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**Author Biography:**

D.C. (Chris) Findlay is a former long-time employee of the Geological Survey of Canada. He retired in 1995 after a 30-year career, during which he served in a variety of capacities, including Technical Officer (1958-59), Field Petrologist (1960-65), Resident Geologist, Yukon Territory (1966-69), Research Scientist (1975-80), Senior Advisor (1980-82), Director, Economic Geology and Mineral Resources Divisions (1982-87) and Director General, Minerals and Continental Geoscience Branch (1987-92). He is a graduate of McGill (B.Sc. 1955; M.Sc. 1957) and Queen's (Ph.D. 1963). He was awarded an honorary doctorate degree (docteur honoris causa) from the University of Quebec in 1996. During the latter part of his career he was actively involved in a number of international geological projects, mainly under the auspices of UNESCO and IUGS (International Union of Geological Sciences). He was a founder of the International Deposit Model Program and the originator and first Chair of the International Consortium of Geological Surveys (ICOGS).

## A Visit in Whitehorse from the Chief Geologist in 1967

In 1966 I went to Whitehorse to replace Dr. Lew Green as Resident Geologist for the Yukon Territory. Lew was returning to the Vancouver office of the Geological Survey after a four year tour of duty in Whitehorse. I was a relatively new recruit with the Survey at that time, having been employed full time in Ottawa only since 1962. At that time, the northern offices of the Geological Survey came under the supervision of the Chief Geologist's office in Ottawa. There were two offices, one in Yellowknife for NWT and one in Whitehorse for Yukon and the southwest part of District of Mackenzie NWT (which was most easily accessible from Watson Lake in eastern Yukon). Although we did not know it at the time, myself and Ralph Thorpe my counterpart in Yellowknife, would be the last two Survey officers to hold these positions. In 1969, at the end of our tours, the northern offices of GSC would be turned over to the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs (later Indian Affairs and Northern Development.)

The Chief Geologist to whom Ralph and I reported was the legendary Dr. C.S. "Cliff" Lord. A widely-respected career officer with GSC, Lord had become Chief Geologist in 1954 and remained in the job until 1972 when poor health led to his retirement. Dr. Lord had a reputation as a formidable taskmaster and a man devoted to ensuring that the Survey continued its tradition of high quality field investigations. He was said to cultivate a gruff exterior to cover a kind heart but junior staff such as myself remained in awe of him and certainly did not address him as "Cliff" (in fact, I knew hardly anyone who did)

In the summer of 1967 (Expo summer) Lord paid a visit to Whitehorse, partly I think to see that I wasn't damaging excessively the reputation of the Survey in Yukon, and partly I think because his first love was the north and he liked to get out of Ottawa and visit the Survey's far-flung field operations. He took his responsibilities for the northern offices seriously, and although he seldom interfered with the operation of the offices, he monitored our monthly reports carefully and he did not hesitate to let us know if he thought we were out of line with comments we made from time to time about the local scene, mining and otherwise. A phone call from Dr. Lord in Ottawa usually meant that something had caught his eye and he wished to remind us proper protocol. Rarely did we have to be reminded twice.

On this occasion I was on hand in plenty of time at the old Whitehorse airport terminal to meet Dr Lord's flight from Edmonton. The terminal in those days was one of the two principal business and social centres in the town, the other being the bar of the Capital Hotel downtown. If you were looking for a Whitehorse citizen, a good place to start was the airport around sked time (the regular scheduled air service was operated by *Canadian Pacific* out of Edmonton and Vancouver several days a week). The chances were you would find your party meeting a flight, leaving on a flight, or just hanging out with what seemed to be the permanent population of denizens that lurked in the terminal.

There is no question that I was nervous, waiting for Dr. Lord. I would be the first time I would have face-to-face contact with my supervisor since taking on the Whitehorse job. I had no idea whether he was satisfied with the work we had been doing out of our little office, or whether he was travelling all the way from Ottawa to fire me. My secretary, Beth Phillips and the person who really knew all about the workings of the office, assured me that Lord would find everything as it should be and not to worry. Easy for her to say.

