

THE PLANES of Snowbirds Capt. Shane Antaya and team leader Maj. Dan Dempsey peel off from their formation after they collided in the cluster, at centre, at the CNE airshow yesterday before thousands of stunned spectators. At right are Sun writer Andy Walker and Antaya last week at Pearson Airport.

- stephen wickens

'I'll never forget him'

Sun reporter Andy Walker flew with Capt. Shane Antaya last Thursday as part of a media promotional event for the Snowbirds' CNE Air Show.

By ANDY WALKER
Toronto Sun

Capt. Shane "Trigger" Antaya died yesterday doing what he loved best.

I know because three days ago I flew with him for 30 minutes over the skies of Toronto in his Snowbird No. 2 — the aircraft Antaya died in. I also spent more than two hours with him on the ground, discussing his love for flying.

"It's a great job, I always wanted to do it," Antaya, 26, told me.

He was excited because this fall he was going to be trained to fly "our big magical fighter," the CF-18 Hornet.

Affectionately known as "Trigger" to his fellow Snowbirds, Antaya jokingly described himself as a "has-been" — the Snowbird's term for a second-year flyer.

Some witnesses said Antaya appeared to deliberately fly his stricken CT-114 Tutor jet into Lake Ontario after his collision with Team Leader Major Dan Dempsey.

He seemingly didn't try to eject or pull out for fear of hitting spectator boats.

That kind of heroism would have been typical of Antaya, who struck me as a consummate pilot.

"It's rock 'n' roll," he said with relish as we were about to take off from Pearson International Airport Thursday for a media flight promoting the 40th Canadian International Air Show.

He spit into his brown suede flying gloves and rubbed them together, giving him a better grip on the joystick. Antaya made a quick, final check of his instruments and within seconds we leapt into the skies.

The ride of his life

For 30 minutes Antaya gave me the ride of my life — one I'll never forget.

Racing over Lake Ontario at 350 mph, Antaya — who flew Inner Right Wing in the nine-plane Snowbird formations — guided his plane until its wing tips were only three feet away from wingmate Dempsey.

It was Dempsey's plane Antaya collided with yesterday during a high-speed



- paul henry, sun

stunt known as an upwards-downwards bomb burst.

Antaya handled his plane with kid gloves.

"Get ready, here we go," he said to me as we neared the CN Tower and he sent the plane into two 360-degree rolls.

He was a natural public relations man for the Snowbirds — Antaya knew exactly how to explain the intricacies of flight without lapsing into pilotese.

If he had an ego, it didn't show. In fact, he downplayed everything he did.

"It was luck," he said of his Snowbirds posting. "I was in the right place at the right time."

He also wasn't above poking fun at himself.

He said the reason he'd been given the nickname "Trigger" was that he had embarrassed the Snowbirds during a

show at the opening of the Calgary Olympics last year.

He had accidentally "pulled the trigger" on his joystick and shut off his trailer smoke.

Antaya, who was born in Kingston, Jamaica, grew up in Windsor and called Stratford his home.

Two-year Snowbird

But, during his training, he and his wife, Suzanne, lived in Moose Jaw, Sask., the headquarters for the Snowbirds. She was in the crowd yesterday, watching as her husband died.

He joined the Snowbirds two years ago after flight training.

I was near tears yesterday when it was finally confirmed that Antaya had died in an heroic plunge into Lake Ontario.

I won't forget you, Trigger.