

THE LAST PUNCH

F2H3 126334

THE TEST FLIGHT

A tribute to Banshee maintainers

“The adventure started sometime in early 1962. A couple of Banshee pilots were conversing with Dave Bennett, the VF 870 Squadron Air Engineering Officer. We were wondering what a lightly loaded, cleaned up Banshee would be like to fly. Dave took the thought away and discussed it with his senior maintenance personnel. Shortly thereafter, he returned with a proposal which quickly met with the approval of the squadron CO.

The project was divided into four phases: planning, technical work, cosmetic work, then a test flight. The planning, including what could be removed, weight and balance considerations and how the cosmetic activity would be conducted, went ahead and, after careful consideration of the condition of these venerable machines, aircraft no. 334 was selected. The project, named “The Last Punch” was launched.

The technical phase involved the removal of everything possible including radar, guns, bomb/rocket racks, tip tanks, and everything else that was not required for safety of flight reasons. The list was extensive. The resulting weight and balance calculations showed that so much had been removed that a few pieces of railroad track had to be welded into the nose compartment to get things right.

Then the cosmetic phase got under way with a complete cleaning, dent and scratch filling, and finding and fixing any and all protrubances which could slow the airplane down. Finally, several coats of wax were generously applied and the entire airframe polished to ensure that the surface was as smooth as silk. All hands, including several pilots, were included in this phase.

Finally, the last step, the test flight, was scheduled. For reasons that have completely escaped my memory in the mist of time, I was detailed off to do the test flight. The airplane was fueled to about half its internal capacity – about one hour of flight time, the paperwork was sorted out, and off we went to proverbially kick the tires, light the fires and launch.

The plan was to do a fairly normal take-off, conduct a proper test flight, then leave a bit of time to see just what the “streamlined” Banshee would do. Start-up, the usual checks and taxi were normal. Everything seemed fine.

Then the fun began! Full power, check the brakes, and away we went. The plane literally leaped down the runway like a startled beast of the jungle. What a difference compared to the normal heavily loaded, fully equipped Banshee. We were airborne in about half the normal distance and gaining speed fast. After pulling up the wheels and flaps, the acceleration was terrific. Departing from the normal test flight procedure just a bit, the nose was raised into a vertical climb just past the end of the runway and 10,000 feet was passed in no time at all.

Then common sense prevailed. I levelled off and did the usual test flight stuff which took about 20 minutes – faster than normal, but everything was working absolutely perfectly. I then decided to put the nimble machine through its paces.

We went into a climb which was nearly out of this world. The plane cruised upwards to over 50,000 feet in record time (usually, it was tough to get much over 40,000). Now was the opportunity to check out terminal velocity and handling at that speed. I rolled over, put the nose straight down, and firewalled the throttles. The Banshee rapidly accelerated to Mach .96 (the design terminal velocity – the best one can get out of a straight wing aircraft). It flew straight down to about 20,000 feet with nary a shudder and the controls were as smooth as could be.

Then it was time to check out maximum manoeuvring capabilities. A number of high speed and high G rolls and various other “dog fighting” manoeuvres were executed. Handling was perfect. The thought crossed my mind that it would be great to find a Saber wandering by so as to see how a real dogfight would work out – I sure was confident of this Banshee’s abilities. Next a series of loops, rolls and other manoeuvres were conducted to complete the spectrum of flight capabilities. All was marvelous.

Time (and fuel) was running out. It was time to return to Shearwater and report on how the test flight went. A couple of obligatory high speed/low altitude passes revealed that the entire squadron had turned out to watch their “baby” return – in one piece. It was a proud moment, for me and for them, when we taxied in and shut down. And there was not a single discrepancy to report on 334’s performance.

The squadron technicians had indeed outdone themselves. Their work was flawless, and their enthusiasm was heart rendering. Their dedication and the superb result were considered a fitting tribute for the end of the Banshee era, and for the end of fighters in the RCN.

A number of other pilots went on to fly “The Last Punch” and all were amazed. Sadly, the Banshee was being retired, but 334 found a wonderful home when Bob (Fergie) Ferguson, the last person to fly it, delivered it to Calgary in January 1963.”

