

A FIERY FAREWELL

Recess at Texada Elementary School Friday morning June 22, 1984 started normally but ended in a spectacular fashion.

Tanner Nyl, Grade Four, recalled: "I saw a jet going over [when] suddenly the wing (Note: probably the engine cover) snapped off. [It] was flopping around and the plane was twisting about...the plane kept going down...all in flames...then it hit the top of the trees and made a line of fire over the treetops before it exploded with a noise like thunder."

A few seconds later a thick plume of black, then white, smoke arose from the vicinity of Crescent Bay - just two km from the playground.

The kids had just witnessed the fiery crash of a CF101 Voodoo jet on a "normal training mission" from CFB Comox. Anxiety was relieved five minutes later when the children caught sight of two red and white parachutes silhouetted against the sky.

As it turns out, pilot Tom Chester and navigator Bernie Hughes suffered only minor cuts and bruises after the "automatic seat ejection bailout" saved them. An alarm activated at CFB Comox immediately mobilized a helicopter recovery operation. Even though their parachutes became entangled in the treetops the two were rescued within half an hour and flown to Comox to be greeted in good humour as "conscientious ejectors".

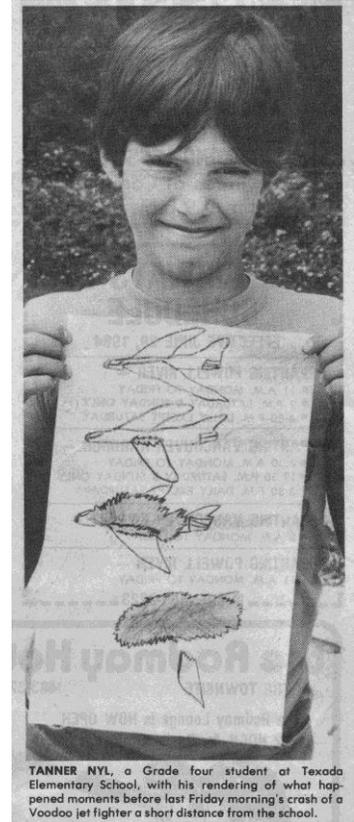
Meanwhile BC Forest Service and up to 35 local volunteers (Van Anda Fire Department, Ideal Cement, Domtar crews, others) fought the resulting forest fire aided by fire retardant from Campbell River dropped by air tanker. By 4 pm the situation was under control.

Investigators from Canadian Forces (with the assistance of some Texadans) spent several weeks tramping through the forest searching for pieces of wreckage. People who witnessed the crash were interviewed, including several children at the school.

The final report later indicated a "catastrophic failure" of the left engine which resulted in severed fuel lines and control cables to the tail section causing a free fall.

One week after the crash the Nighthawks Squadron was relocated to Cold Lake, Alberta and the Voodoos were replaced by CF18's.

It was a fiery farewell to the CFB Comox Voodoos (thank goodness no injuries) and an event that the children at Texada School will remember for the rest of their lives.



TANNER NYL, a Grade four student at Texada Elementary School, with his rendering of what happened moments before last Friday morning's crash of a Voodoo jet fighter a short distance from the school.

Peter Lock

Texada Island Heritage Society