

McNaughton of Prestonvale

The making of a three-star General

By Terry O'Hearn

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The remarkable career of Lt.-Gen. (Ret) Donald M. McNaughton, CMM, CD, a Perth area boy who flew to the top of his profession with the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF).
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Part 1: Flight Cadet to Canadian Army Staff College, 1952 – 1971

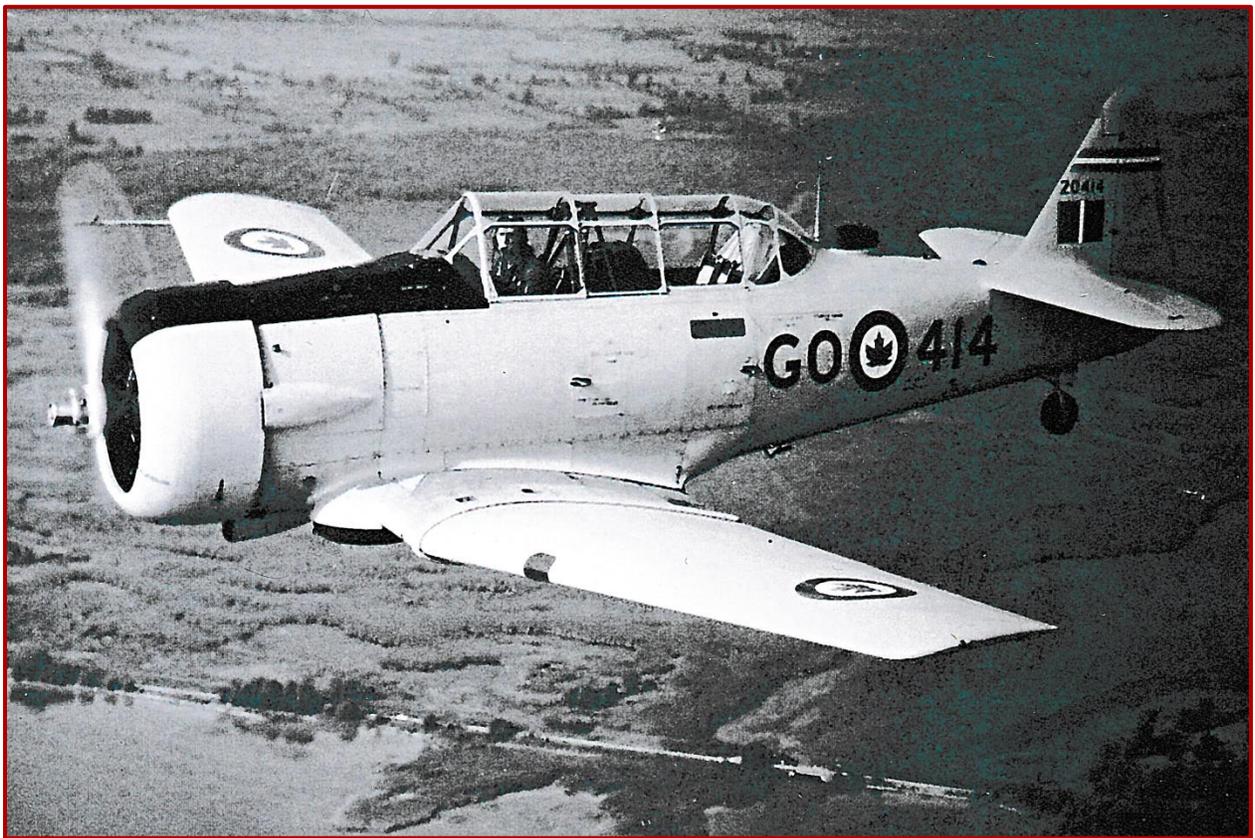
Although he has every reason to be proud of a remarkable career, Lt.-Gen. (Ret) Donald M. McNaughton, CMM, CD, is reluctant to say much until encouraged by his wife Fran, and the story slowly unfolds of a Perth area boy who flew to the top of his profession with the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF).

Don McNaughton was born in 1934, and grew up with 9 siblings on the family farm at Prestonvale, in the former township of Drummond. He graduated from Perth & District Collegiate Institute, and joined the RCAF in 1952, earning his pilot's wings before the age of 20. During his flying career, he amassed more than 6,000 hours in the Harvard Trainer, T-33 Jet, F-86 Sabre Jet, CH-135 Twin Huey helicopter, and several other military aircraft. Although young Don McNaughton only wanted to be the best possible pilot of every aircraft he flew, when he took command of the RCAF on June 12, 1985, he was only the fifth person in Canadian history to hold that position.