Frank Willis, November 25, 2012



Lt (P) Frank Willis RCN prior to a flight at Key West FL in 1958

THE LAST FLIGHT

Pre-Flight Preparations

“When Lt. Ferguson was assigned the ferry flight of Banshee 126334, “The Last Punch” to Calgary, he asked that the aircraft be prepared for a test flight first. I told him that the stick grip had been stolen and that we would have to find another. After some searching, I found three Banshees in storage behind the NAMS building. Two grips were gone but the one remaining was good. I removed it quickly and got it plugged in and tested it on 334.” - Lee Trick, Banshees in the Royal Canadian Navy, by Carl Mills, p. 271

Check and Ferry Flight

“On the January 8, 1963 I took 334 up for a check/familiarization flight and found all satisfactory. I departed for Calgary on January 10 for the one day trip via North Bay and Winnipeg for fuel stops.

The flight planned altitude on the HMCS Shearwater NS to North Bay ON was flight level (FL) 310 (31,000 feet) for a time of 2.6 hours at mach 0.8, which was the cruising speed for all legs of the transit. North Bay ON to Winnipeg MB the initial flight planned altitude was FL350 for a time of 2.6 hours. Approaching Thunder Bay ON I asked for FL430. The Air Traffic Controller queried the request and when I confirmed FL430, clearance was given “Climb to and maintain FL430”. I was pleased with the time taken to climb to FL430—in the standard version F2H3 it had become somewhat of an effort to climb that high. While cruising at FL430, a fine oily mist formed on the inside forward section of the canopy. This was a known problem caused by a leaky seal in one of the engines starter motor. The Winnipeg MB to Calgary AB leg was flown at FL350 for an elapsed time of 2.0 hours and a total flight time of 7.2 hours.

I parked the machine in front of a civilian hangar where it was to be stored until the disabling crew arrived by a CS2F Tracker aircraft. The welcoming committee from The Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, the new custodians of Banshee 126334, met me and we talked about the flight. The bitter cold kept the discussion short because we were outside looking at the Banshee.

Transportation was kindly provided to the CP Palliser Hotel where I checked in, showered, changed into civilian dress and had something to eat. A look around the city centre and fresh air was the next order of the day - that was until I ventured out into the cold, windy street. About 20 minutes was long enough, so back to the hotel bar for a scotch or two.

The disabling crew arrived in Calgary the next day, January 11, and proceeded to remove various components to ensure the Banshee remained on the ground. We all departed in the Tracker to Winnipeg that evening and on to HMCS Shearwater the next day, January 12, 1963.”

Bob Ferguson, December 2012



DND Photo.

S/Lt (P) Bob Ferguson RCN, CJATC Rivers, MB, hands out of cockpit during arming of weapons, October 1958, VF871 Squadron.

Disabling of the Banshee 126334

“When Lt. Bob Ferguson flew the last Banshee to Calgary for use at the technical school, George Dobson and I were sent out to remove any explosive charges and to remove a couple of key parts so that no one could fly the aircraft later on.

When George and I arrived to do our work, it was 33 below and there was no tow bar. The civilian crew at the airport suggested that I taxi the aircraft and I jumped at that opportunity. After nearly hitting the Tracker aircraft we had flown out in, I got used to steering by light port or starboard braking and managed to taxi the aircraft up to the hangar. The tail of the aircraft was about 20 feet from the hangar doors so that taking the engines to 80 per cent to avoid a fire on shut-down was out of the question. Fortunately, there was no fire at 50 per cent. The aircraft arrived in Calgary with one snag, smoke in the cockpit, not uncommon in a Banshee.” - Marvin May, [Banshees in the Royal Canadian Navy](#), by Carl Mills, p. 271

That was the last movement of an F2H3 Banshee under its own power.

US Navy and US Marine Corps BuNos Third Series (126257 to 130264)

McDonnell F2H3 Banshees

126334 (c/n44) Royal Canadian Navy Jul 4, 1956. Made last flight by a Canadian Navy Banshee (and perhaps the last by any Banshee) Jan 10, 1963 when it was flown to Southern Alberta (Calgary) Institute of Technology for use as a ground instructional airframe. Later displayed on lawn of Naval Reserve Division in Calgary, HMCS Tecumseh. In 2007 was at the Naval Museum of Alberta, Calgary, Canada.

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http://www.joebaugher.com/navy_serials/thirdseries14.html



Bob Ferguson

CJATC Rivers Manitoba, summer 1962, 5" rockets, six with explosive war heads. Note powder residue from 20mm cannons, total of four. Outer pylons were for Sidewinder air to air missiles.