

COPA Flight 162 in Shoal Lake; active through the winter!

In most of this country summer is the most active flying season, that's pretty much a fact. But it's also true that much of the flying community finds ways to stay active in the winter even if the weather is not always conducive to flying. COPA Flight 162/Shoal Lake Flying Club members have had a pretty busy winter so far, and, here in Manitoba, we KNOW there's at least a month of winter left at the end of February!

Our most active flying couple, Ken and Colette Pierce, organized a fly out to Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan in early November to visit the NATO Flight Training in Canada (NFTC) and 15 Wing operations. Ken and Colette's neighbour, Brock Chisholm, retired Canadian Forces fighter pilot and presently with his picture high up on the wall at NFTC, was their contact and our tour guide. The day started with fog in Manitoba which prevented some from attending but we still ended up with people from Manitoba to Alberta. Started in 2000, NFTC provides state of the art training for Canadian and NATO pilots from around the world through a partnership between Bombardier and the Canadian Forces. The Canadian Forces provide the facilities and Bombardier provides all the training and equipment, in many ways similar to the Commonwealth Air Training Plan during World War 2. The tour of the classrooms, the briefing rooms, and the simulators was eye opening; it truly is state of the art! The computer based courseware is all written specifically for this facility and puts tremendous learning resources instantly at the fingertips of instructors and students – makes a retired teacher envious! The program makes use of the most modern simulators, both avionics simulators and full motion Harvard 2 simulators. The ride in the back of the Harvard 2 simulator while Brock put it through its paces was the highlight of the day for many of us – the sights, sounds and feelings are very realistic; unfortunately we weren't allowed to take it for a spin! From there we went out to the flight line and watched both Harvard 2's and Hawk 115's in the circuit doing what Brock had shown us in the simulator. The hangars and maintenance facilities were also very interesting with everything from routine maintenance to a total rebuild going on. Thanks Brock for a great day, especially for Mikal, the young fellow in the picture who is considering a military flying career! Check out www.nftc.net for more information.

On December 14 we held our annual meeting at the Airport Terminal. Normally just another meeting we decided to have a pot luck supper with a presentation by Ken and Colette on their Century Club flight to Whitehorse and beyond followed by a brief meeting with critical annual reports and executive elections. We filled the terminal building, there was more than enough food even with some hearty appetites, and the necessary business got done; seems like a good model for next year!

Many hours were spent clearing snow this winter! I suspect from watching the weather that many airport volunteers across the country will report the same thing. Our old Case 970 with

an 8 foot blade made many trips up and down the runway driven by Andrew Critchley, owner of Shoal Lake Aviation, and many trips around the hangars driven by myself. Derek Jenkins and his 4 wheel drive Case tractor, modified so it goes toward the pto end so he can see the snow blower without turning his head, was a saviour this year as the windrows got bigger and bigger! The municipal grader was called on to move the snow outside the runway lights further back a couple of times as well. Many airports across Canada are open in the winter only through this type of volunteerism!

In early February several of our members attended the Rust Remover session cosponsored by COPA Flight 35 and several other aviation organizations. Some of us took the opportunity to visit Harv's Air and try out the 'Red Bird' simulator. The presentation by Nav Canada on FSS systems and the new all computerized air traffic control system was very interesting. The rain later in the day grounded those flying and made the drive home time 4 ½ hours, two hours longer than usual.

COPA Flight 162 held a Valentine's FlyIn on February 13 at the Pierce's farm strip. They did a pile of work making sure their runway was suitable for both wheels and skis, setting up cattle windbreak fences (to protect people in this case), getting wood for the fire, clearing parking spots for airplanes, Unfortunately a terrible forecast (rain, freezing rain and/or snow) and strong winds kept some planes and people away but it turned out better than forecast. Three airplanes, 28 people, gifts from the Pierce's for the ladies who attended, hot dogs, marshmallows, good fellowship, and having our names entered in a draw for a massage package donated by Colette made for a great day!

On February 16 our Club and the Shoal Lake Airport Authority hosted a meeting on rural public-use airport financing in Manitoba. Unlike our sister provinces, Saskatchewan and Alberta, our provincial government does not provide any funding for larger capital maintenance projects. Local governments and flying clubs are doing a good job of operating airports and doing regular maintenance but without access to funding for capital maintenance the airport infrastructure in rural Manitoba will deteriorate and risks becoming unusable. Attendance of 40 people from Swan River in the north to Deloraine in the south included many reps from local governments and lots of quality input; it was very reassuring. A meeting the next night at St. Andrews had low attendance due to a howling storm but has been rescheduled. We are sharing information with the government and opposition and are hopeful that a program can be (re)instituted (Manitoba had such a program until it was cancelled in 2004). Preparation for the meeting and the meetings themselves reaffirmed the importance of our airports to the entire province!

March 5 is our 17th Annual Supper, Awards, Auction and Social. Our theme this year is Planning for the Next 20 Years; next year is our 20th Anniversary! We are hoping for public input into the Plan we started to develop on Feb 16 after the airport funding meeting. Later in March some of

us will attend COPA Flight 138's St. Patrick's Day Social in Russell, returning their visit to ours!
That's how it works in general aviation isn't it!

I'm sure we'll find other things to do to keep us busy until winter loses its grip!

Possible picture captions:

NFTC picture: Brock Chisholm on the left, Mikal Schaworski second from the right, Julia Pierce (Ken's Mom) missing behind the lens!

NFTC maintenance: A Harvard 2 undergoes engine maintenance with another Harvard in the background.

Colette's Valentines: Yes it was Valentines! In spite of a strong wind Colette managed a nice display!

Behind the fence at Pierce's: There's nothing like an open fire and the outdoors to make hot dogs and marshmallows taste good! The cattle windbreaks worked wonders!

Planes at Pierce's: The farm strip was for my nosewheel Cavalier and perfect for Andrew's tail dragging Citabria and Kevin's Kit Fox. All of us appreciated the short but directly into wind (25 knots from the west) runway.