

At Work and Play with the Flyboys

1952-1956

What follows is an excerpt from my memoirs covering the four years 1952-56 during which I was first introduced to the world of naval air. By this time I had graduated as a midshipman RCN from the Royal Canadian Naval College(1945-1947) and received my electrical engineering degree from UBC (1947-1950), graduating as a SLt. This was followed by a summer in the gunroom of HMCS Ontario after which I headed across the country in an old pre-war MG to undertake the Long Electrical course in Stadacona. The MG didn't make it although I did, but that is another story. During the Long "L" I was offered and accepted the opportunity to specialize as an Air Electrical officer which resulted in a posting in mid-1951 to Naval Air Station Jacksonville followed by Naval Air Technical Training Center Memphis for training with the USN. A fire at the latter establishment led to the premature termination of my training in mid-February 1952 so, having been granted a month's leave and also having acquired a large Buick Roadmaster while in Jax, I took a leisurely trip across the continent heading for home in Vancouver to await my first real job as a Lt(L).

My service with the Naval Air Branch of the RCN began in earnest in April, 1952, with my appointment to Shearwater as Air Electrical Officer of the 31st Support Air Group (31SAG) where I was responsible for the electrical and electronic maintenance of a squadron of Avenger anti-submarine aircraft and one of Sea Fury fighters. Fortunately I inherited a first rate technical staff who managed to do an excellent job in spite of me. The practical problems of ensuring that flying programs were not aborted due to equipment failure were challenge enough, but the real challenge for me was the responsibility for the management of a very diverse group of men, something in which I was a complete neophyte. In this I was entirely dependant on my experienced Chiefs and Petty Officers who were able to keep me from making a total fool of myself. In this vital period of self-development I was also fortunate to have as my Group Commander one LCdr "Pop" Fotheringham, a very experienced pilot and a fine gentleman.

On reporting in to begin work I found a very subdued group, for just three days prior to my arrival seven aircrew had been lost in a tragic mid-air collision between two of our Avenger aircraft. While such a great loss of life was never to be experienced again in the RCN's naval air arm, dealing with the tragedy of fatal accidents and the loss of good friends was a part of the job that was always difficult to accept. Regrettably it occurred all too frequently in the high-risk environment of carrier flying. But most of the time the flying out of Shearwater was more or less routine, that is it oscillated between periods of intense activity interspersed with those of intense boredom when the fog rolled in and all flying operations were cancelled, sometimes for days on end. This enabled those of us in the maintenance business to catch up on servicing and repair which kept the technicians busy for a time, but I do recall endless games of "battleships" with my colleague Don Cumming, the Group Air Engineer, if the boredom became too severe. When the maintenance backlog had been cleared up and the shops made shipshape there was nothing for it but to declare a "make-and-mend" or a sport's afternoon.

The amenities for a bachelor living on the base at Shearwater were a far cry from those I had become accustomed to with the USN. Single officers' quarters were an old wartime "H-block", known as "B" Building, in which

we each had a room containing a basic metal-framed bed, table/desk, chest of drawers, hanging cupboard, and easy chair. The communal washroom was down the hall in the cross-piece of the H. Unlike the relaxed rules in Jacksonville, female guests were strictly forbidden at any time. So what was a young man to do but smuggle them in and risk the consequences? With the help of a little bit of luck I never had to face the consequences. The officers' mess was next door in a similar "H-block" where we took our meals, which I don't recall as being particularly memorable, and where we made good use of the bar which certainly was memorable mainly for the parties and high-jinks when the weather was clagged-in and no flying in the offing. A feature of the mess was a false lattice-work ceiling which naturally lent itself to the sport of navigating across the room on the upper side of the false ceiling without falling through. On more than one occasion failure resulted in broken bones. Another favourite was a particularly rough form of rugby where the massive old leather furniture formed an imposing obstacle course. Then there was the classic sport of "Flaming A's" which I won't go into here. If this all sounds pretty childish I suppose it was, but then there was an element of eternal youth, or at least indestructibility, in most naval aircrew that led them to fly hard and play hard. Those who were married certainly had long-suffering wives waiting up for them in the "cabbage patch" as the base married quarters were known. These little war-time jerry-built houses were indistinguishable one from the other and it was not unknown for a particularly inebriated celebrant to stagger into the wrong one and climb into bed with his neighbour's wife.

Having abandoned my old MG in Wyoming on the way east and sold the Roadmaster in Seattle, I was now carless. This placed severe restrictions on my social life. Shearwater was located in the middle of nowhere in those days, about five miles up the coast from Dartmouth, N. S. which itself was across the harbour from Halifax. At that time no bridge connected them although there was a frequent passenger ferry. Since such action as there was generally took place on the Halifax side, this necessitated a very tedious bus ride into Dartmouth, the ferry across the harbour, and another bus to your destination. The real problem came with the return trip since all public transportation, including the ferry, packed up around midnight. The late reveller was left with no choice but to face a long and expensive taxi ride of some twenty miles to Dartmouth, circumnavigating the expanse of Bedford Basin, and on out to Shearwater. Not surprisingly, those in possession of a set of wheels were popular indeed. One such individual was my good friend Ted Forster, an Air Engineer, who was the proud owner of a large Packard car. It happened that, on a dark and rainy winter's evening as I was heading off to catch the bus into Dartmouth for dinner at the home of my squadron-mate Don Cumming, Ted appeared and offered me a lift. What I did not immediately appreciate was that Ted had spent the previous couple of hours celebrating TGIF at the bar. Anyway off we went at considerable speed down the wet, dark and winding road. Suddenly, out of the murk, appeared the red taillights of the Bell bus stopped in the road to take on a passenger. Without time to stop, Ted swung the wheel to go around it only to come face-to-face with a set of headlights coming the other way. What he did next I don't know for I had hit the floor. When I surfaced, we had stopped and were facing back the way we had come, we had passed the bus, and the other car had gone by apparently unscathed! Ted, in his happy state, was quite unfazed and, turning the car around, proceeded to deliver me to my dinner appointment. When my hostess greeted me at the door I was evidently white as a sheet and was offered a stiff drink to calm my shakes. In future I tried to ensure, with only limited success, that my chauffeur was sober.

That summer of 1952 I became involved in the local sailing scene and was recruited to join a group that was planning to lease an old 65-foot staysail schooner, the "Wanderer IX", and enter her in the classic Newport, R.I., to Bermuda yacht race. This adventure, and it was indeed an adventure, I described at some length in a letter to my parents immediately after its conclusion. Fifty-three years later, and some fifteen years after my mother's death, this letter was discovered in her old writing desk. It has subsequently been published in the "Argonauta", the newsletter of the Canadian Nautical Research Society, and "Salty Dips" Vol. 9 under the title "A Young Man's Introduction to Ocean

Racing” so I won’t go into it here.

