

Camp Borden & the RCAF

By Norm Marion, RCAF 441 (Huron) Wing

Military aviation at Camp Borden (today Canadian Forces Base Borden) goes back to early 1917 when a series of "temporary" aircraft hangars and aviation facilities were built to support the training of aviators for the Royal Flying Corps (RFC). The organisation known as Royal Flying Corps Canada - renamed Royal Air Force (RAF) Canada the following year, was a British organisation operating in Canada for the purpose of recruiting and training Canadian aviators for service in the RFC/RAF overseas. There were other RFC/RAF Canada airfields operating in south-central Ontario, but Borden was the main one, home of the headquarters. By the end of 1918, a total of 1,184 aviators had completed training at Camp Borden.

After the Great War, Camp Borden became the central point around which military aviation would develop in Canada. In 1919, an Imperial Gift of over one hundred war surplus aircraft found their way to Canada, most of them going to Borden to provide the nucleus of a national air force. Following the creation of the Canadian Air Force in 1920, Camp Borden was once again selected as the main training centre for aviation. During the Twenties, Camp Borden saw the birth of the Royal Canadian Air Force and claimed many firsts including the graduation of the first RCAF pilots in 1924. Camp Borden was also home to the first RCAF aerobatic team, the Siskins, in the early Thirties.

At the beginning of the Second World War, the implementation of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan resulted in the relocation of air and ground training to several new stations across the country. In Borden, No.1 Service Flying Training School continued to provide aircrew training to RCAF pilots as well as to other Allied countries.

The end of the BCATP and the downsizing of post-war RCAF meant the closing of No.1 Service Flying Training School and the re-opening in Borden of No.2 Technical Training School. By 1958, most aircraft maintainer training had returned to Borden. On February 1, 1968, the Unification of Canada's armed forces marked the end of the RCAF. Since that day, various Air Trade schools in Borden have provided basic technical training for most occupations of the Air Operations Branch of the Canadian Armed Forces. Today, members of 16 Wing Borden take pride in preserving such a long tradition of excellence in training Canada's air forces. The Wing Headquarters is responsible for coordinating the activities of six RCAF schools, two of which are co-located in Borden: the Canadian Forces School of Aerospace Technology and Engineering, and the RCAF Academy. The other schools are located in Cornwall, Ont., Winnipeg, Man., and Comox, B.C.

A century after their construction, many of RFC's "temporary" hangars still stand, one of them being home to the Air Force Annex of the Base Borden Military Museum. They are the only remaining witnesses of many great moments in the history of the RCAF and Camp Borden, Birthplace of the RCAF.

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PHOTO CAPTIONS:

Aerial view of the Camp Borden flight line and its original 15 RFC Canada hangars.



Cadet Hilliard Bell stands in front of a Curtiss JN-4, the main trainer aircraft for the RFC/RAF Canada training program.



One of the original RFC Canada hangars

