

R. C. A. F. ANNIVERSARY

This year, as the R.C.A.F. celebrates its 35th anniversary, it looks back on a life of achievement which has seen it grow from a handful of men and flimsy aircraft to a modern force ready to take its first steps in the missile age.

Although the R.C.A.F. was not formed until April 1924, its traditions go back to the First World War when 21,000 young Canadians flew with Britain's air forces, and it was the spirit of these men which laid the foundation of the R.C.A.F.

In its early years, the R.C.A.F. was unique among the air forces of the world, as the greater part of its work was essentially non-military in character. It photographed great areas of the Dominion, helped to open up new sections of the country, transported officials into inaccessible regions, blazed air routes and experimented in air mail services, assisted in the suppression of smuggling and flew sick and injured trappers and Indians to medical attention.

The formation of the Department of Transport with a Civil Aviation Branch in 1936 meant that the R.C.A.F. could abandon many of its civil responsibilities and develop into a military force. Yet on the eve of the Second World War, it had only 124 operational aircraft, which included such obsolete types as the Atlas, Wapiti, Shark, Vancouver and Siskin. First line service types were limited to 19 Hurricanes and 10 Battles. So, with 4,061 men and out-of-date aircraft, the R.C.A.F. went to war.

During the war the Air Force expanded rapidly: its aircraft were replaced by thousands of the latest training and operational types, and its personnel increased more than fifty-fold to a peak of over 206,000. It emerged as the fourth largest air power among the United Nations.

At the end of the war there were, overseas, 48 R.C.A.F. squadrons operating with the Royal Air Force in the Western European, Mediterranean and Far Eastern theatres, while thousands more R.C.A.F. personnel had served in the air and on the ground with RAF formation's in every corner of the world. R.C.A.F. personnel fought beside their RAF counterparts in the Battle of Britain, in the softening up process prior to invasion and on D-day, in North Africa and the Middle East, on night fighter and bomber operations including the 1000-bomber raids, on coastal patrol and shipping escort, and transport operations.

In the Home War Establishment, the R.C.A.F. put more than 40 operational squadrons in the field on coastal defence, shipping protection and other duties.

From the beginning of hostilities, it was recognized that one of Canada's major roles in the war would be as a training ground where

instruction could be carried out away from the actual battle area. The British Commonwealth Air Training Plan was set up, and between 1940 and 1945 the R.C.A.F. trained 131,553 aircrew from Canada, Britain, Australia, and New Zealand.

Recognition of the services performed by the R.C.A.F. in the BCATP, home defence and overseas operations is to be found in the long list of honours and awards conferred upon its personnel. More than 8,000 officers, airmen and airwomen received decorations from the British and Allied governments, including two Victoria Crosses, more than 4,000 Distinguished Flying Crosses, 515 Distinguished Flying Medals, 427 Air Force Crosses and 42 Air Force Medals. The Force's Roll of Honour for the Second World War contains the names of 17,100 men and women who gave their lives for the cause of freedom.

At the end of hostilities, the R.C.A.F. reverted to a peacetime footing. By mid-1946, all of the squadrons overseas had been disbanded or returned to Canada, and most of the home-based units were disbanded. The few units that were retained resumed the Force's prewar activities of aerial photography and air transport, which included many "mercy" flights.

In 1947 the present search and rescue organization was formed to fulfill Canada's International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) commitment of providing aid to aircraft in distress within the continental limits of Canada and its approaches on both the east and west coasts, and as a secondary duty to provide assistance to ships in distress in Canadian coastal waters, as well as carrying out mercy flights where they could not be handled by commercial planes.

In the field of aerial photography, the R.C.A.F. carried its operations northward into the Arctic, until finally by 1955 the whole of Canada had been photographed. In addition to their military value, these aerial surveys are used in countless ways, from water power development, mineral exploration and town planning schemes to estimating the cordage of forests.

In 1948 the R.C.A.F. broke into the jet age when it received its first Vampire jets. At this time the Air Force also took delivery of the North Star aircraft. Early in 1949, one of these long-range transports made the first non-stop trans-Canada flight from Vancouver to Halifax, in 8 hours 32 minutes.

The year 1950 marked the extension of the R.C.A.F.'s external commitments and the expansion of the Force. The training element was faced with the task of finding large numbers of experienced instructors to triple the service's manpower total. At the same time it undertook the training of thousands of aircrew from other NATO countries as part of Canada's

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