



## **WALLY NIEMI MEMORIAL STARFIGHTER PROJECT TRUST**

Nicki (Niemi) Cammack, Thomasburg, Ontario  
phone or text: 613-848-9565 email: Starfighter644@gmail.com



**Mission Statement: To honour the memory of Capt. Wally Niemi and all fallen pilots, by raising funds to purchase and put on public display a classic icon of Canada's military aviation history – the CF-104 Starfighter**

June, 2021

I am the sister of Capt. Wally Niemi (1954 -1989) who was killed 11 January 1989 at CFB Cold Lake, Alberta in the crash of his CF-18 Hornet. Left to cherish his memory are his wife Mary, son Nicholas (who was not quite two when he lost his father), and son Jonathan who was born six months to the day after the crash.

Before the Hornets, Wally flew CF-104 Starfighters from 1982 to 1986 both at Cold Lake and then Germany.

If you are reading this letter, it is because Wally has in some way touched your life—as a member of our family, our community or the air force community. You may have known Wally personally or perhaps just knew of him. Now, a rare and exciting opportunity has been offered to Wally's family, and I am reaching out to share it with you.

A retired air force officer, Steve Alex, approached me a few months ago to ask if I had ever considered placing a CF-104 Starfighter in my brother's home town area (Birsay, Saskatchewan in the Rural Municipality of Coteau) . Mr. Alex has one, #104644 that he purchased several years ago but has decided to let it go, and he contacted me with the hope that this aircraft could be used in a way to honour Wally's service.

The RM of Coteau council has given their blessing for this Starfighter to reside in the Municipality. Thanks to a local developer, Rauncie Kinnaird, the Starfighter will be placed at a yet to be determined site at Sandy Shores, on Diefenbaker Lake and next to the world famous Gardiner Dam.

<https://www.sandyshoresresort.ca/property.html>

This is such an appropriate location for his Starfighter's last resting place; some of the reasons :

- There is a personal connection to Starfighter #104644. As noted in his flight logbook, Wally flew this particular aircraft on a few occasions while posted at CFB Cold Lake from 1981 to 1982, before being posted to Germany
- Having this piece of Canadian history will be a distinction for Birsay /Coteau and surrounding area; it is a drawing card that will give people the unique opportunity to see a classic aviation icon
- There are many Niemi family memories connected with the Sandy Shores area - swimming, picnics, family gatherings, camping, etc. It is a short drive from Birsay and the Niemi farm where we grew up. The cemetery where Wally rests is also nearby; the Niemi plot is on a hill with an awe - inspiring view that also takes in part of the Sandy Shores/Gardiner Dam area. Most awesome of all, the original Niemi homestead is not far away, and within view of the Sandy Shores area. Our grandparents Johann and Josefiina Niemi first settled there in the early 1900's. How amazed they would be to know that over a century later, this memorial for their grandson would be within eye-sight!

## BACKGROUND:

Wally and I have our roots in the Coteau Municipality. Both sets of our grandparents - Matti and Anna Alto, and Johann and Josefiina Niemi - came to this area from Finland in the early 1900's to set up their homesteads. We still have family and extended family in Coteau and neighbouring areas.

Wally was a fighter pilot in the Canadian Forces from 1981 to 1989. After receiving his wings at Moose Jaw in 1981, Wally was posted to CFB Cold Lake for fighter jet training on the CF-5 and then the Starfighters. He was then posted from 1982 to 1986 at CFB Baden-Soellingen in Germany. When Canada in 1985 began purchasing CF-18 Hornets to replace the Starfighters, Wally was in charge of the logistics of deploying the Starfighters to Turkey as part of Canada's NATO commitment. He was part of the team that flew them to the base at Diyarbakir, Turkey and trained the Turkish fighter pilots.

In 1986 when the Starfighter squadrons at Baden-Soellingen were closed down, Wally was posted back to Cold Lake and became an Instructor Pilot with 410 Tactical Fighter Squadron, flying the new CF-18 Hornets. Tragically during a training mission he lost his life January 11, 1989 in the crash of his aircraft on frozen Seibert Lake (CFB Cold Lake area).

After they were stood down, many Starfighters were stripped and sold as spare parts, or ended up in museums or private collections, which is how Mr. Alex acquired #104644. According to Wally's flight logbook, Wally indeed flew #644 a few times at Cold Lake.

Developed as an interceptor and fighter-bomber, The Starfighter was the first aircraft to attain sustained Mach 2 (twice the speed of sound), as well as being the first aircraft to set an altitude record of 100,000 feet. This aircraft is nicknamed 'The Missile with a Man in it'. It is the fastest operational aircraft ever to serve in the Canadian Forces. Wally of course was one of the members of the "Mach 2 Club".