My return to Halifax, “Wanderer” having won the inaugural running of the Bermuda-to-Halifax race, was just in time to begin preparations for the annual air show at the Canadian National Exhibition in which our squadron would be participating. This involved travelling to Toronto, in company with the Group Air Engineering Officer, to conduct a survey of the maintenance facilities available to us at Downsview where we would be based during the show. Then in mid-August we returned to Downsview with the maintenance team and set up shop prior to arrival of the aircraft. I have a particularly vivid recollection of the trip from Dartmouth to Downsview for I did it in the back of an Avenger flown by one of our larger pilots whose size justly earned him the nickname “Big Nick”. As luck would have it, the weather deteriorated and we were forced to land at the RCAF station at St. Hubert, Que., where we spent the night. Again as luck would have it, we found a party in full swing in the officer’s mess and Big Nick was never one to pass up a good party in spite of certain tiresome rules in respect of drinking and flying. Take-off was scheduled for dawn and when our pilot showed up he had clearly come straight from the party. It took three of us to hoist him onto the wing, get him into the cockpit and strapped in. Then we switched on the oxygen, slapped the mask over his nose, and gave him a few good whiffs until he appeared to be functioning. Needless to say, I strapped myself into the observer’s seat with extra care, said a prayer, and away we went. The rest of the flight was uneventful and we made it safely to Downsview after letting down in Gananoque to refuel. That oxygen is great stuff.

Our role at the air show was to put on a live armament demonstration on the lake in front of the grandstand. This consisted of rocket firing, albeit with dummy heads for safety’s sake, and strafing runs at a target on the water. It was a noisy show with plenty of action and always a crowd pleaser. Fortunately it all went without incident which has not always been the case in spite of the overriding emphasis on safety. It was not so safe, however, in our accommodation in a rundown old hotel on the lower end of Yonge St. which in those days was the heart of the city’s red light district. I don’t remember anyone missing the airshow but it was with some relief that we returned to Shearwater on 8 Sep., weary but with all aircraft and crews intact.

In November of that year, 1952, I finally had my first taste of the real thing when 31SAG embarked in Maggie for three weeks of carrier requalification flying for our pilots. I quickly came to appreciate the vast difference between routine flying from an airfield and the highly charged environment of the carrier. We were suddenly operating under conditions of very high risk where disaster could, and regrettably sometimes did, strike without warning. An aircraft can be a deadly weapon at the best of times but put a couple of dozen of them into the close confines of a carrier, together with their attendant highly volatile fuel and ammunition, and you have the potential for big trouble. Understandably, safety becomes an essential way of life. The greatest risk, however, could never be ameliorated and that arose from the design of the ship itself. Unlike today’s carriers, Maggie, in common with other light fleet carriers of the time, was fitted with a straight rather than an angled flight deck. The chief implication of this was that landing aircraft and parked aircraft had to share the same deck space----and you can imagine the potential for disaster that created. The solution was to park the idle aircraft at the forward end of the deck, string wires across the after end and equip the aircraft with hooks to catch those wires on landing, and erect a net or barrier to hopefully stop any aircraft that failed to catch a wire. This somewhat rube-goldberg arrangement, when coupled with the sometimes heavy roll and pitch of a small light fleet carrier, placed a huge onus on the pilot. His only assistance was provided by “bats”, an experienced carrier pilot who stood precariously on the stern of the ship and, holding a large paddle in each hand, attempted to guide the pilot to a safe landing. This primitive arrangement seems incredible when viewed in the light of today’s carriers with their angled decks and highly sophisticated landing aids. Inevitably the Maggie saw her share of aircraft missing the wires, jumping the barrier and ending in amongst the parked aircraft with disastrous results. Or coming in too low and smashing into

the round down, or aborting too late and going over the side into the sea. Watching flying operations was always a heart-stopping experience.

The most dangerous job in the carrier, apart from flying, was that of the deck crew whose place of work was on the flight deck in the midst of an inferno of roaring engines and spinning propellers. Although I only saw it happen once, and that was once too often, it was not a pretty sight when one of them made the fatal mistake of walking into a spinning prop. They faced injury or death every time there was a crash on deck for theirs was the responsibility for freeing the pilot, dealing with the resultant fire and quickly clearing the wreckage so other planes could land. They are the unsung heroes of carrier operations.

My recollections of life in Maggie are the most vivid of my naval career, perhaps because it seemed to be lived more intensely than at any other time. Everything was magnified. Take noise for instance. One lived in the midst of a continuous cacophony of sounds, from the roar of engines and the explosion of the catapult to the shouts and clatter of work in the cavernous hangar. It seemed to go on day and night----there was no respite even in my bunk for it happened to be adjacent to the lift that raised and lowered aircraft between hangar and flight deck. This was operated by means of massive chains, like hugely overgrown bicycle chains, that ran alongside the steel bulkhead of the lift-well just inches from my head on the other side. Even when the lift was not in use, the roll of the ship caused these chains to first swing away from the bulkhead and then come crashing back like the clapper in a giant bell. It sounded as though my head was inside the bell. Somehow I became accustomed to it.

Then there was the heat. Maggie predated air conditioning in ships and her flight deck acted like a heat sink that, under a tropical sun, radiated heat throughout the ship. We gobbled salt pills in order to alleviate the effects of dehydration. It was a great treat in the tropics when a large canvas pool was rigged on the quarterdeck and filled with sea water to about a three-foot depth. Although the water was warm, it was cooling just to get wet. The next best thing was a soak in the bathtub. These were no ordinary bathtubs but great four-footed monsters that must have been left over from Nelson's day. Unfortunately they could only be used when the ship was alongside in harbour and fresh water could be made. However most of the crew had no such amenities and had to put up with a great deal of discomfort.

Because so many of the aircrew were, like myself, young and single, and our quarters were far from salubrious and generally shared with a number of others, the wardroom became very much the social centre of our non-working lives. At the bar drinks were sold at duty free prices (three cents for a gin and bitters!) although the aircrew did no drinking during flying operations. We also had a number of talented (?) musicians in the wardroom, who put on some legendary jam sessions, as well as a couple of hilarious stand-up comics to keep us entertained. Obviously that was not going on all of the time. Many of us became ardent enthusiasts of bridge, acey-deucey (backgammon) or cribbage in order to while away the long evening hours at sea when bad weather grounded the aircraft. My particular favourite was bridge, which I played with a regular partner, Yves Maynard our Air Engineering Officer, taking on all-comers in the wardroom. Occasionally we were invited to have a game in the Chief Petty Officers' mess where, after a few hands, out would come the illicit bottle of over-proof "pusser's" rum. It only took a few tots before we were no match for our opponents.

