

Top fighter pilot's career could soar into space

The Canadian Champion, Wed., December 21, 1988

By ROB KELLY
Standing with his hand possessively on the cockpit of one of the world's most advanced fighter aircraft is a man who may well one day command a spacecraft.

But even the most stellar careers have to start somewhere. And captain Chris Hadfield's began in Milton.

The Royal Canadian Air Force officer, has, at 29 years of age, already accumulated a formidable resume. The cherry on top, at least to this point, came on Dec. 10 when he won the Outstanding Flying Performance and Academic Excellence award in a field of 24 pilots graduating from the United States Air Force Test Pilot Course at Edwards Air Force Base in California.

Retired USAF general Chuck Yeager, the famed former test pilot, was a graduate of the course. So was Col. Richard Covey, who won the same award as Chris Hadfield approximately a decade ago. Colonel Covey was the pilot on the September space shuttle mission.

Captain Hadfield attended Milton District High School, graduating in 1977, and was a member of the Milton Optimist 820 Air Cadets squadron from 1972 through 1978.

His family still lives in rural Milton. His father, Roger, is a cap-

tain with Air Canada. His older brother Dave, 31, is a first officer with the airline and his younger brother Phillip, 24, is an Air Canada second officer.

Flying is predominant in the family's recreation, too. Together they own several Canadian aerobatic flying championships. But it is Chris who is in the spotlight now, as his career climbs into ever-higher competitive realms.

Roger Hadfield admits to being "amazed" when his son qualified for the test pilot course, not because he wasn't talented, but because the competition was so tough and the course is almost totally crowded with American pilots. In the class Chris topped, he was the only Canadian. There were 22 Americans and one Norwegian.

The course is so much in demand, and standards are so stringent, because it is seen as the route toward work in space. "Ninety per cent of the U.S. astronauts graduated from the Edwards course," Roger Hadfield pointed out.

He readily states how proud he is of his son, but his motive in bringing those accomplishments to the media goes beyond that. It's part of his way of thanking the Milton Air Cadets.

"It provides boys with a consum-

ing interest at a time when they need to be directed.

Chris qualified for both glider and piston engine aircraft flying lessons through the air cadets. The Milton squadron commander at that time was retired RCAF captain Don Stinson, himself now an Air Canada pilot too.

Captain Stinson remembers the young Chris Hadfield as "a very dedicated and intense person. His is a good illustration of making his own breaks. You know how people are always saying 'he got a break.' Well, those people usually make their own breaks. They put themselves in the right positions at the right time with the right qualifications."

A graduate of the Royal Military College (honours) in Kingston, Chris followed up with a noteworthy series of flight instruction courses, during which he won several awards. He was posted to 425 Squadron, an operations CF-18 unit out of Baguville, Quebec, in 1984. He has flown interceptions of Russian probe aircraft off the eastern Canadian coast.

Married with three children, Captain Hadfield is now driving across the U.S. from California to Patuxent River, Maryland, where he will serve for the next three years as an exchange test pilot with the United States Navy.



Captain Chris Hadfield (RCAF) poses with his CF-18 fighter aircraft at an air show. A former Milton Air Cadet, he is today one of the hottest fighter pilots on the continent, a judgment rendered by his peers in both the United States and Canadian air forces.

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