

Flying Training School 1955-1956 at Penhold

After successfully having passed the Norwegian Flying Training Selector School at Vaernes Airport 1954 – 1955, going solo after 9:55 hrs on the Fairchild Cornell PT-19 and 26, and with the total of 20:35 hrs flown, those of us that passed joined the Officers' training school for 3 months.

We boarded the SAS DC-6 appr. June 1, and flew via Keflavik in Iceland, where the plane was fuelled and we were given a nice dinner. From there we flew via Gander on New Foundland to Idlewild outside New York. Nobody was there to pick us up, but well after an hour a Canadian officer showed up, gave us some money for transport in to N.Y. and ordered us to be at Grand Central Station at 17:00 hrs sharp, then disappeared. He picked us up there and got us onto the right train. This train took us straight north to Canada and London, Ontario, where language school waited. Two weeks were reserved for this, but several students from other NATO countries, except the Danes and us, didn't know the language at all. For instance, most of the Turkish students had to study for a year! We learned that 90% of all Canadians lived within 100 miles of the US border, and we had to go through a complete medical check. That usually went well, we had been through a similar check in Norway. However, one Norwegian got in trouble... His eyes were checked with modern equipment, and they discovered that he was as good as blind on one eye. During the eye exam in Norway we were told to "cover your eye with one hand, and then the other eye." He knew the problem, so instead of changing eyes he simply changed hands - and passed! The Canadian doctors were shocked, but gave him two choices: 1) return to Norway or 2) enter Navigator School. He took nav. school and got to be good nav., despite his poor eyesight. He flew as my navigator on the P3-B Orion in the 1970's, and we got a trip to the Niagara Falls, too.

In the end our English was good enough and after two weeks or so we got on the train westbound to Penhold, Alberta. We could see the Rocky Mountains – we could see them when flying over the base, they said. We saw that the country Canada was huge and flat as a pancake west of Winnipeg. At last we came to Penhold, and hello – we could see a small hill! We came via Calgary. The place seemed all right; it was close to Red Deer between Calgary and Edmonton, and was to be our home until March next year.

We started with ground school, where the Harvard was studied from all angles. There wasn't much we didn't know about her before the theory pre-flight check came up; the others and I got all the answers right for the test. The first



flight with the Harvard, or the "Yellow Peril" as we called her, was on July 11th. The Harvard was difficult to control in the start, at least for me. It was big and noisy and you could see absolutely nothing ahead on the ground; you had to turn all the time. Jacobsen's and my instructor was a noisy fellow who used coarse language. He was missing a tooth, and spit flew from his mouth when he talked. I got most of it - Jacobsen was our Ace and avoided it. (Don't use this if it isn't proper).

The big day for the solo-check came Aug. 10th. I was confident at landings, and had few problems. It was the last landing before the solo, but it ended up as a wheels up-landing and a hole in my head. After having turned a little too much I pressed the opposite brake just a little, but the check-pilot pushed on the other pedal to help at the same time. This made the braking too hard and we ended up upside down just on the border between the runway and the grass. I noticed it was extremely quiet after the engine stopped, not a sound until at last the sounds from the crash-wagon. The space between the cockpit edge and the ground was just wide enough to squeeze through. We were both OK except for my head bleeding from the top, but it didn't hurt. Luckily for me the check-pilot was to blame; he never told me that he took control. We spent the night in the hospital, but we were both fine. After extra circuits and bumps the next week I passed the solo-check Aug. 18th, with 23:10hrs on the T-6. After that episode I have always had the seat all the way down and locked, in the air and on the ground!

I got a new instructor after the incident and got a lot better treatment from him, which was good.

The flying was intense. The Harvard got easier to control, but each flight was tough for a while. Luckily we knew the area around Sylvan Lake well. The Fairchild we flew in Norway had no radio, and to understand the radio was tough - at times it was impossible due to a bad instrument when flying solo. We asked for landing instructions and lined up to the runway we took off from and

hoped nothing had changed. Sometimes we got a little lost and asked for “practise homing” now and again. Other times we flew where we thought was right, with good help from Sylvan Lake. But after a while we coped with the radio too.

Now over to what we did in the air. Normal clear-hood with accro was a favourite with the T-6’s strong engine that gave good control all the way. We liked to fly head-down - except Hank, who once on top of a loop forgot



to lock his seatbelt and ended up pressed against the hood. Lucky for him the hood was closed. Rolls, loops, Cuban 8, Clover Leaf – it was like nothing at all for us.