I had arranged a trip with Dr. Lord to Mayo to visit the United Keno Hill Mines operations. He knew some of the personnel there, including the Mine Manager, and I reasoned that it would be an interesting place for him to visit and one for which the logistics were fairly simple. We would fly up to Mayo in my elderly airplane and one of the mine geologists would pick us up at the airport and drive us out to the mine. We would stay overnight in the Guest House, go underground in the morning, and fly back to Whitehorse in the afternoon in plenty of time for Dr. Lord to catch his flight to Vancouver the following day. I had checked with the Whitehorse Meteorological Office (then and for many years later under the direction of Herb Wahl, a good friend of the Geological Survey) and it seemed that the weather would be reasonable, although there was a possibility of thunderstorms on our track to Mayo later in the day.

The flight from Edmonton arrived in due course, and Dr. Lord was indeed on it. We collected his luggage and drove down the hill to his hotel (Norm Chamberlist's ----?----Inn) and then went over to the GSC office, located at that time on the second floor of the old Federal Building (long gone) at the corner of Fourth St. and Main. He seemed very pleased to see Beth Phillips and for a time they reminisced about various mutual acquaintances (Beth had been in the office during Lew Green's tenure, knew almost everybody in the Territory, and could charm the birds right out of the trees). In due course we adjourned to my office to talk business. The Chief Geologist was carrying a long map tube which I had assumed contained a map or maps. But I was wrong. It contained a rolled-up piece of paper about 5 feet long, two feet deep and scribed with a phalanx of columns and boxes, in which various cryptic notations had been made. He explained that it was a prototype of a new form that was intended to allow the Survey to keep better administrative track of its many projects (at the time I think there were upwards of 600 projects on the books). I was not to know it at the time, of course, but I was staring in bewilderment at what would become the notorious Form 231 (it would later spawn a number other related forms to complete the project form family). It was then I that I made my first grievous error.

I said, "My God who designed this thing?" (thinking that it must have been some demented administrator in the bowels of Ottawa) Dr. Lord fixed me with a steely eye. "I did". he said, "and you are going to have to like it because every project - including this one - is going to have a paper trail of these forms every year" He went on to explain the philosophy and mechanics of the project reporting system but I was barely listening. I was frantically trying to think how I could dig myself out of the hole I was in. I remember thinking that the visit was not off to an auspicious start.

After lunch we went up the hill to the airport and loaded our gear into the aircraft. It was a 1948 vintage 4-place machine called a Stinson Station Wagon. There had been several versions

of the Station Wagon - this one was called familiarly the "Dash-3" just as, years later the DeHaviland turboprop commuters were referred to as "Dash -7" or Dash-8". It had a metal fuselage, fabric-covered wings and a "big tail" (hence the designation Dash-3 to distinguish it from its earlier, "small tail" versions). It was slow but tough and reliable. I had bought it from a guy in Watson Lake who couldn't believe his luck when someone came along and actually offered him money (although not much) for it. The government paid me 12 cents a mile when I used it to get around the Territory in my work.

We took off and headed north. Whitehorse Tower said to have a good trip. I said thanks and what was the latest Mayo weather? The Tower said they didn't know because they had not heard from Mayo for awhile. They said they would try to find out. In the meantime we passed the radio range at the south end of Lac Laberge (near the site of the famous bonfire that cooked up Sam McGee) and trundled north, passing Pilot Mountain on our left, a notorious generator of local turbulence. It was about 225 miles to Mayo by the route we would take and at our cruising speed it would take us about two and a half hours, allowing for the forecast northwest headwind.