This first taste of carrier operations took place in the salubrious waters around Bermuda and on its completion we anchored in the Great Sound for a little R&R. It did not take long to discover that the local hospital was largely staffed with Canadian nurses one of whom suggested we go for a spin around the island on her motorbike and handed me the keys. Looking just as though I knew what I was doing, I fired up the bike and off we went----down the wrong side of the road, it being keep-to-the-left on the island, and a brief encounter with the ditch. That was the end of my first

experience of driving a motorcycle although there were many more to come in the years ahead.

All too soon we had to leave beautiful Bermuda and it was back to the rigours of winter in Shearwater before Christmas. It was around this time that I realized that the life of a bachelor stuck out at the air station without a set of wheels was going to be very dull indeed. There was nothing for it but to buy a car and it had to be another MG. This time it was a brand new model TD, a somewhat more refined version of my old pre-war TB but still a very basic rag-top two-seater. However, with its quite inadequate canvas top and flimsy plexiglas side-curtains, it was hardly appropriate for the Nova Scotia climate and I became accustomed to clearing more snow from the inside of the car than I did from the outside. But it freed me from dependence on the infamous Bell buses and, more importantly, provided a way back to base after the Halifax-Dartmouth ferry shut down for the night. This did wonders for my social life. A big part of that social life was playing bridge. It so happened that three old naval college friends, one of whom was my bridge partner in the Maggie, were frequently away at sea leaving their bridge-playing wives back in Dartmouth without a fourth. Yours truly was duly recruited and I spent some of my happiest hours playing bridge with three of the most delightful companions a man could ask for.

The one activity that I missed more than any other while on the east coast was downhill skiing. Although there was a small hill, equipped with a rope tow, at Wentworth Valley, some 150kms inland from Halifax, I could not get very excited about it after the skiing out west. As luck would have it, through a friend of a friend I was offered the use of a cabin belonging to the Harvard Mountaineering Club and located high up Mt. Washington in New Hampshire. So in late March I took three weeks' leave, climbed aboard my new MG and headed for Pinkham Notch, NH. At that time this was not much more than a base camp at the foot of the mountain that offered limited accommodation and supplies. Although there was a cog railway and a hair-raising switchback road to the summit, they were only open in the summer months with no alternative but to climb it on foot in the winter. I loaded up with what food and beer I could carry, in addition to spare clothing, essentials and sleeping bag, and began to climb wearing ski boots and carrying my skis. Although the trail was only a couple of miles long, much of it appeared, at least in hindsight, near vertical and it soon became apparent that I was seriously overloaded and out of condition. After what seemed several hours on the rough and narrow path, I arrived pretty well exhausted at the cabin half buried in snow. It was located on the eastern side of the mountain at the base of Huntington Ravine not far from Tuckerman's Ravine and its notorious "headwall". Fortunately there were a few others also using the cabin so I was able to get advice on where to ski, and more importantly where not to ski, in this intimidating snowscape. I don't remember any tows in the area but a lot of climbing. My skiing was certainly not up to tackling the near-vertical headwall but I do remember climbing to the ice-encrusted weather station on the summit. This holds the dubious honour of recording the highest wind speed ever recorded anywhere in the world, something like 230mph. Although recorded back in 1934, I believe this record still stands.

The cabin, located at around the 3500ft level, was equipped with a good wood stove, a plentiful supply of firewood, an outside privy and not much else. Running water was provided by a nearby ice-cold mountain stream which was the main reason that I gave up shaving and started the beard that I was to wear for the next year. The real problem was supplies, both food and drink, which could only be replenished by making the descent back to Pinkham Notch and facing the climb back up. However I soon discovered that most visitors to the cabin came for only two or three days and invariably brought more food and drink than they consumed. Being loathe to carry the excess back down the mountain, they were only too pleased to leave it with me. In that way I was able to spend ten days at the cabin without once having to go for more supplies. By that time I felt, and must have smelt, like the old man of the mountain giving sage advice to the new arrivals. I had certainly covered a lot of miles on skis and left a fitter man than the one that had struggled up the mountain ten days earlier.

No sooner was I back at Shearwater than the Group suffered the grievous loss of two pilots, Bob O'Neil and Fred Rice, in a mid-air collision between a Sea Fury and an Avenger while flying at night over Halifax. I also found that plans were afoot to overhaul the Shearwater runways and at the same time construct a major new runway to handle jet traffic. With the CAG off in Maggie to attend the new queen's coronation, the SAG was to be moved lock, stock and barrel to a small wartime airfield, at that time disused, at Scoudouc, N.B., outside of Moncton, which was opened up for this purpose. The Main Party, myself included, made the move on 23 June, 1953, with aircrew and aircraft following immediately thereafter, thus leaving Shearwater pretty well empty. Our sojourn at Naval Air Facility Scoudouc was a bit like being let out of school---well out of sight and sound of the brass at Shearwater. As an independent unit we were provided with our very own Supply Officer, Ed L'Heureux, who demonstrated just how well we could be fed on the funds allowed. Ed was even smaller than I, in stature if not in girth, and we soon found that, by folding the windscreen down flat on my MG and ducking slightly, we could drive right under the swing gate at the entrance to the station. This of course infuriated the commissionaire whose duty it was to stop all traffic and check IDs. I also discovered that the MG ran very well on a mixture of regular and aviation gasoline which may not have been the best thing for the engine but certainly cost less and provided plenty of get up and go!

The nearest town, not much more than a village, was Shediac, the self-styled "lobster capital of the world". The local populace were largely Acadian and, although the younger generation were fairly bilingual, their parents generally spoke only French. Nonetheless we were made extremely welcome, given honorary membership in their men's club and generally became involved in the local social activities. One such activity was periodic lobster parties. With lobsters going for 25 cents apiece it was all too easy to eat your fill and then some. This provided a hard lesson in the consequences of mixing large quantities of lobster with equally large quantities of beer---a hangover not to be believed! It also provided the fodder for a little practical joke on our squadron CO, "Pappy" MacLeod, when I placed a bright red whole cooked lobster between the sheets of his bed. Needless to say, he was not too pleased with this bed partner when he finally turned in. I should have known better for Pappy soon got more than his own back the following night by dropping a very large, very much alive and very angry monster on my chest when I was sleeping off my hangover.