Instrument training was the least fun. All those hours we sat in the backseat under the hood flying “range”! To keep on the A (-) or on the N (-) side of the radio-signals close to an hour! I was certain we could be anywhere in Alberta. To spin in the backseat under the hood was another hopeless affair in the beginning, designed to get us airsick (oh no, never!). First, get into the spin. It was fairly easy: close compass-gyro and artificial horizon, nose up and engine to idle, either left or right rudder in and into the spin for full music in Norwegian, in Canadian GO GO GO! Then it was to try and count the actual spins you had been told to do, perform the correct stop-procedure (as was easy visually), get the wings level and keep your altitude with “needle and ball” only. This was close to impossible, at least the first 100 times. Your instincts told you that you turned sharply to the right, when you in reality did a roll to the left. What a life! But after a while you managed to trust the “needle and ball” and hit both the right altitude and the course. After such trips it was straight into the shower.

Then came formation flying, 2 and 4-ships. What a fine period; people were certainly made to fly like this! Flying close together, throttle, stick and rudder in manic work to keep your position, engine forward when being outside in the turn; off when underneath! Some easy accro took place in line astern – yes, this was flying.

Then it is our turn to do night-flying. The courses before us had kept us awake

with even intervals – the Harvard engine was a really noisy contraption – especially at night! Revenge-time was here! It was almost scary during the first take-offs. You couldn't see much ahead during the daytime, but at night you couldn't see anything at all! We just followed normal take-off procedure, throttle full on, some right rudder to counter torque and hoped for the best. And none of us ended up off the runway – proof that RCAAFF's first class flying-school system was first-class indeed! In the air everything was good – white lights from Penhold and Red Deer and coloured lights on the runway. Christ, how narrow it seemed!

Solo night nav was also on the program. We had one trip with the instructor and now we would be on our own. The flight was planned according to known principles; track-lines were drawn on the map, time-marks as well. The weather was supposed to stay fine. So, off into the air and on towards the first turning point. It was far between the settlements in western Canada and very little to use to check our position, but I turned on time towards where I hoped the next point without really being sure. I turned on the watch – it could be Lonesome down there – and with my course set for Penhold, soon Red Deer radio had Pat Boone and Elvis on. After a while I should be close to home, but no Penhold. I went through the bail-out procedures in case the fuel ran out, but at last the QF were blinking straight ahead. (Q (--.-) and F(..-.)) I still have in my system. The wind had increased considerably and it was snowing, clearly visible when the landing-lights came on. No matter, I was home again, and the landing was one of the better ones that I made in lousy weather. (I can't remember we had any homing device in Penhold, except for the A and the N).

On the solo flights unauthorized flying was of course forbidden, but oh well. We had to watch out for other flight's instructors, they loved to catch us and report, and were you caught reprisals of different kinds came up. Once I only flew straight towards the mountains in the sunshine along one of the roads – they always pointed east – west or south – north - , as a lone T-6 came up alongside. I waived at him, turned 180 degrees and flew home. I never heard anything more about it. But not only the students flew unauthorized. The story goes that one of our instructors on a solo night tour saw a train coming. He switched off all lights, flew towards the train from up front and low, and when closing turned on all his lights and woke up a sleepy train driver. A good story, but true? We didn't know.

From time to time we were tested to demonstrate satisfactory progression, and after the bad landing initially it was getting better, and all tests were passed with satisfactory margin. To be honest, the Norwegians showed we were doing better than most, and as good as all test were passed. The washouts were done back home in Denmark and Norway, but of course it happened. One of us,

approaching washout, on final, forgot the undercarriage, and when the instructor asked what it meant that the horn started when the throttle was pulled back, answered "Check horn serviceable, sir". He didn't last long. But quite a few brave pilots did just that and landed flying solo, saying "Oh, man". But this happened fairly rarely. We were punished when we did something wrong. Once, in beautiful, summerlike weather, I was starting up for a solo-flight while the wind blew fairly strongly into the cockpit from the starboard side. After a failed start I primed extra well (something that should be done ONLY cold weather according to the experts), and all 500 hp lit up with a noisy bark. Flames came straight into the cockpit from the exhaust pipe situated over the starboard wing, setting my hair on fire. I put out the fire (my face was OK) and taxied out as if everything was normal. When I came back my instructor, Fisher, took one look at me and said I had the ugliest head he had ever seen, and gave me lawn-mowing duty for several days. After a look in the mirror I agreed completely. The lawns were large and the grass high. One punishment pretty much everyone had to go through was plane-washing. No flight had an aircraft as clean as ours. If you forgot the wheels before landing you were given a main-wheel to drag with you around all the time for a week or so. You built muscles from that. If a fight started the participants got one big glove each to wear at all times. It's hard to eat soup while wearing a glove.