As he sat recently in his comfortable farmhouse with pilot's log book in hand, and reflected on his long and storied military career, Don points to the first entry dated June 5, 1952, shortly after he joined the RCAF at age 18, more than half a century ago. The last entry would come 36 years later to the day - on June 5, 1988.

Don started as a Flight Cadet at RCAF Station Centralia, which was a training base located just outside the village of Centralia, near Exeter, Ontario. It became one of the largest training bases in Canada. He soloed on July 14, 1952, in the Harvard Trainer, with about 20 hours flying time to his credit.

After becoming a pilot in 1953, he was immediately selected to instruct North American Treaty Organization (NATO) student pilots at Centralia and Central Flying School, RCAF Trenton. Trenton, with one of the largest inventories of the Harvard, had become the largest training centre of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan during the Second World War. It later became the home of No. 1 Flying Instructors' School, where potential instructors received their training and then went on to instruct other Harvard pilots.



1. Don McNaughton flying the Harvard Trainer

Until 1958, the RCAF also trained aircrew from other NATO countries under the NATO Air Training Plan. Over a period of five years instructing at No. 1 Flying Instructors' School, Don logged 2700 hours in the Harvard Trainer, and another 1200 hours in the T-33 jet, which was the first advanced trainer for the school.

It was during that period as a NATO instructor that Don recalls taking part in the Canadian International Air Show, flying from RCAF Trenton to the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto. He flew the Harvard, executing what was then called “synchronization aerobatics”, in company with another pilot who was flying a Chipmunk aircraft. The air show began in 1946 when the National Aeronautical Association of Canada attracted overflow crowds to the show at Downsview Airport. Staged annually thereafter, the air show moved to Exhibition Place in 1949, and became a regular feature of the CNE in 1956.

Near the end of the NATO pilot instruction years, Don had the opportunity to fly co-pilot in a World War II Lancaster bomber. By that time, most Lancasters had been lost or scrapped, and it is thought there are only two such aircraft still airworthy today. Many World War II Perth aviators were pilots, navigators, or gunners, on the revered Lancaster.



2. Restored Canadian Lancaster Bomber

Following the pilot instruction era, Don was posted to the F-86 Sabre Operational Training Unit for five years, from 1959 to 1963, at Air Division's #1 (F) Wing, Marville, France. He described his time with 439 Squadron as: “probably the best five years of my career”. He explained that during that era there was an aircraft complement of four wings, each wing comprised of three squadrons, with 25 aircraft in each squadron, for a total of 300 fighters. The Canadair F-86 Sabre, and later the Canadair CF-104 Starfighter, formed the backbone of RCAF support to NATO's air force in Europe during the Cold War.

Canada was said to rule the skies over Western Europe during the Cold War, often taking top honours in NATO gunnery competitions. When pressed, Don recalled a frightening moment which occurred during training: “We were doing combat exercise at 40,000 feet, and all of a sudden another aircraft was right there.” The near-collision took place in the Sabre Jet, during close combat simulated air fighting, commonly known as “dog fighting”.



3. Don McNaughton with F-86 Sabre Jet in Marville, France

In 1963, he was returned to Canada and sent to the Flying Training School at Gimli, Manitoba, where he later became Commanding Officer of the new Tutor Squadron, when that aircraft was introduced in 1965 to replace the Harvard, and he remained in command until 1966.



4. Snowbirds Tutor Jet

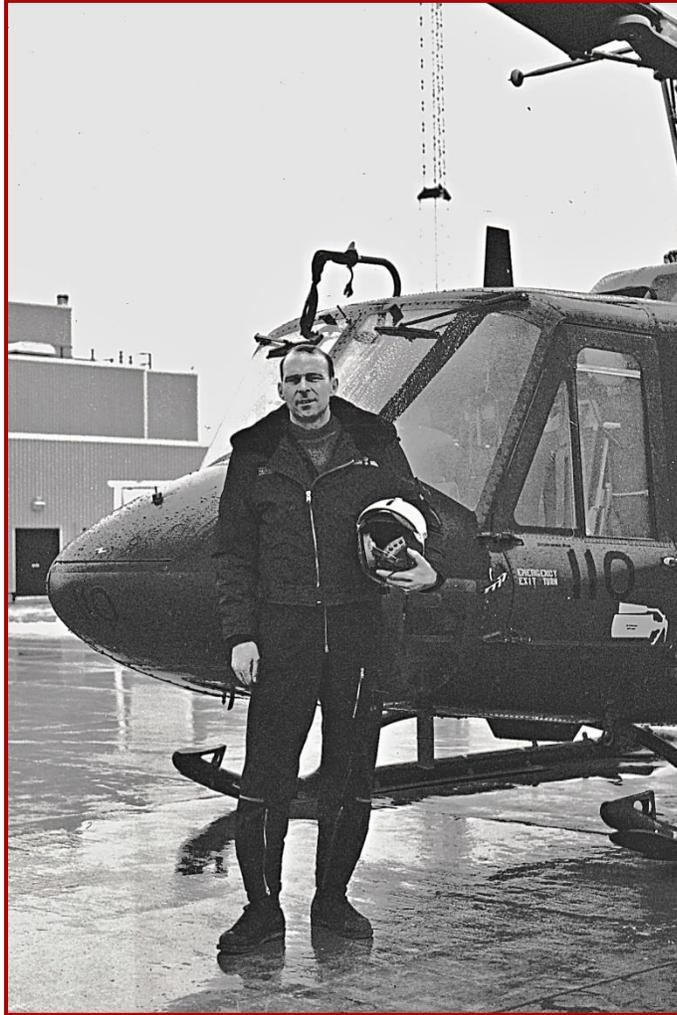
Don explained that the reliable Tutor jet has been used for more than 50 years, in part because of their popularity for training and aerobatics. He added they also have seats side-by-side, so it is easier for the instructor to see the trainee, and thus easier to take over the controls, if necessary. The Canadian Forces Snowbirds (431 Air Demonstration Squadron) use the Tutor to this day for their air shows.