Our summer culminated at the CNE in Toronto with the SAG once again putting on a live-firing show which this time was enlivened by a shower of empty shell casings falling on a parking lot when the wind changed direction. After the CNE a flight of Sea Furies headed cross-country to visit the west coast. Sadly, their accompanying Avenger, piloted by my Naval College classmate George Noble, crashed in Kenora killing both himself and a crew member.

With winter coming on, the heating plant at Scoudouc well beyond practical repair and the work at Shearwater not yet completed, we moved to the RCAF station at Summerside, P.E.I. The island winter was a rude shock after the pleasures of an Acadian summer. I well remember the snow that swept horizontally across the airfield piling deep drifts inside tightly secured hangars and around the houses to the point where entry could be made through an upstairs window! In those days the only way off the island, other than by air, was via the ferry---and the only route to the ferry was via a dirt road where the local farmer lay in wait with his tractor ready, for a price, to pull your car out of the bottomless red gumbo. Definitely on the plus side, however, were the Malpeque oysters which could be acquired by the bushel from the local fishermen. Our preferred method of tackling them was to fill the bathtub with oysters, open a few cases of beer and commence shucking with screwdrivers. What a feast!! In fact we ate very well in the mess at Summerside. I don't know how the airforce did it on what I assume was the same basic food allowance as the navy, but Shearwater couldn't hold a candle to Summerside in the food department.

It must have been a shock to the airforce to suddenly be landed with this group of naval fliers who were a pretty

rowdy lot--- there seemed to be quite a culture gap between the two groups. However our Group Commander, Don Knox (known to all as "Knothead"), ably assisted by his charming wife Anne, succeeded in smoothing over any situation that got a little out of hand. It was Anne who came to my assistance one day when I had undertaken to check out the house on the base that my old bridge-playing friends the Maynards were coming up from Dartmouth to occupy. The house had been empty for some time and I found it thick with dead flies. Anne loaned me her vacuum cleaner and I must have sucked up a million of them before leaving the place spick and span for the Maynards and returning the vacuum to Anne. It was a couple of weeks later that Anne went into her cupboard for her vacuum cleaner and was overwhelmed by a million very lively flies. It took her a long time to clear her house of them and even longer before I was back in her good graces. For me it was a good lesson in the ability of the house fly to become dormant in cold conditions and miraculously revive when warmed up in a nice cosy vacuum cleaner.

This brief sojourn on P.E.I. provided me with another quite different but very valuable lesson. It took place late at night as I was returning to the base in my MG after an evening of partying and drinking. The road between the town of Summerside and the base was well known, including by myself, for a particularly dangerous corner where it performed a sharp S-bend, presumably to align with the county lines since there was no other obvious reason for it. Evidently I drove straight through the bend for I suddenly found myself in a wheat field, having jumped the ditch and gone through a fence. There I sat with headlights blazing and suddenly stone cold sober. As luck would have it, a party on the base had just packed up and the homeward-bound revellers came across this apparition lighting up the farmer's field. Telling me to sit tight and that they would have me out of there before the cops arrived, they gathered around, bodily lifted me and the MG and deposited us back on the road. The only damage to the car was a slight dent in a front fender where I had clipped a fence post so, with a thank you and wave to my rescuers, I headed back to base, a shaken but much wiser man. It was a lucky but lasting lesson in the potentially serious consequences of mixing drinking and driving.

By late 1954 the Fury squadrons were starting to disband with pilots going off to the States for conversion training on the Banshee jet fighter which was scheduled to replace the Furies. In November our remaining squadron of Avengers once again transferred to the Maggie for a brief period of carrier re-qualification. It was during this period that I had my first, and only, flight from the deck of a carrier---as a passenger of course. My pilot was LCdr Fred Townsend, the squadron CO, so at least I felt I was in the best possible hands. I was in the Observer's position which sits high in the Avenger and provides a good view of all that goes on. We were not the first in line to take off and had to wait our turn for the catapult so I had a front seat view of the aircraft immediately ahead. I watched it shot off from the catapult over the ships bow and immediately drop out of sight. In a moment it reappeared making a slow turn back down the ship's side, only a few feet above the water, and promptly fell into the sea! The crew clambered out and, before the Avenger had time to sink, the rescue helicopter had plucked them from the sea and deposited them back on the flight deck, wet but unharmed. I found all of this disconcerting, to say the least. While I was still hoping that our flight might now be called off, there was a mighty kick in the pants from the catapult and we were safely airborne. Landing back on the carrier turned out to be a much more heart-stopping affair. I could not believe how small that flight deck looked from the air. As we approached on the final run-in I envisioned smashing into the round-down or clearing the barrier and coming down amongst the deck park. But I need not have doubted the skill of both the pilot and the batsman for we dropped onto the deck, caught a wire and, with a gut wrenching jerk, were abruptly pulled up well short of the barrier. It was an experience I would not have missed but I was not tempted to put in for pilot training, leaving that to my son many years later.

In December it was back to Summerside to face the island winter. Flying conditions were always questionable

as the snow storms swept in across the gulf of St. Lawrence causing frequent white-outs at the exposed airfield. However, non-flying days were party days and there was no shortage of those. By the middle of February I had had enough of all that snow without a hill to ski on and this time headed for the Laurentians, having heard so much about Mt. Tremblant from my eastern friends. Since the weather was hardly conducive to driving my naturally air-conditioned MG all that way, I cadged a ride on a cross-country training flight to Montreal. There I dropped in for a short overnight visit with my sister who was now living and working in that city. The following morning I boarded the train north to the Laurentian Mountains. While I was still waiting for the mountains to appear, the train pulled into a station marked "Mt. Tremblant" and I hastily disembarked. My western perception of what constituted a mountain was clearly not applicable here. I soon found out that neither the snow nor the ski runs bore much resemblance to what I had grown up with. To begin with, the snow was measured in inches rather than feet and the runs took the form of trails cut through the forest instead of wide-open slopes. As I stood on the summit reading the signs pointing towards various runs, I saw one that said "Taschereau Trail". That sounded familiar so off I went. What a mistake! It turned out to be a narrow, twisty, steep and icy trail that I managed to stay on through three corners before departing it to come to an undignified, but fortunately unhurt, rest amongst the trees. After a few days of this I was ready for a change of venue and moved down the road to St. Sauveur, home of the famous "Red Birds" ski club of McGill.

