Bagotville and I was promoted to squadron leader.

At last we were on an operational squadron and began our combat-ready training while preparing to depart for Europe. We picked up a freshly overhauled



Squadron Leader Stan Nichols poses for a "hero shot" during his service as flight commander with 440 Sqn at 3 (F) Wing Zweibrücken, Germany. The photo was autographed by famed Avro test pilot Jan Zurakowski, during the Jan 2000 CF-100 50th anniversary festivities in Toronto.

photo by Stan Nichols



Armed CF-100s on a rare daylight flight near 3 (F) Wing.



Test pilot Bill Waterton is greeted by VIPs at Washington, D.C. during a demonstration tour of the jet-black prototype CF-100 on May 9th 1950. At left is Air Marshal Wilf Curtis, then RCAF chief of the air staff. It was during this tour that Stan Nichols first encountered the state-of-the-art interceptor.



USAF photo

and camouflaged CF-100 Mk IVB (18331) from the Avro Canada plant in Malton, Ont, which was to be our aircraft until our arrival in Europe. We thoroughly flight-tested our long-range fuel tanks during a four-plane flight from Bagotville to Comox, with stops each way at Portage la Prairie, Man. Everything checked out.

In preparation for our deployment to 1 Air Division in Europe, 440 Sqn flew a mass 21 aircraft cross-country flight from Bagotville to St Hubert, to Ottawa, returning to Bagotville. The farewell fly-past over Ottawa, a squadron parade and a mess dinner completed the last details before climbing into our birds for the long journey to Germany.

*Nimble Bat III* was the code name for our ferry operation to 3 (F) Wing Zweibrücken. We left Bagotville on May 11th 1957, via Goose Bay, Nfld, to refuel and don immersion suits before proceeding to our overnight stop at Keflavik, Iceland. Things got exciting *en route* when No. 4 aircraft had an alternator over-temp condition on one engine. The pilot was forced to shut it down and continue on single engine, arriving in Keflavik within minutes of the others.

Supported by a 426 Sqn North Star, which carried a spare Orenda XI engine for the eventuality, and search and rescue Lancasters from Greenwood, NS, for trans-Atlantic air cover, next morning we departed Keflavik and arrived in Zweibrücken after our second three-and-a-half hour flight. Ours was to be the shortest trans-Atlantic crossing of a full squadron during this era.

Meanwhile, our families followed on the liner *SS Homeric*, departing Quebec City and arriving in Le Havre, France, a week later.

We settled in at 3 Wing, with 440 Sqn replacing one of the three resident F-86 Sabre squadrons, to take up our role as an all-weather fighter component of 1 Air Division. We CF-100 crews held our alert ("Zulu") at night and the two Sabre squadrons held the daylight vigil, alternating weekly.

A good-natured rivalry developed between the squadrons and the Sabre pilots who, no doubt envious over our superior night-fighting prowess, attached some rather unkind nicknames to our stalwart jets. The "CF-Zilch," the "Lead Sled," and the "Kerosene Canso" spring to mind. To counter the friendly derision from our swept-wing wonders we had a standing offer to meet them anytime at 20,000 feet over the beacon – at midnight!

Air weapons training was carried out at the RCAF Air Weapons Unit in Decimomannu, Sardinia semi-annually for both gunnery and rocketry. The CF-100's gun packs contained eight .50-calibre Browning machine-guns which the armourers serviced and harmonized. Operationally the aircraft carried two rocket pods on the wing tips, each containing 29 2.75 inch folding-fin rockets. For rocketry firing practice the CF-100 had two, seven tube pods which enabled the firing of two salvos of seven rockets per training mission on the firing range in the Mediterranean west of Sardinia.

It was during our time in Europe that the much heralded Avro Arrow was planned as the follow-on



to the CF-100 and we were all anticipating its arrival with great excitement. Our hopes were dashed early in Feb 1959 when the Arrow project was canceled.

By Aug 1960, I was on my way home after completing more than 1,000 hours on the mighty CF-100. It was a bitter-sweet departure as we were happy to be going home, but sad as we left several squadron members and dependents buried in the Canadian cemetery at Chology, France.

The CF-100 was an aircraft for its time. A total of 692 copies of the interceptor were produced over the years at Avro's Malton plant and at peak production the assembly line was rolling out 25 per month. The aircraft served the RCAF and Canada in the air defence role with distinction from 1953 to 1962. Although most of the aircraft were scrapped when the CF-101 Voodoo took over in the air defence role, a few soldiered on for another 20-or-so years with the Airborne Sensing Unit in Ottawa, and 414 (Electronic Warfare) Sqn at North Bay. The few remaining relics serve as pedestal-mounted gate guards and museum pieces across Canada.

The official retirement of the CF-100 from Canadian Forces service took place in Sep 1983 when gala farewell ceremonies were held in North Bay, 29 years after RCAF CF-100 operations began there,



photo by Stan Nichols

and another significant era of Canada's illustrious aviation history came to an end. ☹

*(Ed note: Stan Nichols of North Bay retired from the air force in 1970, then worked in civil aviation for 18 years. He is very active with 422 (Nipissing) Wing of the Air Force Association.*

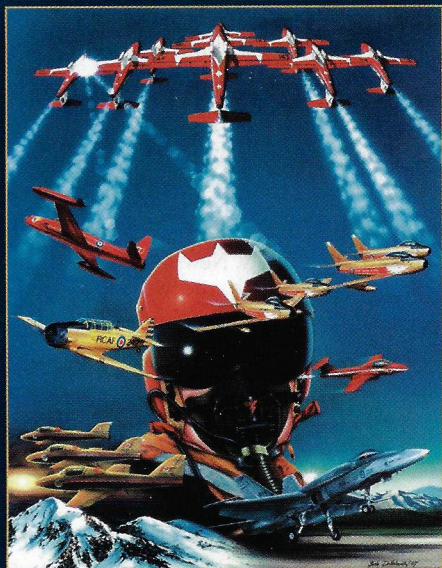
*Veteran aviation artist Peter Mossman of Toronto once worked in the art department at Avro Canada.)*

Unarmed CF-100s at 440 Sqn dispersal at 3 (F) Wing, Zweibrücken, Germany, 1958.

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