**CF-104644** Starfighter at Cold Lake, early 1980's

Starfighter #104644 was built by Lockheed Aircraft of Burbank California in the early 1960's. It was the 14th CF104D manufactured for the RCAF out of a total production run of 38 two seat training versions. This Starfighter spent its whole operational service of nearly 25 years at CFB Cold Lake, Alberta, and was last flown with 417 squadron as a combat support trainer but also flew many missions for the Aerospace Engineering Test Establishment (AETE).

It was sent to CFS Mountainview, Ontario for storage and disposal after use as a ABDR (aircraft battle damage and repair) unit and then sold to Al Rubin who owned the Air, Land and Sea Museum in Markham, Ontario. Just before he passed away, Al sold it to Steve Alex.

Because it spent so much time as a trainer, it can be assumed that nearly every Canadian CF-104 pilot has probably logged time flying #644.

**LINK :** Here is the website of the Canadian Starfighter Association, where you will find a lot of interesting information and history about the CF-104 Starfighter

<https://www.canadianstarfighterassociation.org/>

## HOW YOU CAN HELP BRING WALLY'S STARFIGHTER HOME:

Funds are being received into a Bank of Montreal trust account #0402 8980- 010 "Wally Niemi Memorial Starfighter Project Trust".

### WAYS TO DONATE :

- ◆ Online banking— by way of e-transfer . The email address: **Starfighter644@gmail.com**
- ◆ Go to any Bank of Montreal branch and designate your donation to this account. You don't have to be a B of M account holder to do this - or - at your own bank, designate your donation to the above noted account, Bank of Montreal, Tweed, Ontario Branch 0402
- ◆ Credit card donations received at this GoFundMe link— <https://gofund.me/5b6be44d>
- ◆ Mail a cheque or money order payable to *Wally Niemi Memorial Starfighter Project Trust* to my address as follows: **Nicki Cammack**, 997 Fuller Road, Thomasburg, Ontario, Canada K0K 3H0
- ◆ Out of country donations— You can make a wire transfer using the following :  
Swift Code - BOFMCAM2 Transit 04022 Account 8980-010

- For **\$53,000 USD**, Mr. Alex will restore the jet to display quality and pay for delivery. He will come to Saskatchewan to reassemble it. It will be a finished product for display purposes. He is willing to work with our needs, for such a great cause. A commitment deposit of \$10 to \$15,000 will secure the aircraft and the work started. Over time, payments are made on the progress of the work. When it is finished, the balance is paid and the aircraft gets delivered and set up.
- At the current rates, \$53,000 US amounts to about **\$63,000 CDN**. It seems a scary sum of money to me, but is actually a very good deal for an aircraft of this history and calibre.

If you would consider making a financial contribution to the Wally Niemi Memorial Starfighter, it will be appreciated beyond words. To keep it simple, there are no levels of donors, no amounts expected. Just give from your heart, whatever you wish or are able to do. Income tax receipts are not able to be issued, but **please provide your contact info** for my records and so that your gift can be acknowledged.

**THE PLAN:** I visualize an unveiling / dedication of this aircraft for **Late Summer/Early Fall of 2022**—but that will depend on the progress of the fundraising.

I would like to see this display aircraft be the centrepiece of a parkette which will include a memorial to veterans, so that the community and visitors will have the opportunity to pay tribute not only to Wally but to all veterans.

We need to see Starfighter #104644 come to rest in her final home as a meaningful and memorable tribute to a son of Saskatchewan, a gifted pilot who shone like a star and is now one with the stars.