It came to pass that I was sitting quietly enjoying a nightcap one evening in a St. Sauveur bar when the telephone behind the bar rang and was answered by the barmaid. She looked around the place then came over to me and asked if my name was Hutcheson. I just about fell off the stool----no one even new I was in St. Sauveur let alone having a drink at that particular bar. It turned out to be my sister in Montreal who informed me that she had received a call from the RCMP to tell me that I was recalled off leave. They had contacted her because I had left her address as my leave destination. I had discussed with her the various ski areas in the Laurentians so, ever resourceful, she began to systematically contact the local telephone operators and call all the bars asking after a man with a red beard! Since beards were not as common then as they eventually became in the "hippy" period, she did not get too many false responses. It turned out that my squadron was going to Bermuda to find some decent flying weather and I was being sent down as an advance party of one to get things organized for a month's stay.

I flew to Bermuda via New York and during the stopover there decided to get rid of my beard before hitting the warm weather. Rather than tackle the job myself, I went to a barbershop for the full treatment----straight razor, hot towels and all. The barber seemed to have a thing about beards because he tried to convince me to keep it, but I persisted and I was glad that I had when, after my return, I was told that I looked ten years younger without it. After all I was 26 years old by this time and could do without an extra 10. Bermuda was a real treat after a winter in Summerside. The squadron was to be based at USAF Station Kindley Field which was at the far north-eastern end of the island adjacent to the town of St. George's and shared with the commercial airfield. That put us a long way from the main centre of Hamilton and the south shore beaches, so the first thing I needed was transport. I promptly acquired an ancient single-speed James motorbike from a departing US airman. It was not very powerful but it was ideal for the twisty narrow roads of the island. Unlike today, in those post-war years there were still few cars in Bermuda and the roads were quiet other than in the immediate vicinity of Hamilton. Returning to base late at night I seldom saw another vehicle and could fully enjoy the pleasure of tearing along deserted roads under a bright moon and a balmy star-filled sky. What with making all the arrangements for a month's stay, I got to know some of the key people on the island including the Goslings (liquor) and the Butterfields (banking). The latter were particularly hospitable and I had my first taste of water skiing with their son Chet who must have been about my own age.

The flying program was intensive, in order to take full advantage of the beautiful spring weather, and was

focussed on ASW (anti-submarine warfare) exercises. While I did not get airborne again in an Avenger I did get to know a pilot with the USAF "hurricane chasers" and was invited along on a training flight. The aircraft was an old Boeing B-29 Superfortress in which I was given what must have originally been the bomb-aimers seat in the nose of the plane with a view as good as that in any IMAX theatre. It transpired that the purpose of the flight was to check out another pilot in landing the Superfort. This involved a series of "circuits and bumps" in which we would touch down on the runway then immediately apply power, take off and go around and do it again. It soon became evident that the pilot being examined was having some difficulty mastering this procedure. With my seat in the "eyes of the ship", my heart was in my mouth on every approach. One of the features of the airfield was a prominent hill off the end of the main runway and on the top of that hill sat a large house belonging to the Astors. Every time we staggered off the runway I was sure that we were going straight through the big picture window for a visit with Lady Astor. Evidently she was not often in residence for which I could hardly blame her. The afternoon passed with the aircraft still in one piece but I don't believe that the pilot got his ticket on the B-29, at least not that day.

All good things must come to an end and in early May we returned to Summerside. While the Avengers were en route home over the North Atlantic one of them mysteriously disappeared from its formation, unseen and without any radio contact. A search found only an immersion suit and a wheel from the Avenger but the pilot, Jim Holden, and the crew of three were never seen again. My own return was via commercial airline.

On my first visit to the bar after getting back to Summerside I found that I was a complete stranger to all of my airforce friends. I had forgotten that I had arrived amongst them six months previously with a beard and that they had never known me clean shaven. So a beard really does change one's appearance. I was not to be among them much longer for a posting to the Carrier Air Group had come through effective in early September, prior to which I took a month's leave and hitched a ride with the RCAF to Vancouver. Soon after returning, this time to Shearwater once again, the CAG moved on board Maggie and I was to get a lengthy period of seetime at last.

After intensive work-ups in the North Atlantic, Maggie set out for the west coast, via the Panama Canal, in early October, 1954. We were soon in tropical waters, a novelty for many of us although suffering from the heat in a ship that was never designed for it. The transit of the canal turned out to be far from straightforward. The design of an aircraft carrier is such that a relatively normal hull is surmounted by a very wide flight deck which in turn is topped with a narrow superstructure. In large carriers, such as those in the USN, the flight deck is sufficiently high above the waterline that, while the hull will fit in the canal locks, the flight deck will overhang the sides of the lock by a considerable span. As a small light fleet carrier, the Maggie's flight deck was actually below the top of the lock walls and she would not fit. The problem was resolved by actually cutting off a couple of the sponsons that extended out from the edge of the flight deck so that we could squeeze into the locks. Other than that little modification, the passage through the canal was uneventful. My main recollection was the heat since the ship was not moving a large part of the time and the fans just blew around very hot air. At the western end of the canal we paid a visit to Panama City which was my first exposure to what can only be described as the bottom rung of the "sin cities" of the world. In stark contrast to the official cocktail parties, a few of us visited one of the so-called nightclubs in which the girls performed acts that, even in this liberated age, I would not wish to describe on paper. The prostitutes mingled freely with the patrons, parking themselves on your lap and doing their best to persuade you to complete the activity in a back room. All I could think of was the diseases I might be picking up with even this minimal contact! I suppose today in our liberated society that would be called "lap dancing".

It was a relief to leave Panama behind us and head north where our first port of call was San Francisco. Although our stay was brief, I did manage to get ashore where, by pure chance, I walked into a smoky little nightclub

and discovered the incomparable Ella Fitzgerald on stage. This was the young Ella at her very best---a truly unforgettable experience. As usual, reality soon intervened and it was back out to sea once again. The passage up the west coast was a period of intense flying as we took every advantage of the fine weather. Then it was in to Esquimalt followed by a short passage over to Vancouver. This was a particular treat for me as it gave me the chance to show off "my" ship to family and friends. We also took members of the Vancouver Board of Trade out for the day to observe flying operations. This did not go quite as expected since there was not a breath of wind and the carrier had to steam flat out to create sufficient wind over the deck for take-off and landing. Tearing around amongst the Gulf Islands at full speed, with the aircraft attempting to land while the ship was trying to avoid going aground, was not your standard procedure. I don't think that our guests had any idea what a dicey operation this was. We also had a distinguished visitor in the person of the Hon. R.O. Campney, Minister of National Defence, who had been my next-door neighbour in Vancouver and whose son had been my best friend while I was growing up. He had also recently paid us a visit in Summerside. On this occasion in Vancouver he was delivered to Maggie in a helicopter and evidently had run into some difficulty getting into the chopper for the seat of his trousers had been torn open. He took this in stride and a hasty repair job was performed while he was on the ship.