In 1966, after 14 years in the cockpit “without any damage to an aircraft”, he was posted to the Canadian Army Staff College in Kingston. After graduation in 1967, he was employed at Mobile Command Headquarters, St. Hubert, Quebec for two years, and then he returned to Kingston in 1969 as a member of the Directing Staff at the Canadian Land Forces Command and Staff College for another three years.

Leadership positions in the RCAF with even more responsibility were to come, and one of Don McNaughton’s most important maxims was to always accept the assignments he was offered.

Part 2: RAF Air Warfare College to NORAD, 1972 - 1989

The story continues of the rise to the top of the Royal Canadian Air Force by Lt.-



Gen. (Ret) Donald M.

McNaughton, CMM, CD, who was born and raised in the former Drummond Township, just outside Perth.

Don McNaughton took the CH-136 Kiowa course at Canadian Forces Base (CFB) Portage la Prairie, and the CH-135 Twin Huey course at No. 403 Squadron, CFB Gagetown, in 1972, before going to the United Kingdom to attend the Royal Air Force (RAF) Air Warfare College for six months. While at the college he wrote a paper on Vertical Take Off and Landing (VTOL), and

shortly thereafter would have a chance to take the controls of the remarkable “Harrier Jump Jet”.

5. Don McNaughton with the CH-135 Twin Huey

The Harrier belongs to a family of jet fighters capable of vertical/short takeoff and landing (V/STOL) operations, originally developed by UK manufacturer Hawker Siddeley in the 1960s, and was deemed the only true success of that design, even though it was a subsonic aircraft.



6. The Harrier "Jump Jet"

Don McNaughton's chance to fly the Harrier Jet came at some point in 1973,

when he took to the skies with a UK instructor, after being given the basics in operating the difficult aircraft. Don was handed over the controls and was able to hover steadily at 200 feet, as his inborn flying skills and past helicopter experience clicked in immediately. The instructor was heard to wonder aloud how a pilot could get used to the flying complexities of the Harrier so quickly. It should be noted that the instructor must have had extreme confidence in the man with the controls, as already in that decade more than 20 UK Harriers had crashed.

Although he enjoyed his time abroad, Don was glad to be posted back to Canada in the summer of 1973, when he took command of 427 Tactical Squadron, Petawawa, during the early days of Tactical Helicopter Squadrons. Aircrew and ground crew were a mix of ex-Army, Navy and Air Force, and the aircraft complement at the time was six Huey and eight Kiowa helicopters. Don recalls that Canadians used the much more powerful Huey model with twin engines, while the envious Americans had the model with a single engine driving two rotors.

Promoted to colonel on July 1, 1974, he was then posted to Mobile Command Headquarters as deputy Chief of Staff, Operations Support. From August, 1975 to July, 1977, he was Deputy Commander of 10 Tactical Air Group at St. Hubert, Quebec. He spent six months of that tour in Egypt as Deputy Commander of the Canadian Contingent, United Nations Emergency Force Middle East.



7. Prince Charles & family at 1976 Olympics

One of Don's most vivid memories of the time was the occasion he met His Royal Highness Prince Charles. The Royal Family member visited Montreal for the Olympic Games in July, 1976, with the rest of his family to watch the Games and to cheer his sister, Princess Anne, who was a member of British equestrian team. Don recalls that Prince Charles had flown to their base at the controls of a Sea King helicopter from a Royal Navy ship. As senior airman on the base at the time, McNaughton hosted the visiting royalty in the Officer's Mess, where they enjoyed a sandwich and soft drink together.