Once, our flight had to march to the gate once every hour to stamp orders the whole weekend. We had had night-flying Friday night and were late coming home, which meant we hadn't had time to polish the floor in our rooms, as was done every Friday. No time? We had all morning after the landing to do that! Get going! The problem was that it was -30 degrees Celsius in a strong wind, and the walk to the gate and back was really tough. Stopping because of a little wind? Absolutely not! We Norwegians had luckily brought thick winter coats with us, which helped a little. Other nations were worse off. At last one chief or other settled it Sunday afternoon, if we agreed to clean up the cinema after a Christmas party for the children on the base. Nothing was for free in Penhold!

At weekends we were very active, and not on the flying side! We wanted to discover the more famous places we could reach, such as Calgary, Edmonton and Banff. One thing made it possible for us to reach those places, and that was the willingness among car-drivers to pick us up when we were hitchhiking. Especially those who drove the big heavy transporters picked us up. Often we filled up the driver's cab, but that was OK. We always hiked in uniform, and that was evidently the ticket to "Come on up!" Fantastic! We went to Calgary to see the end of a western show, with horseback riding as the main attraction. Two times we made all the way to Banff, once during summer and once during winter. In the summer we rented canoes, which gave us a feeling of the coastline back home. Once we tried horseback riding. My horse was old and lazy, and

turned all the time to go back. I kept turning him back around every time until I finally gave up and let him walk us back. Stupid horse! In the winter we borrowed skis and were probably a sight in our uniforms. We did as we always did back home – straight down the downhill slalom slopes. This was not popular at all, and a few closed races made an official person arrive and tell us we had to zig-zag like the other skiers, or leave. Norway had only one alpine hill at that time, and that was in Oslo where none of us lived. As far as I remember we went sightseeing instead. One trip to Great Falls, USA, also took place.

One weekend we went to Edminton up north. We had the usual stay and lined up at an intersection to start hitchhiking back. A girl on a bicycle passed us and turned left into the road, when a car came up behind her and drove her straight down, her head half stuck under the wheel. She lay screaming, with one side of face almost scraped off. Nobody did anything whatsoever, and something in me kicked me into action. I knelt beside her and asked people to get help, but no. She screamed: “Am I going to die?” and I comforted her as best as I could, holding her head, wiping off blood, talking to her. After what seemed like a long time to me professional help came, and I could get up and go to my friends who hadn’t moved at all. As an after-effect I nearly passed out, but made it. I learned something from the incident: I was able to act and do something, even with as bizarre an accident as that.

In the middle of November we got mid-term leave, two whole weeks at end. Off to warmer lands, everybody got off base asap. Three of us hitchhiked with Kiwi, an Australian, who had a wreck of a car, paying for the fuel. The



usual 30 dgr C was present, and a drafty wreck without heating made the drive to Spokane and the closest AFB a trying affair. The trick was to find a south-bound aircraft, and a C-121 found room for us. The largest transport machine in the world was headed for South Carolina. From -30 to +25 in a few hours was tough. An A/C to go further south was not to be found, but two colonels were flying a B 25 up to Washington; we could sit in the bomb-room if we wanted. And we wanted it; from there a flight could surely be found. In Washington we found out that since we trained in Canada there was no way we could fly for free in the U.S., so it had to be the highway. I chose to go north to New Jersey and Brooklyn, where I had relatives. I made it up there and spent a quiet but very nice week with them. When I had to return my cousin Joan treated me with 150

dollars for a flight to Calgary, a nice farewell present. The other two got further south and had a nice time there.

Accidents happened with the Harvard, especially with our flight. Some of the incidents went through our flight Commander (don't name him, please!), also called Chief Crazy Horse, shortened to CCH. He had several accidents all over the place, and our accident statistics were way down. After a while he didn't fly any more, and our statistics were fine. One month we had zero accidents, and we won the Safety Banner! A parade took place in our hangar, and we marched up to the commanding officer. CCH got the banner, but didn't know what to do with it while marching past the commander to salute him. Therefore he threw it up on a high cupboard along the wall; the banner went too far and glided down to the floor under the cupboard. Every one found this very funny except our flight. Nothing boring about CCH.

Our stay at Penhold was coming to an end, the final flight was a 4 ship formation March 2nd. The oldest left the place and went to Portage de la Prairie near Winnipeg, for Advanced Jet Training. Five of us, including me, had to stay at Penhold for three more weeks before we could leave. We served as link-instructors, many an interesting flying was shown us by the new students, and compass-swinging (?) day after day. A sad fate if you ask me.

But at last, we entered the train and went via Calgary eastwards to Gimli in Manitoba, situated nicely along Lake Winnipeg, well north of the city.

And now a very different story takes place.