All too soon it was time to leave Vancouver and begin the long journey around the continent and back to Halifax. Once again on the way down the west coast we conducted ASW exercises with other RCN ships and USN submarines until our arrival in San Diego and the huge naval air station at Coronado. As we came alongside I received quite a surprise on finding, waving from the jetty, the girl that I had just seen in Vancouver. Evidently I had mentioned our next port of call. At least I was single and unattached but I learned a valuable lesson for the future. This was a landmark visit for a Canadian carrier and the hospitality was generous. The only problem with these social events was the outfit one had to wear. The officer's tropical white uniform (no.10s), which must have been a carryover from the Royal Navy of a hundred years ago, was starched so stiffly that you could pass out and not fall over. It was designed neither for comfort nor for ease of keeping clean and was particularly vulnerable to perspiration and lipstick, both natural hazards of dancing. Its only saving grace was that, due to its high neck and full-button front, it did not require a shirt, or for that matter anything else, to be worn beneath it.

In between the prescribed social obligations I did manage to get ashore and visit the world-renowned San Diego Zoo where the animals were free to roam in more-or-less natural surroundings separated from the public only by a moat and minimal fencing. It certainly put to shame the only other zoo I had ever seen, that in Vancouver's Stanley Park where the poor ragged creatures paced endlessly in their concrete cages. We were also offered the opportunity to go deep-sea fishing when two fully equipped boats were placed at our disposal. The five of us in one boat managed to hook and land, after a long and strenuous fight, a magnificent sailfish that measured about eight feet in length. The other boat had even better luck, returning with a large blue marlin that provided marlin steaks for the entire wardroom. Then it was back through the Panama Canal and up the east coast, reaching Halifax in early December. There the aircraft flew ashore to Shearwater and Maggie went into annual refit.

Now that I was back in Halifax, once again I became involved in ocean yacht racing. The story really began in pre-war Germany when, in 1937/38, the yawl "Helgoland", designed by Henry Gruber, was built in Bremen for the German Kriegsmarine. With a length of 59.4ft, beam of 13.5ft and draught of 8ft 6in, she displaced 26.5 tons and, after commissioning in 1938, she was raced extensively until war broke out, winning a number of major events. The story goes that she was once used by Adolph Hitler and other high-ranking Nazis for Baltic cruises but that may be more fiction than fact. What is known is that, at the end of hostilities, she was taken as a prize of war by the Royal Navy and, as "HM Yacht Helgoland", was attached to HMS Ganges, the shore training establishment for boy entrants into the RN.

By 1952 she seemed to have outlived her usefulness and was offered to the RCN as a free gift. Welded to the flight deck of Maggie which was returning from the UK with a load of new Sea Furies, the Helgoland, now renamed "Pickle", finally arrived in Halifax in November, 1953, to begin a new life.

It soon became evident why the Admiralty was giving the Pickle away. A comprehensive survey disclosed that an extensive refit was required to make her seaworthy. Since no funding was forthcoming for such a job, she was parked in a maintenance hangar at Shearwater where a number of volunteers worked on her through the winter and spring. Besides a new suit of sails and a new auxiliary motor, she needed many repairs to her hull and interior fittings but by June, 1955, we had her looking like a new yacht and ready for sea. In anticipation we had entered her in the biennial Marblehead, Mass., to Halifax yacht race to take place in July which left us little time to get race-ready. Our skipper was Commander "Trigger" Wadds, a gunnery officer of some notoriety in naval circles. Typical of his capers was the provision of duty-free liquor for the boat, to which we were entitled when out of Canadian waters. He had ordered that a supply be brought to the Pickle from the Maggie's stores before we sailed and I was instructed to be at the boat to receive the precious cargo. As the truck load of liquor arrived so did Trigger and I was summarily dismissed. I estimate that not more than ten percent of it was stowed in the Pickle and only Trigger knew what happened to the rest.

Our run down the east coast to Marblehead was done in typical summer weather for that area---cold and foggy, but at least it was not as stormy as my previous voyage in the Wanderer IX. Little did I know that I was to see a good deal of Marblehead in the near future. I remember little of the race back to Halifax other than losing a mainstay during a squall. A boatswain's chair was rigged on the main halyard and, as the lightest member of the crew, I was hoisted to the masthead to make repairs. This put me about sixty-five feet above the deck and describing a wide arc out over the water each time the boat rolled. I must have spent 90% of the time hanging on for dear life and 10% on the repairs. I do not recall how we placed in the race but I don't think we did too badly for an inexperienced crew in a boat that we had never raced. The Pickle went on to provide seamanship training and to race until she was finally sold in 1979 to a private owner who planned to restore her to her original opulence. However, in 1984 she still lay abandoned in Halifax's Northwest Arm, rotting and vandalized----a sorry end for the one-time pride of the Baltic.

While on the subject of sailing, I am reminded of an incident that must have occurred around this time and involved three naval colleagues. At that time it was fairly common practise to occasionally fly one of the squadron aircraft to the French islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon, off the south coast of Newfoundland, returning with a load of duty free liquor. Since at that time Shearwater shared the airfield with the Halifax Airport, the Avenger would be stopped at the end of the runway with the engine idling and the illicit cargo off-loaded out of sight of the customs officials. These three decided to go one better by sailing to the islands in a boat belonging to one of them and bringing back a proper load. On the return trip they put into a cove a little way up the coast from Halifax where they off-loaded the booze into a car and proceeded to drive into town. They had not gone far when they came upon an accident on the highway with police present. Not wishing to stop and risk their illicit load being discovered, they turned around, backtracked a safe distance, stashed the liquor in the bush for later retrieval and carried on home. A couple of days later they returned to the site but, search as they would, they could not find the stuff and had to leave empty handed. It was a few days later that the RCMP came knocking at their respective doors. Evidently they had unknowingly hidden the liquor on land that was an indian reservation where it had been discovered by the natives. They must have had a sufficiently wild party that the Mounties were called in. In those days providing alcohol to the indians was a serious offence and it did not take long to find the boat and trace it to the owner. The three of them were heavily fined and the boat confiscated----a steep price to pay when they didn't get a drop to drink themselves!