In July, 1977 Don became the base commander of CFB Winnipeg, Manitoba. After one year at Winnipeg, he was promoted to the rank of brigadier-general and posted to National Defence Headquarters (NDHQ) in Ottawa, where he assumed the appointment of Director General, Air Doctrine and Operations, and served there until 1981 when he returned to 10 Tactical Air Group in Montreal as Commander. At that time, there were two CF-5 Squadrons, two Chinook Squadrons, plus several Tactical Helicopter Squadrons.

After one year in command, Don was promoted to major-general in July, 1982, and posted to Air Command in Winnipeg, Manitoba as Deputy Commander. He served for three years in that position before becoming the Commander of Air Command in 1985. While serving in that position, he was appointed to the Order of Military Merit in the grade of Commander (CMM) in December, 1983.

In August, 1986, Don was appointed Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD), in Colorado Springs, Colorado, the top Canadian in the NORAD command structure.



The creation of NORAD began in August, 1957, when an agreement was formed between Canada and the United States. Soviet bombers had extended their range of operations, and also the nuclear Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) weapon had become a reality, along with continued testing of atomic bombs by the Soviets. The new approach to defence for the Cold War was to be an integrated system of defensive measures, installations and systems that would provide early warning and protection to North America in case the Soviet Union attacked.

The military capabilities of the Soviet Union had remained a significant concern in the late 1980s, and 1987 turned out to be a peak year for Soviet military aircraft testing around the fringes of North America. While the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989 reduced the nuclear threat, new problems have arisen such as drug trafficking and weapons proliferation.



8. Cheyenne Mountain Complex

Based in Cheyenne Mountain, outside Colorado Springs, the NORAD facility is usually

referred to as “The Mountain” by locals and military personnel, and surveillance extends to the high Arctic, as well as to other strategic locations around the world. Both Canada and the U.S. are required to commit to any actions taken, and the RCAF and the USAF are effectively placed under a single command, which helps to coordinate any response or action taken on possible threats.

The city of Colorado Springs grew from the need of people with tuberculosis, who came seeking its dry climate and fresh mountain air. The population exploded in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, with patients coming from around the world, and many large facilities were built. “The number of Canadians working as staff at ‘The Mountain’ at the time of my posting was 104, and many stayed after retirement”, Don recalled. He also noted that: “Colorado Springs town people treated us really well.”



9. View of Pike's Peak from Colorado Springs

Don’s NORAD memories include an introduction to the earliest cellular phones. The devices at that time weighed several pounds, and he was required to have one with him at all times. “I was glad in a way when I handed over command to Bob Morton (General Robert W. Morton, CMM, CD). I just said ‘here’s the cell phone Bob’.” Ironically, Morton was a native of nearby Almonte.



BACK ROW (L TO R): LGEN A. WATT; LGEN K.R. PENNIE; LGEN D.N. KINSMAN; LGEN A.M. DEQUETTEVILLE; LGEN L.C. CAMPBELL; LGEN G.S. CLEMENTS; LGEN J.P.A. DESCHAMPS; LGEN J.S. LUCAS
 FRONT ROW (L TO R): LGEN F.R. SUTHERLAND; LGEN D.M. MCNAUGHTON; LGEN W.K. CARR; LGEN M.J. HOOD; GEN P.D. MANSON; LGEN L.A. ASHLEY; LGEN D. HUDDLESTON

Retirement came in 1989, after 38 years of service and 20 family moves. The Cold War, to which Don McNaughton had contributed so much of his heart and soul, would continue for two more years, as he settled in on a 200 acre farm with his wife Fran, not far from where he grew up.



10. Photo courtesy Kiwanis Perth

In retirement, he has been active in several volunteer activities, one his favourites being the Kiwanis ‘Terrific Kids’, which is a student-recognition program that promotes character development, self-esteem, and perseverance. He has also participated in various DND and Government studies, and was a

member of a Government Task Force on military museums. Military honours since retirement include the position of Honorary President of the RCAF Association, and the first Honorary Colonel of RCAF 427 Squadron.

In spite of the fact that it was necessary to keep the focus on his own career, Don is quick to point out that his wife was a big part of what he was able to accomplish. “Fran and I were a team,” he said, “I didn’t make it all by myself. She held up to all those 20 moves.”



11. Don and Fran in their farm home 2016

Don McNaughton has gone about his life with little fanfare, and expecting nothing in the way of recognition. He has proved the value of leading by example, and aspiring leaders of tomorrow could learn much from examining his storied career. He has “walked the walk” in the true meaning of the phrase.