**"PER ARDUA AD ASTRA "**

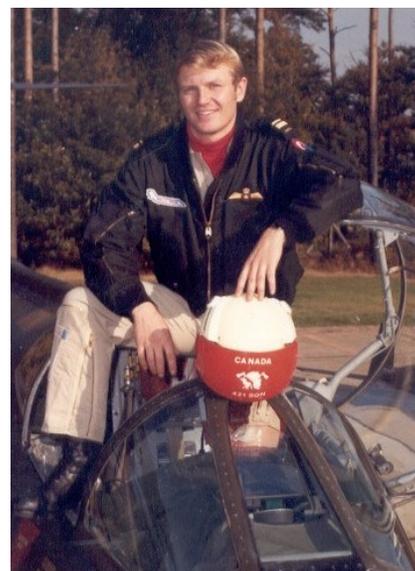
Through Adversity to the Stars



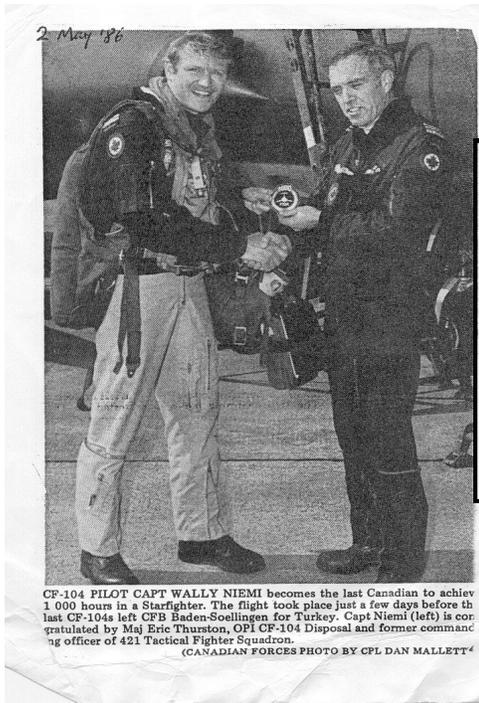
In the year following Wally's passing, his wife Mary and I collaborated on a book called "Remembering Wally", and thanks to the contributions of memories and stories from family and colleagues, the book is a rich mosaic of Wally's life and what he meant to all of us. It is a lasting legacy for his sons Nicholas and Jonathan; the older son who lost his dad at too early an age to really have solid memories of him, and the younger son never having had the chance to meet him. In recent years, thanks to the technical wizardry of his son Nicholas, this book is online, at this link -

<https://www.rememberingwally.com/>

The book is a downloadable Pdf. file. In the Blog, there is a documentary video "Those Daring Young Men" which was filmed at Cold Lake in 1986 and features Wally a few times. He first appears at around the 12:25 mark.



Baden-Soellingen 1982  
421 Red Indian Tactical Fighter Squadron



May 2, 1986 - Wally becomes the **last Canadian to achieve 1,000 hours in a Starfighter**. The flight took place a few days before the last CF-104s left CFB Baden-Soellingen for Turkey.

CF-104 PILOT CAPT WALLY NIEMI becomes the last Canadian to achieve 1 000 hours in a Starfighter. The flight took place just a few days before the last CF-104s left CFB Baden-Soellingen for Turkey. Capt Niemi (left) is congratulated by Maj Eric Thurston, CPl CF-104 Disposal and former commanding officer of 421 Tactical Fighter Squadron.  
(CANADIAN FORCES PHOTO BY CPL DAN MALLETT)



Germany, 1984  
Wally in plane closest to camera



Wally preparing for takeoff to Turkey. As a note of interest, **this was the LAST Canadian 104 to fly out of Canada's service.**

**May 7, 1986 Delivering Starfighters to Turkey**  
In the words of Mike Kaehler, CF-104 technician - "The last Canadian CF-104 to fly in Canadian service was CF-104 12891 flown by Capt. Wally Niemi. I did the "last chance" check on 891 before it took off. Capt. Niemi also did something unexpected. After take off he stayed low, built up speed, zoomed and then rolled the aircraft with full external fuel tanks to say goodbye. We all cheered."



**In Memoriam**  
**Capt Wally "Nemo" Niemi**  
**10 November 1954 - 11 January 1989**

On Wednesday, 11 January 1989, Capt Wally "Nemo" Niemi, of 410 TAC F (OT) Sqn, tragically lost his life on Seibert Lake during a training mission. Capt Niemi was born on 10 November 1954 and joined the Canadian Forces in August 1979. After wings graduation at CFB Moose Jaw in June 1981, Capt Niemi proceeded to CFB Cold Lake for Fighter Pilot Training on the CF-5 aircraft at 419 Sqn and the CF-104 aircraft at 417 Sqn. Upon graduation from 417 Sqn in July 1982, he was posted to 421 Sqn, then 441 Sqn, both located at CFB Baden, Germany. In July 1986, he started the CF-18 OTU at 410 Sqn, where upon graduation he stayed as an Instructor Pilot. Capt Niemi accumulated a total of 1960 hours of which 1005 hours were on CF-104 and 540 hours on the CF-18. Capt Niemi, a CF-104 maintenance test pilot, was a graduate of the Canadian Forces Flight Safety School, and a graduate from the Allied Air Force Central Europe Tactical Leadership Programme (TLP). Capt Niemi's love for airplanes did not

stop on the flight line. His basement hobby workshop, where he built radio controlled aircraft models, is another momento of his love of flying and aircraft. Capt Niemi leaves behind his wife Mary and a son, Nicolas. Wally's dedication, professionalism, sense of humour and his own quiet ways will be sorely missed on the Squadron. Since its infancy in Ayr, Scotland, 410 Sqn has always been a very proud fighter squadron in operational and training roles. This pride comes from outstanding individual achievement during the war and post-war era. Capt Niemi is part of this heritage. Anyone that had the privilege of knowing Wally will miss him dearly.

To the Base personnel that have expressed their sympathies in attending the memorial service at the St. Mark's Chapel on Tuesday 17 January 1989, or at the funeral service in Birsay, Saskatchewan on 19 January 1989, on behalf of his family and friends, 410 Squadron wishes to express its gratitude. Noctivaga!