I had now once again been appointed to Maggie, this time as Electrical Officer for the Avenger squadron, VS880, and early in August we sailed for New York accompanied by the cruiser Quebec and four destroyers. There we joined thirty-five USN ships to celebrate a combined United States and Canada week. New York was still a relatively safe city to walk around in. I did, however, feel a little naïve when, on wandering into a bar in Greenwich Village and ordering a drink, I sensed the atmosphere becoming a little strained. It soon became apparent that I had entered a gay establishment and was not particularly welcome. After beating an undignified retreat, I had at least learned a valuable lesson to be a little more cautious about where I did my drinking. In a more cultural vein, I managed to get a ticket to Tennessee Williams' play "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof", starring Barbara Bel Geddes, Ben Gazzara and Burl Ives, which was just beginning its long Broadway run to great critical acclaim. It was the most memorable stage play that I have ever had the good fortune to see.

A week after returning to Halifax we sailed, in company with four destroyers and three frigates, on what was to be my first crossing of the Atlantic. Severe weather made for difficult flying conditions and hampered our tactical exercises with other NATO ships and it was a relief to finally put into Trondheim in northern Norway. At the head of a long and magnificent fiord, Trondheim was well known to all of us as the first Norwegian town to be taken by the Germans in their invasion of that country early in WWII. They turned it into a heavily fortified submarine base that was the target of many, always hazardous and frequently fruitless, raids by the RAF and RN. It was also used as a relatively secure hideaway by the German battleship Tirpitz. When we got there, ten years after the war's end, it showed few signs of those dark days and the populace was very welcoming to Canadians.

I and a fellow Electrical Officer by the name of Jim Bird decided that we should be making an effort to sample the local cuisine rather than just the bars in our various ports of call. Accordingly we headed ashore in Trondheim in search, first of all, for appropriate female companionship to share in this gustatory experience. This we soon found in the shape of two gorgeous Nordic blondes who were delighted to dine with us although the language did present some communication difficulties. On their recommendation we chose the best restaurant in town and did indeed enjoy a memorable meal. Although I cannot recall the food, I clearly remember the arrival of a most extraordinary gentleman who was greeted with much bowing and scraping by the maitre'd and escorted to what was evidently his accustomed table. He must have stood not more than five feet tall and was about the same dimension in width. The entire staff stood attentively around his table, bringing him course after course each of which he would sample before waving it away with an imperial hand. It was an incredible sideshow to our dinner and I often wonder who he was----perhaps a very influential restaurant critic or a Norwegian gourmand of note.

From Trondheim we proceeded south to the U.K. and the naval harbour of Portsmouth for a short maintenance period after the punishment of the rough ocean crossing. Since there was no flying going on I was able to wangle a few days of leave and headed straight for London. This was my first visit to the "Big Smoke" and it was love at first sight. To this day it remains my favourite city although its ambience has changed dramatically over the intervening fifty years with the huge growth in the immigrant population. At that time, 1955, it was really still recovering from the war and its aftermath of shortages and devastation, but the theatres and pubs were in full swing and such well-known restaurants as Scott's, Bentley's and Wheeler's were serving superb food at what were, to a Canadian, ridiculously low prices. I found a bed at the Pathfinder's Club that had been established, as its name implies, by those RAF squadrons who led the bombers to their targets. Its purpose was to provide affordable lodging to RAF aircrew on leave in London but Canadian fleet air arm officers were made very welcome. At that time the rate for a night, breakfast included, was 10s or about \$2.50. The place was run by a delightful lady of uncertain age who cooked your breakfast in a tiny kitchen and delivered it to your room with your wake-up call. It became my residence of choice whenever duty or pleasure took me

to London. On that first occasion I spent my few days of leave taking in the sights, exploring the pubs and the Soho clubs, checking out the girls at the Windmill, dining in first-class restaurants and even finding time to visit the National Gallery and the Tate.

From Portsmouth we crossed the English Channel to the Dutch port of Rotterdam which still showed signs of the destruction wrought during the war although, judging by the large number of operational cranes, the business of the port seemed to have returned to normal. A few of us took a side trip to Eindhoven to visit quite a different business at the Philips factory which was beginning its huge post-war growth. They had just recently begun to market their unique design of electric shaver and we each left with a free sample of the original model. Mine lasted me for many years, was much travelled and eventually replaced, now at my expense, with ever more modern versions. With the basic design unchanged in more than fifty years, it surely must be right up there with the world's greatest commercial success stories.

Then it was south down the English Channel, across the Bay of Biscay and into the Mediterranean where we made a brief call at Gibraltar. The "Rock" looked just as impressive in actuality as it does in its pictures and it was easy to see why it was such a formidable guardian of the entrance to the Med during the war. I did manage to get ashore and, while strolling around the town, picked up a Harris tweed jacket for all of \$25. It turned out to be quite literally the buy of a lifetime for as I write this, over half a century later, it is still in regular use. From Gib we steamed east along the south coast of Spain, then up the east coast to Valencia. It was not a memorable visit since I have no recollection of it other than a drive into the hot, dry countryside in one of the ship's vehicles. We then continued east to Genoa on the northwest Italian coast where we anchored outside the harbour itself and ran regular "liberty boats" for those going ashore.

It just happened that my sister was working in Rome at the time. She had originally come to the north of Italy where she worked for Alcan and became fluent in Italian, only to discover that she then spoke a dialect peculiar to the north. So she went to Rome to learn "proper" roman Italian and was presently working for the local radio station where she translated the news and gave English broadcasts. This seemed a good excuse to visit Rome so I applied for a few days' leave while we were in Genoa. This meant going before Maggie's captain, Tony Storrs, as a "requestman". When I told him that the reason I wanted leave was to visit my sister in Rome his eyebrows went up, he gave me a long sceptical stare but granted my request with a dire warning to be back before the ship sailed. So I took the liberty boat ashore and caught the first train to Rome. In addition to the usual sightseeing I really did look up my sister who turned out to have become more Italian than the Italians. She evidently had not only a natural flair for languages but also the innate ability of a chameleon to blend in completely with the native habitat. This also extended to having a handsome Italian boyfriend. They lived well out of the city centre and one evening took me to dine at their favourite local restaurant, a small unpretentious place owned and operated by an Italian family. At the appointed hour we arrived to find the whole family, father, mother and children, lined up to welcome the guest from Canada. Once seated, and with my sister doing the interpreting, we were treated to a wonderful meal the highlight of which was the wine or rather the ceremony that went with it. As we began dinner the owner/maitre'd appeared at the table gingerly holding for my inspection an encrusted, cobweb-covered and clearly very precious bottle of wine. He carefully uncorked it, poured a small amount in a glass and offered it for my tasting. A hush fell over the restaurant as I inspected the glass and took a sip. I have no recollection of what it tasted like but I nodded my approval and he was obviously delighted. Although we asked them to join us in a glass, the family refused to share in this obviously very special bottle that had been put aside for goodness knows how many years for just such a special occasion. As we left after dinner the family lined up once again with each one in turn shaking my hand and thanking me for visiting their modest establishment. The thanks were

entirely mine.

