

BY THE END OF 1989, NATO MUST DECIDE where to locate a major tactical fighter training centre: in Canada or in Turkey. If Canadian Forces Base Goose Bay is chosen, it will become the target of protests by Canadian peace and ecology groups that for several years have condemned low-level flights in Labrador.

Military activities are by no means a new development at Goose Bay, but their growth in recent years has increasingly concerned natives as well as the peace and ecology movements, who argue that low-level flights have negative effects on fauna,

and NATO's new military strategy. Western armed forces maintain more than 3,000 combat aircraft in European NATO member countries, with many of these stationed in West Germany. Pilots must train daily to prepare for possible attack. Day and night, more than 100,000 low-level flights are conducted each year in West Germany, to the great consternation of the public. Restrictions on these flights, however, are numerous. Pilots must stay clear of large cities, civilian structures (dams, power plants, towers, etc.) and commercial air lanes, and cannot fly at low altitudes, for more than ten minutes or so. Accidents are frequent nevertheless; so far this year, about fifteen military aircraft have crashed, two of them near nuclear power stations, triggering public demands for even tighter restrictions.

In addition, NATO has adopted a new defence strategy to halt an enemy attack. The Follow-on Forces Attack (FOFA) favours a deep strike against the military forces and support infrastructure in the enemy's rear sector, charged with reinforcing front-line troops. This tactic relies on air power, with fast attack planes flying at more than 900 kilometres an hour at altitudes below 300 metres in all weather conditions, and on the ability to avoid enemy anti-aircraft defences. To master this type of mission, pilots require intensive training over long distances.

Canada's Department of National Defence believes Goose Bay is well-suited to this type of exercise and offers ideal training conditions for pilots. The West German, British and Dutch air forces already use this base for air training, and with a few modifications, the Labrador base could easily meet NATO's requirements.

CFB GOOSE BAY WAS CREATED IN 1941 FOR USE IN the Second World War, and served as a stopover and transit base for more than 24,000 planes. After the war, the United States used it as a Strategic Air Command support base until the late 1960s. Britain's Royal Air Force pilots trained at Goose Bay in Vulcan nuclear bombers until 1984. Today, an international agreement between Canada, the United States, West Germany, Britain and the Netherlands governs military activities there. The last three countries have conducted low-level flights in the area for several years, and maintain forty-two Tornados, Alpha-Jets, F-4 Phantoms and F-16 fighters at the base. The agreement allows each country to send twenty-five fighters to Goose Bay, thus limiting the total to 125 aircraft. Neither the United States nor Canada conduct low-level flights, although Canada has assigned four F-18 fighters to the base to strengthen the defence of the Far North. In June 1985, the federal government also announced a \$93 million modernization plan for Goose Bay.

According to Major Dave McCabe of DND's Directorate of Air Operations and Training, some changes will be necessary if NATO chooses Goose

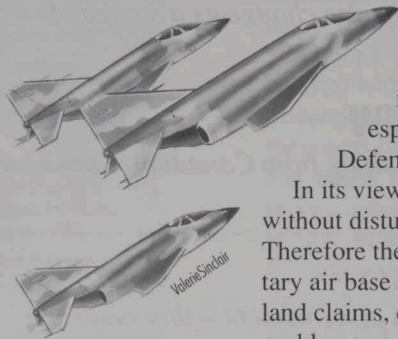
flora and inhabitants of the surrounding area. The Canadian government, especially the Department of National Defence (DND), sees things quite differently.

In its view, not only does the base provide jobs without disturbing local life, but its location is ideal. Therefore they have invited NATO to set up a military air base at Goose Bay. Amid a jumble of native land claims, demilitarization and environmental problems on the one hand, and jobs, economic development and military commitments on the other, the two camps are locked in a fierce struggle.

THE WHOLE CONTROVERSY BEGAN IN JULY 1984, when Canada proposed CFB Goose Bay as the site of the Tactical Fighter Training Centre. NATO had actually begun feasibility studies for such a centre in 1980. It was searching for a very large area, uninhabited if possible, with geographic conditions resembling those found in central Europe, and with few climatic, technical and human restrictions. In 1985, two potential sites were selected: Konya, Turkey and Goose Bay, Canada. After a preliminary assessment, the NATO task force recommended the Turkish site in September 1986, primarily for political reasons. Turkey was to be given the base in order to strengthen its ties with NATO, and to make amends of sorts for its on-going dispute with Greece and strained military relations with Washington. Canadian objections over the method for estimating the cost of setting up the base (costs had been overestimated) convinced NATO to cancel this decision and review the matter. According to Robert Fowler, Assistant Deputy Minister of Defence, the NATO Defence Planning Committee must reach a decision by December 1989.

NATO needs this training base for two reasons: the problems posed by air traffic in central Europe,

THIS LABRADOR BUSINESS ...



The Players in the Game

Amid a jumble of land claims and environmental issues on one hand, and military commitments and economic development on the other, a complex process of public hearings and scientific studies runs its course.

BY JOCELYN COULON