The trouble was visible a long way off. Ahead of us a black band stretched across the horizon. The black band had the look of thunderstorms to me. At first, there was plenty of clear sky to the west and I reasoned that we could angle in that direction and perhaps skirt around the storm cells to the north of the town of Carmacks, about 100 miles north of Whitehorse. We traversed the long axis of Fox Lake and then passed the old Braeburn Lodge at Mile 57 on the Mayo road, with its old Alaska Highway Emergency airstrip. I had been in there earlier in the summer and seen that many small spruce trees were growing up on the strip; obviously it had been put in low-maintenance mode.

We were almost to Conglomerate Mountain, seventy miles north of Whitehorse when the first storm hit us. At first it was just rain, bouncing off the windscreen and blurring our vision. Soon, however, hailstones hammered us like bullets and I began to worry about the integrity of our old wing fabric. I called up Whitehorse on the radio and they told me Mayo was reporting zero-zero in fog and rain (Mayo often did this). I said we were getting beaten up and would probably return to Whitehorse. They said sorry but Whitehorse now was below minimums for VFR (meaning that visibility and cloud ceiling were less than permitted for landing under Visual Flight Rules). In effect, Whitehorse airport was now closed to us. Meanwhile, Dr. Lord seemed to be taking it all in stride but he had his pipe going strenuously. In those days I was a cigarette smoker and between the fugue from Lord's pipe and my cigarette the visibility inside the cockpit was arguably worse than the visibility in the storm outside.

We were hitting rough turbulence now, which, added to the rain and hail was making life distinctly uncomfortable. I turned the aircraft 180 degrees and we headed south, being all the while forced lower by clouds that seemed to block our progress in every direction. Eventually,

the emergency airstrip at Braeburn rose up beyond our nose. It seemed to be the only option left. We circled the strip once, trying to locate the clearest path amongst the small trees that sprouted from the runway. Momentarily, we were out of the rain and taking advantage of the lull we

turned upwind and landed quickly. As we trundled down the runway, I could imagine the snick, snick... of the prop as it carved its way through the small trees (in the end the prop proved tougher than the trees and we suffered no damage). We taxied back to the end of the runway across the road from the Lodge, having been airborne for about an hour and having managed to get a total distance of about 60 miles from Whitehorse. We got out and pushed the aircraft into the trees as far as we could. Around us the storm had descended: the wind blew fiercely and the rain came down heavily. We pelted our way across the road to the lodge, no longer being used as a lodge but now the home of a construction crew upgrading this section of the Mayo road.

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Later, one of the construction crew offered us a ride back to Whitehorse in his pickup truck. He and two pals were heading in for the night. Dr. Lord and I rode uncomfortably in the back, jounced from below by potholes in the road and soaked from above by the rain that fell on us all the way to Whitehorse. Dr Lord's room at the Inn had been given up and the town was full of tourists but Norm Chamberlist found him a bed somehow. When I left him at the hotel (it was now nearly 2:00AM) I apologized for the disaster of the day, but he did not seem upset. He sucked on his pipe and said merely "If we don't go to Mayo again tomorrow, I would just as soon we don't go by air."

I went home, pondering the day.

### *Epilogue*

A week later I returned to Braeburn to take the Stinson back to Whitehorse. Neville Saunders, the RCMP Otter Pilot kindly offered me a lift up (the Otter was going on up to Mayo). As I climbed down from the co-pilot seat Neville said "Watch it when you turn at the end of the strip; the ground is full of gopher holes and the other day Ray told me he tore his tailwheel off in one last year". Ray was a local helicopter pilot who had a Cessna in his spare time. I watched for gopher holes but didn't see any. I waited while Neville trundled off ahead of me. The Otter was on wheel floats and looked like an ungainly large yellow insect. A few weeks later I ran into one of the Braeburn construction crew in Whitehorse. "Jeez", he said, "we thought that Otter pilot was crazy, landing up there on floats. "Jeez, we knew it was wet after all that rain, but not *that* wet."

D.C. Findlay  
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