Fortunately the Italian trains kept to their schedule and got me back to the ship just before she sailed. We turned back west and, taking a shortcut between Corsica and Sardinia, headed for Marseille on the south coast of France, our only stop on the way home. It turned out to be a memorable one. The historic heart of the city, the Vieux Port, was at that time much as it must have been for a few hundred years, having escaped the ravages of WWII when France surrendered to the Germans and Marseille remained untouched in the unoccupied Vichy sector. As soon as the gangway was open, my colleague Jim Bird and I headed ashore in search of a little local colour. We found it when we wandered into a small bistro located in an ancient underground wine cellar at the bottom of a steep stone stairway. The place was jammed and jumping but the only others there from the ship were three or four Chiefs and POs. In the course of the evening a very attractive and petite chanteuse appeared, complete with parasol, and entertained us with a few songs. She then spotted the boys in naval uniform, headed for their table and took the hand of the largest amongst them, who happened to be the Maggie's Master-at-Arms otherwise known as the 'jaunty', and led him out to the centre of the small stage. There she removed her bolero jacket and then removed his uniform jacket. This little game of tit-for-tat went on for a bit with the 'jaunty' looking more and more worried as things proceeded towards their inevitable conclusion. Finally, with speed and dexterity born of much practice, she unzipped him and had his trousers off in a trice. There she stood in her G-string, holding his arm high, and he in his boxer shorts emblazoned, would you believe, with "Toujour L'Amour"! The crowd went wild. It is just as well that not more of the ship's hands were present to witness their chief disciplinarian in such a state. Needless to say, the word got around and the following night the place was packed with Maggie's officers and men alike. This time the little mademoiselle picked one of our squadron's pilots, by the name of Rod Bays, as her striptease partner. Although I was not present for this performance, I understand that it was good enough to earn him the nickname of Fifi la Bays.

The following day several of us, under the leadership of then Commander Fred Frewer, the ship's Executive Officer, took the ship's station wagon on a "goodwill" tour into the French countryside. As we wound our way north towards Avignon, we naturally had to sample the local wine along the way. By the time we reached our destination Fred decided that he needed a little exercise to offset the effects of all that wine. So off he went, in full uniform and coat tails flapping, on a jog around the main square. It happened to be mid-day on the Sabbath, just after church was out, and all the good burghers of Avignon, together with their families, were strolling about in their Sunday best. The sight of a Canadian naval officer running around their otherwise sedate central square stopped them in their tracks. They soon began to cheer him on, cheers graciously acknowledged by Fred. After a few laps he felt ready to move on and we left the citizens of Avignon to puzzle over the strange apparition that appeared in their midst one day in 1955. Our route back to Marseille took us through Aix-en-Provence where, it now being the dinner hour, we sought out a good restaurant. There we were seated at a large semi-circular booth surrounded by families out for their Sunday dinner. Fred soon discovered that the rear of the booth was high enough that if he put his naval cap on backwards, that is with the peak to the rear, by pressing the peak against the booth he could make the front mysteriously rise from his head much to the amusement of all the children sitting around us. Our first problem was ordering dinner since none of us had much French and the waiter even less English. Fred was the last to make up his mind, finally settling for what the waiter translated as "hash". In due course we were all served, all except Fred. While we were all enjoying our dinner he became more and more frustrated. Finally, when the rest of us had about finished, the waiter appeared bearing a large platter covered with a big silver dome. By now we had the fascinated attention of the entire restaurant. With a flourish he uncovered the platter to reveal two incredibly tiny roasted birds. The astonished look on Fred's face broke up the whole place. We finally figured out that the waiter, rather than saying "hash", had been trying to say "thrush". To the

continued amusement of the other diners, Fred tried to figure out how best to tackle his meal but I don't think his heart was in it.

From Marseille we steamed out through the Straits of Gibraltar into gale force winds that once again severely restricted flying and made for an uncomfortable passage across the Atlantic, arriving back in Halifax in early December. There I found a message waiting for me from Naval Headquarters asking if I was interested in taking post-graduate studies in electrical engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston. In support of the current policy of designing and building our own warships in Canada, it had recently become the practise to send a few engineers each year on PG training in their specialist fields. Accepting this offer would mean giving up any future in the naval air branch since my subsequent employment would necessarily be involved with new ship design. It also meant facing two years of the self-discipline of academic life after a six year absence. On the other hand it also meant the opportunity to attend what was arguably the world's very best engineering school.

While I awaited acceptance of my academic credentials by MIT, I was temporarily appointed to VX10, our experimental squadron based at Shearwater. This only lasted a brief four months until I took a month's leave which I spent at home in Vancouver before leaving for Boston and what turned out to be the most difficult and challenging two years that I had yet faced.

Postscript

I returned from Boston in 1958 with an appointment as Electrical Officer of HMCS Terra Nova which was nearing completion at VMD in Victoria. That was to be my last sea-going job. It was also the period in which my carefree bachelor days came to an end. After a series of appointments in NDHQ, London and Esquimalt, for a total of thirty-three years in uniform, I traded the latter for a civvy suit in 1978 and spent a further ten years serving DND in Ottawa. Now, almost 60 years on from the end of my all-to-brief tour with the Naval Air Branch, the faces and names of that unique band of brothers still remain fresh in my mind's eye. It can truly be said that "there's no life like it".

J.G.R.(Rod) Hutcheson

Chelsea, Quebec

June, 2015



HMCS Magnificent passing under the Halifax-Dartmouth bridge----



----and as seen by a pilot on final approach. Note the "batsman" on the after port sponson.



The Sea Fury, last of the propeller-driven carrier-borne fighters----



----and with wings folded as they would be when parked on deck.



The Fury that didn't make it. Note the crumpled oleo and the broken wire barrier. With luck it will end up in the sponson rather than the water.



The Grumman Avenger, fondly referred to as the "Turkey", in its ASW configuration after conversion from its wartime TBM role.



Relaxing on deck during transit of the Panama Canal.



Looking aft down the Panama Canal. The flag staff marks the end of the flightdeck (the "round down").



The seawater "pool" rigged on the quarterdeck. It provided brief respite from the tropical heat.



Me (second from left) and fellow fishermen posing with our trophy sailfish.

